

# Challenges to Democracy in the 21st Century

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### Overview

- Introduction
- Globalization
- Mediatization

## Introduction: some challenges

- **Technological change**
  - Drives economic transformation (e.g. deindustrialization)
  - With a vast range of implications for politics (e.g. decline of the working class)
  - Introduces new ways of voting, which may change the way electoral democracy works
- **Demographic change**
  - Makes life difficult for politicians (e.g. to maintain benefit levels in old age pension)
  - May partly drive some aspects of globalization (e.g. immigration)
  - Younger generations abandon electoral democracy as we know it

## Introduction: some challenges

- **Socio-economic inequality and cultural heterogeneity**
  - Is democracy compatible with increasing inequality of wealth?
  - Increasing cultural heterogeneity threatens ‚demos‘
- **Social-cultural preference formation**
  - Gives rise to new demands for democratic participation

### Challenges to democracy

- Many open questions
- Few answers

## Globalization: the first key challenge

## Globalization: basic assumption

- **Assumption at the heart of democratic theory (Held 2006: 290):**
  - Congruence between decision-makers and decision-takers
  - a self-governing political community
  - Demos=the members of the political community locked into the territory of a given nation-state (=residents enjoying citizenship)
  - Democracy is mainly exercised in the nation-state

## Globalization: break-down of congruence

- **Today, this assumption is fundamentally put into question**
  - Denationalization: dissolution of national boundaries
  - Expansion, deepening and acceleration of global interdependencies
  - ‚unbundling of national territory‘
  
- **Congruence breaks down in two ways**



## Globalization: horizontal incongruences

- **Horizontal incongruencies:** transborder effects of political decisions of a given country
  - Neighboring countries: siting decisions (e.g. airports)

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  - Neighboring countries: siting decisions (e.g. airports)
  - Other countries: regulations (e.g. immigration: brain drain, industrial policy: delocalization; banking regulations: tax evasion)
  - Nothing new, but.....
- **Horizontal incongruencies:** transborder effects within countries
  - In a federalist state: tax competition (e.g. ‚race to the bottom‘)
  - At the local level: metropolitan problems (e.g. transportation systems)

## Globalization: vertical incongruences

- **Vertical incongruencies:** transborder effects of supranational political decisions
  - Supra-national governance structures (WTO, IMF, UN, EU)
  - Globalization in Europe=European integration, the last stage of political development in Europe (Bartolini 2005)
  - A response to increasing global interdependencies: externalities/spillovers of the horizontal type
  - Chief benefit of the emerging multi-level governance structures: ‚scale flexibility‘
- **Double problem:**
  - Coordination problem
  - Demos problem

## Globalization/European integration: vertical incongruences

- **Solution to the coordination problem** (Hooghe/Marks 2003)
  - Type I governance structures (federalism):
    - general purpose, non-intersecting, hierarchically structured, durable jurisdictions,
    - Territorially defined units
  - Type II governance structures (‘Zweckverbände’):
    - Functionally specific, intersecting, and flexible jurisdictions
    - Task-specific networks

## Globalization: problems for democracy

- **Type I: territorially defined (=demos), but....**
  - Coordination of multiple demoi: a (qualified) majority of national ,demoi‘ may impose a decision on a minority of ,demoi‘
  - A minority of powerful national ,demoi‘ may impose a decision on a majority of ,demoi‘
- **Type II: no corresponding demos.....**
  - Functionally defined ,stakeholders‘ replace territorially defined ,demoi‘
  - ,advocacy democracy‘: ,those who can credibly claim that they express strong preferences and defend causes that are of central concern to them‘ (interest groups, SMOs)
- **Both: Increasing complexity of political process**

## Globalization: problems of increasing complexity of decision-making

- **Increasing number of ,stakeholders‘ to whom national authorities are responsible:** contradiction between governmental and representative roles of parties (Mair 2009)
  - As representatives of national populations: responsive to voters
  - As responsible governments: responsive to other stakeholders (EU Commission, Council of Europe, WTO, Central Banks, UN etc.)

## Globalization: problems of increasing complexity of decision-making

- **increasingly long chains of delegation:**
  - Increasingly diffuse character of accountability,
  - Increasing remoteness of decision-making



## Globalization: problems of increasing complexity of decision-making



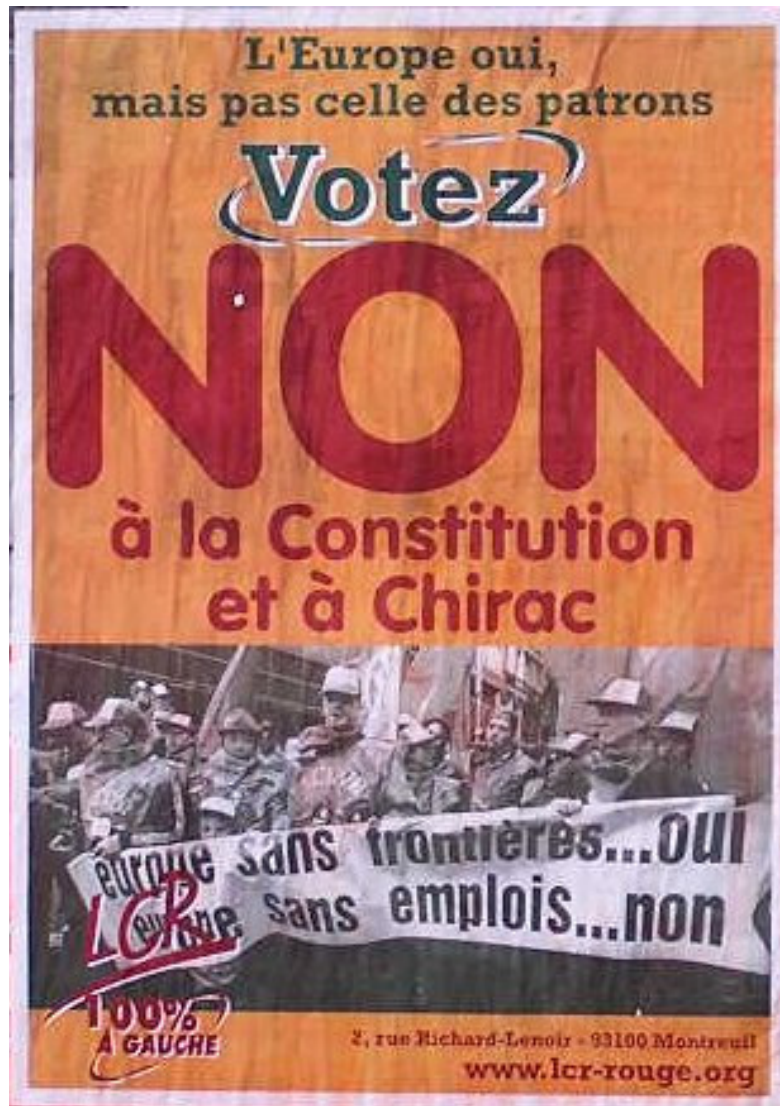
## Globalization: problems of increasing complexity of decision-making

- **increasingly long chains of delegation:**
  - Increasingly diffuse character of accountability,
  - Increasing remoteness of decision-making
  - lack of transparency
  - Lack of control by national parliaments and voters
  - ‚presidentialization‘: reinforcement of executive power



## EU in particular: democratic control?

- **There is no ,democracy deficit‘ in the EU** (Liberal intergouvernementalism, e.g. Moravcsik 2002)
- **New (non-parliamentarian) control mechanisms in EU** (e.g. Héritier 1999)
- **There is a serious ,democracy deficit‘ in the EU** (,end of the ,permissive consensus‘, e.g. Hooghe/Marks 2009)



## Is democratization at all possible at the supranational level?

- **Problem of size** (Robert Dahl)
- **Lack of a demos:** cultural and political definitions of the demos (‘constitutional patriotism’, Habermas)
- **Lack of a centre:** two types of democratization (Charles Tilly)
  - Strong state (e.g. France)
  - Weak state (e.g. Switzerland)
- **There are actually no necessary conditions for democratization** (Koenig-Archibugi): you do not need
  - Strong centre
  - Cultural homogeneity
  - Economic development and equality

## Mediatization: the second key challenge

## Mediatization: changing patterns of political communication

- **Processes of communication between decision-makers and citizens**
- **Archetype of classical Athenian democracy (local):**
  - Assembly democracy, but
  - Citizens (audience) and their representatives (speakers)
  - Assembly=public sphere
- **Modern representative democracy (national):**
  - Essentially media-based communication
  - Assemblies at the local level (town meetings, Landsgemeinde, local party sections), and for internal coordination (parties, interest groups)
  - Political communication depends on media infrastructure



## Mediatization: double transformation of the media

- **Golden age of nation-state:**
  - ‚public service‘ model of broadcasting: nationally organized radio/tv
  - Nationwide programming and audience („time signal‘ from the observatory in Neuchâtel at 12.30 p.m.)
  - National demos covered by national news at prime time
  - Captive news audience
  - Standardized notions of what counts and what not, constitutionally mandated to nonpartisan norms
  - Partisan print media

## Mediatization: first transformation of the media

- **Proliferation and diversification of media channels**
  - Third age of political communication systems: abundance, ubiquity, reach, and celerity (Blumler and Kavanagh 1999)
  - Multiplication of channels, integration of communication equipment in people's homes
  - Message tailored to particular identities, conditions, tastes
  - Selective exposure, widening cultural gap
  - ‚balkanization‘ of the public sphere (Sunstein 2001: internet)
- **Fragmentation of the demos from within**

## Mediatization: second transformation of the media

- **Commercialization**
  - Admission of private broadcasting
  - Orientation to consumers' demands
  - But: consumers cannot control quality of news (,credence good'), less powerful than.....
  - Investors/advertisers/sources

## Mediatization thesis:

- **Mediatization:** the media increasingly follow their own commercial logic in selecting, presenting, and interpreting the political news
- **‘media logic’:** reflects the commercial logic of the media industry
- **Media:**
  - Present politics according to their own criteria
  - Pay selective attention politics
  - Set the agenda: define the relevant problems
  - Construct the relevance of events/personalities
  - Become a political actor in their own right
- **Politicians** have to adapt to this logic:

## Mediatization thesis: ‚media logic‘ as frame of reference



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- **Pessimists:**
  - ‚mediacracy‘ (Meyer 2002): manipulation by the media
  - Political news increasingly replaced by ‚faits divers‘ (Bourdieu 1996) – trivialities of daily life: creates political indifference (20 Minuten)
  - Selective information: creates polarization
  - Contribute to presidentialization: focus on leaders
  - ‚Media populism‘ and ‚media complicity‘ with populist leaders: cater to popular culture/tastes
    - Dramatization
    - Personalization
    - Spin and sound bites instead of substance

## Mediatization thesis: ‚media logic‘ as frame of reference

- **Optimists:**
  - **Greater inclusion:** style of popular culture appeals to otherwise excluded groups (van Zoonen 2005): populist discourse brings the people back into politics
  - **Media effects are very limited:** mainly reinforce political predispositions
  - **Politicians are still in the drivers‘ seat:** ‚although it takes two to tango, either sources or journalists can lead, but more often than not, sources do the leading‘ (Gans 1980)



## Pessimists: Monica Lewinsky Affaire:

Contributes to the

- Reduction of politics to an irrelevant spectator sport
- Anti-political reflex
- Depoliticization: indifference
- Decoupling of input/output-processes





## Optimists: Monica Lewinsky Affaire

Shows that

- American public still puts more emphasis on substance than on personal errors and lies

## Mediatization thesis: Swiss example

	Campaign
Campaign effect	Asylum Naturalization Corporation tax
reinforcement	
Activation	
conversion	
Total	
n	

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Campaign effect	Campaign		
	Asylum	Natura- lization	Corpo- ration tax
reinforcement	<b>68.7</b>	<b>47.3</b>	<b>56.8</b>
Activation	21.5	<b>42.1</b>	23.5
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Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
n	847	729	816

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### Jürgen Habermas (1990): Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit, preface to the 2nd edition

- The revolutionary change in the GDR: tv coverage of mass demonstrations in the GDR turned the physical presence of protesters in the streets into an omnipresent phenomenon
- The democratic potential of the public sphere under contemporary conditions: ‚ambivalent‘

**Thank you for your attention!**