

# Truth, Trust, and Democracy

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*Tracing the Rift running through Liberal Democracy*

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From the Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia in 1787 to the Basic Law of the German Federal Republic, the “liberal” in democracy breathes skepticism toward unregulated, unrestricted popular power: law should emanate from the people, but never must they determine everything and by themselves; democratic power must be divided and fundamental rights in particular should largely be removed from popular decision-making altogether. No fusion of liberalism and democracy, however constitutionally arranged, can escape this tension that arises from affirming popular sovereignty and mistrusting it at the same time. Populist movements occupy this rift running through liberal democracy, claiming that “true democracy” needs no liberal (“elite”) restraints. In return, critics of populism may overemphasize the liberal side of democracy or even toy with the idea of rolling back democratic participation, having lost faith in the reasonableness of the multitude. In an almost tragic dynamic, liberal democracy is in danger of being torn apart. It is therefore crucial to assess the potential for democratic innovation that lies precisely in the conflictual nature of liberal democracy and to build trust between citizens pulling on both sides of this unique experiment.

## CV

**Marie-Luisa Frick** is a full professor of philosophy at the Department of Philosophy at the University of Innsbruck since 2025. Her research focuses on the philosophy of law and political philosophy (human rights, democratic theory, social contract theories, multiculturalism, migration, international relations, and world order), ethics (objectivity/relativity, justification of norms, applied ethics, ethics in a global context), the history of philosophical ideas in the 17th and 18th centuries, philosophy of religion, and philosophy of science.

