

Why Do We Disagree About Politics?

**THE ROLE OF
KNOWLEDGE IN
DEMOCRATIC
SOCIETIES
PANEL DISCUSSION
AND RECEPTION**

**21 February 2024
19:30 – 22:00
Billrothhaus**

“Democracy is a mechanism for distributing knowledge about matters of public interest, allowing us to decide which politicians should govern.” This popular view paints the picture that a politician’s role is to inform voters about what is in our best interest. Losing elections, then, must be the result of ineffective communication: “If only we’d managed to get our message across to people properly”, the story goes, “then they would have seen why they had to vote for us!”

This picture clearly falls short of the messy reality of politics. But why? Does it portray an overly rationalistic picture of the democratic process? Is this picture overly idealistic? Does it overestimate the importance of (conveying) knowledge in democratic decisionmaking? Does it overestimate the potential for people to know what is in their best interest? How can we even determine what a person’s “best interest” truly is?

Speakers:

Michael Ignatieff
(Historian, former politician, Rector Emeritus at Central European University)

Oliver Traldi
(Philosopher at Princeton University, author of the forthcoming book *Political Beliefs*)

Åsa Wikforss
(Philosopher at Stockholm University, member of the Swedish Academy, Director of the Knowledge Resistance project)

The discussion will be moderated by **Eva Stanzl**, journalist at the *Wiener Zeitung*.

