Preface

Democracy as the Political Empowerment of the Citizen: Direct-Deliberative e-Democracy conceptualizes the age-old idea of democracy in a new way. The fundamental idea underlying this new conceptualization is the now-neglected notion of the people's sovereignty. Literally, "democracy" means rule by the people. However, the people cannot rule unless they are empowered to do so. Since its inception, liberal democracy has eschewed the question of the people's sovereignty and their political empowerment for a variety of reasons. Among these, one should include the lack of faith of liberal democracy in ordinary citizens' ability to rule and the unavailability of practicable instruments and ways of empowering private citizens to act as sovereigns. Thus, liberal democracy's solution to the question of democracy has been the purely representative form of government that keeps citizens at a "safe" distance from the business of governing. The conceptualization attempted in this book resurrects the Rousseauean notion that the question of democracy is, not ultimately but, immediately the question of people's sovereignty. Moreover, this conceptualization relentlessly pursues the Rousseauean claim that sovereignty cannot be represented, and in order to be substantive, it ought to be exercised directly, hence *direct democracy*. The book takes the existing theoretical framework of American liberal democracy as its theoretical grounds and argues that the conception of democracy it develops is relevant to this society. In order to introduce the notion of sovereignty (and its direct exercise) into the liberal-democratic conceptual scheme, the book attempts to "individuate" the idea of the people's sovereignty via individuating the notion of the political empowerment of the people. That is to say, it conceptualizes the legislative power of the people as a composition that is made up of the sum total of the equal sovereign powers of the equal individuals who comprise the people or the nation. Of course, such a conceptualization would be meaningful only if there exist some feasible instruments or media that would empower individual citizens to exercise their individuated sovereign powers directly. The book argues that the present-day American society has such instruments and means at its disposal; i.e., it has both the material and technological means and infrastructures ("*e*-technologies"), and the political-cultural institutions needed for the actualization of the idea of the direct exercise of the individuated sovereign powers. In order to make a case for the

practicability of the idea of the direct exercise of sovereignty by individual citizens, the book proposes and discusses a realistic democratic utopia wherein individual citizens are empowered to "fully express" their political wills in a direct manner via the use of *e*-technologies. These expressed wills are then "fully integrated" into a collective decision-making process that uses complex amalgamation schemes to "compose" collective wills on major legislative and policy questions.

In one sense, the conceptualization attempted here is a bold, and perhaps a last ditch, attempt to keep the idea of direct democracy (and its moral content) relevant to the contemporary world. This volume sets out to restore to democracy the ideal of citizens' direct participation in the democratic process, which its companion volume retrieves and reclaims. Concurrently published as *Democracy as the Political Empowerment of the People: The Betrayal of an Ideal*, the companion volume rescues the ideal of citizens' *direct* participation in decision-making from the perversions and distortions it has suffered throughout history. This ideal, it argues, was an essential component of the original idea of democracy. In this endeavor, both volumes take the insight they have derived from C. B. Macpherson's project of retrieving the moral content of democracy as a source of inspiration, and as their principal guiding thread.

The task of restoring to democracy its betrayed ideal takes the form of developing a new theory of democracy, which the book refers to as the "theory of direct-deliberative *e*-democracy." To this end, the theory develops a conception of individuated sovereignty with an eye on having it exercised directly by individual citizens through the use of *e*-technologies. This attempt also manifests itself in the importance the theory assigns to the idea of engaging everyday citizens in public deliberations on major legislative issues and public policy questions—deliberations taking place in both face-to-face and virtual forums using the *e*-media. In the idea of public deliberation, the theory of direct-deliberative *e*-democracy identifies two sorts of democratic utility. First, public deliberations motivate citizens to educate themselves on public issues, and provide directions for their civic-political self-educating activities. Second, public deliberations also help with generating "social capital" and strengthening communal bonds.

The theory of direct-deliberative *e*-democracy is highly critical of the liberal-democratic conception of democracy, the theories of deliberative democracy, and the received view on the question of "*e*-democracy." These approaches to the question of democracy either completely abandon the moral content of the idea by reducing it to a value-free method for selecting the government officials (the case of liberal democracy), or severely dilute its moral substance by overlooking the indispensability of the directness of citizens' participation to the idea of democracy (e.g., the case of deliberative democracy). For the theory of direct-deliberative *e*-democracy, the question of democracy (and democratic legitimacy for that matter) is not primarily about giving to people the "freedom of choice" in politics or the "right to choose" their governments; nor just about securing their consent; nor just about establishing "procedures" and assuring their "fairness"; nor just about establishing communication links between the constituents and their representatives (a main tenet of the received view of *e*-democracy). Nor is it just

about morally justifying the power of authority and its right to exercise this power. Neither is this legitimacy primarily about the "quality" or "substance" of the laws legislated and the policies instituted; but also and primarily about the *actual*, *direct, and continuous input* of individual citizens into the legislative and policy decision-making process. More than anything, democracy is primarily about individual citizens being empowered to experience the political power directly, and to do so on a continuous basis. For the theory of direct-deliberative *e*-democracy, this constitutes both the immediate and ultimate yardstick of democratic legitimacy.