

Comment to strengthening the citizens' role in international organizations by Bruno S. Frey and Alois Stutzer

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Strengthening Some Citizens Role in International Organizations

Serious thought about international relations and the role of governments in them is obviously desirable. The Frey and Stutzer paper is a first step in this direction. Unfortunately in my opinion it is a weak and stumbling step. I suppose it is not surprising that two citizens of Switzerland should propose that in the new international scheme, the citizens of Switzerland have as many vote as the citizens of China. It seems more or less impossible that China, India, and the United States would go along.

I should perhaps point out that Luxembourg, Iceland, and Equatorial Guinea would also have as many votes as Switzerland. Indeed I suppose that there would be an argument for giving Liechtenstein and San Marino similar equality. The Lesser Antilles would become a major center of international control.

The obvious alternative to this would be to draw their random samples in accordance with population. This would leave China and India as the two most powerful voting countries. There are, of course, various compromises, the random sample could be proportional to the square root or even the cube root of the population, but there's no point in continuing this speculation until the original authors propose their solution. I must confess that I have doubts about anything which they propose, for example they refer to the reform of the composition of the Security Council as "minor."

These however are the less important problems. At the moment it seems quite possible that half of the world population live in democracies. The exact percentage depends on decisions as to whether places like Russia or Venezuela should be listed as democracies or not. If democracy is given the benefit of the doubt then, for the first time in history half of the world population live in democracies. I believe that

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Frey and Stutzer expect that democracy will grow, and it may well do so. It might shrink also, however. In any event one could predict that the random sample drawn from a Chinese regime would cast a block vote in accordance with the instructions of the police. If they didn't there would be gaps in that representation which would have to be filled.

It should be pointed out that even in democracies like the United States, the existing government would have great influence over the votes cast by its random sample.

This is not necessarily a bad thing. As Frey and Stutzer point, the professionals would have an information advantage over the sample. Nevertheless this makes it somewhat less democratic than they apparently want.

Speaking for myself I would be very, very reluctant to entrust major decisions to a body in which the United States could be outvoted either by the citizens of some disorderly dictatorships in Africa or by, let us say a block of China, India and Indonesia. The alternative which they rather hint at in which the Lesser Antilles and a collection of minor countries in other parts of the world can control seems at least as undesirable.

I rather suspect that Frey and Stutzer haven't really carefully considered these problems. If their article starts serious discussion of radical changes it will serve a useful purpose. I hope, however, that it merely starts the discussion, and is not considered to have concluded it.