

Citizen Engagement and the Shaping of Public Goodness from the Perspective of Republicanism

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Abstract: This paper delves into the intrinsic relationship between civic engagement and the public good from a republican perspective, positing that civic engagement is the core pathway to realizing the public good, while the public good is the fundamental goal and value orientation pursued by civic engagement. It begins by elucidating the ideological trajectory and historical evolution of republicanism, and defining the connotations and basic concepts of civic engagement and the public good. Subsequently, it conducts an in-depth analysis of the interplay between civic engagement and the public good, wherein the public good, as a value guide, inspires citizens' enthusiasm and sense of responsibility for participation, while civic engagement serves as the critical force driving the realization of the public good. Finally, it explores the challenges encountered in advancing civic engagement and the cultivation of the public good, proposing that the government should strive to safeguard citizens' rights to participation, strengthen civic education, and expand avenues for participation, thereby promoting and safeguarding the realization of the public good.

1. Introduction

This article aims to explore the relationship between citizen engagement and shaping public good from the perspective of republicanism. As a long-standing political concept, republicanism advocates that political power originates from the people, and its core lies in public good, civic virtues, and political participation. The political freedom emphasized by republicans is the freedom from interference, that is, the positive freedom to actively participate and self-governance. Citizens exercise their political rights by influencing political decision-making and participating in social management, while also ensuring the legitimacy and legitimacy of their power, and safeguarding and realizing their political freedom. The process of participation is also a practice of civic education, which can cultivate the qualities and virtues that republicanism expects citizens to possess, as these are the foundation of a harmonious society and public good. As the cohesion of social consensus and the reduction of differences, the implementation of public good relies on citizen engagement. The inherent relationship between citizen engagement and public good is complex, and citizen engagement is the key way to achieve public good, while public good is the goal and value it pursues.

The article aims to explain the concept and history of republicanism, analyze the role and mechanism of citizen engagement in shaping public interests, explore how citizen engagement promotes and maintains public interests, and reveal its theoretical logic and practical significance

2. The historical development of republicanism

2.1. Classical Republicanism

The concept and application of republicanism can be traced back to the city-state period of ancient Greece and Rome. This doctrine originated from Plato, later deepened by Cicero and Roman jurists, and further elaborated by humanists such as Machiavelli during the Renaissance. Communism emphasizes the public nature, impartiality, and neutrality of the government, advocating that the government should be committed to the well-being of the entire population, rather than just serving a few in power. It advocates for a fair political system based on constitutional provisions, periodic elections, rather than hereditary succession.

The basic principles of classical republicanism mainly include the following aspects: the existence of government is for the benefit of the majority; Rule of law and separation of powers and checks and balances; Democratic autonomy and active participation of citizens in politics.^[1] The ideas of philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle laid the theoretical foundation for republicanism. They explain the political system, power, and freedom of a city-state or nation from the perspective of civic morality. Classical republicanism regards political freedom as a positive state of autonomy, not just immunity from intervention. Classical republicanism emphasizes the virtues of citizens and their pursuit of the public interest. Through a mixed form of government, the republic can transcend individual and factional interests and promote the well-being of all its people. In ancient Rome, republicanism received further theoretical development from political and legal scholars such as Cicero. Cicero discussed from two perspectives: firstly, the realization of public interests requires a virtuous public; The second is that the maintenance of public interests relies on the institutional design of mixed political systems. He explains the essence of the republic through public interests, aiming to provide theoretical solutions for social conflicts in late republican systems, and deeply explores ways to achieve public good from the perspectives of citizen morality and mixed political systems.^[2] Roman political scientists and jurists, represented by Cicero, emphasized the public nature of the republic and the rule of law, believing that the republic is the property and cause of all citizens, and that citizens should actively participate in politics and safeguard the public interest. The political legacy left by ancient Rome is the political practice of republicanism. In the Renaissance era, the governance experience of various Italian city republics injected new practical content into republican theory. Machiavelli agreed and proposed that a republic should integrate the advantages of monarchy, aristocracy, and democracy to form a hybrid form of government, which is the most ideal form of government. Meanwhile, Machiavelli also emphasized the importance of virtue, believing that it contains a dual meaning: firstly, citizens should prioritize the national and public interests; The second is that civic virtues should be reflected in the ability to maintain freedom and promote national prosperity. The roots of modern republicanism can be traced back to the classical republican ideas represented by outstanding political thinkers such as Machiavelli.^[3]

Classical republicanism emphasizes the importance of citizenship, believing that citizens are not only the holders of rights, but also the bearers of responsibilities, and encourages broad citizen engagement in the political decision-making process. This concept promotes active participation of citizens in political life. The mutually beneficial cycle of citizen engagement and public good can ultimately achieve the pursuit of the highest value.

2.2. Neo-republicanism

After entering modern society, with the popularization of democratic systems and the awakening of civic consciousness, the theory of republicanism has ushered in a new revival. Scholars such as Hannah Arendt criticized liberalism and nationalism while rediscovering the intellectual resources of

republicanism, forming a theoretical system of neo-republicanism (also known as citizen republicanism). It differs from traditional republicanism by emphasizing equality, political participation, and public spirit more. Neo-republicanism advocates the supremacy of citizen engagement, public spirit, and public good, viewing them as the foundation of a democratic society. It believes that public good is the common goal of citizens in the public sphere, surpassing individual interests. Citizens should actively engage in politics, cultivate virtues of self-management, responsibility, and realization through participation, in order to shape and maintain public goodness. Citizen engagement is not only a superficial behavior such as voting, but also a positive way of life and social practice. By participating in discussions and decision-making on public affairs, citizens not only improve themselves but also promote social harmony and development. Neo-republicanism emphasizes that public good should take precedence over individual interests, and citizens should be willing to make personal sacrifices for the realization of public good.

Citizenship from the perspective of republicanism emphasizes the unity of citizens' rights and obligations. Citizens not only enjoy basic rights such as freedom and equality, but also have the obligation to participate in political life and contribute to the public interest. Hannah Arendt's emphasis on active citizenship, republican style construction of freedom, and discussion of deliberative democracy paved the way for the revival of republicanism, known as the "New Athenian Republicanism," and became a precursor to the revival of contemporary republicanism. Firstly, she inherited the positive civic view of classical republicanism, believing that citizenship is a political identity and the essential characteristic of being human. She also inherited the concept of non-sovereignty in classical city-state politics and the value of civic virtues.^[4] She criticized the possible phenomenon of elite rule and public opinion manipulation in representative democracy, believing that these phenomena would harm the realization of public good. Therefore, she advocates ensuring the realization of public good through citizen engagement and joint deliberation.

Sandel believes that citizen engagement is a core element of republican politics, and he advocates that politics should strive to shape citizen character, such as independent judgment and public consultation ability, which can be achieved through participation. Only a life that is integrated into political action is a fulfilling life. This participation not only promotes comprehensive personal development, but also is the key to achieving public good. He advocates building a good political structure through citizen engagement, but this participation is limited to within a specific political community, and the right to citizen engagement belongs only to those members who are deemed qualified to participate in that community. Sandel suggested revitalizing the civic republican ideology in American history by replacing the current "rights politics" and "neutral politics" with a "public interest politics" and "virtue politics". And he values consultation through public processes and national implementation, as well as the necessity of private intermediary organizations.^[5] Sandel's republican ideology emphasizes the close connection between citizen engagement, citizenship, and public good. He believes that through citizen engagement and joint deliberation, a good political structure can be built, citizens' virtues can be cultivated, public interests and public good can be achieved.

Petit also emphasized the importance of citizen engagement in republican politics. He believes that citizen engagement is an important means of safeguarding political freedom and preventing the abuse of power. He advocates for ensuring the legitimacy and effectiveness of political rule through continuous political dialogue and debate, and considers this dialogue and debate to be an important way for citizens to participate in political life. He regards citizenship as an active role in political participation, emphasizing that citizens should have the ability to think independently and express their opinions boldly, in order to play an active role in political dialogue and debate. Petit's new republican theory has the advantages of supporting moderate forms of democracy, reflecting the vitality and authenticity of democracy (advocating broad political participation and profound

deliberation), following the deliberation mode of decision-making (accommodating different voices of the social community), seeking democratic consultation mechanisms of different interest groups and social forces, emphasizing the role of public judgment and sufficient debate, and helping to prevent majority tyranny and anarchism (enhancing the civic virtues and rational judgment ability of the people's democratic participation in national governance).^[6] These propositions all emphasize and demonstrate the pursuit of civic virtues and public goodness by republicanism, as well as how to implement these pursuits in the land.

In general, "public good" is a core of republicanism. Among public interests and individual interests, republicans usually believe that public interests are higher than individual interests, because the harmonious development of society depends on the achievement of public interests, not just individual desires.

3. The Position of Citizen engagement in Republican Theory

3.1. The concept of citizen engagement

Broadly speaking, citizen engagement refers to the process in which citizens directly influence government decision-making, manage public affairs, and participate in social governance through various channels, including voting, policy-making, public services, community governance, and social supervision. In the perspective of republicanism, citizen engagement emphasizes that citizens, as members of the political community, actively shoulder the responsibility of safeguarding public interests and promoting social development.

There are various types of citizen engagement, which can be divided into multiple types based on the degree and method of participation. The following are several main types:

(1) Direct and indirect participation

Direct Participation: Refers to citizens' direct involvement in government decision-making and public affairs management, such as voting, attending citizen meetings, and juries.

Indirect participation: Citizens participate in politics through representatives or intermediary institutions, such as political parties, interest groups, and non-governmental organizations, to convey their opinions. This participation does not directly intervene in decision-making, but indirectly influences policy-making by influencing representative institutions.

(2) Surface Participation and Deep Participation

According to Sherry R. Arnstein's categorization in "A Ladder of Citizen engagement", civic engagement can be divided into two types: tokenistic participation and genuine participation. Surface participation mainly includes informing and persuading, where the government provides information or engages in appeasing communication with citizens, but the actual level of citizen engagement is limited. Deep participation includes partnership, delegated power, and citizen control, where citizens have greater voice and influence in the decision-making process and can substantially participate in policy formulation and implementation.^[7]

3.2. Theoretical basis of citizen engagement

Political legitimacy is one of the important theoretical foundations for citizen engagement, and republicanism believes that political legitimacy comes from the consent and authorization of the people. Cicero emphasized in "On the Republic" that the legitimacy of a republic lies in its representation and service to the public interest. He believed that political power should be granted by the people, and rulers should follow the law. In modern times, political legitimacy is typically achieved through democratic processes such as elections, citizen voting, and participatory decision-making, ensuring that government policies and actions align with public interests and will.

Democratic governance is also one of the core values of republicanism. From the perspective of republicanism, the foundation of democratic governance theory should emphasize the core position of citizen engagement, representativeness, rule of law, and public interest in democratic politics, with the core being the people's autonomy and participation rights. Madison put forward his views on democratic governance and checks and balances, believing that decentralization and representation can prevent tyranny and ensure that government decisions reflect the will of the people. Rousseau believed that the legitimacy of government comes from the common will of the people, and democratic governance is the best way to achieve this will. Therefore, the government should manage public affairs and make political decisions in an open, transparent, and responsible manner.

The theory of social capital provides another important theoretical basis for citizen engagement. Citizens are in an interactive network, and in spatialized and gridded regions, it is inevitable for people to interact and connect with each other, that is, humans are socialized animals. Social capital encompasses key elements such as trust, norms, and cooperation present in social networks, which collectively drive collective action and social cooperation. Citizen engagement not only helps to enhance trust and cooperation among members of society, but also promotes the accumulation of social capital. Putnam first proposed the concept of social capital and emphasized the importance of social capital. Giddens believed that social capital is an important component of modern society, which helps maintain social order and promote social change. Ostrom found that by establishing trust, norms, and networks, communities can effectively manage public resources and avoid the tragedy of the commons. Therefore, when citizens actively participate in public affairs, they establish closer social connections and cooperative relationships through joint discussion, decision-making, and implementation. It can help citizens jointly cope with the challenges and problems faced by society. This enhances the cohesion and stability of society, providing strong support for the shaping of public goodness.

3.3. The significance of citizen engagement

Citizen engagement is a key way to shape public good. Citizens express their own interests and drive the government to formulate policies that are in line with public interests by participating in discussions and decision-making on public affairs. In addition, citizen engagement can also promote communication and negotiation between different interest groups, which is conducive to reducing social conflicts, enhancing social harmony and stability, and creating a favorable environment for shaping public goodness.

The theory of republicanism further emphasizes that active citizen engagement is not only a necessary condition for safeguarding individual freedom, but also the key to ensuring social fairness and justice, as people cannot enter into contracts that undermine their own freedom. A healthy democratic society should encourage its members to directly participate in political life, through which citizens can safeguard their own freedom and rights, and jointly promote the overall well-being of society, ensuring that government policies and actions are in line with the public interest. This active citizen engagement strengthens the democratic structure of society and enhances citizens' understanding of the value of freedom and their sense of social responsibility.

4. Citizen engagement and the Shaping of Public Good

4.1. The basic concept of public goodness

Public goodness, as an important concept in fields such as political science and ethics, refers to a value goal or interest state that transcends individual or specific group interests and is shared and universally recognized by all members of society. It emphasizes the integrity, universality, and

publicness of society, which is fundamentally different from private interests and collective interests. Private interests focus on the direct needs and satisfaction of individuals or minorities. Although collective interests involve groups, they may deviate from the general welfare of society due to the special interests of specific groups. Public goodness transcends these limitations and points towards a broader, far-reaching, and universal pursuit of social values. The core values of public goodness lie in fairness, justice, and harmony. Fairness, justice, and harmony are inherent requirements of public good and important benchmarks for measuring social progress and civilization. So, they demand fair distribution of social resources and opportunities to ensure that every citizen receives their rightful share, establish a just social order, and emphasize mutual respect, understanding, and cooperation among members of society. In the pursuit of public good, the virtues of citizens are crucial. Republicans believe that virtues such as courage, temperance, wisdom, and justice are not only manifestations of personal character, but also the most basic qualities for citizens to participate in public affairs. Having these qualities can encourage them to balance the interests of others and society as a whole while pursuing personal interests, and contribute to the public good.

4.2. Ways to shape public goodness

Under the framework of republicanism, dialogue and negotiation are key ways to achieve public good. Through equal dialogue, different interest groups can express their views and demands, enhance mutual understanding and respect, and engage in rational discussions and compromises through negotiation to seek solutions accepted by all parties and reduce conflicts and differences.

Policy formulation is a manifestation of shaping public good, and republicanism emphasizes that the government should represent and safeguard the public interest. The government formulates decisions and policies by listening to public opinions, so policies are important tools for achieving the goal of safeguarding public interests. In the process of policy-making, it is necessary to ensure democratic participation and extensive consultation, ensure that the voices of different interest groups are heard and considered, and increase the legitimacy and credibility of policies through open and transparent decision-making procedures, which reflects the overall interests of society and the pursuit of public good.

Civic education is an important foundation for shaping public goodness. By educating and cultivating citizens' public awareness, sense of responsibility, and social responsibility, citizens can consciously participate in public affairs and contribute to the realization of public good. This requires value guidance, knowledge transmission, and practical testing. By comprehensively and systematically learning various types of knowledge, including knowledge in politics, economy, culture, society, and other fields, citizens can understand the laws of social operation, policy-making process, and the complexity of public affairs, and improve their participation ability and decision-making level. In the process of practice, it is important to ensure the effectiveness of citizens' political participation, which requires continuously expanding the scope of ordinary citizens' political participation, requiring the government and all sectors of society to actively create conditions, lower the threshold for participation, and improve the convenience of participation. More citizens have the opportunity and ability to participate in public affairs.

Moral standards are the cornerstone of shaping public goodness. They guide citizens to form correct moral concepts and behavior patterns. Citizens can be guided to form an inherent sense of moral responsibility. This sense of responsibility is the key to achieving public good, providing solid moral support for the realization of public good.

Through these paths, social public good can be guided and shaped from multiple levels, laying the foundation for building a harmonious social environment.

4.3. The interaction between citizen engagement and public good

Citizen engagement is a powerful way to promote the realization of public good. The government extensively solicits public opinion and gathers public wisdom through citizen engagement, enhancing the democratic nature and scientific basis of policies, ensuring that policies are more in line with public interests, and avoiding blindness and arbitrariness in the policy-making process. The direct participation of citizens can make different interest groups cherish and maintain policy achievements more, and also enable them to conduct effective supervision and timely feedback. In the process of policy implementation, it ensures the effective implementation of policies, so citizen engagement enhances the execution and credibility of policies. For citizens, in the process of participating in public affairs, they constantly improve their abilities and qualities, and stimulate their political enthusiasm.

For citizens, in the process of participating in public affairs, they constantly improve their abilities and qualities, and stimulate their political enthusiasm. Public goodness tells citizens what to pay attention to, what to pursue, and how to act. Under the guidance of public good, citizens will be inspired to have a sense of responsibility and mission, and will strive to achieve these goals. When citizens realize that their actions are closely related to the overall interests of society, they will cherish their rights and obligations more and actively participate in public affairs. It is worth noting that in the pursuit of public good, different interest groups need to understand and support each other, otherwise conflicts may arise. This requires citizens to overcome various difficulties and challenges, and only through cooperation between different groups can the maximum effect be achieved.

In short, public goodness promotes unity and cooperation among citizens, and this spirit of unity and cooperation not only enhances social cohesion and centripetal force, but also provides strong guarantees for the long-term stability and development of society.

5. Difficulties and Suggestions

5.1. Difficulties

In the process of promoting citizen engagement and shaping public good, there are also some challenges and problems. For example, issues such as information asymmetry and divergent opinions among citizens during the participation process result in poor participation outcomes. Some citizens lack interest and attention to public affairs, resulting in a low willingness to participate. The lack of smooth participation channels and high participation costs make it difficult to participate.

Asymmetric information is the primary issue that restricts citizens' participation in the formulation and implementation of public policies. Government departments have a natural advantage in mastering policy related information, and ordinary citizens often find it difficult to obtain comprehensive and accurate information. The government is prone to "gatekeeping" in the policy-making process, restricting citizens' participation and making it difficult for citizens to independently judge and discern policies. Moreover, information asymmetry may lead to ineffective supervision during policy implementation and harm the interests of citizens.

Political apathy harms political participation. Some citizens lack interest and enthusiasm in political affairs, believing that their participation cannot change the direction of policies. This political apathy weakens the motivation for citizen engagement and reduces the democratic and scientific nature of policy formulation and implementation.

The lack of smooth participation channels is a practical problem faced by citizens' participation. Although the channels and avenues for citizen political participation have become rich and diverse in contemporary times, there are still many shortcomings in their practical operation, such as complex procedures, low efficiency, and inadequate feedback mechanisms. With the popularity of the Internet,

online participation has become a new channel, but the complexity and uncontrollability of online public opinion have also increased the difficulty of citizen engagement.

5.2. Suggestions

To ensure the legal protection of citizens' participation rights, the government needs to formulate and improve relevant laws and regulations, clarify the rights, obligations, and procedures of citizens' participation in public policies. Moreover, it is necessary to establish a sound supervision mechanism to ensure openness and transparency in the process of policy formulation and implementation, and to prevent the occurrence of abuse of power and corruption.

Civic education is an important way to enhance citizens' awareness and ability to participate, and the government should increase investment in civic education. Establish a sound incentive mechanism and reward system. Commend and reward citizens who actively participate in policy formulation and implementation. Inspire citizens' participation motivation, guide them to establish correct values and political views, enhance their sense of responsibility, and improve political apathy.

Civil society is an important carrier of citizen engagement. The government should provide more platforms and opportunities for citizen engagement, broaden channels for citizen engagement, innovate ways of participation, and enable citizens to participate more conveniently and directly in the policy-making and implementation process.

6. Conclusion

From the perspective of republicanism, citizen engagement and the shaping of public good are complex and long-term processes. Citizen engagement is not only the key path to achieving public good, but also its guarantee. The shaping of public interest relies on comprehensive factors such as dialogue, negotiation, policy-making, improvement of civic literacy, and formation of moral norms. In the face of challenges such as information asymmetry, political alienation, and limited participation channels, the government needs to make efforts at multiple levels, including ensuring citizens' participation rights, strengthening civic education, cultivating civil society, expanding participation channels, promoting public interest awareness, and enhancing citizens' enthusiasm for participation, in order to promote citizens' more active participation in political activities and jointly promote and maintain the realization of public good.

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