

The Concept of Integrity

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This research note draws on our emerging conceptualization, research and conversations about deliberative integrity and has not been peer-reviewed. For up to date information on the deliberative integrity project, visit

www.deliberativeintegrityproject.org

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Problem

Integrity as a philosophical concept is understood and applied in various ways. For our project to apply it to deliberative processes, we need to be clear what we mean by integrity.

Purpose

This research note considers some of the different ways in which integrity is conceptualised in order to understand if and how existing definitions can inform our work on deliberative integrity.

Approach

This research note looks to existing work on integrity from philosophy, normative theory and empirical political science. It considers the relevance of each contribution to our work on deliberative integrity before using this foundation to suggest deliberative principles for integrity.

Findings

Based on understandings of integrity from normative theory, deliberative integrity could be conceptualised as fidelity to the basic ideals of deliberative democracy.

Value

These preliminary thoughts help to ground our theoretical understanding of deliberative integrity and consider how this might translate into practice and empirical research.

What is deliberative integrity?

Are there any lessons we can draw from electoral integrity? Pippa Norris in her approach completely avoids normative theorizing, and rejects an approach to electoral integrity based on democratic values. What she does instead is define electoral integrity “in terms of international commitments and global norms, endorsed in a series of authoritative conventions, treaties, protocols, and guidelines” (2014: 9). These include the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the 1966 UN International Covenant for Civil and Political Rights, and the 1990 Copenhagen Document of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe. So from the 1966 document she gets: Periodic elections at regular intervals, Universal suffrage, Equal suffrage (one person one vote), Right to contest elections, Rights of all electors to vote, Secret ballot, Elections reflect free expression of will of people. And from the 1990 document, the right to establish parties, honest vote counting with results publicly reported, winners allowed to serve full terms. Unfortunately this doesn't help us because there are no authoritative international conventions etc when it comes to deliberation. So I think we have to engage with normative theory. I do not think this is a second best approach; normative grounding is I think preferable to induction from international agreements that happen to exist.

I will now look at the normative theory/philosophy of integrity with a view to seeing how it could help. What exactly is integrity? Integrity is not the same as a positive evaluation of a process. Nor is it the same as quality. It is possible for a process to have integrity, while yielding bad results. For electoral integrity, consider a system that uses simple plurality voting in a divided society; it could meet all the standards of integrity perfectly, while still yielding polarization and/or permanent marginalization of a minority's core interests. Or think of a possible mismatch between a deliberative model and the kind of issue it is applied to; again you could have integrity, but poor quality. I think if a process does not have integrity it will necessarily yield bad results; but the converse isn't true. Also, the deliberative quality we do observe (whether good or bad) will depend on factors beyond integrity (consider for example the independent variables in [Simon Niemeyer's metastudy project](#), such as group building, duration of process, issue complexity). So I do not think integrity is the same as quality.

Integrity has a necessary ethical component; and a set of principles for integrity of a process would presumably constitute part of a code of ethics for practitioners (though not I think the entirety of that code, which would also have to cover principles of individual conduct for practitioners).

Given the ethical component, can moral philosophy tell us anything useful? There is an article on integrity in the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy. However this article is limited in its

helpfulness for us because it treats integrity only as an attribute of individual agents: “integrity is primarily a matter of keeping the self intact and uncorrupted” (Cox et al 2021). In this light, I think the best way to think of integrity is in terms of what Shmuel Nili in his recent book *The People’s Duty* defines as “fidelity to one’s identity-grounding commitments or projects” (2019: 4), which should not be sacrificed for the sake of material gain or expediency. Here I’d probably say “fidelity to deep moral commitments” because I don’t think identity has to come into play for structures as opposed to agents. (Note how once we apply moral principles such as this beyond the individual level, a problem arises for the standard deliberative systems point that non-deliberative acts or practices can have positive deliberative consequences for the system as a whole. If that happens, does this imply that the system lacks integrity despite being evaluated in positive terms? This could be the topic of a short paper.)

Nili develops the idea of integrity as applied to collective agents – in his case the democratic state, which he treats as the same as the sovereign people. Nili argues for example that democratic states should not trade with dictatorships because of the damage it does to themselves; undermining their own deep commitments. However Nili is still concerned only with integrity as a property of agents. A deliberative process is not an agent, it is a structure.

So how can we think about the integrity of structures or process? I think it can still involve fidelity to deep commitments that are implicit in the way the process is supposed to be working. These deep commitments can be located in the basic ideals of deliberative democracy. In our original proposal to the Australian Research Council, we identified these ideals as:

1. Mutual respect
2. Absence of power/coercion
3. Inclusion of all affected interests
4. Equal freedom of expression
5. Elicitation of relevant considerations
6. Clarification of agreement and conflict
7. Ethical constraints on expression of self-interest
8. Publicity
9. Accountability to other citizens
10. Sincerity of expression

(Listening/reflection is not on the list but could be added)

Consequentiality is also on our list but on reflection I'm not sure it belongs. Some of these ideals refer to behavior of individuals; so we need to think through what they mean at the process level, which could be as simple as "the process allows for/encourages..."

In addition, this list does not say anything about how deliberative processes relate to their environment or larger political system. Relevant considerations might involve:

11. Neutrality (ie no normative conclusion presupposed; this is routinely violated when citizens' assemblies are seen as a campaigning tool)
12. Autonomy (lack of explicit or implicit pressure from outside)

These twelve can then form the basis for an analysis of deliberative integrity. Though at some point we need to bring practitioners into the discussion to see what they think.

References

Cox, Damian, Marguerite La Caze, and Michael Levine (2021). Integrity. *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2021 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.).

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