

Code of course: BMI-FILD-342.54, BBN-FIL18-342.55, BMI-FILD-342.54

Title of course: **When Does the People Rule? Theories of Democracy**

Lecturer: **Attila Mráz**

**General aim of the course:**

This course familiarizes students with some of the core issues in the contemporary political philosophy of democracy. After a brief methodological introduction, we will first critically review some of the most prevalent answers to the question: Why is democracy valuable? We will consider theories which see democratic decision-making as a useful means to achieve some valuable aim, and also theories which argue for the intrinsic value of the democratic procedure—such as its capacity to realize equality or collective self-determination. Then we will apply these values and principles to institutions, critically examining representative democracies—the typical current implementation of democracies: Is representative democracy superior to direct democracy? What makes an election democratic, and how can we identify non-democratic (autocratic) electoral regimes? Is the European Union democratic, and what would make it even more so?

**Content of the course:**

Topics covered will include:

- What makes democracy useful?
- What distinguishes a highly imperfect democracy from an autocracy with elections?
- How can democracies work with declining and uninformed participation?
- Is there a moral duty to vote?
- Political equality
- Collective self-determination, popular sovereignty
- Representative democracy and the democratic value of elections
- Democracy deficits of and within the European Union

Some of the topics will cover more than one class.

**I. Introduction**

What do we mean by democracy? Why is the concept and ideal of democracy significant for political philosophers, legal theorists, or political scientists? What can we learn by studying democratic theory? This single introductory session uncovers the motivations for the course, and attempts to fix the reference of the term 'democracy', which we will use in the rest of the course.

**1. What is democracy? Is it in a crisis?**

Key concepts & ideas: the concept of “democracy” and its conceptions, elections, political liberties, democratic procedures, the demos, the right to vote, the right to stand for elections, crisis, critical theory

Mandatory readings:

- The International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA)’s Global State of Democracy assessment questions, in *The Global State Of Democracy Indices Methodology. Conceptualization and Measurement Framework, Version 7* (2023), <https://www.idea.int/sites/default/files/GSOD/global-state-of-democracy-indices-methodology-v7-2023.pdf> (check only Table 2.1 on p. 19).

- IDEA Institute, *Assessing the Quality of Democracy - A Practical Guide* (2008), <https://www.idea.int/sites/default/files/publications/assessing-the-quality-of-democracy-a-practical-guide.pdf> (check only Table 1.2 on p. 26).
- Wolfgang Merkel (2014). Is There a Crisis of Democracy? *Democratic Theory* 1(2): 11–25.

## **II. The Values and Principles of Democracy**

Democracy is often valued as a means to achieve some valuable aim(s) rather than for its intrinsic merits. In this part of the course, we will first examine theories which attempt to justify democracy as an instrument to achieve various good aims, or to avoid some bad ones. Then we will examine theories that do not ground the value of democracy in its instrumental features, but value it for some inherent procedural characteristic of democratic decision-making. By the end of this unit, we will have a good grasp of democratic ideals and principles that will also allow us to evaluate particular institutional arrangements as more or less democratic or nondemocratic.

### ***A. Instrumental Accounts***

#### **2. Disposing the worst leaders: minimalism and the problem of participation**

Key concepts & ideas: minimalist conception of democracy, elitist conceptions of democracy, declining participation, the political economy of democracy, party democracy

Mandatory readings:

- Joseph A. Schumpeter (1992). *Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy*. London: Routledge. Chs XXI and XXII: pp. 250–283.
- Carole Pateman (1970). *Participation and Democratic Theory*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP. Ch 1: “Recent theories of democracy and the ‘classic myth’”: pp. 11–21.

Recommended readings:

- A. Przeworski (1999). Minimalist Conception of Democracy: A Defense, in I. Shapiro and C. Hacker-Cordón (eds.), *Democracy’s Value* (23–55). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Christopher Freiman. (2021). *Why It’s OK to Ignore Politics*. New York and London: Routledge. Ch. 7: pp. 119–131.

#### **3. Making better (right) decisions: epistemic instrumentalism**

Key concepts & ideas: marginal contribution, public justification, cognitivism about voting

Mandatory readings:

- Elizabeth Anderson (2006). The Epistemology of Democracy, *Episteme*, 3(1–2): 8–22.

Recommended readings:

- Robert Weston Siscoe (2023). The Epistemic Aims of Democracy. *Philosophy Compass* 18(11): e12941. <https://doi.org/10.1111/phc3.12941op>
- Hélène Landemore (2013). *Democratic Reason: Politics, Collective Intelligence, and the Rule of the Many*. Princeton & Oxford: Princeton UP. Ch. 8: “Political Cognitivism: A Defense”, pp. 208–231.
- Joshua Cohen (1986). An Epistemic Conception of Democracy. *Ethics* 97(1): 26–38.
- Gerald F. Gaus (1997). *Justificatory Liberalism. An Essay on Epistemology and Political Theory*. pp. 226–237.
- Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1762). *On the Social Contract*. Trans. Jonathan Bennett. Book 2, Ch. 3.: “Can the General Will Be Wrong?”, Book 4, Chs 1–3: “The general will is indestructible”,

“Voting”, “Elections”. Available, e.g., at  
<http://www.earlymoderntexts.com/assets/pdfs/rousseau1762.pdf>

#### 4. Voting Well

Key concepts & ideas: cognitivist v. preference-based approaches to voting, voting on self-interest v. common good, informed voting, strategic v. sincere voting

Mandatory readings:

- Gary Gutting (2016). Is Voting out of Self-Interest Wrong? *The New York Times, Opinion Pages, The Stone*. March 31, 2016. <http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2016/03/31/is-voting-out-of-self-interest-wrong/>
- Julia Maskivker. (2019). *The Duty to Vote*. Oxford: OUP. Ch. 4.4 (“Lesser Evil Voting”): pp. 147–152.
- Eric Beerbohm (2012). *In Our Name: The Ethics of Democracy*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. Ch. 2: “Paper Stones: The Ethics of Participation”, pp. 51–81.

Recommended readings:

- Jason Brennan (2011). *The Ethics of Voting*. New Haven, NJ: Princeton University Press. Ch 5: “For the Common Good”, pp. 112–135. (M)
- Anthony Downs (1957). *An Economic Theory of Democracy*. New York: Harper and Row. Part I: pp. 3–74.
- Geoffrey Brennan and Loren E. Lomasky (1989). “Large Numbers, small costs...”. In G. Brennan and L. E. Lomasky (eds.), *Politics Process* (42–59). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

#### B. Non-instrumental Accounts

#### 5. Disagreement, Deliberation, Compromise and Consensus

Key concepts & ideas: democratic deliberation, freedom of speech and democracy, consensual decision-making and democracy, democracy and compromises

Mandatory readings:

- Jeremy Waldron (1999). *Law and Disagreement*. Oxford: Clarendon. Ch 1: 1-17.
- Joshua Cohen (1991). Deliberation and Democratic Legitimacy. In: A. Hamlin and P. Pettit (eds), *The Good Polity* (17–34). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Recommended readings:

- Hélène Landemore (2013). *Democratic Reason. Politics, Collective Intelligence and the Rule of the Many*. Princeton, NJ and Oxford, UK: Princeton University Press. Ch. 5: “Epistemic Failures of Deliberation”, pp. 118–144.
- Amy Gutmann and Dennis Thompson (1990). Moral Conflict and Political Consensus. *Ethics* 101(1): 64–88.
- Peter Singer (1973). *Democracy and Disobedience*. Oxford: Clarendon Press. Ch. 5.

#### 6. Political Equality I: The Distribution of Power

Key concepts & ideas: what does the equality of the vote consist in?; horizontal v. vertical equality, equality of influence v. impact, equality in deliberation; campaign regulation, democracy, and free speech

Mandatory readings:

- Harry Brighouse (1996). Egalitarianism and Equal Availability of Political Influence. *The Journal of Political Philosophy* 4(2): 118–141.
- Steven Wall (2007). Democracy and Equality. *The Philosophical Quarterly* 57(228): 416–438.

Recommended readings:

- Ronald Dworkin (2002). *Sovereign Virtue: The Theory and Practice of Equality*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. Ch. 4: Political Equality, pp. 184–210.
- Charles R. Beitz (1989). *Political Equality: An Essay in Democratic Theory*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. Ch. 1: “The Subject of Political Equality”, pp. 3–30.
- Thomas Christiano (2012). Money in Politics. In D. Estlund (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Political Theory*. New York: Oxford University Press.

## 7. Political Equality II: The Political Relations of Equals

Key concepts & ideas: Is the equality of the vote necessary or sufficient for political equality? What is the relationship between social and political equality?; relation v. distributive conceptions of political equality

Mandatory readings:

- Niko Kolodny (2014). Rule Over None II: Social Equality and the Justification of Democracy: Rule Over None II: Social Equality and the Justification of Democracy. *Philosophy & Public Affairs*, 42(4), 287–336. <https://doi.org/10.1111/papa.12037>

Recommended readings:

- Andreas Bengtson (2020). Differential Voting Weights and Relational Egalitarianism. *Political Studies*, 68(4), 1054–1070. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0032321719889870>
- James Lindley Wilson (2019). *Democratic Equality*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. Ch. 3: “Against Equal Power”, pp. 75–95.
- Daniel Viehoff (2014). Democratic Equality and Political Authority. *Philosophy & Public Affairs*, 42(4), 337–375. <https://doi.org/10.1111/papa.12036>

## 8. When the People Rule: Popular Sovereignty & Collective Self-Determination

Key concepts & ideas: individual v. collective self-determination, self-rule; sovereignty, self-determination and autonomy

Mandatory readings:

- Adam Lovett & Jake Zuehl (2022). The Possibility of Democratic Autonomy. *Philosophy & Public Affairs*, forthcoming. papa.12223. <https://doi.org/10.1111/papa.12223>

Recommended readings:

- Eric Beerbohm (2012). *In Our Name: The Ethics of Democracy*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Carol C. Gould (2006). Self-Determination beyond Sovereignty: Relating Transnational Democracy to Local Autonomy. *Journal of Social Philosophy*, 37(1), 44–60. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9833.2006.00302.x>
- Anna Stilz (2016). The Value of Self-Determination. *Oxford Studies in Political Philosophy* Vol. 2. Oxford: OUP. pp. 98–127. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198759621.003.0005>

- Anna Stilz (2019). *Territorial Sovereignty: A Philosophical Exploration*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. Ch. 4: “Legitimacy and Self-Determination”, pp. 89–118; Ch. 5.: “Refining the Political Autonomy Account”, pp. 119–154.

## OUTLINES DUE

### **III. Representative Democracy, Imperfect Democracy, Non-Democracy**

How can we distinguish between imperfect democratic regimes and political systems that are not democratic at all? Could popular rule be implemented both as direct democracy (without representation), or as indirect (representative) democracy? Which one should be preferred and why? How do we distinguish democratic regimes from autocracies that are not democratic despite regularly holding elections? Finally, how should we evaluate the complex democratic institutions of the European Union, and how should we address democratic backsliding within it and beyond it? In this part of the course, we will explore these questions by investigating the concept, ideal and institutions of political representation, as well as by taking a manifestly non-idealistic approach to the concept and value of democracy.

#### **9. Representative Democracy: Is It Democratic?**

Key concepts & ideas: direct v. representative democracy, bound vs. free mandates; representatives as delegates vs. trustees; geographical vs. interest-group vs. individual representation; electoral systems and normative criteria of representation; substantive & descriptive representation

Mandatory readings:

- Nadia Urbinati (2011). Representative democracy and its critics. In Sonia Alonso, John Keane & Wolfgang Merkel (eds.), *The Future Of Representative Democracy* (pp. 23–49). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Recommended readings:

- Thomas Christiano (1996). *The Rule of the Many*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press. Excerpt from Ch. 6: “Equality and Legislative Representation”, pp. 207–231.
- Jane Mansbridge (2003). Rethinking Representation. *American Political Science Review* 97(4): 515–528.
- Jane Mansbridge (1999). Should Blacks Represent Blacks and Women Represent Women? A Contingent “Yes”. *The Journal of Politics* 61(3): 628–657.
- James Madison (1787–88), *The Federalist Papers*, 56, 57, available at, e.g., <http://thomas.loc.gov/home/histdox/fedpapers.html>

#### **10. The Specter of Electoral Autocracy: Imperfect Democracy or Not Democracy at All?**

Key concepts & ideas: demarcation problem, non-ideal vs. ideal theory, electoral autocracy, electoral authoritarianism, hybrid regimes

Mandatory readings:

- Kirshner, Alexander. S. (2022). Legitimate opposition. New Haven: Yale University Press. Ch. 3, “Opposition under Attack: Democracy, Populism, and the Specter of Electoral Autocracy”, pp. 78–101.
- Schedler, Andreas. (2002). Elections Without Democracy: The Menu of Manipulation. *Journal of Democracy*, 13(2), 36–50. <https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2002.0031>

Recommended readings:

- Robert Jubb. (2024). *Unjust Authority*. Oxford: OUP. Ch. 2: “Nonideal Political Authority”, pp. 44-70.
- Lachlau M. Umbers (2021). Against Lottocracy. *European Journal of Political Theory*, 20(2), 312–334. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1474885118783602>

## 11. Democracy in / vs. the European Union

Key concepts & ideas: accountability, democratic deficit, demos, demoicracy

Mandatory readings:

- Andreas Follesdal (2006). Survey Article: The Legitimacy Deficits of the European Union, *Journal of Political Philosophy*, 14: 441–468.
- Kalypso Nicolaïdis (2022). Cretan Europa’s second coming, *European Review of Books*, Issue 1. 13 June 2022. <https://europeanreviewofbooks.com/cretan-europa-s-second-coming/en>

Recommended readings:

- Kalypso Nicolaïdis (2013). European Demoicracy and Its Crisis, *Journal of Common Market Studies* 51: 351–69.
- Miriam Ronzoni (2016). The European Union as a Demoicracy: Really a Third Way?, *European Journal of Political Theory*, 16: 210–234.
- Dieter Grimm (2017). *The Constitution of European Democracy*. Oxford: OUP.
- Richard Bellamy (2019). *A Republican Europe of States: Cosmopolitanism, Intergovernmentalism and Democracy in the EU*. Cambridge, UK: CUP.
- Markus Patberg (2021). The Democratic Ambivalence of EU Disintegration: A Mapping of Costs and Benefits. *Swiss Political Science Review*, 27(3), 601–618. <https://doi.org/10.1111/spsr.12455>

## 12. Democratic Backsliding, De-Democratization in Europe and Beyond

Key concepts & ideas: democratic backsliding, de-democratization, autocratization, waves of democratization

Mandatory readings:

- Fabio Wolkenstein. (2023). What Is Democratic Backsliding? *Constellations* 30(3): 261–75. doi:[10.1111/1467-8675.12627](https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8675.12627).
- Kim. Lane Scheppele. (2013). The Rule of Law and the Frankenstate: Why Governance Checklists Do Not Work. *Governance*, 26(4), 559–562. <https://doi.org/10.1111/gove.12049>

Recommended readings:

- Jørgen Møller & Svend-Erik Skaaning. (2024). *Democratization and autocratization in comparative perspective: Concepts, currents, causes, consequences, and challenges*. Oxford: Routledge. Ch. 3, “Historical processes of democratization and autocratization”, pp. 61–83; Ch. 4, “Regime changes in the twenty-first century: a new wave of autocratization?”, pp. 84–103.
- Rainer Forst. 2023. The Rule of Unreason: Analyzing (Anti-)Democratic Regression. *Constellations* 30(3): 217–24. doi:[10.1111/1467-8675.12671](https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8675.12671).

### Grading criteria, specific requirements:

- Active participation in class
- Short home assignments

- A term paper of ca. 1500 words (for BA students and non-philosophy MA students) / 2500 words (for philosophy MA students), based on a short topic proposal developed in consultation with (and approved by) the instructor, or on one of the topics suggested by the instructor.

**Required reading:**

See above.

**Suggested further reading:**

See also above.