

Article

# The Theory of Democratic Antinomies and the Identification of Value Trade-Offs in Political Practice

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## Abstract

In theory, the idea of democracy consists of several insoluble contradictions, aporias, and conflicts. In practice, democracy demands an effective balancing of its essentially opposing principles and values in order to preserve an authentic character as well as to avoid its inherent self-destructive tendencies. In this regard, the concept of value trade-offs promises a heuristic tool to grasp both the analytical and normative impact of a political theory which takes the complexity of democracy seriously. Proceeding from this, the contribution will demonstrate to what extent the conceptualisation of democratic antinomies and the notion of value trade-offs can be seen as a kind of communicating vessel. The article's general argument is that democracy is defined by several antinomies that are irreducible in theory and therefore require trade-offs in political practice. Moreover, it will discuss three relevant issue areas to suggest the approach's empirical relevance and to prove the existence of value trade-offs as an operating benchmark for the legitimacy and consolidation of democratic processes on the one hand but also for their shortcomings and risks on the other. Correspondingly, the article concerns the antinomic relationships between freedom and security, economic growth and sustainability, and finally, democracy and populism to underpin the general perception that the success of democratic institutions first and foremost depends on the balance of the necessarily conflicting principles of democracy.

## Keywords

antinomies; democracy; economic growth; freedom; populism; security; sustainability; value trade-offs

## Issue

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## 1. Introduction

The intense consideration to the history of political thought reveals that the concept of democracy is generally associated with essentially opposing connotations and values: Liberty and equality, representative government and popular sovereignty, the principles of quality and quantity in respect of democratic decision-making, plurality and social unity, individual and collective claims, and last but not least universality and particularity—all of these evident contradictions inevitably belong to the idea of modern democracy and therefore provoke a permanent struggle of conflicting opinions, interests, and actors within the democratic system. Hence, the theory of democracy presented here argues that what is vaguely

called the government of the people, by the people and for the people is made up of several specific 'antinomies.' These antinomies stretch a discursive framework which can function as an adequate measure to distinguish legitimate political efforts from extremist enunciations and demands exceeding the democratic boundaries by suspending its obligatory opposites and rendering the always 'relative' features of democracy in terms of absolutes. Accordingly, one may say that an 'authentic' type of democracy is primarily characterised by a number of dynamic trade-offs between its inherent (and insoluble) antinomies.

Proceeding from these preliminary assumptions, the following line of argument briefly outlines the theory of democratic antinomies (Section 2), before it clarifies the

interdependence of these antinomies in theory and the need of (value) trade-offs in democracy's political practice (Section 3). Furthermore, the theoretical considerations should be illustrated by three substantiated examples, which will be reconstructed in terms of the relevant concepts in order to highlight both the structural benefits and problems of democratic discourse (Section 4).

## 2. The Theory of Democratic Antinomies

The history and theory of democracy are surrounded by numerous inconsistencies, paradoxes and aporias. For instance, as it is well-known, democracy exhibits a particular tendency to self-destruct as well as "autoimmunity" (Derrida, 2005), whenever an 'undemocratic' group of political actors attempt to gain the majority of voters in order to abolish civil rights and democratic institutions with the help of legally implemented 'democratic' procedures. An associated problem is a paradox identified by Richard Wollheim (1962). This paradox means that democracy is always confronted with the inherent dilemma that an outvoted minority nevertheless has to obey the political decisions taken by the representatives of the voters' majority, even if the outvoted minority is convinced that the majority is wrong and believe they have the moral right or even duty to engage in civil disobedience. This dilemma evidently leads to the need for, or at least the imagination of there being, an "overlapping consensus," in which the existing political antagonisms of a particular society are symbolically absorbed and therefore effectively defused (e.g., Heller, 1928/2000; Rawls, 1993, Chapter 4). A third aporia of democracy is indicated by Kenneth Arrow's "impossibility theorem," according to which it is not possible to formulate a consistent social preference ordering which can simultaneously satisfy the conditions of non-dictatorship, individual sovereignty, unanimity, freedom from irrelevant alternatives, and uniqueness of group rank (Arrow, 1963). Together with John Nash's (1951) critique on the "invisible hand" in Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations* (1776/2012), Arrow's impossibility theorem suggests that there is no method to extrapolate from individual preferences to the common good. The same insight can be drawn from Jean-Jacques Rousseau's description of the "general will" as "sum of small differences" to people's individual interests (Rousseau, 1997, p. 60). In consequence, there will always remain a significant incongruence and therefore a deep tension between individual and collective claims, private interests, and public goods.

The above-mentioned (as well as many other) paradoxes basically result from one overarching reason: That democracy as a form of government and society established by the principle of competition requires every claim for (absolute) truth to be renounced (e.g., Arendt, 2007, pp. 223–259; Kelsen, 1955). Ensuing from this, two things are supposed to emerge: First, the implausibility to define the concept of democracy unequivocally; and second, the emphasis on democracy's multiple identities.

Thus, the almost countless patterns, (sub-)types and varieties of democracy which the history of democratic theory assembles (e.g., Cunningham, 2002; Diamond, 2008; Dunn, 2005; Eisenstadt, 1999; Held, 2006; Schmidt, 2010; Tilly, 2007) are not only logical outcomes of the classical statement by Walter B. Gallie (1956) that democracy—as justice or the arts—is among the "essentially contested concepts" lacking unique standards for both a commonly accepted definition and a consistent discursive practice. Far from being just an arbitrary political system, it has to be assumed that a unique characteristic of democracy is that it offers social and political struggles a reliable framework and a platform on which their political objectives might be transformed into legitimate individual and collective claims. This means the concept of democracy quasi 'internalises' the contradictions, oppositions and antitheses circulating in society. Thereby, the legitimacy of 'democratically' formulated political goals precisely emanate from the (paradoxical) fact that it accepts the entitlement of alternative political goals as a quid pro quo. Otherwise, a 'democratic' decision regarding any political conflict would be nothing but absurd.

Against this elaborated theoretical background, even common distinctions such as those between liberal and republican, direct and representative, consensus and majoritarian (for this distinction, see particularly Lijphart, 1999, Chapters 2–3), market and social democracy, as well as further discrepancies between elitist and participatory, deliberative and agonistic forms of democracy, or even strong opposition such as that between grassroots democracy and democratic leadership or Western and Non-Western ideas of democracy do not inevitably reinforce the popular prejudice that democracy can mean "everyone and everything" (Sartori, 1992, p. 11). Instead, the evident coexistence of many divergent conceptions and notions of democracy just confirms that democracy itself apparently consists of significant paradoxes, aporias, and contradictions. However, these 'democratic' contradictions do not prevent democracy being treated as an essentially contested concept which nevertheless has clear contours at its boundaries. Since it seems to be unmistakable what all legitimate controversies within democracy are about, the permanent (and essentially indissoluble) political struggles may indeed forbid a strict definition of democracy, but allow at least its theoretical framing as well as a normative estimation of democratic qualities. This approach may neither be confused with a minimal concept (Dahl, 1971, 1998) nor with the perception that the concept of democracy might only be "boundary contested" (Lord, 2004). In contrast, we have to become aware of the fact that it is exactly the special character of conflict giving democracy its distinctive feature. In this respect, first of all the recognition of plurality, the existence of conflicting opinions and values, and most notably, the integration of governments' and oppositions' rival claims, are what distinguishes democracy from every other political system (Luhmann, 2000). Likewise, this perspective

sheds new light on democracy's historical ability to subsume very contrary ideas and realities under its semantic field. In this regard, it is remarkable that the antithetical oppositions commonly associated with democracy, obviously imply a similar level of legitimacy: liberty vs. equality (Antinomy I); representation vs. popular sovereignty (Antinomy II); the principles of quality and quantity concerning democratic decision-making (Antinomy III); plurality vs. social unity (Antinomy IV); individual vs. collective claims (Antinomy V); and finally, universality vs. particularity (Antinomy VI). All of these antagonistic principles and values definitely include an 'authentic' side of democracy, even though a permanent clash is bound to occur (Hidalgo, 2014, Chapter 3). A main consequence of this essential discernment might be that even profoundly opposing theorists such as Hobbes and Rousseau, Schumpeter and Barber, Kelsen and Loewenstein, Dahl and Pateman, Habermas and Mouffe, Nozick and Taylor, Kant and Derrida, each contribute to a comprehensive understanding of modern democracy in an appropriate and equitable manner.

The previously outlined characteristics of democracy can be conceptually grasped by the keyword: antinomy. With the concept of democratic antinomies going beyond the rather indefinite notion of a "democratic paradox" (Mouffe, 2000), we are able to stress that democracy actually 'consists' of several insoluble contradictions. This statement does not deny that the concept of antinomy linguistically overlaps with several similar notions as paradox, contradiction, tension, opposition, aporia or dialectic. But at least, one can say that by indicating a 'law-like' proposition, the application of the noun 'antinomy' verbalises the character of irreconcilable (democratic) principles in the strictest sense. Hence, the existence of democratic antinomies might even be seen as the fundamental reason for the inevitably resulting paradoxes, contradictions, tensions, oppositions etc., in democratic politics.

In accordance with Kant's definition of "antinomy" as a "conflict of laws" (*Widerstreit der Gesetze*; Kant, 1911, p. 407) leading to equally justified theses and antitheses which cannot be resolved by a compromise or synthesis, the identification of democratic antinomies primarily emphasises the underlying capacity of democracy to mediate between obviously opposing but equally legitimate principles. Though in Kant (1911, pp. 426–461), the identification of four (metaphysical) antinomies merges with a critique of pure reason itself. With regard to the political idea of democracy, it is supposed to be evident a priori that the historical discussion concerning the government of the people, by the people and for the people has to be distinguished from the claim for pure and absolute knowledge. Instead, the argument of democratic antinomies is not a transcendental one suggesting that these antinomies did always exist. In contrast, the antinomies of democracy do not imply a matter of logic but only of semantics reflecting the contradictory meanings being attributed to the idea of democracy during its con-

ceptual history and concluding from the relevant genealogy to the already mentioned main quality of democracy: the ability to subsume very contrary ideas and realities under one and the same semantic field. Additionally, the method of genealogy which has been applied in order to detect democratic antinomies within the history of political thought (Hidalgo, 2014) performatively implies both a thesis that the hitherto identified six antinomies cover the dominant historical debate on democracy and a concession that the relevant discussion is always open for supplements, advancements and the identification of further democratic antinomies.

Proceeding from this, democracy can also be understood as a basic idea or proposition from which further propositions and their very opposites can be deduced (cf. Müller, 2004, p. 516, footnote 6). Moreover, it is due to its antinomies that democracy shapes an infinite number of disagreements, disputes, and conflicts since there is never the one and only 'democratic' position but always a few or even a large number of alternatives for how a particular political question can be treated and decided. In addition and upon closer examination, the unique framework of democracy, in which different political decisions are available by pursuing, for example, liberty against equality, the individual against the community, quality against quantity or vice versa, is also a consistent result of democratic antinomies: As long as these one-sided political demands show respect for the (normatively equivalent and only temporarily neglected) other side of the opposition, the 'democratic' character of the political process or debate is maintained *in toto*. The latter is the case if a political demand or decision does not abolish the opposition itself by pursuing extreme objectives or denying the general entitlement to opposing views. Hence, democracy means not least a permanent struggle to bring or to keep its extremes into a dynamic balance. This balance of democratic antinomies should not be confused with the golden mean or the desirable middle between two extremes. Instead of falling prey to the fallacy of seeking the 'truth' as a compromise between two opposite positions, the theory of democratic antinomies rather demands the coexistence of the relevant extremes without signifying that the extremes are bad and the middle ground is good. Instead, the ideal coexistence could be described as an indispensable oscillation of democracy and its processes of political decision-making between its opposing principles. In this respect, Claude Lefort's conception of democracy as a system characterised by both the institutionalisation of conflict within society and the maintenance of an "empty space" of political power might be a helpful illustration (Lefort, 1988). In return, the possibility of a process of 'sublation' in the sense of Hegel that might unite and keep both sides and reproduce the contradiction on a higher level must be rejected from the perspective of democratic antinomies.

Although each of the aforementioned six democratic antinomies deserve a rather extensive reflection, it is cer-

tainly the first one (between liberty and equality) which needs the most clarification. At a first glance, the liberal doctrines of John Rawls (1971) or Ronald Dworkin (1981a, 1981b, 1987), combining both ideals as an ineluctable normative fundament of democracy, suggest that liberty and equality do not inevitably mean insoluble contradictions. However, a ‘real’ or ‘essential’ equality could only be achieved by repression since a free society must necessarily evoke social differences, inequalities, and hierarchies because of people’s different procedures, capacities, and interests. That is also the reason, why liberals such as Rawls or Dworkin tend to reduce equality to a political or legal status and give priority to liberty, while social democrats conversely prefer equality against liberty and therefore support redistribution of wealth and greater intervention by the welfare state. Sometimes, it is even controversial to which camp an author belongs. For instance, Rawls might rather be assigned to the advocates of social democracy, since the difference principle and the fair equality of opportunity in the *Theory of Justice* (Rawls, 1971) suggest the legitimacy of an expansion of the welfare state. However, it is at least evident that Rawls was very aware of the fact that liberty and equality remain contradictions, as he arranged his principles of justice in a lexical order prioritising the liberty principle and determining this priority if the principles conflict in practice. In *Political Liberalism*, the priority of basic liberties against equality is not only confirmed (Rawls, 1993, Lecture 8) but intensified, as the liberty principle as the equal right to the most extensive total system of equal basic liberties is replaced by only an equal claim to a fully adequate scheme of equal basic rights and liberties (Rawls, 1993, Lecture 8, Section 8). Indeed, since democracy means both liberty *and* equality, both groups, liberals and social democrats involve the first antinomy in their doctrines, while there is a never-ending political struggle between the left and the right concerning the necessary extensions and boundaries of both concepts and, additionally, the adequate balance of them.

A very similar thing regards the rather evident antinomies between people’s sovereignty and representation, individual rights and collective duties, as well as about the quantitative principles of participation and majority rule on the one hand and the need for qualitative or normative measures to guarantee a particular output of political decision-making on the other. Democracy always means and includes both contradictory sides. Therefore, it is only complete if it does not ignore any one of these components, although it is obvious that democracy is unable to resolve the inevitable tensions and paradoxes which result.

### **3. The Identification of Value Trade-Offs in Democratic Politics**

A trade-off is popularly known as a situational decision that involves the gaining or growing of one quality or

quantity concerning a certain set or amount in return for simultaneously losing or diminishing qualities or quantities in different aspects. Similar to the figure of a reciprocal or inverse proportionality, a trade-off is often compared with a zero-sum game, in which each gain or loss of one actor’s or group’s utility is balanced by or compensated for by the gains or losses of other actors or groups. Thus, in simple terms, a trade-off is commonly observed, whenever the increasing of one thing is accompanied by the decreasing of another.

The origins of trade-offs are numerous, including basic physical or biological reasons. In economic realms, a trade-off is usually expressed in terms of the “opportunity cost” a particular choice implies, which is equivalent to the loss of or relinquishment of the best available alternative (Campbell & Kelly, 1994). Accordingly, the concept of economic trade-offs indicates a strategic or tactical situation, in which relevant actors have to come to a decision by considering the advantages and disadvantages of each alternative very carefully. In this respect, it could be that the (economic) reasons considered affect the field of ethics as well, which is particularly the case whenever a trade-off concerns not only the various (or even conflicting) interests and values of a single person but also the competing interests and values of groups of people. It is similar regarding situational decisions being defined by the rivalry of different ethical principles as with deontology and utilitarianism for instance.

On the surface, this general concept of economic and ethical trade-offs dominates democratic politics in an all-encompassing manner. As economic theories of democracy—e.g., by Gary Becker (1958, 1983) or Anthony Downs (1957a, 1957b)—insinuate, all politics and processes of political decision-making might be interpreted as an infinite series of trade-offs based upon the interests and core values that political actors, politicians, or just the majority of people share. However, the economic theory of democracy in the wake of Becker and Downs obviously fails in reflecting and understanding the fourth democratic antinomy: between plurality and competition on the one hand, and modern democracy’s need for social cohesion, political unity, and an imagined community in the sense of Benedict Anderson (1991), or the previously mentioned “overlapping consensus” (Rawls, 1993) on the other. Hence, the question of trade-offs in democracy is rather complex than in an economy and must, therefore, go beyond the focus on politicians’ and voters’ rational choices. In democracy, the role of public good, as well as the principles of collective action and the common identity of people, are directed against the simplified notion that the ‘typical’ democratic situation is that, in which one person’s gain inevitably means another’s loss.

Nevertheless, the concept of trade-offs could be adapted through the democratic antinomies approach in a quite different way. An expedient application merely requires one to recognise the dual nature in the meaning and impact of trade-offs in the field of democratic pol-

itics. Instead of understanding trade-offs only in utility maximising terms, in which more of one good implies less of another, the democratic antinomies do not predominantly concentrate on choices across competing goods but on the need to find a balance between democracy’s insoluble contradictions. Proceeding from this, the inherent ‘self-contradiction’ of the trade-off conception is coming to the fore: On the one hand, a trade-off between conflicting and even mutually exclusive alternatives ineluctably implies a constructive dealing, an arrangement with the underlying, (almost) equally desirable options for decision-making. Otherwise, situations which require trade-offs would not happen at all. Moreover, as far as this deal or arrangement avoids radical extremes (which is apparently plausible since both sides of the trade-off are positively connoted and every relevant decision between them had at least to guarantee the minor evil), it could be described as a kind of agreement, anyway if we want to call this more precisely an adjustment, a *modus vivendi*, a compensation for asymmetries or even a pragmatic compromise. On the other hand, no trade-off between such a set of alternatives would be able to solve or overcome the underlying conflict of political aims, goals, and objectives. At best, it might just be suitable to ensure that the relevant political conflicts in democracy are defused and unlikely to escalate.

As we have seen, the requisite balance of democracy’s conflicting principles should not be confused with the (dis)solution or ‘sublation’ of the conflict itself. Instead, dealing with the indissoluble tensions and antagonisms appropriately within democracy requires the coexistence of contradictory (and conflicting) democratic principles. Hence, the concept of a trade-off between the democratic antinomies ensures both the respect of the antinomies’ intrinsic character and an illustrative configuration in order to describe the (assumable) phenomenological hallmarks of democracy. Referring to this, the three different levels and functions of trade-offs concerning the theory of democratic antinomies can finally be highlighted:

- First, one may say that the occurrence of trade-off situations in democracy actually depends on the

condition that there are relevant public actors as political parties, members of parliaments and candidates who are running for elections, citizen and interest groups, as well as the media or judges, who are able to articulate and represent the wide range of legitimately conflicting principles and values within the democratic system;

- Second, and vice versa, the empirical existence of trade-off decisions in democratic processes provides a good indicator that the characteristic antinomies of democracy are still present and virulent. In contrast, a lack of trade-offs in any political society would suggest democracy’s decline to its inherently deficient, self-destructive forms as for instance in illiberal or exclusive democracies (Antinomy I), tyrannies of majority or post-democracies (Antinomy III), as well as anti-pluralistic democracies or cases of social disintegration (Antinomy IV);
- Third, and finally, the concept of trade-offs offers a heuristic pattern to describe generic political, structural and institutional outputs of antinomically organised democratic processes. In this regard, the (six) democratic antinomies shown in Section 2 evidently correspond with a juxtaposition of concrete opposing characteristics which empirical democracies ordinarily combine. An overview is given in the following Table 1.

The table emphasises that due to the antinomies several empirical trade-offs concerning evidently antithetic structures and institutions are predestined within democratic societies. Concretely, the first antinomy between liberty and equality pre-eminently leads democracy to evoke essential affinities to both the free market and the social state, whereas the second antinomy between representation and popular sovereignty is translated into the normative equivalence of parliamentarism and popular referenda, elections, and public debate in respect of legislative processes. Moreover, the parallelism of influential power and lobby groups and the reverse validity of the classical principle ‘one person, one vote’ is an expression of the first two democratic antinomies as well. In

**Table 1.** Trade-offs in antinomic democracy.

Democratic Antinomies	Trade-Offs
I Liberty and equality	Free market and social state
II Representation and popular sovereignty	Parliamentarism and popular referenda Interest groups and ‘one person, one vote’
III Quality and quantity	Rule of law and majority rule
IV Plurality and unity	Pluralism of opinions/lifestyles and collective identity
V Individual and collective claims	Civil rights and duty of solidarity
VI Universality and particularity	Global values/human rights and national interests Similarity and dissimilarity of all democracies

terms of the third antinomy between quality and quantity as contradictory principles of all methods of democratic decision-making, there is a further antithetic coexistence of majority rule and the rule of law to be noticed. And while the fourth antinomy provokes a salient clash of pluralistic opinions and lifestyles on the one hand and an efficacious collective identity of people on the other, the fifth antinomy finds its trade-off in the simultaneous validity of civil rights and the duty of solidarity. Last, but not least, we can conclude from the sixth antinomy between universality and particularity that a similar collision between national interests and global responsibility of a democratic association occurs. In addition, this antinomy includes as a further paradox that every democracy is inevitably both similar and dissimilar to all other (empirical) democracies because they all reflect a particular will of their people as well as also having a substantial affinity to universal claims and values such as human rights.

Although these trade-offs cannot be measured with methods of mathematical exactness, which might be a feature of alternative approaches to eliciting value trade-offs in politics (e.g., Baron, 2000), quantifiable indices for measuring goods being implicit to antinomic democratic principles as liberty and equality are definitely available. However, since the theoretically identified (semantic) antinomies of democracy cannot be reformulated (and therefore be resolved) by the distinction of a meta language and an object language following Alfred Tarski's concept of truth in formalised languages, the resulting trade-offs in practice affect a subject beyond mathematical axiomatics, arithmetic, and particularly equivalence as well. Therefore, value trade-offs due to the democratic antinomies approach obviously cannot indicate (the intervals of) zero-sum games in a strict sense, since the antinomies cannot be enunciated by linear and inverse mathematical functions. But apart from that, the scheme above gives us a comprehensive impression of the prototypical value conflicts in modern democracies. For instance, the ferocious debate between the advocates of open borders, multiculturalism, and the right to immigrate as the only morally acceptable position for someone committed to democratic values (e.g., Carens, 2013) and their opponents who stress democracy's need for national identity and the legitimate interest of any political community in self-determination (which includes launching a rather restrictive immigration policy, e.g., Miller, 2016) is a perfect example of an argumentative trade-off in respect of the fourth and sixth antinomy. Moreover, the controversy between liberals and communitarians regarding the relationship between the individual and their community could easily be reconstructed in terms of the first and fifth antinomy. Hence, Section 4 of this article will discuss three further issues in order to strengthen and illustrate the assumed nexus between democratic antinomies in theory and value trade-offs in political practice.

## 4. Three Issue Areas

### 4.1. Freedom and Security

Since its inception, the modern democratic state stands for an evident trade-off between freedom and security. The institutional guarantee of civil rights and liberties protects the citizens from state despotism, while the security of the state can reciprocally be seen as a precondition of people's freedom. Moreover, checks and balances, as well as people's (indirect) contribution to the implementation of laws, mean that the legislative power generally provides a framework of private liberties which the large majority of citizens feel is justified. But although freedom and security might (and must) complement one another, both principles, at least *within* democracy, are equally the components of a trade-off similar to a zero-sum game. Self-autonomy and civil liberties are factually limited whenever the security of the state is effectively or virtually threatened. In return, democratic states have to accept surveillance gaps or incomplete control of their people in order to guarantee civil liberties.

Likewise, the maintenance of an at least unstable balance of freedom and security is one of the greatest challenges of the democratic state, since each social, economic, or political crisis is usually succeeded by a significant increase in state power and a restriction of freedom at the same time (e.g., Cobden, 1973; Higgs, 1987). Today, particularly the phenomenon of transnational terrorism tends to disturb or even destroy any trade-off between freedom and security. Basically, the transnational terrorist represents in a special sense a maximum of freedom and, inversely, a minimum of security. Comparable to a freedom fighter, the terrorist exhibits only few regards to his personal safety forcing the authority of the state to tighten counter-measures permanently. In the worst case, security fanatic politicians and citizens are even willing to sacrifice (all) civil liberties, which are assumed to endanger the survival of the state. In fact, democratic states often over-react to the risks of transnational terrorism (e.g., Art & Richardson, 2007; Jacobson, 2006). Hence, the democratic rule of law is under ongoing risk of becoming replaced by a 'state of prevention' which would be equivalent to a triumph of security over the freedom of democracy.

Undeniably, it was the theoretical thinker Thomas Hobbes, who first reflected on the antinomic foundations of the trade-off between freedom and security in the modern democratic state in 1651. However, in Hobbes' *Leviathan* (1651/1996), the common argument, that there is no security without a significant restraint of freedom, had already been taken to its extremes. In Hobbes, the collective power of people represented by a single sovereign aims to ensure that all or at least the majority of citizens equally benefit from law, order, and security, while all other sides of the democratic antinomies (I to V)—individual rights, people's sovereignty and participation, the rule of law, freedom and plural-

ity (including a separation of powers)—are neglected. In other words, Hobbes’ refusal to accept any trade-off between freedom and security likewise rejected democracy. Accordingly, the theoretical accomplishment of a balance between the relevant antinomies of democracy and particularly a trade-off between a guaranteed individual right to freedom and the collective interest in security (Antinomy V) was only achieved by his successors, e.g., Locke, Montesquieu, Kant or the Federalists. In practice, the antinomic trade-off between freedom and security in democracy demands that both principles remain under reservation of the other. Since a concrete state intervention either increases freedom or security, the relevant decisions should not focus on only one side of the paradox but need respect for both sides, which means nothing less than the underlying antinomies must be maintained. Otherwise, there is the risk that freedom is sold out for security or vice versa. Both alternatives—the obsession for a secure state or to have an anarchy—would be incompatible with democracy. Moreover, the democratic trade-off between security and liberty illustrates the fact that dissolving antinomies to one side might finally eliminate both sides, since erasing all security does not mean maximising liberty and, on the contrary, without security, there is no liberty at all. As it has been mentioned above, the reason for this is that, outside democracy, the identified antinomies never lead to trade-offs similar to zero-sum games, since democracy depends on a (positive) coexistence of its opposing principles. Thus, the sum of them cannot be zero there, whereas within democracy (and beyond the undemocratic, one-sided extremes), it is very plausible that one can only increase one side of an antinomy by decreasing the other. This strengthens the argument that there is generally a need for trade-offs in democracy. In return, the trade-off between freedom and security advances to a measurable empirical quality of democratic antinomies.

#### 4.2. Economic Growth and Sustainability

The basic principle of sustainable development is to meet “the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987, p. 41). This obligation towards sustainability originally attempted to combine the aspects of an intergenerational justice (Rawls, 1971, Chapter 5, Section 44) and a common responsibility for poverty reduction and environmental protection with a commitment to economic growth as a condition for global welfare. However, the conservation of natural resources and livelihoods on the one hand and social progress, productivity increases, and growth in global incomes on the other have meanwhile been proved as rather conflicting goals (e.g., Jackson, 2009; Latouche, 2009). In this matter, as things stand today, the prospect of “green growth” or “green capitalism” (e.g., Ekins, 2011; Fay, 2012; Heal, 2010; OECD, 2011) has to be estimated as very uncertain.

Once again, democracy is basically predestined to offer a discursive framework to negotiate an appropriate trade-off in this matter. But unfortunately, the democratic antinomies suggest sustainability being rather a structural deficit of democracy itself. Three main problems can be identified in order to grasp the reasons for this deficit systematically:

- In contrast to the theory and practice of ancient democracy (e.g., Finley, 1985), the powerful position of individuals in modern democracies requires and principally justifies the absence of a general priority of community and collective aims over individual rights and claims (Antinomy V). In consequence, a (temporary) subordination of individual interests, e.g., in the society’s economic growth and welfare, might still be possible if there are good and traceable reasons. Nevertheless, a just virtual community of future generations is apparently too ‘weak’ in order to avoid the well-known “future-individual-paradox” (Parfit, 1983) and to enable such a withdrawal of current desires in favour of future goals;
- Although it is plausible, that, in democracy, environmental protection and the claim for sustainability acquires the quality of being an elitist or avant-gardist issue, it could hardly be expected to become a mass phenomenon (Antinomy III). Instead, the majority of people have been unwilling to renounce on their own rational advantage promised by economic growth;
- An additional focus on the levels of the democratic antinomies II and IV gives further rise to the suspicion that the interest in sustainability and the conservation of natural resources is structurally underrepresented in (Western) democracies. The main challenge is that there is not one single acting subject, one interest group of really concerned and affected people who are able to give environmental issues an unambiguously audible voice within the polyphonic choir of pluralistic democracy.

Thus, as Alexis de Tocqueville’s *Democracy in America* (1840/2002) has already pointed out, we are confronted with the inconvenient insight that, particularly in democracy, citizens usually do not cultivate the capacity to renounce their current needs and desires in favour of future prospects, chances, and obligations. The reason is obviously that, at least according to the consistently large majority of people, the issue of sustainability is not recognised as a normatively equivalent goal to the principle of economic growth. From this, against the background of the democratic antinomies approach, we could conclude that the antinomic conditions to achieve a balance or trade-off between the conflicting objectives—economic growth and sustainability—yet are not given. In consequence, as long as there is not an efficacious social “imagination” (Castoriadis, 2006) that present and future gen-

erations have to be considered as ‘equal’ (Antinomy I), while people ignore the fact that the contributors to climate change and environmental pollution from the industrialised countries bear a particular responsibility for those suffering the consequences in developing countries (Antinomy VI), a significant improvement of the contemporary ecological situation will remain out of reach. Therefore, in case of sustainability and economic growth, the theory of democratic antinomies even provides a benchmark, regarding the reform, efforts and institutional innovations which eventually have to be done in order to include all concerned parties in the controversial democratic discourse.

**4.3. Populist Democracy**

For the final example, we have initially to elucidate to what extent the theory of democratic antinomies serves as a reference point to understand the synchronic populist and non-populist character of democracy. Instead of encouraging a problematic separation between populism as a (thin) political ideology (e.g., Mudde, 2004) and as only a style of political communication (e.g., Moffitt & Tormey, 2014; Taggart, 2000), the democratic antinomies approach underlines that democracy always includes two effects: first, a substantial alignment to populist strategies, whenever only one side of its contradictory and conflicting principles is getting accentuated; and second, an effective resistance to such one-sided appearances of populist democracy by cultivating its non-populist counter-principles at the same time.

The following chart (Table 2) illustrates these populist and non-populist sides and features of democracy due to its several antinomies: Here, the left hand side of the first column consisting of the principles of liberty, representation, quality, plurality, individual rights, and universality suggests that one half of democracy shows deep affinity to liberal and non-populist values; whereas the italicised right-hand side of the first column (assembling the norms of equality, popular sovereignty, quantity, homogeneity, collective claims, and particularity) indicates that the second half of democracy can barely be distinguished from the prototypical principles of political populism (e.g., De La Torre, 2015; Mudde, 2004, 2007; Priester, 2007, 2012).

In accordance with that, the table’s second column alleges the kind of politics a (populist) dissolution of

each democratic antinomy (suppressing the liberal side of democracy while enforcing its illiberal one) must obviously lead to. As a result, which is apparently very close to the empirical programs and rhetoric of many right and left-wing populists in European and American democracies, a form of populist or illiberal democracy emerges which fails to ensure the necessary balance or trade-off between the relevant liberal and illiberal opposing principles. Such a populist or illiberal democracy, which is most of all characterised by a very one-sided emphasis on equality, popular sovereignty, majority rule, social homogeneity, and the particular interest of the political community, implies both a remaining affinity to democratic principles and their parallel degeneration. In detail, the populist denial of the existence of a trade-off between the liberal and the illiberal side of democracy provokes typical political phenomena such as:

- Sweeping defamation and condemnation of established political classes and active political professionals, often accompanied by a strong vindication of social security (Antinomy I);
- The advocacy of a rather limitless sovereignty of people which is emplaced against representative institutions, political elites and corporations (Antinomy II);
- An unleashed and destructive rule or even a tyranny of majority preventing a possible self-containment of democracy by the rule of law (Antinomy III);
- The enforcement of a homogeneous collective identity of people due to nationalist, culture-specific, or religious matters at the charge of pluralistic or multicultural requirements (Antinomy IV);
- The strict superiority of the political community over individual rights (including harsh polemics against liberal achievements in modern democracies particularly in the field of anti-discrimination of women, homosexuals, religion, foreigners and coloured people; Antinomy V).

In sum, the populist reason tends to overrule all sides of democracy showing affinity to universal values. In reverse, it forces all opposite sides of the antinomies to guarantee the particular national interest of their own democracy (Antinomy VI).

**Table 2.** Biased populist democracy with lacking trade-offs between democratic antinomies.

<b>Democratic Antinomies</b>	<b>Imbalance/Lacking Trade-Offs</b>
I Liberty and <i>equality</i>	Defamation of established political classes and politicians
II Representation and <i>popular sovereignty</i>	General critique on elites, corporations, and institutions
III Quality and <i>quantity</i>	Tyranny of majority
IV Plurality and <i>homogeneity</i>	Anti-pluralism and strict friend/enemy distinction
V Individual and <i>collective claims</i>	Anti-modernism (including gender- and homophobia)
VI Universality and <i>particularity</i>	Radical nationalism/chauvinism



Hence, a populist democracy in the rough sense builds a very biased form of a democratic order, not by attacking directly the liberal sides of democracy but by overemphasising or absolutising its populist counterparts. In contrast to this, every functioning democracy must remain able to keep its inherent populist elements in a balance or trade-off with non-populist and liberal institutions and principles. In other words, the populist side definitely belongs to democracy (e.g., Laclau, 2005) and might even function as a correction to liberal democracy because populism enables it to renew itself against its own post-democratic and technocratic tendencies whenever such biases have not been spotted by the liberal side of democracy (e.g., Mouffe, 2018; Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2012). But, at the same time, populism always undermines democracy, since all democratic principles need to be balanced by their antinomic counterparts and would act against democracy if the (liberal) counter-principles were destroyed.

At a first glance, Table 2 and the ensuing argument in Section 4.3 shows indeed only tendencies or probabilities and therefore must necessarily be seen as a limited argument. Considering this objection, it is true that, for instance, there are a couple of populist movements (e.g., the Tea Party in the United States or the Progress party in Norway) pursuing not an egalitarian but rather an anti-welfare and pro-liberty agenda. Moreover, not all populists are homophobic (e.g., the former Pim Fortuyn list in the Netherlands) or chauvinistic (e.g., left-wing populists as Syriza in Greece or Podemos in Spain). Nevertheless, the antinomic tension between the 'liberal' and 'illiberal' parts of democracy can be observed in these special cases as well. Since illiberal politics should not be confused with strict anti-liberal positions but must rather be understood as an abuse or exploitation of liberal institutions in favour of illiberal purposes, an illiberal agenda of radical 'liberalism' is apparently as plausible as an illiberal suppression of minorities by other minorities. Hence, the countless examples and differences of populist parties and programs have to be analysed from case to case; but in general, the explanatory power of the democratic antinomies approach is not reduced too much thereof.

## 5. Conclusions

This article has applied the concept of value trade-offs in order to get a rather empirical benchmark for illustrating the political implications of democratic antinomies. In return, the democratic antinomies approach is able to give the relevance of trade-offs in political realms a theoretical basis. More precisely, it should have become evident how the democratic antinomies approach serves as an adequate reference point to identify the specific value trade-offs which are necessary within the political arena of democracy in order to keep its potential to degenerate in check. Therefore, it is vital to democracy that its genealogically recognised antinomies are never resolved

in such a way as to abolish oppositions or possibilities for new (and always temporary) resolutions.

In this respect, the three examples concerning freedom vs. security (Section 4.1), (short-range) economic and (long-range) ecological goals (Section 4.2), and, finally, this issue's area of populist democracy (Section 4.3) might suggest that the particular antinomic trade-offs in democracy demand less of a compromise but rather a peaceful coexistence to balance different but equally legitimate objectives. This means (and enables) that there be an only temperate articulation of political goals as well as a demonstration of substantial respect to the antagonistic positions of political opponents.

In sum, the identified trade-offs concerning the antinomies of democracy confirm that it is mostly not possible to accomplish all beneficial political goals at the same time. But, metaphorically speaking, it must nevertheless be guaranteed that all governance and politics in democracy provide a permanent symbolic 'presence' of these democratic values being occasionally and temporarily 'absent.' Even though this only offers a very preliminary perspective on how to balance the goods implicit in democracy's antinomies rather concretely, what has been achieved here in identifying value trade-offs as logical outcomes and requirements of the relevant theory in political practice might become helpful in order to fulfil this need in the future.

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## Conflict of Interests

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