

DEMOCRACY & RESISTANCE

The future of democracy is one of the most pressing problems in contemporary political science and philosophy. On the one hand, we face a growing alienation in politics: democratic institutions and procedures may be working properly, but important decisions are taken behind closed doors, and, for the citizens, only an illusion of democracy persists. On the other hand, citizens worldwide seem to be not politically-inactive or de-motivated at all. Instead, we witness many faces of citizen-resistance and activities against the current political situation: mass protests in many European cities, riots in London, and revolts in Northern Africa. We are confronted with two developments, which, at first glance, aim in different directions: democracy seems to be both in decline and to rise from the dead at the same time. What should democratic practices and institutions look like in a globalised society, and what are the normative principles that underlie them? This project will scrutinise both questions and relate them to one another – an endeavour not often undertaken in the academic context. Only by combining the perspectives of different disciplines, can the complexity of these phenomena be addressed in a fruitful and innovative way, thus bridging the gap in today's research.

The project topic will be addressed in four steps, which correspond to four sections.

Democracy in a Crisis?

The first part discusses the current state of democracy, focusing on the question of whether there is a crisis of democracy today, and, if so, what the crisis precisely involves. Democracies are threatened by a variety of factors. It is not just the economic and financial crisis, but also climate change and other global risks that create the need for transnational action and regulation, but the state-framed democratic embeddedness of decision-making falls short of the mark. Moreover, there is an erosion of national sovereignty caused by transnational governance and the globalisation of law and politics. Expert committees, international organisations, and global corporations substitute the “will of the people” and legitimate private international law and other regulations. To analyse this state of affairs, we must confront a range of normative, conceptual and sociological questions: What is the nature of challenges that exceed the traditional notion of democracy? Are we facing a crisis of democracy, or is it a crisis of social and political theory that is not yet able or willing to describe the current challenges for democracy adequately? Does democratic theory suggest how to overcome the current decline of democratic institutions? And does resistance acquire a different meaning and role in democracy, given the dramatic emptying of conventional channels of participation and popular influence?

Democratic Participation and Legitimate/Illegitimate Forms of Resistance

For a deeper understanding of these questions, it will be necessary to make a second, reflexive step and ask: Does the complexity and occasional confusion that characterises the debate on democracy and resistance relate to the fact that there are no valid normative conceptions that could serve as a basis for a comprehensive democratic order?

Whereas some analysts consider civic revolts and resistance tactics (boycotts, blockades, strikes, and acts of civil disobedience) to be legitimate only when they de-legitimise dictatorial rule or initiate a democratic revolution, others think that resistance, protests and uprisings are, and should be, an intrinsic element of democracy. According to the latter position, domestic and worldwide protests, *Twitter* and *Facebook* and “real” revolutions, leaks (*wikileaks*) and civil disobedience all need to have a constant place in democracy. However, whether the consequences for a transnational democracy can be drawn from this remains an open question.

This part will look at various new and old forms of violent and non-violent resistance - riots, disobedience, forms of sacrifice such as hunger-striking, suicide attacks, *etc.* Under what conditions are they legitimate or illegitimate? How should democratic theory account for their occurrence? Special attention should be given to the issue of violence and violent resistance, which has remained a relatively unexplored topic in political theory. Is violent resistance a meaningful means of action? Do violent means bring a democratic change as well? And how do the aesthetic dimensions of resistance contribute to subverting dominant normative orders?

Democracy Revisited

Finally, as a third part of the project will demonstrate, there are conflicting opinions regarding new forms of democracy, political participation and modes of resistance, as well as their implementation. One of the responses in political theory to the critical diagnosis and the different normative suggestions is the discourse about how to revise and radicalise democracy. Voicing some concerns about the capacity of established liberal democracies, with their systems of competitive representation, deliberation dominated by élites, and corporations holding sway over the markets, radical democratic ideas have re-emerged as an important intellectual current over the past generation to avert the pressures and engage the energies of ordinary citizens. To the suggestions to re-inforce an inclusive deliberation process and participation in order to acquire a direct role for citizens in public choices, radical democrats pointed out that there are limits to expanding participation and deliberation, as these institutions only re-inforce a hegemonic position of liberal version of democracy. Agonistic and pluralistic perspectives emphasise the inevitability and incommensurability of deep divisions, and hence come into conflict within pluralistic societies and look at ways in which democracy provides an arena in which conflicting views are confronted and the contestation is channelled in positive directions.

This part is aimed at re-thinking the project of democracy. Pointing out the limits of available conceptions of radical democracy, the scrutiny will attempt to outline a new conception of radical democracy, one that incorporates contemporary conditions – globalisation, the emergence of world society, new possibilities of political action, and participation made by technology. The main objective of the discussion is to link radical democracy to the recent rise in citizen-activity and revolt, and look at how resistance and revolt can be incorporated to its conceptual apparatus. How to channel the

energy of the broad popular-mobilisation into constitutional politics and democratic constitution-making, and thereby potentially enhance the durability of democratic change? And how can political and social theory contribute to developing a new framework of radical democratic-theory enriched by the perspectives of agents acting spontaneously in response to practical problems?