

Call for Papers

Heterogeneity and Democracy

Joint conference of the Working Group “Democracy Research” of the German Political Science Association (DVPW), the Committee on Concepts & Methods of the International Political Science Association (IPSA), and the Research Unit “Democracy” of the Social Science Research Center Berlin (WZB)

Berlin, Germany
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1) Outline

Today, modern liberal democratic societies are facing manifold challenges. *Economically*, nation-state democracies are in danger of losing autonomy due to the increasing globalisation of markets. The growing predominance of economic imperatives over decisions that were democratically legitimized by nation states interferes with the functioning of established and new democracies inside and outside of the OECD. *Politically*, some democracies experience a loss of democratic sovereignty not only through processes of political regionalisation and supranationalisation, but also by the increasing dependencies of national politics on transnational regulations (e.g., in the context of WTO, IWF, or the EU).

Whereas processes of economic and political globalisation and regionalisation have to be faced mainly on a supranational level, democratic societies are confronted with further challenges—to some extent induced by the named supranational processes—that have to be met on the nation-state level. The most apparent internal challenge for modern democracies seems to be the increasing heterogenisation of democratic societies, manifesting at least in two dimensions: *culturally* as ethnic and religious heterogenisation and, *structurally*, as socioeconomic and social heterogenisation. To put it with Claus Offe (1998): Democratic societies today are particularly confronted with *identity-based* and *interest-based* differences that often result in conflicts about recognition and resources.

On the identity-dimension, the growing ethnic and religious heterogenisation of Western and non-Western societies originates mainly from migration processes that have to be managed adequately. In addition, deprived groups of different kinds call for recognition and respect. On the interest-dimension, socioeconomic disparities are on the rise (again) in many societies causing severe legitimacy problems for democratic governance. Sometimes socioeconomic problems and questions of recognition even interfere with each other. Identity politics can be exploited for socioeconomic purposes and vice versa. And as the current case of Bolivia shows, sometimes the mix of identity politics and socioeconomic conflicts culminates in sturdy secession disputes.

2) Core research questions

The growing heterogeneity of democratic societies inside and outside of the OECD can be assigned at least to two topical areas: ethnic and religious heterogeneity on the one hand (identity) and socioeconomic heterogeneity on the other (interests). Migration processes in open societies are bound to cause ethnic and religious heterogenisation. At the same time, they offer the chance for a discussion and re-evaluation of existing heterogeneities that are gaining political importance again. Processes of diversification and differentiation do not only appear on a cultural dimension. Growing socioeconomic differences between citizens can also pose challenges to democracies. Especially, we have to re-assess the importance of “social

homogeneity” (relating to the broad term of Hermann Heller) for the functioning of democracies: How much homogeneity or justice between citizens is necessary to meet various social, economic, and cultural heterogeneities? Under which circumstances do socioeconomic differences have disintegrative effects and deteriorate the quality of democracy? Does democratic governance *per se* alleviate societal inequalities? How can the relationship of “democracy” and “justice” be conceived?

Both challenges together (Identity-based Differences and Interest-based Differences) are growing at the same time and are building a common feature of heterogeneity that mixed together have a bigger impact than the sum of the two single ones. There still exists a remarkable lack in the current research on democracies which does not examine the complex findings of heterogeneity as a common challenge.

Therefore, we first have to ask whether and to what extent these processes are posing serious problems for democracies at all and how these problems are dealt with. Secondly, we have to look for normative answers to potential problems in the framework of democratic theory or political philosophy (e.g., the role of the secular state, the role of religion in democracy, discourses of recognition, etc.). A debate on these questions requires a clarification of the conception of homogeneity and justice prevalent in democratic societies. For example, we have to ask which status “justice” has for the functioning of “democracy” (besides asking which kind of justice we are talking of): Is justice “only” a prerequisite for democratic governance or is it a defining characteristic? Is there a “threshold of justice” that must be reached to run significant democratic processes? How do justice, civil rights, and the concrete exercise of these rights correlate? If one can speak of a “low intensity citizenship” (Guillermo O’Donnell) existing under certain circumstances, shouldn’t justice (in the sense of a rudimentary material standard for citizens) be more closely connected to the concept of democracy? Further, we have to ask whether criteria of justice can be measured conceptually and which role they play for the quality of established democracies. For OECD and non-OECD democracies, it is worthwhile to analyse whether “more just” democracies are also qualitatively “better” democracies (and how this can be determined theoretically and empirically).

For the planned conference, empirical questions can be separated from normative ones: On the *empirical level*, we have to ask which concrete differences, divergences, and processes of heterogenisation can be distinguished, and which of them turn out to be real challenges for democracies and democratic governance. Especially, we have to analyse empirically the impacts of the (growing) heterogeneity on the functioning of democracy. *Normatively*, we can question the significance of concepts of cohesion and heterogeneity for democratic governance in the framework of democratic theory and political philosophy.

The conference will place emphasis on specific differences between young and established democracies. In particular, we want to ask how identity- and interest-driven problems are differing in established and non-established democracies and how those differently institutionalised democracies are dealing with these specific problems. We will look not only at culture-specific dependencies of democratic systems, but also at the advantages and disadvantages arising from unconsolidated institutional structures. Maybe new democracies can deal better with the required adaptation of their institutions than old democracies. On the other hand, established systems can possibly benefit from “institutional experience” and thus be able to cope better with the new challenges. Therefore, the planned conference will focus on the questions how new democracies can profit from the experiences of established democracies in facing new challenges and, in particular, how established democracies can learn from innovative processes of adaptation in new democracies.

The problems touched upon can be discussed under *two general perspectives*.

- *First*, we can ask for the *consequences* of the heterogenisation of democratic societies on the quality and functioning of these democracies (democracy as a dependent variable of the analysis): How much heterogeneity is compatible with democratic governance—and how much may even be essential for a liberal society? Is there such a thing as a “productive” heterogeneity required for the functioning of democratic processes—and under which circumstances can this heterogeneity be hazardous to democracy? To what extent has the societal and cultural context to be incorporated into the answering of these questions?
- *Second*, we have to explore the *impacts* of various institutional designs on processes of heterogenisation, their consequences, and feasible strategies of conflict resolution (democracy as an independent variable). Firstly, we have to study conciliatory strategies of democracies: Do democracies *per se* have a specific problem solving capacity concerning processes of heterogenisation, and does this capacity rise with the quality of democracy? Beside institutional resolutions there can be analyzed affirmative actions in the wide range of social politics as well as political communication strategies.

Both perspectives of research should be included in the following structure of the conference:

3) Structure of the conference

The planned conference should cover and discuss the problems touched upon as comprehensively as possible, but not necessarily along the distinguished dimensions of problems and challenges. We suggest a more appropriate structure according to different theoretical approaches and methods. It would be conceivable to divide the program into three main sections:

- I) Democratic theory and normative models: heterogeneity as a challenge for and precondition of democracy
- II) Empirical outcomes: identity- and interest-based challenges for democracy, their interconnectedness and their impact on the quality of democracy in established and young democracies
- III) The management of challenges: To what extent is a higher democratic quality conducive to a better management of challenges? Do strategies of problem-solution have different effects in young and established democracies?

The conference will deal with theoretical-normative questions as well as with empirical analyses and outcomes. Contributions shouldn't just focus on OECD democracies, but also include countries and regions outside of the OECD. Only comparative analyses of new *and* old democracies promise to provide encompassing answers to the questions of interest here.

Please submit a **concise abstract** of your proposed contribution, about one page in length, via e-mail to Sascha Kneip, Social Science Research Center Berlin (WZB) at kneip@wzb.eu. The deadline for submission of abstracts is **September 30, 2008**.

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