



Every Day an Election Day

Kal Hailu Kalewold, Philosophy, University of Leeds,
k.kalewold@leeds.ac.uk

Voting occurs on Election Day. In the history of electoral democracy, this fact has been closely identified with the practice of elections. However, I argue the temporality of election time generates problems that undermine or disable crucial democratic values such as responsiveness, popular rule, and government accountability, among others. This paper outlines and defends a new electoral system I call “registral voting.” Under this system voters electronically register their votes daily—thereby eliminating the distinction between electoral and non-electoral periods—with the results determined by summing up votes over the whole term of office. In effect, under registral voting every day is election day. Registral voting reduces the capacity of politicians to manipulate near-election events for their benefit and empowers voters to make informed choices based on a wide range of salient information as and when they arise. Registral voting preserves the virtues of electoral democracy while mitigating or eliminating anomalies of election time highlighted by critics of elections and empirical studies of voter behavior.



ARTICLE

Every Day an Election Day

Kal Hailu Kalewold*

Voting occurs on Election Day. In the history of electoral democracy, this fact has been closely identified with the practice of elections. However, I argue the temporality of election time generates problems that undermine or disable crucial democratic values such as responsiveness, popular rule, and government accountability, among others. This paper outlines and defends a new electoral system I call “registral voting.” Under this system voters electronically register their votes daily—thereby eliminating the distinction between electoral and non-electoral periods—with the results determined by summing up votes over the whole term of office. In effect, under registral voting every day is election day. Registral voting reduces the capacity of politicians to manipulate near-election events for their benefit and empowers voters to make informed choices based on a wide range of salient information as and when they arise. Registral voting preserves the virtues of electoral democracy while mitigating or eliminating anomalies of election time highlighted by critics of elections and empirical studies of voter behavior.

“The only poll that counts is the one on election day.”

Modern Politician Proverb

“The people of England regards itself as free; but it is grossly mistaken; it is free only during the election of members of parliament. As soon as they are elected, slavery overtakes it, and it is nothing.”

Jean-Jacques Rousseau *The Social Contract*,
Chapter XV: *Deputies or Representatives*

I. INTRODUCTION

The 1959 British general election offered one of Westminster’s textbook cases of a pre-election expansionary budget.¹ In April 1959, Chancellor Derick Heathcoat-Amory tabled his final budget before the election scheduled for October. Among the provisions in the budget were reductions in the stan-

* Philosophy, University of Leeds.

1. Peter Sloman, “‘Where’s the Money Coming from?’ Manifesto Costings and the Politics of Fiscal Credibility in UK General Elections, 1955–2019,” *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 23, no. 3 (2021): 355–373, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1369148120951026>.

dard rate of income tax, a cut to the upper purchase-tax bands, and 1p off the price of a pint of beer. Prime Minister Harold Macmillan then campaigned across swing constituencies beneath banners reading “Life’s Better Under the Conservatives—don’t let Labour spoil it,” urging voters to re-elect his government. On the general election held on October 8, the Conservatives won a landslide victory.

Nearly half a century later, ahead of Australia’s 2004 federal election, a similar case of pre-election redistribution unfolded. Cabinet minutes published by the Australian National Archives show how hours after dissolving parliament, Prime Minister John Howard’s cabinet approved roughly AU\$4 billion in new outlays—which included an immediate lift in the Medicare rebate, a tax offset for mature-age workers, and extra veterans’ benefits—scheduled to hit voters’ pockets within the calendar year. The record of the cabinet’s deliberations shows senior ministers “were acutely conscious of the politics of their decisions as they prepared to seek re-election.”² Whether the pledges were electorally decisive, the Coalition won a majority in both the House and Senate and returned to government.

These two historical cases illustrate a common phenomenon in electoral democracies called *the temporality problem* of elections. Elections happen over a short period of time. Electoral campaigning occupies a few weeks or months and voting in most jurisdictions occurs on a single day. This renders electoral outcomes susceptible to influence by near-election events. Since elections take place over a limited window, electoral candidates are incentivized to maximize their appeal over that period. Candidates promise or pursue policies optimized for their election year impact. Benefits are front-loaded for the campaign, while the fiscal pain is deferred until the ballot boxes are safely stored away. Incumbents are therefore empowered to use the machinery of the state to entrench their power and hamper the opposition.

The narrowness of election time, and its political consequences, is an underexplored feature of elections. As Elizabeth Cohen notes in her groundbreaking book on the political value of time, temporal boundaries are as important as spatial boundaries in the life of a democracy. As such, “when a precise date or duration of time is given explicit importance in a political procedure we ought to ask why this is so.”³ There is nothing special about

2. Karen Middleton, “A Cost-of-Living Election: Howard Ministers Agreed to \$4bn in Last-Minute Spending in 2004” *Guardian*, 31 December 2024, <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2025/jan/01/january-1-national-archives-release-2004-election-john-howard-spending>.

3. Elizabeth F. Cohen, *The Political Value of Time: Citizenship, Duration, and Democratic Justice* (Cambridge University Press, 2018), 3, <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108304283>.

the Tuesday after the first Monday of November.⁴ The narrow temporality of election day was not objectionable insofar as, for most of the history of elections, technological and practical limitations meant that elections had to be separated by reasonably long intervals and held over a single day or short period. Nonetheless, advances in digital technology now give us cause to reconsider the narrowness of election time. The marginal cost of gathering voter preference data daily is astronomically lower than in the past due to digital advances such as widespread internet access and basic digital literacy.

This paper defends a novel and innovative electoral system, which I call “registral voting,” that mitigates the temporality problem of elections. I argue registral voting should be implemented for the election of legislatures. Under registral voting, voters log into an electronic board of elections (call it an *eBoard*) and vote for their preferred electoral candidate.⁵ A voter may log in and change their vote *every day*. If they do not log in to change their vote, their last recorded vote rolls forward as their vote for each subsequent day. At the end of the term of office, or on the date that was historically taken as election day, the sum of all the votes over the whole term of office is taken, and winners assigned based on the chosen *voting method* of a given jurisdiction (e.g., ranked choice, plurality, Borda count, D’Hondt method, etc.).⁶ In effect, under registral voting every day is election day.

Registral voting eliminates the distinction between electoral and non-electoral periods in a democracy. Under current electoral systems, there is an electoral period, which includes the official campaign time, election day, and the period before it when early voting is permitted depending on the jurisdiction. Electoral periods are typically a few weeks to a few months. The non-electoral period is far longer and includes the time in between electoral periods. This could range from several months to several years. As I’ll show in this paper, by eliminating the electoral/non-electoral period distinction, registral voting offers a unique solution to the temporality problem of elections.

In section II, I outline two dimensions of the temporality problem of elections: *epistemic manipulation* and *myopic retrospection*. I then outline

4. This is the date of presidential elections in the United States (in an election year). It’s not exactly right to say there is nothing special about it. The choice of date balanced a number of desiderata for electoral programming in the 19th century American context.

5. For simplicity, I do not discuss party primaries, in jurisdictions where they occur. Throughout, I refer to general elections. Of course, registral voting can be extended to primary elections. In jurisdictions where primaries determine access to the ballot line, there would have to be a division of election time between primary and general elections.

6. For an overview of voting methods, see Eric Pacuit, “Voting Methods,” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2011 (substantive revision 2019), ed. Edward N. Zalta & Uri Nodelman, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2024/entries/voting-methods/>.

registral voting and briefly defend registral voting proposals for legislative elections and parliamentary systems (section III). Section IV shows how registral voting avoids the temporality problem engendered by periodic⁷ electoral systems and better realizes core democratic ideals. I then sketch practical steps for implementation of registral voting for state and non-state elections (section V). Finally, I consider and respond to possible objections to registral voting, highlighting the virtues of registral voting in the process (section VI) and conclude (section VII).

II. TWO DIMENSIONS OF THE TEMPORALITY PROBLEM OF ELECTIONS

In a study of the political effects of election time, Dennis Thompson⁸ identifies the temporal properties of elections—their periodicity, simultaneity, and finality—as grounded in fundamental democratic values while nonetheless engendering unfavorable anomalies.⁹ Thompson identifies three anomalies that arise from the temporal properties of elections interacting with the political system of the United States. Thompson notes that the anomalies arise due to the special character of election time. The first anomaly arises because political electoral districting allows elected officials to shape their electorate. This blunts the power of current majorities to supersede past majorities facilitated by the periodicity of elections. The second anomaly compromises simultaneity, namely, exit polls and staggered voting allow some voters to decide with information about results from earlier voters. The third anomaly arises from the regulatory distinction between electoral and non-electoral periods.

Thompson proposes independent non-partisan redistricting, limiting the use of early voting, a ban on publishing exit polls, and stringent regulation during electoral periods to overcome the three anomalies of election time he identifies. While Thompson highlights political anomalies that arise because of the temporality of elections, the proposed corrective measures will not

7. I use *periodic* to refer to electoral systems in which voters cast one ballot per electoral term, usually on a single election day at or close to the end of the previous term of office. Every extant electoral system is periodic.

8. Dennis F. Thompson, "Election Time: Normative Implications of Temporal Properties of the Electoral Process in the United States," *American Political Science Review* 98, no. 1 (2004): 51–63, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055404000991>.

9. For Thompson, each of the three properties support popular sovereignty. Periodic elections allow current majorities to supersede past majorities. The simultaneity of elections ensures a determinate majority has its hand on the wheel. And finally, since electoral results are final, the government formed as a result has legitimate political authority until at least the next election.

blunt two considerable weaknesses to democratic governance engendered by election time: epistemic manipulation and myopic retrospection.

II.A EPISTEMIC MANIPULATION OF VOTERS

Epistemic manipulation of voters occurs when information (or misinformation) is strategically withheld or deployed during an electoral period in order to influence the outcome. It is not just politicians but media organizations, advocacy groups, and other political agents that are incentivized to manipulate the timing and salience of public information.¹⁰ Of course, electoral campaigning involves a host of strategies to persuade voters ahead of an election. These include strategically timing announcements, debates, advertising, and other media and public relations strategies. Many of these acts are innocuous and necessary for informing voters as they make up their minds about which candidates or policies to support. However, some elements of political campaigning are objectionable from the perspective of a voter who wants to rely on accurate, relevant, and timely information before voting. Specifically, the temporality of elections creates problems because both the *salience* and the *timing* of public information is manipulable by political actors.

Salience is a property of information that makes it striking or perceptible to voters.¹¹ Voters not only have policy preferences but also policy priorities. Voters have limited cognitive resources they must deploy strategically in order to make their choice. Focusing on striking information that aligns with their issue priorities while ignoring less noticeable information makes the electoral process cognitively manageable for voters. Problems arise, however, because the salience of an issue can be manipulated.¹² Changes to salience can be driven by factors that are exogenous or endogenous to the agency of political actors. Exogenous sources of salience include financial crises, security threats such as terror attacks, and long-term structural changes beyond party-political control.¹³ Endogenous factors, such as significant political

10. A recent example is WikiLeaks release of DNC emails ahead of the 2016 Democratic Convention for the explicit purpose of damaging Hillary Clinton's candidacy (See Charlie Savage, "Assange, Avowed Foe of Clinton, Timed Email Release for Democratic Convention," *New York Times*, July 26, 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/07/27/us/politics/assange-timed-wikileaks-release-of-democratic-emails-to-harm-hillary-clinton.html>).

11. Giovanna Invernizzi, "Public Information: Relevance or Salience?," *Games* 11, no. 1 (2020): 4, <https://doi.org/10.3390/g11010004>.

12. Christopher Achen and Larry Bartels, *Democracy for Realists: Why Elections Do Not Produce Responsive Government* (Princeton University Press, 2016), <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781400882731>.

13. Henrik Bech Seeberg and James Adams, "Citizens' Issue Priorities Respond to National Conditions, Less So to Parties' Issue Emphases," *European Journal of Political Research* 64, no. 2 (2025): 649–670, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1475-6765.12714>.

decisions taken by a government, can also affect salience. A notable example is a declaration of war. However, more prosaic information can become salient ahead of an election by the policy response taken by elected officials.

Take, for instance, the response of the Trump Administration to a large “migrant caravan” that formed in Central America in the summer of 2018. Migrants typically travel together in caravans as mutual protection against criminals. The migrant caravan formed in Honduras in 2018 had from one to as many as four thousand individuals, making it the largest such caravan to be assembled.¹⁴ However, this must be put in the context of the nearly 400 thousand migrants apprehended by US border agents in 2018.¹⁵ In the unlikely event that the caravan made it to the US border intact, it would represent less than 1 percent of those who were detained, not counting those who successfully cross. What made this particular migration story notable is that President Trump raised its salience. “Migrant caravan” entered the public discussion like never before amid news reports about its size and progress, rampant speculation about its potential composition, and Trump’s association of its existence with weak border laws he claimed were supported by his Democratic opponents. The saga culminated with the decision of the Department of Defense, under White House directive, to deploy 5,200 active duty troops to the southern border on October 29, days before the midterm congressional elections.¹⁶ Trump’s unprecedented decision to deploy active duty troops to the southern border was widely criticized by his political opponents as an attempt to mobilize support for his party ahead of the 2018 midterm congressional elections. Whether his intention was electoral manipulation or a sincere effort to discharge his duty, the episode illustrates incumbent governments’ ability to use its authority to raise the salience of a policy issue.¹⁷

The susceptibility of voters to salience manipulation is heightened by the narrowness of the electoral period. The ability of misinformation to be dispelled, better arguments to win the day, and more thoughtful outcomes to

14. Annie Correal and Megan Specia, “The Migrant Caravan: What to Know About the Thousands Traveling North,” *New York Times*, October 26, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/10/26/world/americas/what-is-migrant-caravan-facts-history.html>.

15. US Customs and Border Protection, “Southwest Land Border Encounters,” 2025, <https://www.cbp.gov/newsroom/stats/southwest-land-border-encounters>.

16. Ted Hesson and Wesley Morgan, “Trump’s Troop Deployment to the Border Comes Under Fire,” *Politico*, October 29, 2018, <https://www.politico.com/story/2018/10/29/caravan-mexico-border-troops-899006>.

17. For instance, public broadcasters in many jurisdictions have mandates to carry special messages by the government. In the United States, major networks in practice never refuse a president’s request to address the nation, suspending regular programming to enable them to do so.

emerge are hampered by the short window in which elections occur. Voters also find themselves inundated with a large volume of information over a short period of time ahead of elections. As a result, “voters may find it difficult to process all relevant information and instead rely on cognitive shortcuts when faced with difficult problems.”¹⁸ Using short-cuts and heuristics is often an efficient way to make optimal decisions. However, as I show in the next section, the narrowness of the election period diminishes the effectiveness of these cognitive strategies.

II.B RETROSPECTIVE VOTING AND THE TEMPORALITY PROBLEM

In a representative democracy, citizens exercise their political authority through their elected representatives. There are various competing accounts of the nature and role of representation in democracy, and how elections realize the ideals of representation.¹⁹ Theories variously identify representatives as trustees,²⁰ advocates,²¹ mediators,²² among others. Furthermore, the fact that representatives are distinct from and, in some sense and by some standard, have to act on behalf of citizens opens up robust debate on the institutional design of democracies. Nonetheless, a core aspect of any ideal of democratic representation is that representatives are selected and authorized by voters and accountable to them. Elections play a better or worse role to the extent they empower voters to realize ideals of fair representation.²³ Periodic voting undermines the ability of voters to exercise these functions. While I cannot survey how temporality interacts with, and undermines, the various ideals of representation, I use the retrospective theory of voting to illustrate the temporality problem. The retrospective theory of voting is ideal for exploring the temporality problem because: (i) it captures a core aspect of the popular understanding of democracy wherein voters “hire” and “fire” their representatives based on their performance and (ii) retrospective voting assumes that voters make their decisions without the benefit of deep

18. Andrew Healy and Neil Malhotra, “Retrospective Voting Reconsidered,” *Annual Review of Political Science* 16 (2013): 288, <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-polisci-032211-212920>.

19. See Andrew Rehfeld, “Towards a General Theory of Political Representation,” *The Journal of Politics* 68, no. 1 (2006): 1–21, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2508.2006.00365.x>; and Jane Mansbridge, “Clarifying the Concept of Representation,” *American Political Science Review* 105, no. 3 (2011): 621–630, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055411000189>.

20. Burke, Edmund. *Reflections on the Revolution in France*. (Cambridge University Press, 2013), <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139814461>.

21. Nadia Urbinati, “Representation as Advocacy: A Study of Democratic Deliberation,” *Political Theory*, 28 (2000): 258–786, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0090591700028006003>.

22. Melissa S. Williams, *Voice, Trust, and Memory: Marginalized Groups and the Failings of Liberal Representation*, (Princeton University, 1998), <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781400822782>.

23. *Ibid.*, 57.

policy expertise. As such, the fact that the temporality of periodic voting undermines the effectiveness of elections (in realizing democratic aims) when voting retrospectively suggests temporality imposes even more constraints on accounts where voters are expected to have higher levels of sophistication and knowledge.

According to retrospective theory, voters cast a ballot on the basis of the past performance of the government and their representatives.²⁴ That is, voters “exert substantial control over their leaders, despite knowing little about the details of public policy, simply by assessing the performance of incumbent officials, rewarding success and punishing failure.”²⁵ This makes retrospective voting a core mechanism for realizing democratic accountability of political institutions. The retrospective theory of political accountability offers a less epistemically demanding account of how citizens ultimately control the democratic political system.²⁶ When voting retrospectively, voters need not assess the technical details of government policy. Rather, voters respond to policy outcomes—such as economic indicators including GDP growth, income growth, and the unemployment rate—which are a far more transparent signal for the average citizen. Retrospective theory therefore preserves the normatively attractive division of labor between representatives and citizens. On the retrospective account, representatives pursue policies that advance the interests of citizens. Voters respond to the positive effects of government policy (or lack thereof) in making their electoral choices.

However, the interaction of voter psychology and the temporal properties of election time disable the effectiveness of this mechanism. As has been well-documented in the literature on voter behavior, incumbents may find themselves benefiting or being penalized by voters for actions over which they have little or no control simply because they occur in proximity to an election. These include natural disasters, price increases due to exogenous events, and even putatively irrelevant occurrences such as the recent performance of a local beloved sports team.²⁷

24. See Jonathan Woon, “Democratic Accountability and Retrospective Voting: A Laboratory Experiment,” *American Journal of Political Science* 56, no. 4 (2012): 913–930, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-5907.2012.00594.x> and Andrew Healy and Neil Malhotra, “Retrospective Voting Reconsidered,” *Annual Review of Political Science* 16 (2013): 285–306, <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-polisci-032211-212920>.

25. Achen and Bartels, *Democracy for Realists*, 91.

26. *Ibid.*, 90–91.

27. Andrew Healy, Neil Malhotra, and Cecilia Hyunjung Mo, “Irrelevant Events Affect Voters’ Evaluations of Government Performance,” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 107, no. 29 (2010): 12804–12809, <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1007420107>.

For our purposes, the main challenge the temporality of elections poses to effective retrospective voting is that voters overwhelmingly rely on public information available close to an election to determine how to vote. For instance, multiple studies on US politics have established that the election-year economy influences presidential election results more than cumulative economic growth over the full presidential term. Healy and Lenz find that voters intend to judge presidential performance by using cumulative growth. However, that information is not easily accessible. As a result, voters use the election-year economy as a proxy for cumulative performance.²⁸ The unintended myopia of voters is such that “objective changes in economic well-being seem to matter significantly only if they occur in close proximity to Election Day.”²⁹ Consequently, *myopic retrospection* severely hinders voters’ ability to select for or sanction economic performance by incumbents. Given the electoral value of election year economic performance, myopic retrospection incentivizes incumbents to pursue policies that boost economic activity in the months leading up to an election potentially to the detriment of long-term economic performance.

William Nordhaus’ influential work on the “political business cycle” first drew significant scholarly attention to political manipulation of economic policy for electoral gain.³⁰ Nordhaus posited that the constraints on policymakers in a democratic political system would result in a business cycle, i.e., cycles of economic growth and contraction. Policymakers operate within a macro-economic framework where there is a trade-off between inflation and unemployment and voters have preferences about both (although they are ignorant of the tradeoff). Nordhaus’ model has the result that “democratic systems will choose a policy on the long-run trade-off that has lower unemployment and higher inflation than is optimal.”³¹ This is due to the myopia of voters incentivizing expansionary policy ahead of elections to boost employment followed by contractionary policy after elections to tame inflation.

Political business cycles subsequently became one of the most widely studied phenomena in economics and political science. However, subsequent empirical work has revealed much less empirical evidence for political business cycles in mature democracies than the theoretical models

28. Andrew Healy and Gabriel S. Lenz, “Substituting the End for the Whole: Why Voters Respond Primarily to the Election-Year Economy,” *American Journal of Political Science* 58, no. 1 (2013): 31–47, <https://doi.org/10.1111/ajps.12053>.

29. Achen and Bartels, *Democracy for Realists*, 158.

30. William D. Nordhaus, “The Political Business Cycle,” *The Review of Economic Studies* 42, no. 2 (1975): 169–190, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2296528>.

31. *Ibid.*, 178.

suggest.³² Achen and Bartels suggest the limited empirical evidence for political business cycles is due to the difficulty of detecting pre-election economic fluctuations with short time series and few elections, among other challenges posed by variations in democratic electoral systems.³³ Regardless of whether political business cycles are well-founded, there is considerable evidence that governments target *income* growth in the form of tax cuts, subsidies, and other policies ahead of elections. For instance, in the United States, there is a significant increase in income growth in presidential election years.³⁴

In sum, epistemic manipulation of voters and myopic retrospection undermine or disable crucial democratic values such as responsiveness and the ability of citizens to hold representatives to account. It empowers incumbents to shape the narrow electoral time period to their electoral benefit or at least incentivizes them to do so. Providing voters with *more* information so as to enable them to avoid these manipulative strategies will merely exacerbate the cognitive task voters are asked to perform over a short period of time. Below, I outline registrational voting and show how it blocks the mechanisms that endanger responsiveness and accountability of representatives.

III. REGISTRAL VOTING

Registrational voting works as follows. Each voter would sign in to the eBoard and register their vote for the candidate or party of their choice.³⁵ Whatever vote has been recorded by Vote Close (7pm)³⁶ is recorded as that day's vote. If voters do not change their vote, the recorded vote will be carried by the system over for all subsequent days until and if they change it. This is to ensure that non-persuadable voters who have firmly made up their minds about which party or candidate to support do not have a higher marginal cost of voting than persuadable voters. Voters can also abstain from voting; in which case their votes will not be counted towards the total for the days they have abstained. Additionally, voting terminals can be set up in government buildings (such as post offices) to allow voting year-round. This

32. Allan Drazen, "The Political Business Cycle After 25 Years," *NBER Macroeconomics Annual* 15 (2000): 75–117, <https://doi.org/10.1086/654407>.

33. Achen and Bartels, *Democracy for Realists*, 171.

34. *Ibid.*, 172.

35. Registrational voting can be combined with any voting method. There could be approval registrational voting, ranked choice registrational voting, mixed member proportional registrational voting, and so on.

36. The exact closing time of voting for each day can follow the precedent of election day in each jurisdiction. Nothing much hangs on the time chosen.

provides an avenue for those who wish to vote in private and those who may live in remote areas with poor internet connection.³⁷

This is the core of registral voting. Nonetheless, it can be implemented in different configurations depending on the constitutional context. For instance, registral voting will vary between polities where elected offices have fixed terms and those where there are mechanisms to call an early election. I call these alternatives *fixed-term* and *confidence* registral voting. In fixed-term registral voting, votes are registered over the course of term and the sum of all the votes is tallied and winners are determined according to the prescribed voting method (for instance, in a plurality system the candidate with the highest number of votes wins). Let us take a vignette to illustrate the features of fixed-term registral voting.

Let us assume a polity with a parliamentary system of government and fixed, four-year terms of office (1,460 days in the term). On January 2, at the beginning of the parliamentary term, Alice registers a vote for the Greens, a party she has long supported. The Greens are in a governing coalition with the Reds in the current parliament. Over the first few months, Alice grows increasingly dissatisfied with the Greens' performance. In October, the Greens introduce legislation that Alice opposes. This leads Alice to log into the eBoard and register a vote for the Blacks, a party in opposition that had expressed similar concerns to Alice to the policies of the Red-Green government.³⁸ Greens see significant attrition of support from their core supporters and begin to rethink their policies. They hold town halls around the country to see what voters want to see going forward. They elect a new leader and reverse some of their more unpopular positions. Eight months after switching to the Blacks, Alice comes to see these changes as satisfactory and switches her vote back to the Greens and remains a Green voter for the rest of her term.

Alice's votes can be summed up as follows: Green between January and October of year one and then again from April of year two to end of term; Black from October of year one to April of year two. Alice has therefore registered 282 out of 1,460 votes for the Blacks and 1,178 out of 1,460 votes for Greens.

Alice is a persuadable voter. Although she has a party she usually supports, she is willing to change her vote if they do not align with her political preferences. Registral voting allows Alice to express her political preferences in a way that is binding upon the electoral outcome without having to wait until

37. The system can be designed such that the eBoard periodically provides vote tally information to the public. However, whether or not this feature is included, regular opinion polling will be highly accurate in the registral model.

38. Alternatively, Alice could switch to abstain to signal her displeasure at the government without lending support to another party.

election day. Registrar voting has the flexibility to accommodate many types of voters. If Alice is firm in her commitment to the Greens and has no intention of changing her votes, she may simply register for the Greens and not look back. If Alice doesn't want to vote until she sees the performance of the government, she can abstain until she is ready to vote. A voter who is actively engaged in politics or one for whom electoral politics plays a minor role in her life are both well-served by registrar voting. Although voters are "casting a ballot" every day (if they so choose), registrar voting is consistent with the principle of "one person, one vote" to the same extent as periodic voting. All voters *qua* voters have an equal chance to influence the outcome of the election.

However, most parliamentary systems do not have fixed terms of office. While there is a statutory term at the end of which an election must be held, in most parliamentary systems of government the head of government (usually a prime minister) can dissolve the legislature and call early elections before the expiration of the statutory term.³⁹ As Bradley and Pinelli note,

the essence of parliamentarism in modern constitutions is that executive power is exercised by the Prime Minister and other ministers, who have the confidence of the legislature; if this confidence is withdrawn, the Prime Minister loses authority to govern and must either advise the head of state (monarch or president) that a general election be held, or must resign so that a different government can be formed. In the latter event, if a different government can be formed that has the support of a majority in parliament it will enter into office; if not, a general election must be held.⁴⁰

The requirement that a government maintain the confidence of parliament means that in the absence of parliamentary confidence either the government must resign (and be replaced by a new government), or parliament must be dissolved and replaced after new elections.

Nonetheless, parliamentary confidence is subject to limitations imposed by the temporality problem. If the government can call an early election, they are incentivized to do so at a time that will maximize their vote share. If a government enjoys a majority in parliament, it can time early elections to

39. Notable exceptions include Norway and the UK under the Fixed-term Parliaments Act between 2011 and 2021. See Philip Norton, "The Fixed-term Parliaments Act and Votes of Confidence," *Parliamentary Affairs* 69, no. 1 (2016): 3–18, <https://doi.org/10.1093/pa/gsv003>.

40. Anthony W. Bradley and Cesare Pinelli, "Parliamentarism," in *The Oxford Handbook of Comparative Constitutional Law*, ed. Michel Rosenfeld and Andras Sajó, (Oxford University Press, 2012), 651, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199578610.013.0032>.

avoid periods of unpopularity or to capitalize on periods of high approval. In fact, governments are canny in identifying the point during a parliamentary cycle when an election would maximize their vote share.⁴¹

Confidence registral voting transfers the confidence requirement from parliament to the electorate. The power to dissolve parliament is directly exercised by voters.⁴² Consequently, the ability of governments to manipulate the timing of early elections to maximize their vote share is mitigated. An example of how to implement confidence registral voting is to institute a *confidence threshold* for the continuation of a parliamentary term. For instance, if the majority party or coalition falls below 25 percent of the vote share for 180 consecutive days, the legislature is dissolved, and new seats allocated based on the sum of votes during the current term.⁴³

In the Alice vignette, if voters had the power of early dissolution through confidence registral voting, the Red-Green coalition government could be dissolved before the end of the statutory term if the combined support for the parties in the coalition fell below the confidence threshold. Suppose that 917 days into the 1,460-day statutory term, the coalition's support fell below 25 percent and remained below that threshold for 180 days. This would constitute a loss of confidence and parliament would be dissolved. The new parliament's seats would be re-allocated on the basis of the sum of registral votes recorded in the 1,097 days of the term.

Confidence registral voting need not remove parliament's power to dissolve on its own initiative. Under a dual confidence system, both voters and parliament can exercise confidence. However, parliament's power of dissolution must be exercised by a qualified majority to prevent the governing party or coalition from unilaterally dissolving whenever it would increase

41. See Alastair Smith, "Election Timing in Majoritarian Parliaments," *British Journal of Political Science* 33, no. 3 (2003): 397–418, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007123403000188>.

42. There is growing interest in providing a mechanism that allows voters to directly call snap elections. In 2023, Richard Burgon MP introduced a bill in the UK House of Commons to allow the public to directly call elections. Burgon's bill leaves the mechanism unspecified but calls for the use of signed petitions; <https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3407>. The registral model provides a far more elegant and effective mechanism to achieve the bill's aims.

43. This is merely one proposal for implementing confidence registral voting. In practice, the confidence threshold will depend on the voting method. This mirrors the choice of thresholds in proportional representative systems where the minimum vote share for a party to win seats varies between countries. The choice of threshold has consequences for the effective number of political parties and the longevity of governing coalitions. See Rein Taagepera, "The Number of Parties as a Function of Heterogeneity and Electoral System," *Comparative Political Studies* 32, no. 5 (1999): 531–548, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414099032005001>; Michael Gallagher, "Comparing Proportional Representation Electoral Systems: Quotas, Thresholds, Paradoxes and Majorities," *British Journal of Political Science* 22, no. 4 (1992): 469–496, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007123400006499>.

their vote share. The Fixed-term Parliaments Act of 2011 in the UK allowed early dissolution and elections if a qualified two-thirds majority voted in favor. This can be adapted in a parliamentary system to establish a dual confidence requirement. Additionally, minimum terms of office, such as a rule that parliament cannot be dissolved more than once per year, can provide stability. Similar rules are already in place in many parliamentary and semi-presidential systems.⁴⁴

The cases of registral voting I have outlined are for election of legislatures. The properties of the registral model are best suited for legislative elections. This is due to the typically strong role political parties play in candidate selection and policy formation in legislative elections and parliamentary systems. If registral voting is implemented for presidential systems (i.e., the direct election of chief executives such as mayors, governors, presidents, and so on), the model introduces objectionable temporal restrictions on the electoral supply of candidates. Even if there are no formal rules barring late registration, candidates must register at the beginning of the term to secure the votes necessary to win at the end of term. The later their registration, the less likely their chance of winning. Late-term events may give rise to new political stars who will not be able to capitalize on their popularity to win elections simply because they emerged too late in the electoral term. Even a large majority of voters would fail to elect late-declaring candidates if a deciding share of their vote had already been cast earlier in the term. This restriction on electoral supply hinders one of the benefits of presidential systems. Serendipitous events can motivate candidates to run for office who might not otherwise have the kind of profile and established political support enjoyed by veteran politicians. This problem does not arise in parliamentary systems where through a system of party lists, direct appointments, or special elections, seats can easily be found for newly emergent candidates at any point in the term. This makes registral voting ideal for electing legislatures, especially in parliamentary systems with strong political parties.

It is not my aim to discuss the relative merits of each variant of the registral model of voting. There is much more that needs to be said to describe the different proposals and show their strengths and weaknesses. The purpose of the brief outlines above is to show the *flexibility* by which registral voting may be implemented in democratic societies with different constitutional structures. Furthermore, since registral voting has never been tried in the history of democratic governance, there are likely to be unexpected prop-

44. For instance, in France the president of the republic cannot dissolve the National Assembly more than once per year.

erties that emerge. But we should not underestimate how much the political culture of a society already depends on its choice of electoral system. In parliamentary systems, the choice of voting *method* will influence how powerful a prime minister is in relation to her ministers, how independent the executive is from parliament, the average duration of governments and the effective number of parliamentary parties.⁴⁵ Whether elections are conducted with simple plurality rather than run-off voting methods will influence the number of viable political parties and the strategies voters must use to express their preferences.

Similarly, registral voting will likely result in substantial changes to the political culture of a democratic society. Political parties, interest groups, the media, and other political actors will reshape their strategies in response to the temporal expansion of the franchise. Although it is beyond the scope of this paper to fully outline this transformed political environment, what this paper argues is that registral voting improves upon periodic voting by disabling objectionable features of election time. The justification for registral voting partly rests in the fact that, as I argue, it *enhances* the control voters exercise over their representatives.

IV. TOWARDS A NEW TEMPORALITY OF ELECTIONS

IV.A REGISTRAL VOTING AND THE VALUE OF DEMOCRACY

With an outline of registral voting in place, we can see how it disables or minimizes the effects of epistemic manipulation and myopic retrospection. Under periodic voting, cognitive limitations combined with the range of manipulable signals available to political actors (especially incumbents) put voters in an unenviable epistemic position ahead of an election. Voters want to make informed evaluations of political performance. However, as discussed in section II, they are ill-served in their capacity to do. The incentive of political actors to manipulate the timing and salience of political information and the myopic retrospection of voters are consequences of the temporality of periodic elections. Registral voting *equalizes* the importance

45. See Alastair Smith, "Election Timing in Majoritarian Parliaments," *British Journal of Political Science* 33, no. 3 (2003): 397–418, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007123403000188>; Thomas Lundberg, "Politics is Still an Adversarial Business: Minority Government and Mixed-Member Proportional Representation in Scotland and in New Zealand," *British Journal of Politics & International Relations* (2013) 15 (4): 609–625 <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-856X.2012.00522.x>; Matthew Shugart and Rein Taagepera, "Electoral System Effects on Party Systems," in *The Oxford Handbook of Electoral Systems*, ed. Erik S. Herron, Robert J. Pekkanen, and Matthew S. Shugart (Oxford Academic, 2018): 41–68, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhpb/9780190258658.013.15>.

of every day in determining the outcome of an election. As a result, information being made available to the public at one time rather than another has dramatically reduced election-specific importance. Registrational voting therefore minimizes the ability of political actors to manipulate the salience of information or events for electoral ends.

Myopic retrospection is eliminated by registrational voting. Voters are able to assess the performance of their representatives in “real time” and vote accordingly. The cognitive load of the information they must consider when voting is significantly reduced. Voters need not remember all the information over the term of office they view as being important to making voting decisions, they can vote as and when salient information becomes available. There is no period close to Election Day during which events have overwhelming importance.

Of course, it is inevitable, and not objectionable, for politicians to attempt to capture voters’ attention. Indeed, registrational voting will tend to enhance political competition by making every day electorally valuable. What registrational voting dampens is the ability to translate attentional capture into electoral benefit *on the cheap*. For instance, tax cuts, short-term subsidies, reduced petrol prices at state owned pumps,⁴⁶ among other policies, can be enacted for relatively low fiscal cost since their effect need only be felt for a short period ahead of an election. The electoral benefit of pump priming hinges on the limited, short-term boost to voter consumption (and therefore voter’s perception of government performance) ahead of an election. Such expansionary pre-election budgets are frequently followed by post-election contractionary measures to stabilize public finances.⁴⁷ The elimination of non-electoral periods by registrational voting means that incumbents pursuing such policies over long periods would be forced to commit much larger fiscal resources to rapidly diminish electoral returns.⁴⁸ The reputational cost

46. Ben Munster and Izabella Kaminska, “Poland’s Government Under Fire for Massaging Price Data Before Election,” *Politico*, September 28, 2023, <https://www.politico.eu/article/poland-inflation-data-rates-pis-law-and-justice-party-election/>.

47. Tax cuts in the last budget before an election followed by post-election tax rises are a frequent occurrence in the UK. In 1992, then Chancellor Norman Lamont said of this gambit that it was “not a very good budget. But it did help us to win the 1992 election,” quoted in Robert Chote and Carl Emmerson, “Taxes and Elections: Are They by Any Chance Related?,” *Institute for Fiscal Studies*, March 15, 2010, <https://ifs.org.uk/articles/taxes-and-elections-are-they-any-chance-related>.

48. Policies that benefit voters lose their salience over time. See Michael M. Bechtel and Jens Hainmueller, “How Lasting is Voter Gratitude? An Analysis of the Short- and Long-Term Electoral Returns to Beneficial Policy,” *American Journal of Political Science* 55, no. 4 (2011): 852–868, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-5907.2011.00533.x>.

is therefore much higher. Incumbents would open themselves up to more effective charges of fiscal irresponsibility.

The structure of election time inevitably results in a particular distribution of political power. As Elizabeth Cohen notes, “in the same way that decision making is considered democratized when it is dispersed over a larger rather than smaller portion of the population, so too might we think of boundaries and rights as more democratically structured when they are built using multiple points in time rather than single dates.”⁴⁹ Registral voting realizes a new form of election time. By enfranchising voters across the whole term rather than a single date, registral voting enhances the ability of voters to resist the ability of governments and elites to wield durational time for their own ends. This, among other things, serves as a democratic counterweight to a form of temporally distributed binding constraint on governments, namely, markets. Capital markets provide instantaneous feedback to government policy. But binding feedback from voters potentially takes years. Policy therefore will tend to be more receptive to capital than to ordinary voters. Registral voting rectifies this imbalance by providing a daily democratic counterweight to markets.

IV.B SAVING DEMOCRACY FROM ELECTIONS

Prominent defenses of democracy highlight its capacity to secure values such as political equality, deliberation, autonomy, among others. On egalitarian accounts, democracy is justified by the fact that it treats everyone as equals. In a democracy, everyone has an equal ability to influence the political process and shape public policy.⁵⁰ Democracy prevents the subordination of some citizens to others. It is not a system where some rule while others are ruled but rather one in which citizens relate to one another as equals.⁵¹ A (democratic) political system is justified insofar as it realizes these egalitarian aims. Another influential account of democracy centers the

49. Cohen, *The Political Value of Time*, 59.

50. See Robert Dahl, *Polyarchy: Participation and Opposition* (Yale University Press, 1971); Nadia Urbinati, *Representative Democracy: Principles and Genealogy* (University of Chicago Press, 2006), <https://doi.org/10.7208/chicago/9780226842806.001.0001>; and Thomas Christiano, *The Constitution of Equality: Democratic Authority and its Limits* (Oxford University Press, 2008), <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198297475.001.0001>.

51. Niko Kolodny, “Rule over None I: What Justifies Democracy?,” *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 42, no. 3 (2014): 195–229, <https://doi.org/10.1111/papa.12035>; Niko Kolodny, “Rule over None II: Social Equality and the Justification of Democracy,” *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 42, no. 4 (2014): 287–336, <https://doi.org/10.1111/papa.12037>; Niko Kolodny, *The Pecking Order: Social Hierarchy as a Philosophical Problem* (Harvard University Press, 2023), <https://doi.org/10.4159/9780674292819>.

value of *deliberation* to public justification.⁵² Democracy enables the public use of reason by which the laws and institutions that govern citizens conceived as free and equal are justified.⁵³

The promise of registral voting lies in its capacity to better realize these core democratic values. *Electoral* democracy's putative failure to do so has recently become a flashpoint for proposals to restore democracy by doing away with elections. Alexander Guerrero and Hélène Landemore advance prominent lottocratic alternatives to elections, where representatives are randomly selected from among the citizenry by a lottery system, to fully replace or complement electoral representation.⁵⁴ For Guerrero the "primary purpose of elections is to help measure the extent to which candidates are actually supported and authorized to govern [...]."⁵⁵ Different electoral systems can do better or worse at realizing this aim. However, Guerrero argues elections are inherently limited in their ability to deliver a responsive and good government. Elections fail to secure "meaningful accountability" of representatives because of the widely established ignorance of voters on many aspects of government policy as well as the capacity of powerful interests to capture the electoral process. For instance, financial constraints and the corporate control of mainstream media impose limits on the range of candidates and policies that are viable.

Landemore argues that elections are ill-suited to realizing the aims of democracy, including ideals of deliberation, political equality, and popular rule. For Landemore, representative democracy engenders "the separation of a ruling elite of elected officials, appointed courts, and administrative bodies on the one hand and the mass of ordinary citizens on the other."⁵⁶ According to the most prominent accounts of democracy, ordinary citizens control the ruling elite through periodic free and fair elections. However, Landemore argues that elections fail to empower all citizens equally. For Landemore:

52. Jürgen Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms*, trans. William Rehg (MIT Press, 1996).

53. John Rawls, *Political Liberalism* (Columbia University Press, 1993).

54. Alexander Guerrero, *Lottocracy: Democracy Without Elections* (Oxford University Press, 2024), <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780198856368.001.0001>; Alexander Guerrero, "Against Elections: The Lottocratic Alternative," *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 42, no. 2 (2014): 135–178, <https://doi.org/10.1111/papa.12029>; Hélène Landemore, *Open Democracy: Reinventing Popular Rule for the Twenty-First Century* (Princeton University Press, 2020), <https://doi.org/10.23943/princeton/9780691181998.001.0001>. See also David Van Reybrouck, *Against Elections* (Seven Stories Press, 2016); Cristina Lafont, *Democracy without Shortcuts: A Participatory Conception of Deliberative Democracy* (Oxford University Press, 2019), <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780198848189.001.0001>.

55. Guerrero, "Against Elections," 277.

56. Landemore, *Open Democracy*, 38.

Elections introduce systematic discriminatory effects in terms of who has access to power, specifically agenda-setting power. By so doing, elections skew the type of perspectives and input that shape law-making, likely resulting in suboptimal results. Second, elections entail a type of party politics that is itself not all that conducive to deliberation or its prerequisite virtues, such as open-mindedness, rather than partisanship.⁵⁷

The immense influence elites have over crucial institutions in an electoral system, from political parties to news organizations, render elections an ambiguously democratic form of popular rule. The reliance on political parties to mediate the relationship between voters and their elected representatives engenders partisanship, which is inimical to the open-minded, undominated, and free dialogue that is central to deliberative accounts of democracy. As such, Landemore argues, elections prevent rather than facilitate popular rule.⁵⁸

Guerrero and Landemore argue that existing proposals to “save democracy” (e.g., campaign finance reform) are ill-matched to the scale of problems posed by modern electoral democracies. They propose moving away from elections to randomly selected representative assemblies to secure the core values of democracy. While analysis of their specific proposals is beyond the scope of this paper, there are two reasons to resist the move to lottocracy made possible by registral voting. First, Guerrero and Landemore partly draw on the empirical evidence on the ignorance or myopia of voters (discussed in section 2) to highlight the far-reaching and objectionable divergence between democratic theory and practice. However, as I have argued, these facts are exacerbated by the temporality of elections. Insofar as registral voting can disable many of these objectionable features of election time, we have reason to try this transformative reform before taking the more radical step of abolishing elections altogether.

Second, as Kevin J. Elliot argues, lottocratic proposals come at the cost of making the political process much more complex than in modern electoral democracies.⁵⁹ The participation costs of randomly selected citizens assemblies are far greater than those exacted by elections. As Elliot notes, the potent value of elections rests in the fact that “elections [...] are a powerful instance of the principle of concentrating power where participation costs

57. Ibid, 26.

58. Ibid, 43.

59. Kevin J. Elliot, *Democracy for Busy People* (University of Chicago Press, 2023), <https://doi.org/10.7208/chicago/9780226826318.001.0001>.

are low.”⁶⁰ If there is a way to preserve elections while disabling the anomalies of election time, such a proposal would combine the relatively low participation cost of elections with a more responsive political system. I argue registral voting does just that. Registral voting does increase the participation costs of elections by increasing their frequency, at least for persuadable voters. However, this is balanced by the reduction in cognitive and epistemic costs associated with periodic elections. Registral voters do not have to consider an immense amount of cumulative information (representing years of governance) as well as the highly dense near-election media environment. Registral voting eases this cognitive burden by temporally decompressing the electoral period.

Elliot also identifies election time as the source of many of the political anomalies that plague democracies. His proposed solution, mandatory annual elections, does better than other proposals in tackling election time. But, as I argue below, it does so at the expense of the effective ability of elected representatives to direct the state.

IV.C WHY NOT ANNUAL ELECTIONS?

Elliot argues that the “unequal busyness” of democratic citizens poses a serious and underexplored challenge to democratic equality. Elliot contends that recent lottocratic proposals for replacing elected legislatures increase the complexity of the political system and thereby render political participation even more demanding for the average citizen. Elliot defends elections on grounds that they are uniquely well-suited to serve as participatory institutions for busy people. For Elliot, “the brute fact of voting being inexpensive and yet also decisively powerful makes democracies that center elections much more likely than conceivable alternatives to empower busy people and avoid the pathologies of inequality generated by more demanding modes of participation.”⁶¹ That is, elections fulfill the design principle that realize democratic equality among citizens who are unequal in the time and attention they are able to give to politics. Among these design principles is that political participation be “simple, easy, and undemanding to leave citizens with as much time under their control as possible.”⁶²

Elliot’s main proposals, mandatory voting and annual elections, aim to empower ordinary, busy citizens by creating an institutional and cultural environment of low-cost, participatory elections. Elliot’s proposal for annual

60. *Ibid.*, 125.

61. *Ibid.*, 124.

62. *Ibid.*, 122.

elections directly addresses the politics of election time. Elliot argues that “longer durations between elections mean fewer opportunities to change political direction. This concentrates more power in the hands of representatives because they get to hold power for a longer period of time. It also reduces their accountability [...]”⁶³ Elliot interprets the literature on retrospective voting as having the upshot “that we can divide the term of office between an electorally accountable period crowded temporally close to the next election and the rest of it as a period of unaccountable power.”⁶⁴ Representatives are untethered from voters in the non-electoral period over which voters are blinded by myopic retrospection.

Annual elections circumvent the anomalies of election time generated by myopic retrospection. If elections are held every year, there is no need for voters to rely on a proxy to gauge the performance of the government. The amount of information they need to consider or recall is significantly reduced. Consequently, the ability of voters to hold representatives accountable is magnified. However, annual elections come with a cost. I appeal not to the cost of frequent *elections*, but to the cost of frequent *changes of government or representatives*. Longer terms of office may insulate representatives from the influence of their voters. But they also engender the development of deep political expertise in politicians. Additionally, regardless of whether incumbents are re-elected, it gives them the opportunity to enact policies whose benefits have a longer time horizon without worrying that they will not receive the credit. Annual elections incentivize politicians to campaign on and enact policies with immediate or short-term benefits potentially to the detriment of longer-term gains.

Elliot cites annual elections for state legislatures in the early American republic as a real-world case of how annual elections contribute to responsive and accountable government.⁶⁵ However, the lessons to be drawn from this case are tempered by the evolution of government over the intervening centuries. The activities of government and its social, economic, and legal role have grown immensely complex in the past century. Among member states of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, the average government spent 40.8 percent of GDP in 2019.⁶⁶ In advanced modern economies, sectors such as education, health and social care, energy, and banking, among others, have extensive state involvement. In this context,

63. *Ibid.*, 145.

64. *Ibid.*, 146.

65. *Ibid.*, 148–152.

66. OECD, “General Government Spending,” *OECD* 2019, <https://www.oecd.org/en/data/indicators/general-government-spending.html>.

having annual terms of office might perversely limit the responsiveness of government not by insulating representatives from voters but by shrinking the role of elected representatives in the state. It would potentially empower the permanent civil service vis-à-vis elected officials.

Fortunately, registral voting is able to side-step these limitations of annual elections without sacrificing responsiveness and accountability. Under registral voting, while votes are recorded daily, representatives serve over longer terms of office (perhaps four or five years as is typical in most democracies). Consequently, even a newly formed government will have a significant period of time to become adept at directing the operations of the state. However, the longer term of office does not shield incumbents from popular control. The fate of the government after its term of office expires is being written every day.

V. IMPLEMENTING REGISTRAL VOTING: MODEST FIRST STEPS

Jurisdictions occasionally change voting methods, for instance moving from plurality voting to ranked-choice voting (where voters can rank multiple candidates on a single ballot). Over fifty jurisdictions in the United States have adopted ranked-choice voting (RCV), including for federal elections.⁶⁷ The most populous US jurisdiction to make this change is New York City, which adopted RCV for mayoral and other municipal offices in 2021.⁶⁸ Nonetheless, adopting new voting methods still maintains the basic structure of election time. Registral voting represents a radical departure from how we conceive of and conduct elections.

Registral voting preserves the role of elections in representative democracy. To that extent, it is less of a radical change than lottocratic proposals. However, unlike in the case of lottocracy, there is no historical precedent we can draw on to confidently forecast all the interactions this new system would generate. Our theoretical and empirical understanding of election time and the effect of differences in voting methods on political outcomes can provide only preliminary evidence about the outcome of adopting registral voting. But the adoption of registral voting need not be a blind plunge. Transitional electoral reforms can both generate evidence of registral voting's effectiveness against the temporality problem and deepen

67. Jimmy Balser, "Ranked-Choice Voting: Legal Challenges and Considerations for Congress," *Congressional Research Service*, 2022 <https://www.congress.gov/crs-product/LSB10837>.

68. Sarah Almkhatar, Jazmine Hughes, and Eden Weingart, "How Does Ranked-Choice Voting Work in New York?," *New York Times*, April 22, 2021. <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2021/nyregion/ranked-choice-voting-nyc.html>.

understanding of how election time, both under registrational and periodic voting, influences democratic politics. The adoption of registrational voting for non-state elections also provides a relatively low-stakes opportunity to reap the benefits of the registrational model and provide evidence regarding its properties. I propose three mechanisms for implementing registrational voting: (i) hybrid models, (ii) local implementation, and (iii) non-state registrational voting.

V.A HYBRID MODELS

Registrational voting can be paired with periodic elections to combine elements of both models. For instance, in ranked-choice registrational voting, registrational voting can be used to determine the top two candidates (through ranked-choice registrational voting). These two candidates will then proceed to a run-off, periodic election to determine the winner. In *ranking-based* registrational voting (e.g., Borda Count or Hare Rule), voters do not select a single candidate or party in their registrational ballots but rather rank the parties or candidates in order of preference.⁶⁹ Among other advantages, ranking-based voting methods prevent wastage of votes. Even if electoral candidates withdraw or are removed well into the electoral term (and voting period), the voting rules will reallocate those votes to candidates that are still active.

Registrational voting is also an ideal system for implementing provisions for recall elections in jurisdictions that have them.⁷⁰ In the United States, thirty-nine states have provisions for recalling elected officials at some administrative level. Twenty US States make provisions for the governor to face a recall election. Typically, recall elections are triggered by gathering valid signatures on a recall petition.⁷¹ On the registrational recall model, at the beginning of the term after every periodic election for executive office, voters register a vote of confidence on the eBoard. If the confidence vote share of the incumbent falls below a threshold over a specified period of time, a recall election will be held according to provisions in the electoral laws.

69. On this method, voters rank presidential candidates in a Single-Transferable Vote registrational ballot.

70. Pierre-Etienne Vandamme, "Can the Recall Improve Electoral Representation?," *Frontiers in Political Science* 2 (2020): 6, <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpos.2020.00006>.

71. For instance, in California a recall election to remove a statewide officer (such as the governor) requires collection signatures of at least 12 percent of the number of votes cast in the last election for that office within 160 days. This process is expensive and difficult to implement. Furthermore, recall petitions only sample a small subset of all voters. Registrational voting by contrast would be able to seamlessly register the votes of the whole electorate.

V.B LOCAL EXPERIMENTATION

In federal or devolved political systems, sub-national units can serve as genuine “laboratories of democracy” through implementation of registrational voting. I propose that municipalities are the ideal political unit for initially implementing registrational voting, for instance through registrational ranked-choice voting for the election of city councilors. The size and scale of municipalities, along with their more limited political role compared to national political institutions, makes them a favorable testing ground for emergent political dynamics. Lower-level political units also tend to suffer from lower voter engagement and turnout when political competition is limited.⁷² Since municipalities are providers of crucial services such as education, public safety, water and sanitation, among others, the enhanced responsiveness secured by the registrational model is a welcome empowerment of residents.

V.C NON-STATE REGISTRATIONAL VOTING

This paper has almost exclusively discussed elections as mechanisms for the democratic governance of *states*. However, non-state institutions—such as labor unions, universities, corporations, co-operatives, among others—conduct elections. These elections can be conducted through registrational voting. In particular, the governance of public corporations is well-served by registrational voting. Under US laws, shareholders have governance rights over corporations which they exercise through electing members of the board of directors and advancing and voting on proposals at annual meetings.⁷³ As they have a direct financial interest, shareholders are incentivized to be well-informed about the firms in which they invest. Investors pay large sums for high-quality information from financial newspapers, proxy advisors, trading platforms, among others. Public markets provide daily information aggregating market sentiment about firm performance. These are ideal epistemic conditions for governance. Registrational voting enhances shareholder control over corporations, a “fundamental element of corporate ownership.”⁷⁴

Even with cautious implementation, there are still challenges to the registrational model that need to be addressed. Below, I discuss objections to registrational voting and respond.

72. Melissa Marschall and John Lappie, “Turnout in Local Elections: Is Timing Really Everything?,” *Election Law Journal: Rules, Politics, and Policy* 17, no. 3 (2018): 221–233, <https://doi.org/10.1089/elj.2017.0462>.

73. Renee Jones, 2022, “The Shareholder Proposal Rule: A Cornerstone of Corporate Democracy,” U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission, 2022, <https://www.sec.gov/newsroom/speeches-statements/jones-cii-2022-03-08>.

74. *Ibid.*, VI.a.

VI. OBJECTIONS AND REPLIES

VI.A THE BENEFITS OF TEMPORALITY

A challenge to registral voting argues that while it disables problems caused by election time, it also undermines positive values secured by the temporality of the election cycle. I consider two objections to registral voting drawing on the literature on the temporality of election cycles: the *responsibility objection* and the *electoral fatigue objection*.

First, the responsibility objection holds that while register voting enhances the responsiveness of representatives, it for the same reason reduces their responsibility. Recently, political scientists studying the relationship between party and government (particularly in Europe) have highlighted what they call the responsiveness-responsibility dilemma.⁷⁵ There is a trade-off between the extent to which governing parties adhere to the preferences of their voters and the need for governments to pursue policies that transcend election cycles. On this framework, responsiveness is the tendency of political parties and leaders to “sympathetically respond to the short-term demands of voters, public opinion, interest groups, and the media” while responsibility concerns “(a) the long-term needs of their people and countries” and “(b) the claims of audiences other than the national electoral audience.”⁷⁶ The relationship between responsiveness and responsibility is highly complex.⁷⁷ Yet it is plausible that on many occasions the constraints imposed by voters (responsiveness) will go against the constraints imposed on governments by international treaties, financial markets, and long-term planning requirements (responsibility). In such cases, registral voting can be said to have a *responsiveness bias* by making voter preferences more binding.

The temporality of periodic elections has features that facilitate responsibility by shielding governing parties from electoral penalties of acting ‘responsibly’. The period immediately after an election is typically a time of intense government activity. Newly formed governments enjoy a “honeymoon period” of popularity. This early period serves as cover for governments as they push through policies that may otherwise be unpopular

75. See Klaus H. Goetz, “A Question of Time: Responsive and Responsible Democratic Politics,” *West European Politics* 37 no. 2 (2014): 379–99, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01402382.2014.887880>; Zoe Lefkofridi and Johannes Karremans, “Responsive versus Responsible?: Party Democracy in Times of Crisis,” *Party Politics* 26, no. 3 (2020): 271–279, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354068818761199>.

76. Luciano Bardi, Stefano Bartolini, and Alexander H. Trechsel, “Responsive and Responsible? The Role of Parties in Twenty-First Century Politics,” *West European Politics* 37 no. 2 (2014): 237, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01402382.2014.887871>.

77. For a survey of the different views on the responsiveness-responsibility relationship, see Zoe Lefkofridi and Johannes Karremans, “Responsive versus Responsible?”

but that they reasonably judge to be in the long-term interests of society. On the periodic model, incumbents hope that some of the fruits of this early activity will be apparent before the next election or be forgotten by the time elections are held. Without this “cooling-off period,” governments might become reluctant to enact bold but “responsible” policies for fear of a backlash that would, under registral voting, immediately register an electoral penalty.

Second, the electoral fatigue objection highlights the benefits of the election cycle in providing political warming-up and cooling-off periods. The interval between elections offers rest for voters. On the other hand, an election campaign is an opportunity for voters to re-engage with the political process more fully. Campaign rallies, debates, political canvassing, and other forms of electioneering bring politics to the forefront of citizen’s minds for a relatively contained period ahead of an election. Whereas in the period immediately after an election, voters can partially disengage and reduce partisan political activity. A citizenry that is constantly electorally engaged, with no warming-up or cooling-off period, might become exhausted by the political process. Furthermore, election cycles influence economic and social behavior. For instance, strong partisanship affects voters’ emotions and market pricing activity.⁷⁸ If voters continuously see one another as either co-partisans or political opponents, this has the potential to distort other social and economic relations between fellow citizens.

The responsibility and electoral fatigue objections raise reasonable worries. The temporality problem must be weighed against the benefits of electoral cycles. However, I argue registral voting can realize both responsibility and civic rest. First, in so far as there is a trade-off between responsiveness and responsibility, registral voting shifts the balance toward responsiveness. Yet these concepts need not be characterized as purely antagonistic.⁷⁹ Responsibility is itself a species of responsiveness—to non-citizens and foreign states, to the long-term interests of citizens, to future generations, and to outcomes that outlive a single parliamentary term. The practical tension, therefore, is not between being responsive or not, but between being responsive to short-run preferences and being responsive

78. See Kristin Michelitch, “Does Electoral Competition Exacerbate Interethnic or Interpartisan Economic Discrimination? Evidence from a Field Experiment in Market Price Bargaining,” *American Political Science Review* 109, no. 1 (2015): 43–61, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055414000628>; Leonie Huddy, Lilliana Mason, and Lene Aarøe, “Expressive Partisanship: Campaign Involvement, Political Emotion, and Partisan Identity,” *American Political Science Review* 109, no. 1 (2015): 1–17, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055414000604>.

79. Luciano Bardi, Stefano Bartolini, and Alexander H. Trechsel, “Responsive and Responsible?”

to long-term (or non-electoral) interests. Registrational voting can lessen rather than exacerbate that tension. By widening the electorate's sense of ownership over governmental direction, the reform supplies mainstream parties with strong incentives to articulate and defend credible long-horizon policymaking. When citizens no longer feel disempowered, the appetite for "populist" entrepreneurs—whose platforms typically jettison fiscal, environmental, or constitutional restraints—declines.⁸⁰ In this way, greater day-to-day responsiveness can indirectly fortify long-term responsibility.

Peter Mair's influential analysis of European party government underscores this dynamic: decades of dwindling responsiveness have eroded the capacity of governing elites in Europe to pursue responsible policies because they face constant insurgencies that deny the very legitimacy of responsibility-constraints.⁸¹ Registrational voting counteracts that erosion by restoring the sense that voters can meaningfully steer the ship of state, thereby insulating leaders who adopt forward-looking policies against the charge of technocratic detachment.

Robert Dahl famously defined democracy as "the continuing responsiveness of the government to the preferences of its citizens, considered as political equals."⁸² Responsiveness is a constitutive requirement of democratic legitimacy, whereas responsibility is a prudential virtue that depends on continual legitimation. However, characterized in this way, there occasionally remains a trade-off between the short-term preferences of voters and their long-term interests. Where the two conflict, registrational voting will tend to incentivize politicians to pursue the shorter-term. While I cannot fully defend that bias here, it is worth noting that it realizes the Dahlian conception of democracy even if it might trade that for some level of policy effectiveness. For democratic theorists worried about a contemporary "democracy deficit" or the "democratic malaise" fueling extremist movements, the responsiveness bias of registrational voting is a welcome feature.

Nonetheless, if responsibility and civic rest require cool-off and warm-up periods provided by electoral cycles, these can be accommodated by registrational voting. A registrational model could incorporate a formula that puts less weight on votes registered on, say, the first three months of a term and puts higher weight on the votes of the last three months. The exact fig-

80. Increasing responsiveness by incorporating revocation procedures such as recall mechanisms has been shown to increase the perceived legitimacy of the political system. See Pierre-Etienne Vandamme, "Can the Recall Improve Electoral Representation?"

81. Peter Mair, *Ruling the Void: The Hollowing of Western Democracy* (Verso, 2023).

82. Dahl, *Polyarchy*.

ures don't matter for the purpose of the argument, but a weighted formula could instantiate cooling-off and warming-up periods. I am not claiming that such a formula is necessary. Rather, weighted registral voting is an alternative for those who argue electoral cycles are indispensable for responsibility and civic rest. Weighted registral voting allows for cooling-off and warming-up without many of the drawbacks of periodic elections highlighted in this paper. It could minimize the ability of incumbents to bank insurmountable support in their honeymoon period, provide an electorally less costly time to enact bold policies, and allow voters to reduce engagement early in the term and increase it towards the end of the term without fear of losing out on influence.

VI.B VOTER REGRET

I have argued that registral voting eliminates myopic retrospection. Nonetheless, one may object that voters who change their votes may come to regret their registered votes. Take the case of Joe, who registers a vote for candidate A in 1,300 out of 1,460 days of a term of office. On day 1,301 a news story reveals that Joe's favored candidate is corrupt. Joe is mortified and changes his vote to candidate B. However, he sees that 89% of his vote has already gone to candidate A, with only 11% remaining to be allocated to another candidate. Knowing what he knows now, Joe would not have voted the way he did. Joe feels that his vote has been wasted. Joe may also regret his lack of *foresight*. For instance, suppose Joe switched his vote from candidate A to candidate B in response to his anger at candidate A, and later switches back his support to candidate A because it turns out his anger was unwarranted. He may regret the many votes he has deprived his candidate (or given to a candidate he doesn't support).⁸³

Registril voting does not eliminate voter regret. However, this is not a feature that is unique to registril voting. In fact, registril voting may end up doing better than periodic systems on that front. After all, a voter like Joe may come to learn something about a candidate after election day such that, had he had that information before election day, his vote would have been different. Voters wishing to change their vote in periodic voting systems will at best get the chance during the next election many months or years later. Under registril voting, potentially only fractions of one's vote are regretted. In periodic electoral systems, necessarily the whole of one's vote is regretted

83. Of course, a voter may switch to abstention to signal withdrawal of support for a party or candidate without thereby lending votes to others.

if one finds oneself in Joe's situation. Similarly, voters on election day may vote against an incumbent to signal their displeasure and later come to regret their lack of foresight if the opposition party or candidate they do not support overall is victorious.

However, there is an asymmetry between voter regret under periodic and registrational voting. Voter regret in periodic elections concerns an outcome that is in the past. In the registrational model, the failure of the incoming government to reflect the current preference of voters is something that's yet to be realized. Voters might be frustrated in cases where the late-winning candidate seems ideal for the political moment. The weighted formula discussed in section VI.A goes some way to strengthening late-term votes but does not guarantee the late-term vote share leader will win.

This objection is then a question of whether the preferences of voters proximate to the end of term ought to prevail in all cases. In this paper I have argued that there are reasons to hold it should not. I grant that there are circumstances where the ideal candidate is one with wind in its sails late in the term. But this is sometimes a serendipitous outcome. The limitations of the temporality of elections on the other hand are well-established and persistent across elections (e.g., myopic retrospection). Given these limitations, I argue it is better to distribute the franchise throughout the whole term. The loss in the occasional serendipitous electoral outcome is made up for by the persistent enhancement of the responsiveness of the political system. A core feature of registrational voting is that it eliminates the significance of any one day. Consequently, voters have greater flexibility in assigning their votes between candidates. While eliminating voter regret is not possible, registrational voting provides more opportunities for voters to change their vote and still influence the electoral outcome without having to wait until the next election.

VII. CONCLUSION

Registrational voting severs the connection between elections and election day. We can vote in all the days of the term of office and determine winners by using one of many voting methods. Registrational voting prevents events, relevant or irrelevant, from having greater importance than warranted simply by being proximate to election day. The registrational model reduces the power of politicians to manipulate the timing or salience of policymaking to serve their electoral aims and entrench their power. The epistemic aims of democracy are better realized by expanding the electoral period to the full term of office, allowing voting to occur while a wider range of information is available and

salient to voters. These factors recommend registrational voting as an attractive solution to many of the problems identified by critics of electoral democracy, especially in the digital age.

Acknowledgements I am grateful to Elsa Kugelberg, Henrik Kugelberg, Leif Wenar, Joseph Bowen, Jessica Isserow, Ed Elliot, Todd Karhu, Katie Creel, Valerie Soon, Linda Eggert, Daniel Hutton Ferris, Diana Acosta Navas and to audiences at the Stanford McCoy Family Center for Ethics in Society Workshop, University of Leeds CAMP Seminar, LSE Political Theory Workshop, Nuffield College Political Theory Workshop, CU Boulder Philosophy Colloquium, Wake Forest University Philosophy Colloquium, Bled Ethics Conference, University of Notre Dame Philosophy Seminar, UC San Diego Political Theory Workshop and Marquette University Philosophy Colloquium as well as the editor and two anonymous reviewers for this journal for their generous and helpful comments on the ideas and earlier drafts of this paper.

Competing Interests The author has no competing interests to declare.