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Born in 1978 in London

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#### PROJECT

## Democracy's Rhythm: on the Temporal Preconditions of Legitimate Opposition

Periodicity is central to the well-functioning modern democracy. Electoral cycles express the capacity of citizens to cast judgement at regular intervals and revise their political priorities. Parliamentary timetables enable ordered debates and the recurrent interrogation of ministers. Often the pulse of these events extends over months or years, as though meaningful deliberation requires both regularity and an unhurried pace.

Yet while modern democracy has been closely tied to a certain temporality, the link has seldom been analysed in democratic theory. My project develops a systematic appreciation of the role of institutional time structures in making representative democracy possible. I look at how periodicity has functioned as a facilitator of organised and legitimate dissent, contributing thereby to modern democracy's characteristic dynamic of government/opposition.

Why study democracy's time structures now? Because arguably they are under threat: one sees tendencies towards a destructuring of the temporality of modern politics. This finds expression in the rise of irregular forms of decision-making in which executives are weakly constrained, leading to the marginalisation of the institutional rhythms of debate and scrutiny. Though arguably a global trend, nothing displays the tendencies towards executive discretion more clearly than contemporary responses to the Euro crisis. Discretionary politics arguably tends towards a politics without rhythm: weakly bound by rules and norms, it typically features snap decisions, arbitrary ultimatums, indefinite mandates and policy regimes of unknown duration.

The forward-looking task is therefore to imagine ways of maintaining democracy's core temporal prerequisites while adapting to changed conditions. In my project I shall be looking at two lines of response: moves to strengthen the familiar time structures of parliamentary politics, and efforts to imagine forms of democracy less reliant on the rhythms that discretion subverts.

#### Recommended Reading

White, Jonathan. "Thinking Generations." *British Journal of Sociology* 64, 2 (2013): 216-247.

- (with Lea Ypi). "On Partisan Political Justification." *American Political Science Review* 105, 2 (2011): 381-396.

-. "Europe in the Political Imagination." *Journal of Common Market Studies* 48, 4 (2010): 1015-1038.

## Democracy without Rhythm? On the temporal preconditions of legitimate opposition

In a variety of everyday contexts, we encounter patterns based on regular recurrence. From music to the movements of the body, our experiences are structured by rhythm. This is no less true in politics. In the form of electoral cycles and parliamentary timetables, institutions periodic in structure have been central to the practices of citizenship in modern democracy. Here the pulse of events typically extends over months or years, as though meaningful deliberation requires both regularity and an unhurried pace.

My talk begins by examining the role attributable to such institutional time structures in making representative democracy possible. I look at how periodicity has functioned as a facilitator of organised and legitimate dissent, contributing thereby to the characteristic dynamic of government-and-opposition. There are good reasons, I suggest, to consider democracy without rhythm unthinkable.

Yet today the familiar time structures of democracy increasingly seem under threat. One sees tendencies towards a destructuring of the temporality of modern politics, expressed in the rise of irregular forms of decision-making in which executives are weakly constrained and the institutional rhythms of debate and scrutiny are marginalised. Though arguably a global trend, nothing displays such tendencies more clearly than the handling of the Euro crisis. Executive discretion tends towards a politics without rhythm: weakly bound by rules and norms, it typically features snap decisions, arbitrary ultimatums, indefinite mandates and policy regimes of unknown duration. Political opposition suffers accordingly.

The forward-looking task is to imagine ways of maintaining democracy's core temporal prerequisites while adapting to changed conditions. I shall be looking at two lines of response: moves to strengthen the familiar time structures of parliamentary politics, and efforts to imagine forms of democracy less reliant on the rhythms that discretion subverts.

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PUBLICATIONS FROM THE FELLOW LIBRARY

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White, Jonathan P. J. (Oxford, 2020)

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Climate change and the generational timescape

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When parties make peoples

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Authority after emergency rule

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White, Jonathan P. J. (2015)

The party in time

<https://kxp.k1oplus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=1040833918>

White, Jonathan P. J. (Basingstoke, Hampshire [u.a.], 2011)

Political allegiance after European integration

<https://kxp.k1oplus.de/DB=9.663/PPNSET?PPN=1611658578>

Palgrave studies in European Union politics

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