

Primarily Concerned with Food Democracy Initiatives and Democratic Innovation

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ABOUT THE STUDY

The global food system is under intense scrutiny for reform. Some of society's most urgent concerns are being driven by current food production and consumption practices. Globally, the food system accounts for roughly one-third of anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions and is a major driver of biodiversity loss and land-use change, groundwater depletion, and pollution. Improper diets have led in a rapid growth in communicable diseases, threatening citizens' wellbeing and putting a burden on public expenditures, as evidenced by the COVID-19 pandemic. Furthermore, many individuals living in poverty continue to lack access to sufficient and healthy food. Meanwhile, labor conditions in the food chain are deplorable, as seen by widespread farmer protests and recurring concerns about the food system's reliance on cheap and illegal labor. For these reasons, governments, universities, civil society organizations, and a wide range of business leaders have called for a shift in the global food system towards more sustainable outcomes.

Undoubtedly, the pursuit of more sustainable food systems is first and foremost a political challenge: Implementing a food system transition necessitates efficient governance mechanisms across policy sectors and levels, which are currently lacking in most situations. Furthermore, success will be contingent on the willingness and ability of millions, if not billions, of people, ranging from farmers and fishers to consumers, to change their daily habits. Scholars of food policy have been outspoken about the consolidation of power in the hands of well-organized commercial interests and policy elites.

For these reasons, civil society movements, academics, and governments have become more concerned about how to effectively incorporate citizens and food system in food policies in

order to design more effective and legitimate initiatives. The search for food democracy has evolved to refer to the degree of control that individuals and communities have over the running of local, national, or international food systems, as well as the development and study of new forms of involvement and decision-making. Whereas food democracy scholars have identified a wide range of innovative democratic practices emerging within civil society and food value chains, this study is primarily interested in food democracy initiatives that qualify as democratic innovations. Examples of such initiatives in the food sector include the formation of urban and regional food policy councils, the International Monsanto Tribunal, and the usage of national deliberative citizen's summits.

Despite high promises, this and other food democracy efforts have remained ad hoc and fragmented, raising concerns about their long-term impact on the quality of democratic decision-making. Similarly, while there has been a surge in the literature on food democracy in recent years, these studies have remained relatively detached from larger discussions on democratic innovation in political science. As a result, there is no evidence on how food democracy projects have affected democratic goods.

This is not to suggest that no significant insights have been acquired; nonetheless, these are yet to be incorporated into a systematic and comparative study strategy. The study then develops the conceptual approach, expanding on the concepts of food democracy and democratic innovation. Following that, the methodologies employed for the systematic literature review are outlined. The synthesis, providing insights into the types of democratic innovations and associated effects emerging from the research on food democracy. The study concludes with a critical perspective on the state of the art and many suggestions for future research directions.

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