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## Italy / USA

## Living in a pluralist society : politics, minorities and religious diversity

### The author

**Nadia Urbinati** is Professor Political Theory at Columbia University who specializes in modern political thought and the democratic and anti-democratic traditions. She co-chaired the Columbia University Faculty Seminar on Political and social Thought and founded and chaired the workshop on Politics, Religion and Human rights in the department of Political Science of Columbia University. She is co-Editor with Andrew Arato of the journal *Constellations*.

### Bibliography

***Democracy disfigured : Opinion, Truth and the people.*** (Harvard University Press, 2014) (320 p.)

***Boundaries of toleration.*** (dir. A.Stepan et C. Taylor) (University Press Group Ltd, 2014) (328 p.)

***Representative democracy : Principles and Genealogy.*** (University of Chicago Press, 2006) (344 p.)

***Mill on democracy.*** (University of Chicago Press) (300 p.)

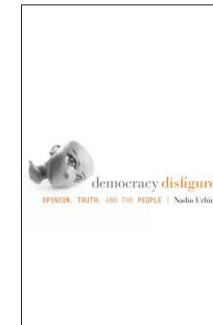
### Keywords

Droits fondamentaux  
Pensée démocratique  
Pensée politique moderne  
Religion

Sciences politiques  
Tolérance

### Zoom

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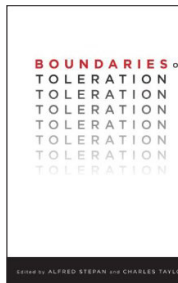
In *Democracy Disfigured*, Nadia Urbinati diagnoses the ills that beset the body politic in an age of hyper-partisanship and media monopolies and offers a spirited defense of the messy compromises and contentious outcomes that define democracy.

Urbinati identifies three types of democratic disfiguration: the unpolitical, the populist, and the plebiscitarian. Each undermines a crucial division that a well-functioning democracy must preserve:

the wall separating the free forum of public opinion from the governmental institutions that enact the will of the people. Unpolitical democracy delegitimizes political opinion in favor of expertise. Populist democracy radically polarizes the public forum in which opinion is debated. And plebiscitary democracy overvalues the aesthetic and nonrational aspects of opinion. For Urbinati, democracy entails a permanent struggle to make visible the issues that citizens deem central to their lives. Opinion is thus a form of action as important as the mechanisms that organize votes and mobilize decisions.

Urbinati focuses less on the overt enemies of democracy than on those who pose as its friends: technocrats wedded to procedure, demagogues who make glib appeals to "the people," and media operatives who, given their preference, would turn governance into a spectator sport and citizens into fans of opposing teams.

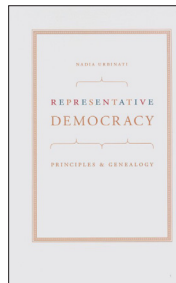
**Boundaries of toleration.** (dir. A.Stepan et C. Taylor) (University Press Group Ltd, 2014) (328 p.)



How can people of diverse religious, ethnic, and linguistic allegiances and identities live together without committing violence, inflicting suffering, or oppressing each other? In this volume, contributors explore the limits of toleration and suggest we think beyond them to mutual respect.

Salman Rushdie reflects on the once tolerant Sufi-Hindu culture of Kashmir. Ira Katznelson follows with an intellectual history of toleration as a layered institution in the West. Charles Taylor advances a new approach to secularism in our multicultural world, and Akeel Bilgrami responds by offering context and caution to that approach. Nadia Urbinati explores why Cicero's humanist ideal of Concord was not used in response to religious discord. The volume concludes with a refutation of the claim that toleration was invented in the West. Rajeev Bhargava writes on Asoka's India, and Karen Barkey explores toleration within the Ottoman and Habsburg Empires. Sudipta Kaviraj examines accommodations and conflicts in India, and Alfred Stepan highlights contributions to toleration and multiple democratic secularisms in such Muslim-majority countries as Indonesia and Senegal.

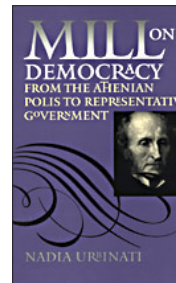
**Representative democracy : Principles and Genealogy.** (University of Chicago Press, 2006) (344 p.)



It is usually held that representative government is not strictly democratic, since it does not allow the people themselves to directly make decisions. But here, taking as her guide Thomas Paine's subversive view that 'Athens, by representation, would have surpassed her own democracy' Nadia Urbinati

challenges this accepted wisdom, arguing that political representation deserves to be regarded as a fully legitimate mode of democratic decision making and not just a pragmatic second choice when direct democracy is not possible. As Urbinati shows, the idea that representation is incompatible with democracy stems from our modern concept of sovereignty, which identifies politics with a decision maker's direct physical presence and the immediate act of the will. She goes on to contend that a democratic theory of representation can and should go beyond these identifications. Political representation, she demonstrates, is ultimately grounded in a continuum of influence and power created by political judgment, as well as the way presence through ideas and speech links society with representative institutions. Deftly integrating the ideas of such thinkers as Rousseau, Kant, Emmanuel Joseph Sieyès, Paine, and the Marquis de Condorcet with her own, Urbinati constructs a thought-provoking alternative vision of democracy.

**Mill on democracy.** (University of Chicago Press) (300 p.)



Despite John Stuart Mill's widely respected contributions to philosophy and political economy, his work on political philosophy has received a much more mixed response. Some critics have even charged that Mill's liberalism was part of a political project to restrain, rather than foster,

democracy.

Redirecting attention to Mill as a political thinker, Nadia Urbinati argues that this claim misrepresents Mill's thinking. Although he did not elaborate a theory of democracy, Mill did devise new avenues of democratic participation in government that could absorb the transformation of politics engendered by the institution of representation. More generally, Urbinati assesses Mill's contribution to modern democratic theory by critiquing the dominant «two liberties» narrative that has shaped Mill scholarship over the last several decades. As Urbinati shows, neither Isaiah Berlin's theory of negative and positive freedom nor Quentin Skinner's theory of liberty as freedom from domination adequately captures Mill's notion of political theory.