

Parties as a necessary evil – How democracy is threatened by its defenders

Summary:

The text examines the role of political parties as indispensable but problematic institutions in modern democracies. Building on Karl Popper's concept of the open society, it is argued that parties fulfill the need for community but do not offer real participation in power. They are described as prone to anti-democratic tendencies: right-wing parties promote elite rule, while left-wing parties rely on technocratic control mechanisms. Both endanger democracy because they further curtail the power of the people.

The strength of democracy does not lie in an idealized government of the people, but in the peaceful removal of rulers. Separation of powers, majority voting, gradual reforms and freedom of expression are essential for this. Alternatives such as proportional representation or grassroots democracy, however, would weaken the foundations of democracy. Parties that do not respect these principles should be viewed critically, including Alliance 90/The Greens, the AfD and other parties that promote ethnic, technocratic or grassroots democratic approaches.

Side effect warning:

- **For party supporters:** The text could be perceived as an attack on your political identity. Political camps, especially supporters of grassroots democratic or progressive approaches, could feel excluded.
- **For progressive thinkers:** Criticism of transnational institutions and technocratic models could be perceived as conservative and hostile to innovation.
- **For religious groups:** Portraying religion as morally suspect could be offensive.
- **For democracy enthusiasts:** The sober assessment of democracy as a “necessary evil” and the criticism of its idealized form could have a disillusioning effect.
- **For Popper critics:** The emphasis on Popper's principles could appear one-sided or dogmatic.

Readers should be aware that the text offers a critical, sometimes provocative perspective on democracy and parties, which is intended to stimulate discussion, but will not remain without contradiction.

The large systems of economics and politics, whose communication media of money and power dominate people's lives and everyday lives, shape our society. It has long been considered commonplace that wealthy entrepreneurs and their ventures rob individuals of their time and exploit them. Religious communities have also lost their moral standards by revealing their power mechanisms. Only political parties remain as institutions that meet the human need for community and belonging – for the “horde”. In a globally networked world, traditional forms such as tribe or family have become too narrow, while religion appears too suspect for many people.

However, Karl Popper has been warning since the end of the Second World War that political parties do not deserve this trust. For him they are a necessary evil, comparable to companies, religious communities or other associations. Although they fulfill the need for social closeness and exchange, they do not offer the people real participation in power. According to Popper, the people, by definition, remain powerless and are dominated.

This dynamic makes parties more susceptible to anti-democratic tendencies. Right-wing parties tend to replace democratic control mechanisms in favor of elite rule, as they often equate democracy with corruption. Left parties, on the other hand, tend to replace democratic processes with scientifically legitimate transnational commissions, which they consider to be more efficient and faster. Both approaches, whether from the right or the left, threaten democracy by further eroding the rule of the people.

Democracy, understood as “rule of the people,” is often a euphemism or even an oxymoron. Its real strength lies not in an idealized popular government, but in the possibility of deposing rulers through peaceful elections. In order to ensure such a change of power, a consistent separation of powers that extends down to the individual is essential. Only if parliament, the government and the judiciary operate in strict separation from one another can an elected government that refuses to give up its power actually be removed.

There is currently no viable alternative to the democratic nation state. Although nation, party and religion are unavoidable evils, they should only be tolerated within the framework of freedom of assembly and should not be actively promoted or involved in the formation of political will. Proportional representation in particular simulates participation, while grassroots democracy endangers the separation of powers. The principles of an open society, as formulated by Popper, are crucial for the preservation of democracy: majority voting, gradual reforms (“piecemeal technology”), freedom of expression and the goal of reducing suffering.

Parties that do not meet these basic requirements pose a threat to democracy. These include in Germany, among others, Bündnis 90/Die Grünen, AfD, Die Basis, Volt, Tierschutzpartei, der III. Weg, Die Heimat and all parties that rely on ethnicity, elite rule, commission rule, grassroots democracy or proportional representation. Such parties undermine the conditions for a stable democracy and should be viewed critically.