Microtargeting: threat or opportunity for democracy?

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C1: Introduction

Developments in ICT[1] have become increasingly relevant to political science. Autonomous weapons have changed just war theory (Asaro, 2008), social media has impacted democratization theory (Effing, Van Hillegersberg & Huibers, 2011), and the development of surveillance technologies have raised questions about modern civil liberties (Reiman, 2017). ICT is also quickly changing political election campaigns as parties try to keep up with what is possible. The USA are said to lead the way in developing campaign techniques. Those techniques are often adopted by campaigns in different (Western) countries. In academic literature this is called the 'Americanization' of political campaigns (Groen-Reijman, 2018). One development in campaign techniques that has received much attention over the last few years is the ICT-powered use of *psychographics*. What psychographics are exactly, and how they are related to ICT, will be explained in more detail below. For now, it is enough to know that psychographics are quantitative research methods that can be used to construct psychological profiles of individual persons. Combined with extremely large databases full of personal information that companies like Facebook and Google possess, psychographics can be used to target individual voters with tailored campaign messages: a practice known as *microtargeting*.

1.1 How ICT challenges theory

While these and other developments might increase the efficiency and/or the effectivity of political campaigns, they are not necessarily commendable when we consider them from a normative perspective. There is public and academic debate on whether or not the use of ICTs like microtargeting in the electoral process are morally permissible. According to Barocas (2012), microtargeting could induce divisiveness, discrimination and single-issue politics while reducing political participation. Other authors, like Groen-Reijman (2018) and Bay (2018) believe microtargeting could even threaten the very fairness of elections. Voters could be limited, for instance, in their access to diverse information. Their autonomy could be impaired. Perhaps politicians gain too much power through the use of microtargeting.

It can, however, be hard to understand these problems by using theories that do not take ICTs into account. The reason is that ICTs are a special kind of technology. Partly this is because ICTs are increasingly present in many different activities: they can be made to perform a great variety of tasks. At the same time, certain characteristics of ICTs can create moral problems where they are used (Van den Hoven & Weckert, 2008). Tavani (2002) argues that these problems are created because ICT creates new modes of action to which we cannot easily transfer our existing moral intuitions. He considers the example of cyberstalking. Although

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[1] I will follow Herman Tavani in defining information and computer technology (ICT) as the entire range of computing, information, and communication technologies, including the internet itself (Tavani, 2002)

the practice of stalking is not new, ICT made it so easy that people who would have never thought about 'offline' stalking might be more easily tempted into cyberstalking. Moor (1985) argues that these moral problems are the result of *policy vacuums* and *conceptual muddles* (Moor, 1985). A policy vacuum means that moral norms surrounding a certain conduct are not developed because that conduct is new (ibid). We have yet to invent norms for the use of autonomous weapons because these weapons did not exist before. The same goes for cyberstalking: it was not possible before cyberspace was created. A conceptual muddle, on the other hand, is created when moral norms surrounding certain conduct need revision because ICT becomes involved. The introduction of ICT changes the problem to such a degree that we need to rethink the problem altogether. An example is the way in which the discussion of privacy has again become relevant. Governments and companies now possess such large amounts of data on individual citizens that we can ask ourselves what privacy in the 21st century even means. Therefore, merely applying existing ethical theories to policy vacuums might not be enough. If conceptual muddles are created, new conceptual frameworks are required to understand what we are talking about in the first place.

1.2 Microtargeting: a policy vacuum in democratic theory
Democratic theory is a branch of political theory that concerns itself with what a democracy should look like. Therefore, we might expect it to have an answer on whether microtargeting is morally permissible. The problem is that microtargeting is a new practice and very little democratic theory mentions it: it forms a policy vacuum. Another problem is that the studies that do mention it vary in their interpretation of democracy (Bay, 2018; Groen-Reijman, 2018). This makes sense because democracy is not an ordinary concept: there is fundamental disagreement on what it entails (Cunningham, 2002). There is no single agreed upon definition of democracy within democratic theory: it depends on what kind of democrat you are. These differences between conceptions of democracy run deep. For example, some conceptions of democracy even argue against the most basic of democratic procedures: holding elections. Some deliberative democrats think that a system of sortition is preferable over elections (Van Reybrouck, 2016). The existing literature on microtargeting can only partly guide us. It adopts a specific view on democracy one might disagree with. We can, therefore, not expect a clear-cut answer on whether microtargeting is morally permissible from simply consulting a democracy textbook or using existing studies.

What we can do, however, is answer the question by taking a detour. I will take an approach that is similar to that used by Bozdag (2015). Bozdag investigated whether the often discussed 'filter bubbles', the reduction of online information diversity, was harmful for democracy. To that end, he compared different views of democracy on their position regarding information diversity and autonomy. By applying that to

what filter bubbles do, he was able to draw a conclusion on whether we should permit them based on theory that did not explicitly mention this situation.

It is not clear *a priori* whether we should or should not permit microtargeting in election campaigns. Election campaigns are allowed to be strategic and persuasive, at least to some degree. We do not expect a party to dedicate the little attention it gets from voters to a well-balanced and objective consideration of each party's policy proposals. Instead, we already expect that a campaigning political party will try to convince us of their candidates and proposals. Yet on the other hand, if this persuasion turns into manipulation, we can expect multiple views of democracy to have a problem with it. Where the border exactly is, can differ per view on democracy. Some might think that people must behave like autonomous and rational citizens in elections, while others perhaps leave more room for persuasion or emotional appeal. It is therefore not clear whether microtargeting is permissible without dedicating further study to the topic. Therefore, the question this thesis will answer is the following: *Is it morally permissible to 'microtarget' voters in election campaigns according to different conceptions of democracy?*

1.3 Chapter outline

The rest of this thesis will proceed as follows. In chapter 2, I will explain the concept of microtargeting by discussing in detail how psychographics and big data analysis form what we call microtargeting. In chapter 3, we have to take a dive into democratic theory. I will explain why democracy is a tricky concept, after which I select six models of democracy: three models of liberal democracy, and models of deliberative, participatory and agonistic democracy. In chapter 4 I will provide a general overview of these six models and show how they compare. In chapter 5, I use these models to assess to what extent microtargeting is permissible for these models. Chapter 6 will be the conclusion of this thesis. I will summarize the thesis and state the general lessons we can learn from it.

C2: What is microtargeting?

Political campaigns employ a variety of communication techniques in order to persuade people to vote for a political party or candidate (Groen-Reijman, 2018). Examples of these techniques range from flyers and TV-ads to political debates. Pre-digital techniques like these have a common problem: there is only limited space on a flyer and a TV-ad can only last so long. Therefore, candidates are forced to reduce a party program of many pages into generic, bite-sized chunks they hope will appeal to the most voters. The rise in the use of social media has created a way around this problem for political campaigns. Through social media, the campaign technique of *microtargeting* has emerged: sending tailored messages to subsets of voters (Schipper & Woo, 2017). The availability and analysis of personal information gathered by large tech companies makes it possible to group users of social media platforms on specific factors of interest, and tailor advertisements to that information (Kosinski et al., 2014).

Microtargeting is facilitated by the construction of so-called *user profiles*. Social media companies combine information about, for example, the demographics of users, their social interactions and their behavior on the platform (Bay, 2018; Kosinski et al., 2015). These user profiles are meant to reflect the 'physical' user in the broadest sense. A car company that advertises on Facebook wants to show its ads to people that are interested in buying a car. Facebook, then, tries to predict whether you are. User profiles are not only used to predict if people are in the market for a new car. A user's hobby can be relevant for certain companies, while others might want to know if a user is interested in dating. Microtargeting is equally interesting for political campaigns. Politicians are increasingly interested in what these companies, especially Facebook, can tell them about the political attitudes of its users. As politicians and political parties want to win elections (Snyder, 1989). *Voter models* can help them decide how to approach voters, or what voters to approach in the first place. If campaign officials can make predictions on who are likely voters, campaigns can become more effective (Hirsh, Kang & Bodenhausen, 2012). Moreover, information on voter *personalities* could help them make campaign messages more persuasive.

I will first discuss how user profiles are constructed by tech companies. Then, I will show how personality profiles, specifically, can be used to make predictions about a user's political attitudes and how they can best be persuaded. Finally, I will show how this information is applied in election campaigning through microtargeting.

2.1 Constructing a user profile: big data analysis

Social media companies require access to vast amounts of information to provide the services described above. Until recently, that information simply was not available. Things have, however, changed. Every two days, humanity collectively produces an amount of digital information that exceeds all of the information produced in human history before 2003. In fact, ninety per cent of the information existing in 2015 has been created after 2012 (Bozdag, 2015). The colossal amounts of information that companies and governments now have access have euphemistically become known as *big data*. It is revolutionary not only because there is so much of it. It can also be indexed, searched, and analyzed by algorithms (Gonzalez, 2017). The five companies that own most of the electronic data we produce - Facebook, Alphabet, Amazon, Apple and Microsoft - are all specialized in big data analysis. The business model of some of those companies, especially Facebook and Alphabet, is built entirely around it.

The actual construction of user profiles by most tech companies happens in both an *explicit* and *implicit* way. Explicit construction involves the user. She can voluntarily register her interests, demographics or any other information to get a more customized and relevant online experience. Netflix, for instance, asks new users to indicate what genres of film they like so that Netflix can show them more relevant movies. You can allow Google access to your location so that if you search for restaurants, Google will show you restaurants that are nearby. When you tell YouTube you are interested in politics, it can recommend news channels to you. For the implicit construction of user profiles, on the other hand, the company itself predicts what the user is interested in. Companies like Facebook and Google try to infer characteristics of their users by looking at their behavior on the platform. This implicit construction is often preferred over explicit construction (Bozdag, 2015). Some users might not to provide explicit information, which leaves the company with nothing to go on. Even if they participate, however, the functionality of explicit construction is limited. People's interests change over time, and Netflix cannot keep asking its users what movies they like. Moreover, the preferences stated by users might not line up with their actual behavior. It could also be that I think Monty Python's Life of Brian is an arthouse film rather than a comedy, and, as a Monty Python fan, tell Netflix I like arthouse movies. Netflix will then perhaps believe I am not interested in Monty Python because they classify it as comedy instead. For these reasons and others, Companies are better off just studying how people behave on their platforms: implicit construction is often preferred. How the implicit construction of user profiles works differs per company. As said, Netflix can simply track what you watch to determine what you are interested in cinematically. Facebook analyzes your interaction with the platform - posts, likes, and comments - as well as the wider internet to make predictions about your more general interests.

2.2 Predicting political behavior from big data: personality profiles

To determine what a user's political attitudes are is more complex. It seems, however, that the big data that tech companies possess can be used to make predictions about users' political attitudes.

So-called *personality profiles* could prove to be a valuable source of information for both commercial and political parties. Personality profiles have been used in psychology for decades and somewhat resemble demographics. But where demographics are used to group people on the basis of relatively general information - age, education, or gender -, personality profiles include 'deeper' information about persons: activities, interests, opinions, needs, values, attitudes, and personality traits (Wells, 1975).

There are different ways to construct a personality profile, but the model that is best known and most used is the so-called Big Five model of personality (Gonzalez, 2017). The model places people along dimensions of openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness and neuroticism. Those who, for example, score high on neuroticism are more likely to be fearful, frustrated or negative than those who score low on it. These characteristics seem to be very stable throughout life and remain valid under different contexts and cultures (Hirsh, Kang & Bodenhausen, 2012). The popularity of the model has even led some to name it 'a grand unified theory for personality' (Digman, 1990). The Big Five model is heavily used to predict how people will behave in different contexts. It is used, for example, to predict professional performance, addiction, or economic behavior (Barrick & Mount, 1991; Gerber et al., 2011).

The Big Five personality model has also made its way into political science. Gerber et al. (2011) state that research into Big Five traits can be used to study how individual psychological characteristics affect individual political outcomes. Gerber et al. (2011) argue the Big Five model is a very promising tool for political science research. It could help predict political attitudes ranging from ideology and voting behavior to partisanship and political participation.

Voters do not provide this information to companies or campaigns directly: tech companies do not require their users to fill in personality questionnaires. We have, however, seen that user profiles can be constructed implicitly. It turns out that this is possible for personality models as well. Kosinski et al. (2015) created a way to construct personality profiles of social media users without having to ask them:

> Even if the desired information is not directly available through the Facebook profile data, it can often be inferred. For example, myPersonality did not contain any questions related to views on environmental issues, but such information can be extracted from other variables, including participants' Likes or status updates (e.g. liking "Stop Global Warming" or posting about it). Similarly, rather than collecting participants' responses to personality items such as "I make friends easily", researchers could measure the size and growth of their Facebook friendship networks; analyze the emotional valence of friends' comments on their activities; or count the number of times they were tagged in other people's pictures (Kosinski et al., 2015)

This method of personality assessment proved remarkably effective. As Youyou et al. (2015) showed, the data provided by users on these platforms is more than ample to construct personality profiles with. By analyzing a user's Facebook 'likes' through a sophisticated method of statistics and machine learning, they came to very accurate predictions. Youyou et al. (2015) were able to predict personality with an accuracy similar to someone's colleagues using only ten 'likes'. Less than a 150 were needed to achieve the accuracy of family members. This computer-based personality profile was then found to predict life outcomes, including political attitudes, better than friends, spouse, and even the subjects themselves. Such knowledge about the political attitudes of voters can be very useful for political campaigns (Gonzalez, 2017).

2.3 Uses of microtargeting
Microtargeting can assist campaign officials in two ways. First, campaign officials can use microtargeting to approach more of their likely voters. Second, they can use microtargeting to tailor campaign messages to different groups of supporters.

Campaigns have limited resources, which means they have to make decisions about who to target. A socialist party, for example, will try to reach out to people that are relatively poor. They will knock doors in working-class neighbourhoods, but skip very affluent areas as their voters are not likely to live there. We might call this practice macrotargeting. It is relatively unreliable. Not all working-class people are socialists, while some rich people are. Relying on these kind of demographics to target likely voters is ineffective compared with microtargeting. The latter provides politicians with a tool that can predict political attitudes better and tailor advertisements to that information. Let's say that party X is popular under young, educated women that live in urban areas. Instead of paying a TV network to air an ad in the hope that these voters are indeed watching, party X can pay Facebook to show a message precisely to them. Those unlikely to vote for that party, in contrast, will not be shown the message. If someone is predicted to be a strong supporter of party Y, the campaign resources of party X might better not be wasted on them. Party X, therefore, can reach more of their likely voters with the same money using microtargeting. Parties that do not feel they have a problem with reaching likely voters might face another problem. Social-democratic

parties, for instance, usually have a diverse voter base that includes both working class supporters as well as university educated elites. Broad parties in majoritarian systems face the same challenge. Parties like these can use microtargeting to tailor their campaign message to the subgroup of their voters that will receive it. The social-democratic party, for instance, could show its working-class voters a message about the party's socioeconomic proposals, while sending its highly-educated and urban voters a message on climate change.

Microtargeting can also be used to make campaign messages more persuasive. A meta-analysis of 57 studies shows that tailoring messages to personality profiles like the Big Five model seems to increase the persuasiveness of the message (Noar, Benac & Harris, 2007). Microtargeting is solely used here to make a campaign message more persuasive. A person scoring high on agreeableness could for instance be shown a message about community and family. A neurotic person, on the other hand, could be told that crime numbers have been rising in their neighbourhood under the watch of the other party.
In some cases it seems that tailoring messages to personality profiles is more persuasive than actual facts. The 'fake news' problem shows that the right kind of message sent to the right kind of voter can have consequences. The message 'crime is rising' might affect highly neurotic voters whether the statement is true or not.

The two forms of microtargeting are not mutually exclusive. Campaign officials can combine demographic information, explicit information that users provide, user profiles and personality profiles into what we might call *voter profiles*. They can these to microtarget their likeliest voters are while also adjusting those messages to the specific type of voter that receives the message. A progressive party could use microtargeting to show their ads, for example, to 18-35 year olds in urban areas that attend or have attended university. They could further personalize these messages to the personalities of voters. They could show more neurotic voters an ad about the threat posed by climate change, while voters who score high on openness are perhaps more interested in the party's ideas about multicultural society.

The use of microtargeting in election campaigning is growing. But with the practice, the question whether we can permit political parties to campaign in this way becomes relevant. How Russia influenced election campaigns around the world might be a clear wrong, but the use of microtargeting in election campaigns generally raises moral questions. Parties can perhaps reach voters more efficiently, but at what cost? According to Solon Barocas, 'the very same techniques that empower political candidates to be more efficient and effective in their campaigning may also undermine the political and social fabric of the democracies in which those candidates seek office' (Barocas, 2012, p. 31). Is there a risk to democratic

debate if political communication becomes increasingly personalized? When does persuasion turn into manipulation? In the next chapter, I will discuss which theoretical approaches might be able to shed light on these questions.

C3: Democracy, a tricky concept

Some concepts are easier to fathom than others. If a chemist wants to know whether a specific substance is an example of water, she only has to test whether it is made up of H_2O molecules. The political scientist trying to do something similar - testing whether a certain practice is democratic or not -, faces more challenges. In this chapter, I will first explain why democracy is a 'tricky' concept and what challenge this poses for political theorists. Second, I will discuss two ways that might circumvent this problem. I will then show that these are not satisfactory, and propose how we might address issues of democracy instead.

The concept of 'democracy' is a difficult one to grasp. Robert Dahl (1989), perhaps the most prominent theorist of democracy, notes that the concept is subject to a dual meaning. It refers to an ideal situation as well as existing, imperfect, regimes. When these existing regimes sufficiently meet the demands of democracy understood as an ideal situation is inherently unclear. To decide this, we need indicators.

What indicators should be used is debated in the field of democratic theory. Yet here we should also not expect to find easy answers. Dahl represents democratic theory as a 'very large three-dimensional web', that is 'much too large to take in at a single glance' (Dahl, 1989, p. 6). There are two main things that complicate discussions about democracy. The first is that different *values* are placed in democracy. Some, like Joseph Schumpeter, value democracy solely as a mechanism for leadership selection (Schumpeter, 2003). Others do not agree, and believe it provides freedom, equality, or simply better decision making. Sometimes, these values are even opposites. Deliberative democrats, for example, see rationality as central to democratic decision-making. Agonists, on the other hand, argue that instead emotion, even passion, is the basis of democratic politics. Some values, however, seem to be shared by all democratic theorists. David Held (2006) reminds us that the term democracy, literally, means that 'the people rule'. Even this simple statement brings up a plethora of issues. Who count as the people? Even in modern models of democracy, children do not. How should rule by the people be institutionalized? We might, and many do, disagree about what rule by the people means in practice. Lively (1975), for instance, notes that the term 'rule by the people' could imply at least seven different things:

1. That all should govern, in the sense that all should be involved in legislating, in deciding on general policy, in applying laws and in governmental administration.
2. That all should be personally involved in crucial decision-making, that is to say, in deciding general laws and matters of general policy.
3. That rulers should be accountable to the ruled; they should, in other words, be obliged to justify their actions to the ruled and be removable by the ruled.
4. That rulers should be accountable to the representatives of the ruled.
5. That rules should be chosen by the ruled.
6. That rulers should be chosen by the representatives of the ruled.
7. That rulers should rule in the interests of the ruled. (Lively, 1975; p. 30)

For these reasons, Bernard Crick (2002) starts his 'very short introduction to democracy' by noting that democracy, as a concept, can be used '*to mean almost everything we want - all things bright and beautiful*' (p. 8). Another democratic theorist, James Hyland, makes a similar observation that '*everyone purports to be in favour of democracy, but there is little agreement over what democracy is*' (Hyland, 1995; p. 36).

What democracy *should* look like, therefore, is an extremely difficult question (Held, 2006). There is no fundamental or true meaning of the term democracy: it is not possible to rationally favour one interpretation of democracy over another. Arguing that one is better than another would inevitably require calling upon wider ideological disputes like 'justice' or 'freedom'. In other words, the concept of democracy can be called *essentially contested* (Cunningham, 2002). Stating that a certain practice, like microtargeting, is or is not democratic, therefore, is usually stressing the relevance of one criterion of democracy relative to others (Weale, 1999). This leaves scholars who want to test whether practice X or Y is *democratic* with a problem. Consider that we might condemn the use of microtargeting because it could make people vote on emotional rather than rational grounds. Such a statement, however, presupposes an understanding of democracy in which 'rationality' is important, or even necessary, for democratic outcomes. As we will see, not all conceptions of democracy share this assumption. As we cannot speak about 'true' meaning of democracy, the argument that something is 'democratic' actually means that something is democratic *in this or that way*.

3.1 How to conceptualise democracy?

Two solutions to this problem have been proposed. First, we could try to define democracy in such a way that it applies to all conceptions of democracy. If we do so, we can assess practices to a general benchmark of democracy. Second, we could take those characteristics of democracies we find most important and measure those instead of measuring something as abstract as 'democracy'. We could, for instance, measure citizen participation or suffrage instead of 'liberal' or 'agonistic' democracy.

The problem with ideal types of democracy is that there are no examples of it in the world to begin with. Real-world circumstances, like limited time, scarce resources, or lack of information always limit how much 'democracy' can actually be realized. Ideally, we would like to see a hundred percent turnout for elections. In practice, this will of course never happen. What we really want to know, in this case, is how high turnout should be to still count as democratic. It would clearly be problematic if turnout was one percent, but it is vague where we should draw the line. Weale (1999) therefore argues that ideal conceptions

of democracy are not very useful for practical purposes. Instead, we should try to formulate a minimal definition of democracy: a 'bottom condition' that distinguishes between democracies and non-democracies and thereby identifies whether something is democratically *acceptable*. In other words, we could try to demarcate democracies from non-democracies by trying to establish a criterion of sufficiency. For Weale, it is sufficient to be categorized as a democracy that important public decisions depend (in)directly upon the formally expressed public opinion of citizens (1999, p. 14). Other theorists have offered similar definitions of sufficiency. Bozdag (2015), for example, states that democracy is 'a method of group decision making characterized by equality among the participants at an essential stage of the collective decision making' (p. 56). Both definitions share a commitment to political equality and see an important role for public opinion in public decision making. Both definitions are also incredibly vague. A relation between 'public opinion', however defined, and 'important public decisions', whatever those may be, could be understood in many ways. The same goes for 'a method of group decision making'. Will any method do? What is an 'essential stage'? The problem with definitions of democracy that are based on a criterion of sufficiency is that they do not provide much of a practical guide. If we want to decide whether a practice like microtargeting is morally permissible by looking at these definitions, it would be difficult to come to a satisfactory conclusion. A definition that is ought to cover all conceptions of democracy can only include those basic characteristics of democracies that are found across conceptions of it: values like equality and self-rule. To explicate what they entail exactly would be choosing one conception of democracy over another. Take public opinion, for instance. Some liberals might argue that public opinion is simply the opinion of the majority. Deliberative democrats would wholeheartedly disagree and state that inclusive discussion is needed to formulate a shared public opinion. There is not enough clarity in these general definitions of democracy so that they can be used for our purpose. Instead, like the term democracy itself, they are only the kindling for more discussion.

A potential solution is to treat democracy as a different kind of concept. Hyland (1995) argues that we can distinguish between two kinds of concepts: *sortal* and *scalar* ones. A sortal concept distinguishes between classes rather than quantity. The minimal definition offered above is an example of the sortal approach: it should distinguish between what is a case of the concept and what is not. A definition of a zebra, for instance, should be able to distinguish zebras from horses. It does not have to tell us what a perfect zebra is. A zebra that has lost an eye or a leg, should still be classified as a zebra. A horse with stripes painted on it, on the other hand, should not. As we saw above, the challenge for any sortal definition is to determine what the exact set of characteristics are - the condition of sufficiency - that makes a zebra a zebra. Because democracy is an essentially contested concept, it is not possible to formulate a condition of sufficiency that is still of practical use. We would have to resort to very general statements like 'political equality', that can

be understood in many different ways. This makes them not useful as a yardstick to assess whether certain practices are democratic or not. For zebras, this is easier: the criterion that they should be a member of the African equids and possess a black-and-white striped coat is much less ambiguous.

Another approach would be to treat democracy as a *scalar* concept. Scalar concepts describe those things that can be more or less: heat, size, wealth, or mass (Weale, 1999). Democracy is often understood as a scalar concept: countries are said to be *more democratic* than others. Intuitively, this makes sense. Democracies are works in progress, and it is unrealistic to expect them to meet an ideal condition because of real-world constraints. Therefore, it makes sense to study democracies as *approaching* that ideal to a certain extent. We want to pass judgment about what democracies are more democratic than others. Yet a scalar method of comparison also has downsides. First, it leaves us with the same problem that a minimal definition does. Like a sortal approach, a scalar one still requires the formulation of a minimal condition if we want to pass judgment on whether something is not democratically permissible. There must be a point, somewhere along the scale, where democratic practices resort to undemocratic ones. The alternative is to merely assess those practices against ideal standards that no community ever reaches in the first place. The second problem with the scalar approach is that it requires a measurement of democracy. To do so, we have to measure the elements it is composed of. Therefore, a higher score on those elements would make a system more democratic *as such* (Weale, 1999). This approach also has problems. Consider the widely supported value of citizen participation. On a scalar approach, countries with higher citizen participation would automatically be more democratic. The first problem is agreeing on what citizen participation is, but let's assume that we do. A scalar approach remains problematic. Judging the quality of a democracy by measuring one or some elements of it is like judging the performance of an orchestra by only paying attention to the sound of the clarinet or the French horn. North Korea's election turnout might be 99,99%, but no-one considers this a sign of democratic citizenship. Whether or not higher citizen participation improves democracy does not depend on citizen participation alone. Instead, the way it relates to other values, like freedom, determines if higher citizen participation can indeed be called more democratic. Democracy can be understood better as a harmony than as the isolated sound of some instruments. The final problem with the scalar approach is that it provides too little space to consider multiple conceptions of democracy. Ranking democracies on a scale requires agreement on one ideal conception of democracy. Yet because democracy is an essentially contested concept, we should at least be open to the thought that different conceptions of democracy could possibly be equally democratic (Weale, 1999). The top end of the scale to which democracies are usually assessed in practice is usually some conception of liberal democracy. There are, however, other conceptions of democracy which argue that liberal democracy is not democratic enough. Scoring democracies, or democratic practices, on a scale of 'democracy' is therefore

picking one conception of democracy over another. If we want to see the wider picture, therefore, the scalar approach is also unsatisfactory.

These considerations show that there is no simple test of whether microtargeting can be allowed in democracies: it depends on what we mean by the term 'democracy' in the first place. Formulating a minimal condition for democracy does not solve this problem. It would only force us to further explain what the general values in those definitions mean concretely, pushing us back into the debate over what democracy means. Ranking democracies on a single scale, the 'scalar approach', is also not the solution. It does not work because it forces us to approach the question of what is democratic from a single perspective, while we want to consider the wider picture of democratic theory instead. We can, however, choose the middle ground by employing a comparative approach. By selecting multiple conceptions of democracy we can assess practices to these conceptions separately. Doing so avoids picking one conception of democracy over another. At the same time, it allows us to study these conceptions in their entirety, avoiding the danger of the scalar approach that we only consider one or some elements of a conception of democracy. For this purpose, I will select six distinct models of democracy. They all share the common core that democracy is a method of collective decision-making characterized by equality among participants at an essential stage of that decision-making (Bozdag, 2015). These models all, however, give different content to this very general core. What method of decision-making ought to be used, for example, differs strongly per model of democracy.

3.2 Selecting models of democracy

We can draw from a large collection of models of democracy. They range from liberal, participatory and deliberative to agonistic, republican or radical. Next to these, many more exist. Because of the limited space in this thesis, it is not possible to consider how all models of democracy would judge microtargeting. Instead, I will make a selection from them. My goal is to select those models of democracy that are the most salient, but are still conceptually distinct. Weale's definition of democracy gives us an important clue on where to start. As the definition requires that public policy must directly or indirectly depend on public opinion, it follows that we can make a distinction between *direct* and *indirect* forms of democracy. *Direct democracies* are those communities where the link between policy-making and public opinion is direct: public opinion constitutes public policy. There are few, if any, contemporary examples of large-scale direct democracies. Switzerland perhaps comes closest: compared with other democracies, it uses direct democratic devices like referenda the most (Kobach, 1993). The reason that there are no large direct democracies is largely a practical one. Where the few citizens in 'pure democracies', as James Madison called them (Held, 2006), like ancient Athens could be brought together to make decisions about public

matters, the citizenries of modern countries are simply too large to do public decision-making in that face-to-face way (Macpherson, 1977; Pateman, 1970). Instead, *indirect democracies* constitute all large-scale democracies we see today. Usually, they take the form of representational democracy, which arguably is 'our form of government' (Manin, Przeworski & Stokes, 1999, p. 1). In representational democracies, elections determine who gets to represent the people. By voting on one candidate or party instead of another, citizens formally declare their opinion about matters of public interest. In other words, elections form the central link between public decision-making and public opinion, and shape the foundation under any indirect democracy. This does not mean that all indirect, or representative, democracies look alike. There are many different ways to institutionalize a representative democracy, making for many different outcomes. Different electoral systems, for example, can result in different kinds of representation. The proportional representation in countries like the Netherlands makes for a very different politics than majoritarian systems like those found in the USA or the United Kingdom (Manin et al., 1999).

In this thesis I will consider six models of democracy. We will consider microtargeting from a liberal, participatory, deliberative, and agonistic perspective. I choose these models for three reasons. The first reason is that they are among the most dominant conceptions of democracy around today (Held, 2006). Liberal democracy is the most known and developed model of democracy, and also the models many countries describe themselves as. Democratic theory has however not stopped developing. There is growing criticism on liberal models of democracy, and different models have been proposed as a response to that criticism. In the next chapter, I will consider three such responses as well as the model of liberal democracy itself. We will see, first, in what ways liberal democracy can be understood. Next, I will consider the model of participatory democracy: a response to the purported lack of citizen involvement in models of liberal democracy. Two other models of democracy, deliberative democracy and agonism, will be considered next. Deliberative democracy is a response to and a critique of both liberal and participatory conceptions of democracy (Habermas, 1994). Agonism, like deliberative democracy, also pits itself against liberal democracy but for very different reasons (Mouffe, 2005). The second reason that I select these four conceptions is that they are compatible with representational forms of democracy. I question a practice used in election campaigning, which would make a discussion of, say, direct democracy beside the point. The final reason is that these conceptions of democracy differ in places that matter for our purpose. Most importantly, they have different views of the role of citizens in democracies (Habermas, 1994). All three of these factors could lead us to a different conclusion regarding the moral permissibility of microtargeting in election campaigns. In the next chapter, I will discuss at length what these four conceptions of democracy exactly entail.

C4: Six models of democracy

The previous chapter has shown that the field of democratic theory is a large web of interconnected and related positions. This makes it no easy task to provide a simple and straightforward formulation of the models of democracy I want to discuss in this chapter. However, I will try to describe them as clearly and objectively as possible. This chapter will start out with what is often called the classic, orthodox, or standard model of democracy: *liberal democracy*. Second, I will consider *participatory democracy*, which directly responds to the viewpoints of liberal democracy. Third, a model of *deliberative democracy* will be put forward. I will conclude this chapter with a short description of *agonism*, which provides a very different outlook on democracy than the other three models.

4.1 Liberal democracy

The model of liberal democracy is, by far, the most widespread model of democracy: Bernard Crick (2002) notes that democracy and liberalism often get equated. Earlier, I mentioned Fukuyama's statement that the widespread adoption of a model of liberal democracy is normatively desirable - further stressing the point that liberal democracy is the most dominant model of democracy (Fukuyama, 1989). Nonetheless, we would be mistaken to believe that a clear model of liberal democracy exists. David Held starts his discussion of liberal democracy by noting that its origins are hard to trace. The circumstances contributing to the emergence of liberal democracy, he writes, were 'immensely complicated' (Held, 2006, p. 56). In another contribution, CB Macpherson (1977) demonstrates that no less than three distinct historical models of liberal democracy have existed. I will briefly discuss the developments that led to the ideas of liberal democracy, after which I will explain what these three models of liberal democracy entail.

Obviously, democracy has not always been the preferred mode of government. For most of history, the idea of 'one person, one vote' sounded ridiculous to political elites and theorists alike. The main historical reason for rejecting democracy as a theoretically viable system of government, I believe, is that theorists were afraid that ordinary citizens lacked the skill and knowledge necessary to make political decisions. Plato, for example, did not hold democracy in very high regard. The 'ship of state' allegory in Plato's 'Republic' provides a well-written description of his argument. In his nautical metaphor, Plato describes a scene in which a ship is in need of a new captain. Plato argues that when sailors are allowed to choose the captain, they will choose the person who is best at persuading them he is a proper captain instead of choosing the person who is best at interpreting 'year, seasons, heaven, stars, winds, and everything that is proper to the art' (Plato, trans. 2000, VI, 488a-e). In other words, ordinary citizens are generally oblivious to the skills that are required to steer a ship, or the qualities required to govern a country. Plato would argue that people staying in caves of ignorance would not understand the business of state even if their rulers explain it to

them. Therefore, they cannot be trusted to make decisions on public matters themselves, nor can they be trusted to elect someone to do it for them.

4.1.1 Protective liberal democracy

This rationale of popular incompetence remained popular with political elites for many centuries. Slowly, however, different ideas started floating to the surface. Held (2006) believes that John Locke was an important 'first mover' in the development of liberal democratic thought. Locke spread the idea that was at the very root of liberalism: that individuals are free, equal, and possess certain rights. Classical theorists argued sovereignty lies with the state. Through Locke, the idea was developed that sovereignty also lies with the people. Individuals, for this early liberal, should be free to pursue their own preferences and the primary job of government ought to be protect their 'life, liberty and estate'. The central challenge for liberal democratic theory was how to reconcile this double notion of sovereignty, how the idea of a sovereign people could be related to the sovereign state: to find a balance between 'might and right, power and law, duties and rights' (Held, 2006, p. 59). Locke's solution to make sure that the rights and liberties of citizens are safeguarded is that government must be constrained and restricted in scope (Held, 2006). A fully sovereign government, with the power to do as it desires, would be unjust. Held (2006) contends that Locke did not develop a clear model of how this form of balanced and limited government should be practically achieved. Locke did not mention the establishment of a parliament, regular elections, or suffrage.

Formulations of how liberal democracy had to be practically organized were popularized no sooner than the 19th century, when the impact of the utilitarians Jeremy Bentham and James Mill brought about new developments in liberal democratic thought. Utilitarians argue that we should strive to create the greatest net amount of happiness for the greatest amount of people. In calculating happiness, each person counts as one. No matter one's education, creed or position in society, happiness is happiness. Now consider Locke's belief that government is not to rule the people but to rule *for* the people. It would require a method to determine what the people want (Macpherson (1977). Utilitarianism provides that method. In contrast to classical theorists of democracy, utilitarians believe that the people can play a role in government. Bentham and Mill see people as 'infinite desirers of their own private benefits' (Macpherson, 1977, p. 43). If all citizens express what their preferences are, say through elections, government can determine what policies to adopt. The utilitarian method of establishing the common good however faced a problem. According to Macpherson (1977), private happiness often got equated with wealth. To achieve wealth, his argument goes, people try to get power over others and exploit them to their own benefit. The politicians that make up the government are no exception. Governments would always be 'rapacious', argues Macpherson, if there are no incentives for them to behave otherwise (Macpherson, 1977, p. 34). As utilitarianism holds that each

person's happiness is equally important, it is problematic if some achieve it at the expense of others. The solution to this problem was establishing a *protective democracy* (Macpherson, 1977; Held, 2006). It requires that citizens choose governments that best fit their interests and hold them accountable afterwards. Democracy, in this view, was instrumental for protecting people against tyrannical governments and to provide governance that increased the happiness of citizens. A central part of the protective model of democracy was holding elections. For elections to be 'free and effective expression of the voter's wishes' (Macpherson, 1977, p. 34), certain conditions had to be in place. Suffrage was required so that every voice was heard; the secret ballot made sure that citizens would not feel pressure to vote against their interests; frequent elections made sure that bad governments could quickly be removed (Held, 2006). The 'democratic conclusion' of Bentham and Mill came with some reservations (Macpherson, 1977). Macpherson makes clear that these philosophers had not forgotten the concerns about democracy voiced by their classic predecessors. Democracy was possible, they thought, only because most of the working-class voters would follow the advice of 'that intelligent, that virtuous rank': the middle class (Macpherson, 1977, p. 43). The protective model of democracy, he concludes, had little enthusiasm for democracy as an end in itself. It was simply the instrument needed to govern a society of self-interested individuals.

4.1.2 Developmental liberal democracy

A liberal democrat of a later generation, John Stuart Mill, criticized the model of protective liberal democracy on two grounds. First, the utilitarian doctrine of ethics on which is was based, he argued, was incomplete. Second, he believed that a model of democracy that was based on his improved version of utilitarianism would yield better outcomes. For protective liberal democrats like Bentham, all happiness is equal. It does not matter what the reason for happiness is. JS Mill's utilitarianism, in contrast, is not neutral about this. For JS Mill, some kinds of happiness are better than others. Not only the quantity of happiness matters, but its quality does as well. The kind of happiness that is qualitatively better, Mill argues, is that which employs our 'higher faculties' (Mill, 1874, p. 12). 'No intelligent human being', he states, 'would consent to be a fool (...) even though they should be persuaded that the fool (...) is better satisfied with his lot than they are with theirs' (ibid, p. 12). Political participation is one of those intellectual activities that employs our higher faculties, and is therefore desirable over many other day-to-day activities people partake in. In other words, political participation is morally desirable for JS Mill, where for protective liberal democrats it is only instrumental.

Developmental liberal democracy, however, believes that political participation is not just intrinsically valuable but also for instrumental reasons. JS Mill was not content with the state of the working class in the 19th century. He was 'not charmed' by the idea that people struggling to get on in life, 'trampling, crushing,

elbowing, and treading on each other's heels', it is a normal state of affairs in a developed society (Mill, 1965, p. 754). Moreover, this situation is quite incompatible with the principles of utilitarianism, regardless of whether one adopts the utilitarianism of Bentham or that of JS Mill. Improvement of their situation, Mill argued, would require that citizens first develop the capabilities needed to make effective political demands. Democracy, he argues, provides an environment in which that development becomes possible. It gives citizens the incentive to inform themselves about public matters, discuss them, and participate in politics (Held, 2006). It could form a learning school for citizens. They could practice using those 'higher faculties' and learn how to participate in politics. Participation, therefore, would lead to the 'advancement of community… in intellect, in virtue, and in practical activity and efficiency (Mill, 1862, p. 43). Participation, then, is not only intrinsically valuable, but instrumentally as well.

The problem facing Mill, however, was that if political participation is needed for development, people needed to be in a position to participate in the first place. For reasons ranging from poverty to a lack of education, however, many people were not. Although he believed people were capable, in theory, of developing themselves into politically active and informed citizens, they lacked the circumstances to realize that capacity. Instead, he argued that political inequalities are a fact of life. For that reason, Mill concludes that the equal weighting of votes was unfair. Instead, people of higher status in society should have multiple votes. Those citizens are better informed and would thus make 'better' political demands. This position, Mill admitted himself, received little support (Pateman, 1970).

4.1.3 Equilibrium liberal democracy

20th century liberal democrats, marked by the experiences of two world wars, became less optimistic about the possibility of sound political judgment by ordinary citizens. The developing social sciences increasingly provided evidence that many citizens, especially those with low socio-economic status, lacked a general interest in politics altogether. JS Mill's picture of 'democratic man' was argued to be 'hopelessly unrealistic' (Pateman, 1970). The participation of citizens could even harm the stability of system altogether. From this bleak picture of the democratic potential a new model of democracy was born: the so-called *equilibrium model*, or alternatively the elite model of democracy (Macpherson, 1977; Held, 2006). Democracy, here, is not a kind of society or a set of moral ends. As Schumpeter famously put it, the primary function of voting was to produce a government (Schumpeter, 2003). Frank Cunningham (2002) notes that these liberal democrats see apathy and political inactivity on the part of citizens as characteristic of, even essential to, democracy. Active politics should not be the domain of ordinary citizens, but of political professionals instead. In the equilibrium model of democracy, the role of the voter is not to decide on political issues. Instead, they are to choose representatives who will decide on political issues for them.

Participation, in this model, is not a value, nor is it an instrument for achieving development. Democracy is simply a market where voters are the consumers and politicians the entrepreneurs (Macpherson, 1977). Politicians package sets of political goods which they try to 'sell' to voters, who choose between them like we choose between brands of soda. In this way, stability can be maintained. Although the amount of voter influence in equilibrium democracy is a low, equilibrium democrats do not believe it is unimportant. Dahl (1989) states that elections are pivotal for ensuring that leaders are 'somewhat' responsive to the preferences of citizens. Elected officials, he believes, keep the real or imagined preferences of their voters constantly in their mind. Equilibrium democrats point out that although citizens are not rational in the sense of Mill's developmental model, democracy works nonetheless. Its outcomes are better than we might expect from its input. Equilibrium democrats, again comparing politics to a market, see Smith's 'invisible hand' at work in politics that ensures beneficial outcomes (Macpherson, 1977). A formulation of this claim is made in the book *the rational public* by Benjamin Page and Robert Shapiro (2010). They accept that although individual voters might be uninformed and act irrationally. In aggregate, however, they show that these individual errors cancel each other out. The policy preferences of the general public, therefore, are remarkably stable and rational when aggregated and viewed over time.

We can conclude from these three models that liberal democracy has had a long history. Under Locke, Bentham and James Mill it started as a means to govern a society made up of individuals that hold different interests while at the same time protecting them from government domination. Later, JS Mill imagined a more positive role for democracy. He believed democracy could be an end in itself, helping citizens develop their capacities through participation. In turn, more participation would lead to an increased quality of governance. Equilibrium democrats were less optimistic about the capacities of individual citizens and created a model based on minimal citizen participation. They came to see liberal democracy as a market, where packages of political goods are offered to the public during election times. A market-like mechanism would make sure that this system, in the long run, creates rational policies even when the input provided by citizens is not. The three models of liberal democracy are not different in every respect. Although they differ in the amount of citizen participation argued to be advantageous, all three of them see at least some role for it. Protective liberal democrats believe participation is important so that citizens' opinions are known by policymakers. Developmental liberal democrats agree, but also believe that participation itself is a tool for human development and would benefit society as a whole. Equilibrium liberal democrats, finally, are primarily interested in citizen participation for the sake of political stability. They are concerned that citizens lack an informed opinion and therefore turn the tables around. Instead of letting citizens decide their interests for themselves and vote accordingly, they get a choice between sets of political goods pre-packaged by political parties. Elections are the central tools for realizing the ends of all models of liberal

democracy. It is where citizens can formally choose between party X or Y, or between policy A or B. For each model of liberal democracy to work, it is important that the vote is a 'free and effective expression of the voter's wishes' (Macpherson, 1977, p. 34).

4.2 Participatory democracy

The origins of participatory democracy lie, according to Held (2006), with the New Left movement of the 1960s and 1970s. This movement questioned the extent to which, in liberal democracies, citizens really are free and equal. Their complaint was that liberal theorists seem to assume freedom and equality are realized, a claim they believe should be carefully examined (Held, 2006). Participatory democrats argue that the main participatory tool in liberal democracies, elections, insufficiently ensures freedom, equality, and accountability (Held, 2006; Macpherson, 1977; Pateman, 1970). Large groups of people, they argue, are systematically and unfairly restricted from participating in political and civil life: people of certain class, sex or race. For these reasons, liberal democratic states should become more democratic. Parliament, bureaucracies and political parties should be designed to be more open, accountable and responsive. The main way to achieve those goals, participatory democrats argue, is maximizing citizen engagement (Cunningham, 2002). Moreover, participatory democracy is not only limited to the state. There have been proposals to democratize spaces ranging from the workplace and the family to media and schools (Cunningham, 2002).

The argument for participatory democracy is not based on fairness alone. Like developmental democrats, Pateman (1970) argues that participatory democracy could foster human development and create a more informed and committed citizenry. Similarly, Macpherson (1977) makes the case that citizens should stop seeing themselves as the political consumers they have become under the equilibrium model of liberal democracy. Again, they should become more like the image of the citizen proposed by JS Mill: exerters and developers of their own capacities. Pateman (1970) states that if people take part in public affairs, they are 'forced' to widen their horizons and take the public interest into account.

Participatory democrats do not believe that citizens themselves are responsible for this current lack of participation. They do not endorse the analysis of equilibrium democrats that the public lacks an interest for politics, or that they are reluctant to devote time and effort to democratic spaces. Instead, the unavailability or ineffectiveness of public political fora through which to exercise this ability is what limits participation (Cunningham, 2002). Cunningham quotes Samuel Barber, who argues that 'the people are apathetic because they are powerless, not powerless because they are apathetic' (Barber in Cunningham, 2002, p. 128). A normative model of participatory democracy would require that citizens are involved at

all stages of decision-making: from identifying and defining problems, formulating potential solutions to making decisions and implementation, citizens should be involved. This is not something, Macpherson (1977) argues, that is achieved easily. It would require a substantial reduction of social and economic equality to change the cycle of passivity and subordination. Pateman (1970) similarly subscribes to Rousseau's argument that a degree of economic independence is necessary to achieve a participatory system. However, the central problem for participatory democrats is that such a reduction of inequality likely requires more democratic participation in the first place (Macpherson, 1977). A full-fledged discussion of this vicious circle is beyond present purposes, but it is worthwhile to note that Macpherson does not see the challenge as insurmountable. He places his hope in his Marxian analysis of exogenous factors, like pollution, that he hopes will increase the people's consciousness about their situation.

Even if this cycle of passivity is resolved, there are other problems that block the road to participatory democracy. One is the problem of scale. Macpherson (1977) argues that examining ancient 'face-to-face' societies will not help us see how a modern participatory democracy should be. The size of modern political communities is just too large to imagine any political system built on face-to-face discussion by ordinary citizens. Macpherson and Pateman both conclude that in a such large-scale societies representative government will remain necessary (Pateman, 1970; Macpherson, 1977). The only realistic option for participatory democracy, therefore, is to combine it with a competitive party system. Macpherson and Pateman believe that such a combination is possible. Pateman concedes that 'it is doubtful if the average citizen will ever be interested in all the decisions made at the national level as she would be in those made nearer home' (Pateman, 1970, p. 110). All evidence, she argues, indicates that people understand issues closer to home better and that they also are more interested in those issues. For that reason, Macpherson (1977) notes, it is no problem that there is some kind of representative system at the national level. Every level of government below it, however, should incorporate much more citizen participation than it currently does. To that purpose, Macpherson presents a pyramidal model of participatory democracy. It would have direct democracy at the base. An example of it would be direct political participation in neighbourhood councils. At this level, the argument that people are not interested or uninformed about political decisions is not convincing. People care especially about what goes on close to home, or about things that impact them in their daily lives. Pateman (1970), therefore also stresses the importance of workplace democracy. At the levels above, where issues become further removed from citizens' daily lives, increasing amounts of representation or delegation could take place. For it to still meet the demands of participatory democracy, representatives have to be elected by the levels below. City councils could be elected by neighbourhood councils, and provincial representatives by local representatives: hence the pyramidal structure of participatory democracy. Those representatives, or delegates, should be sufficiently instructed by and

accountable to those who elected them (Macpherson, 1977). In reality, Macpherson admits, the pyramidal model would have to be combined with the continuation of the existing party systems. He believes, however, that this combination might in fact be desirable. It would require political parties to operate by ways of pyramidal participation themselves. Citizens would have to gain more opportunities for participation in political parties. It would give citizens more influence, and make parties more accountable and responsive. To conclude, the core of participatory democracy is that politics should be a bottom-up, rather than a top-down process. In contrast with the tenets of equilibrium liberal democracy, representatives at the more abstract national level of politics should be instructed by local representatives or the people themselves. National representatives should not, therefore, tell the people why they should vote in such and such way.

4.3 Deliberative democracy

In a frontal charge against liberal democracy, James Fishkin (1991) argues that the state of democratic processes in liberal democracy is poor. Contemporary politics, he argues, is shallow, media-driven, mean and 'empty of both ideas and high quality leadership'. Democratic debate is generally 'superficial, ill-informed and thoughtless'. There is not enough focus on policy, especially when soundbites replace arguments and candidates are selected 'more or less the way we choose detergents' (Fishkin, 1991, p. 3). The process of policy-making, he argues, has been 'invaded' by opinion polls, focus groups and other marketing tools. At first glance, Fishkin seems to go down the same road as the likes of Plato and Schumpeter. He is worried that the general public is disinterested in and disengaged from politics. Moreover, they make political decisions without giving them much thought. Held describes his reasoning by writing that 'a spectre haunts contemporary democratic politics, namely that … politics could be reduced to governance by the masses who are neither well informed nor wise' (Held, 2006, p. 231). Adopting a model of participatory democracy, Fishkin argues, will not solve this problem. The mechanism that they and developmental democrats assume will improve the quality of decision-making, mere participation, is not sufficient. Fishkin makes this argument by describing what he calls 'teledemocracy', which is essentially giving citizens the opportunity to vote directly on all public matters by hooking up their TV's with 'yes' and 'no' buttons (Fishkin, 1991, p. 21). Although it would provide the political equality participatory democrats strive for, Fishkin provides two arguments why believes that such a democracy would not be satisfactory. First, he does not believe that it makes sense to give people power if we cannot guarantee that they will *think* about how to use that power. Second, the public might become subject to demagoguery. For Fishkin, such notions of democracy are too thin. We cannot assume that the political customer is always right. Deliberative democrats argue for a different, thicker, model of democracy.

Fishkin (1991) aims to achieve a threefold goal with deliberative democracy: political equality, non-tyranny, and deliberation. Where liberal democrats like JS Mill argued that political equality eventually had to be sacrificed in order to achieve the goal of deliberation, deliberative democrats do not believe there is a trade-off between these goals. Instead, they take the apparent dilemma as a 'clarion call' to rethink democracy altogether (Held, 2006). Political equality, for deliberative democrats, is not only formal equality. Fishkin argues that if the supporters of one party dominate the media, through which many voters inform themselves about political choices, there might be formal political equality without actual political equality. The latter, he writes, requires the 'institutionalization of a system which grants equal consideration to everyone's preferences and which grants everyone appropriately equal opportunities to formulate preferences on the issues under consideration' (Fishkin, 1991, p. 30-31). In other words, it requires the development of a procedure that considers everyone equally. Non-tyranny, Fishkin's second requirement, is harmed when a policy is chosen that (severely) harms a group while another policy could have been chosen that would not have done so. Fishkin, however, does not adequately describe what would constitute such a severe harm. His examples, the Holocaust and the regime of Uganda's Idi Amin, are quite obvious ones. We should feel free, Fishkin notes, to decide for ourselves where the border lies. The third goal, deliberation, is what distinguishes deliberative democracy from other models of democracy. As we already saw, the analysis of deliberative democrats about the state of public opinion is not that different from that of other democratic theorists: it is quite pessimistic. But instead of simply accepting that situation, deliberative democrats attempt to solve it. Deliberative democracy underwrites the criterion of enlightened understanding. Robert Dahl, coining the term enlightened understanding, contests that 'in order to express preferences accurately, each member of the demos ought to have adequate and equal opportunities for discovering and validating, in the time available, what his or her preferences are on the matter to be decided' (Dahl, 1977, p. 11-12). Deliberative democracy argues that enlightened understanding can be achieved by institutionalizing procedures of deliberation. For deliberative democrats, this process of the formation of public opinion is where democratic legitimacy is located.

The process of deliberation can most readily be described as a reasonable public debate. More comprehensively, deliberation requires the adoption of procedures that 'put a premium upon the formulation of carefully considered, consistent, situationally abstract, socially validated and justifiable preferences (Held, 2006, p. 233). Deliberative democrats attach quite strong demands to such a procedure. It should be a 'situation of free and equal discussion, unlimited in its duration, constrained only by the consensus which would be arrived at by the force of the better argument' (Fishkin, 1991, p. 36). Such a procedure, Fishkin admits, is 'utterly utopian'. It is more realistic that deliberation would look as follows. It would be a debate where the participants raise proposals based on arguments and arguments alone. The

participants would have to listen to the arguments provided by others. If they disagree, they would have to come up with valid arguments about why they do. It is often recommended that a moderator is present during deliberations to ensure that its demands are met. Many more ideas have been floated as to how deliberation might achieve its three-fold goal (see Cohen, 1997 or Rosenberg, 2007), but discussing all of them would defy present purposes. The important conclusion is that through a deliberative discussion, it is argued, the dilemma of combining enlightened understanding with political equality can be solved (Fishkin, 1991). There would no longer be a need to resort to JS Mill's solution: sacrificing the latter in favour of the former. At the same time it is clear that this solution is not easily achieved. Many demands have to be in place to produce the results deliberative democrats aspire to, and the extent to which they are realistic is heavily debated (e.g. Sanders, 1997; Lupia & Norton, 2017). Moreover, deliberative democrats not always believe that deliberative democracy can realistically be created within existing representative democracies (Rummens, 2012).

4.4 Agonistic democracy

Agonism is a critique both of liberal and deliberative democracy. One central part of that critique is that both deliberative and liberal models assume that conflict and disagreement about matters of politics can be overcome by means of argument. Deliberative democrats argue that with enough discussion, debate, or information, consensus can be reached. Liberals take a less strong position, but argue that conflict could be avoided. A *modus vivendi* could be established, a way to carry on with the business of governing together. This is the proposal of liberal democrats, who solve the problem of disagreement by adopting the preferences of the majority. Agonists believe that such a political community is not inclusive enough (Bozdag, 2015; Deveaux, 1999). Instead, they take a radically different approach. Agonists contest that conflict is an 'unavoidable fact of social and political life (Cunningham, 2002, p. 184). Fundamental disagreement on not only policy, but also values and even ethics are constitutive of politics (Mouffe, 2005; Bozdag, 2015). These different political views, moreover, are sometimes irreconcilable. The creation of an 'overlapping consensus' is not always possible (Bozdag, 2015). This, agonists argue, ought to be recognized and institutionalized by our democratic system. If not, refusing a clash of political ideas in favour of consensus will lead to apathy and a general dissatisfaction with politics, eventually paving the way for autocracy (Cunningham, 2002; Bozdag, 2015).

The liberal view that there needs to be consensus on political principles 'in advance of politics' is in fact, Mouffe (2005) argues, a *hegemonic* consensus on the views of some, but not all. Instead, a wider range of ethical differences should be allowed to emerge. Deveaux believes that there should be 'no limits on what sorts of demands may be put forward in the political forum'. Politics should be freely enacted so that the

'individuality of the political actor can be authentically revealed' (Norman, 2014, p.6). This vision of the political space creates the risk that political debate diminishes to a confrontation between endlessly disagreeing parties: the other party could become an enemy to be defeated. Agonists therefore argue that it is essential that this 'opening' of the political space is accompanied by viewing political opponents not as enemies but as adversaries instead. An adversary can be defined as 'somebody whose ideas we combat but whose right to defend those ideas we do not put into question' (Mouffe, 2009, p. 102). Such a discussion, however, cannot be understood as deliberation. Contrary to deliberation, agonists believe that 'passions' fulfill an important task of mobilizing people for a cause (Bozdag, 2015). The priority given by deliberative democrats to reason and rationality tends to exclude certain groups from the political arena. Allowing 'passions' into political debate, instead, would constitute a more inclusive political system than that of deliberative democrats. The refusal of liberals to do so, Mouffe (2005) argues, largely explains why democratic theory has such difficulty with understanding arguably irrational phenomena like nationalism. I.M. Young argues along similar lines. The focus on consensus by deliberative democrats, she contends, invites the risk of ignoring some concerns for the sake of agreement (Young, 2002). It is problematic to think of public debate as something that is impartial. Difference, diversity and division are facts of social life like structural inequalities (wealth, access to knowledge) are facts of social life. The 'common' good is thus consistently at risk of actually being the 'dominant' good (Bozdag, 2015).

4.5 Conclusion

This chapter provided us with an overview of six distinct models of democracy: three models of liberal democracy, and models of participatory, deliberative, and agonistic democracy. I argue that there are two accounts on which these models differ and that are important to the question we are trying to answer. First, they have different ideas about *voter capabilities*. They range from the view that citizens are ill suited to participate in politics to the position that no-one else than citizens have the qualities needed to participate in politics. In between are multiple views arguing that voters do have the capabilities to participate in politics, but that their participation is subject to certain requirements. Second, the models diverge in what we may call the method of *preference formation*. Some models of democracy believe that the formation of political preferences is an individual process: people look at their own interests and how these would translate into political preferences. Other models think that citizens should also take the situation of the broader society in mind: not only the interests of the individual citizen should matter, but instead what they think would be good for society as a whole. Rousseau also makes this distinction by saying there is 'often a great deal of difference between the will of all and the general will' (Rousseau, 1973, p. 185). The former represents the aggregation of private interests, while the latter signifies the common interest..

Concerning *voter capabilities*, I think we can identify three main positions within the six models. The radical position is that ordinary citizens are not competent to participate in politics. *Equilibrium liberal democrats* argue that the picture of 'democratic man' is hopelessly unrealistic: most people do not have the skills to participate in politics - nor are they interested in doing so. High levels of participation, they argue, are even dangerous because of this: people can easily be led astray. Their participation, therefore, should be held to a minimum to ensure the stability of the system. At the other end we find the utilitarianism-inspired *protective liberal democrats*. They defend a strong view of voter capabilities. Their support of utilitarianism leads them to the conclusion that people themselves are the best judges of their interests. Citizens know what makes them happy and what they need from politicians to make them happy. Therefore, they are able to instruct politicians what to do. Politicians only have to listen and find majorities. In between these extremes we find the models of democracy that approach the question of voter capabilities in a more nuanced way. In these models it is argued that most people might lack the capabilities to adequately participate in politics *now*, but this is not because they would not like to. They will, and can, participate if we change certain changes are made. What those changes are, differ per model.

First, *developmental liberal democrats* and *participatory democrats* argue that the lack of political skills in the general public is simply due to too little practice. The reason that people are not good at political participation is because they never get the chance to participate. If they would, however, the experience would eventually lead to a more informed and committed citizenry. The two models differ somewhat in their analysis of the reason why people cannot participate. Developmental liberal democrats argue that structural inequalities like income inequality or unequal access to education are the reason: people need to have time to devote to politics rather than work, and need to be educated so that they can understand what is going on. Participatory democrats take a stronger position. They have a more optimistic view of citizen capabilities and believe that the public is well-suited to participate, but merely lack the channels through which they can. Therefore, more channels for participation should be created, which do not even have to be limited to politics: why not democratize schools, workplaces and day care? Participation through these channels would develop political capabilities and result in an informed and committed citizenry. *Deliberative democrats* argue that participatory and developmental liberal democrats have too strong a view of voter capabilities. Participation, they argue, will not guarantee that people will 'think', or that they are not led astray by demagoguery. This somewhat pessimistic analysis of voter capabilities however does not lead deliberative democrats to the conclusion of equilibrium liberal democrats, namely that participation should be limited. Deliberative democrats argue that through proper procedure all citizens can participate in politics, no matter their education, background, or political experience.

Agonists, finally, share the analysis of deliberative democrats that it is not the public that needs improving, but the system of political decision-making itself. Yet where deliberative democrats want to create procedures which strengthen the potential for 'ordinary people' to make reasoned decisions, agonists take a very different path. They argue that it is precisely that focus on rationality and consensual decision-making which has to go. Instead, political decision-making should make room for the passions and emotions of citizens, which they argue are constitutive of politics.

Now that we have an overview of the positions the models of democracy have on voter capabilities, we can move towards the second question: how do different models of democracy see the process of preference formation? Again, different models have very different answers to these questions. On one side, there are those models of democracy that see preference formation as an individual process and therefore see collective action as an expression of aggregated individual preferences. On the other, some models hold that citizens should not only take themselves into account, but should try to envisage what would be good for society as a whole. Other models, of course, are in between. *Agonism* takes a decidedly individualist approach. Central to agonism is the notion that groups in society might disagree so deeply that their relationship can best be described as conflictual. For agonists, political agreement is sometimes just impossible. A consensus on certain principles - a compromise - is always hegemonic. The models of *protective* and *equilibrium democracy* still rely heavily on individualism, but somewhat less strongly. Both still believe that there is not much that holds a society together: it is mainly a collection of individuals. Citizens all have their own specific desires and interests which they can express through elections. The liberal notion of community, however, is stronger than that of agonists. Liberal democrats believe in the rule of the majority, but also argue that groups with different interests can work together. Citizens might not always get what they wish for, but will nonetheless remain loyal to the system. They see that compromise is essential and that they might prevail next time. The strongest communal notion of preference formation within the models of liberal democracy is found in *developmental liberal democracy*. In contrast to the other models of liberal democracy, JS Mill argued that political decision-making should not revolve around finding compromise between competing private interests. Instead, it should be about what political actions would benefit all of society: what is the common good. JS Mill however sacrificed political equality for this purpose, as he did not believe that 'ordinary' citizens could think about the public interest in this way. Overall, the strongest communal notions of preference formation are found in the models of *participatory* and *deliberative democracy*. Both believe that, through discussion and debate, individual differences and disagreements can and should be resolved. Through new channels of participation or procedures of deliberation, citizens can come to an agreement on a conception of the common good without sacrificing political equality.

In the next chapter, I will explain what this typology of democracy models concerning these two factors means for the practice of microtargeting in election campaigns.

C5 Microtargeting: hacking democracy?

In chapter 2, I made a distinction between two general uses of microtargeting. I argued that microtargeting can make campaigns more *persuasive* and more *efficient*. First, microtargeting allows campaigns to target most-likely voters, thereby 'wasting' less resources on unlikely voters. Through access to vast amounts of digital information, parties are increasingly able to predict what voters are likely to vote for them. A green party could, for instance, send Alice a campaign message on their sustainability proposals because they inferred from the information they have about her that she is interested in sustainability. If they know that Bob is a rural, conservative voter that is unlikely to vote for the Green party, they do not have to waste resources on Bob: it is unlikely that he will be persuaded. Another efficiency-based type of microtargeting is to diversify campaign messages to different (potential) supporter groups. Many political parties have diverse support groups. This creates a problem for classical methods of political advertising. Groups of supporters, who might have different reasons to vote for the party, have to be addressed in the same TV ad or on the same flyer. Through microtargeting, it becomes possible to diversify the messages a party sends out. Second, microtargeting can be used to make campaign messages more *persuasive*. I argued in chapter 2 that political parties can use digital information about voters to make predictions about a voter's personality. Those predictions can be used to tailor political advertisements in such a way that they become more persuasive. A party could predict Bob's score on a personality model and use that information to make their advertisements more persuasive for people like him. This chapter will discuss whether these two forms of microtargeting in election campaigning are morally permissible. The benchmark to which we judge the two kinds of microtargeting are the different models of democracy I set out above. Specifically, the two recurring factors across models of democracy - voter capabilities and preference formation - are used.

5.1 Persuasion-oriented microtargeting

Persuasion-oriented microtargeting might sound suspicious and perhaps this is for good reason. Even if we consider the practice from six distinct models of democracy, there seems quite some agreement that this kind of microtargeting cannot be allowed.

Protective liberal democracy requires that the vote is a free and effective expression of the voter's wishes. Microtargeting aimed at persuasion might not fulfill this requirement. What exactly constitutes 'free' can of course be debated, but it seems that an attempt of psychologically influencing voters without their knowledge of that attempt would harm that requirement of free decision-making. In fact, it comes close to manipulation, which can be understood as a 'perversion of the decision-making process' (Wilkinson, 2013, p. 347). This kind of microtargeting is an attempt to make messages more persuasive by playing into what the campaign in question knows about a specific voter *personally*, rather than politically. A party could, for

instance, show the progressive but also highly neurotic Alice a message that sustainability policies will prove extremely expensive. Without providing explicit evidence for that statement, the message could still succeed in influencing Alice because her neuroticism makes her susceptible for those kind of statements. In this case, her neuroticism might overrule her pre-existing preference for sustainability measures. On a critical note, we must ask to what extent protective liberal democrats would believe that citizens can be influenced in this way. Because protective liberal democrats have a very strong view of voter capabilities, they might argue that it would be hard to persuade or manipulate voters in such a way. If empirical research should find that it is possible, however, it could not be permitted from the point of view of protective liberal democracy.

Developmental liberal democracy reaches the same conclusion. Forms of political communication that try to persuade voters on the basis of their personality characteristics are quite obviously problematic for the goal of developmental liberal democracy, that is developing an informed and committed citizenry. This form of persuasion can interfere with that goal. For development to be possible at all, as little persuasion as possible should take place. The ideal political campaign for developmental liberal democrats would be take the shape of a forum or debate where every party offers his or her ideas about public policy, justifies them, and let the public deliberate over which party has the common good in mind the best. Over time, the repetition of this process, combined with other sites of participation, would lead to an informed and committed citizenry. It thus does not look like there is space for persuasion-oriented microtargeting in this model of democracy. Bob, for instance, could come to believe that anti-immigration measures are in the interest of the country. Although this is not a problematic position per se, it would be problematic for developmental liberal democrats if Bob developed this preference because he highly neurotic and he has been influenced in developing that preference by campaign messages that play into his neuroticism.

Persuasion-oriented microtargeting is also problematic from the perspective of *deliberative democracy*. The norms of deliberation, namely that beliefs and arguments should be justified, prohibit it. Consider that Bob and Alice take part in a deliberation about the future of the healthcare system in their country. According to deliberation, Bob and Alice should come to a decision about this topic only on the basis of better argument. If Bob believes that the healthcare system should be privatized, he should explain to Alice why he believes this is the case and provide evidence that supports this claim. If Alice, who also is in the possession of all relevant information, believes Bob's argument is justified a decision can be made. If Bob, however, somehow has information on Alice's personality, he would not be allowed to use that information to convince Alice. It is not relevant to the question at hand. Only the force of the better argument should prevail, not persuasive techniques. The same would apply, I argue, to election campaigning. If they manage

to convince voters by playing into their psychological 'weaknesses', the election result would fall short of the demands of deliberative democracy.

Participatory democracy comes to the same conclusion, but through a different argument. A central value for participatory democracy is that preference formation is a bottom-up, rather than a top-down process. Persuasion-oriented microtargeting, however, is an attempt by political campaigners to influence voter preferences without them knowing. This would interfere with the idea behind participatory democracy, namely the strong position that politicians should be instructed what to do, rather than politicians convincing people that what they are doing is right.

The argument on persuasion-oriented microtargeting is somewhat more complex from the perspective of *equilibrium liberal democracy*. At first glance, it might not seem very problematic. From the position that elections are not much more than leadership selection mechanisms follows that a lot can be allowed in election campaigning. Adjusting campaign messages to the personalities of voters does not immediately seem to fall outside of the realm of what is permissible. Yet there can be, I believe, one main reason to not permit this type of microtargeting for equilibrium liberal democracy. That reason is if its use could seriously harm political stability, which arguably is the driving factor behind the entire model of equilibrium liberal democracy. If equilibrium liberal democrats had a strong view of voter capabilities, it would be hard to make such an argument. Fact is, they do not. The reason citizen involvement should be held to a minimum, according to equilibrium liberal democrats, is because their involvement could harm political stability. The people, they argue, are easily led astray. Persuasion-oriented microtargeting could pose a problem for equilibrium liberal democrats in this regard. When neurotic Bob, again, comes to hold strong anti-immigration views because of advertising that plays into that psychological characteristic of Bob and this makes him become a radical anti-migration activist, equilibrium liberal democracy would reject such practice. Whether or not this type of microtargeting could indeed result in such situations is an empirical one, but we can conclude for now that equilibrium liberal democrats would argue to at least be cautious with the practice until more is known about its effects.

The only model we have not yet discussed is the only model where there is, potentially, space to allow persuasion-based microtargeting. *Agonism*, in contrast to all other models of democracy, does not endorse the view that rational decision-making is central to all of politics. Emotion, they argue, are an important part of what moves voters and should for that reason not be excluded from politics. Persuasion-oriented microtargeting is, essentially, mobilizing citizens by playing in to their emotional dispositions. Bob might feel threatened by an increase of immigrants coming to his country. Rationally, he might not have to feel

threatened. That he does, however, is a legitimate political attitude for citizens from an agonistic perspective. Because his fear is seen as legitimate, it would not follow that appeals to those emotions in campaign advertising should be prohibited.

5.2 Efficiency-oriented microtargeting

We have seen that almost all models of democracy, excluding agonism, would not permit the use of persuasion-oriented microtargeting. I will now discuss how they would judge efficiency-oriented microtargeting, which results in a more varied set of positions.

5.2.1 Protective liberal democracy

Efficiency-oriented microtargeting in election campaigns seems unproblematic for *protective liberal democracy*. There are two reasons for this: one based on voter capabilities and one on preference formation. Protective liberal democracy is strongly utilitarian: it is about using democracy to create the largest amount of happiness for the largest amount of people. Democracy could provide that goal, they argue, because citizens are capable to assess what political preferences fit with their personal interests. Citizens express these preferences in elections, so that representatives can make collective political decisions on the basis of those expressed preferences. This type of microtargeting fits the goal of protective liberal democracy quite well. It could allow campaigners to discover the preferences that voters already have and appeal to them in advertising. I will give an example to clarify this point. Bob, according to protective liberal democracy, himself knows best what he wants politicians to do for him. Suppose Bob's political preferences are tax cuts and a more lean business regulation. In this case, he simply has to find a party that says it wants to provide these goods. Another party, arguing that taxes should increase, would normally not be able to convince Bob. Alice, on the other hand, thinks sustainability is important and she wants people to eat less meat. If enough people are like Alice, she will also find a political party that promotes these goods. It would be permissible for protective liberal democracy if a Green party targets people like Alice, but does not spend any campaign resources on the likes of Bob. Bob does not require exposure to the ideas of the Green party for him to decide he wants lower taxes. At the same time, Alice would be glad she received a campaign ad by the Green party: she now knows what party will look after what she thinks is important.

The second reason why microtargeting type I fits the model of protective liberal democracy is because it could make more general campaign messages superfluous. Sending one general message through TV, for example, would not do justice to the individual basis of political preferences that protective liberal democrats believe in. Instead, political advertisements could be made to fit the individual preferences of voters more. Suppose Bob still believes lower taxes are important, and Alice remains convinced that more

has to be done on the issue of sustainability. There might be a party that wants to achieve both these things. It could, then, send Bob a message on the topic of taxes, while simultaneously reaching out to Alice about sustainability. There would be no problem: each citizen has its own preferences, and political parties can cater to those preferences. It would only be problematic, of course, when a party sends one voter a message that it wants to raise certain taxes, while sending another a message that these taxes will be cut. Yet this would simply be deception, and does not say much about microtargeting *an sich*.

5.2.2 Equilibrium liberal democracy

A similar argument can be made when considering efficiency-based microtargeting from the perspective of *equilibrium liberal democracy*. In this model of democracy, it is argued that voters have little capabilities to participate in politics themselves: their democratic involvement is reduced to selecting representatives to make decisions for them. Stability and elite competition, in this model, are more important than a direct link between vote choice and public policy. Therefore, more can be permitted in election campaigning. Campaigns, in this view, are just strategic tools to get people to vote for a party. This form of microtargeting could contribute to that goal by targeting citizens more specifically with advertisements that might interest them. Like microtargeting is used to sell cars, clothes, or services to people on the basis of their past behavior and interests, political campaigns can make use of it according to the same logic. A party could infer that Alice is interested in sustainability by digging through her Facebook data. It could show, for example, that she is interested in vegetarianism and attends lectures about sustainability policies. The party could then use this information to send her a campaign message about what she is interested in. This is the same mechanism as when, say, a clothing company sends you advertisements about trousers because you browsed the internet looking for a new pair of them. In this model of democracy, moreover, there is also no requirement that people have to be exposed to different ideas or beliefs in order to form legitimate political preferences. The argument that this form of microtargeting inhibits that process is therefore not relevant for equilibrium liberal democrats.

5.2.3 Agonist democracy

Although *agonism*, as I argued in the previous chapter, takes in positions similar to protective liberal democracy, the conclusion about efficiency-based microtargeting is not the same. Agonism takes a broader stance than other models of democracy on what is allowed in politics. For agonists, disagreement on policy, values, even ethics are constitutive of politics and are a legitimate part of political debate. Although it is quite difficult to transform these rather abstract statements about the nature of the political space to practical recommendations, I think two observations can be made with regard to agonism and efficiency-based microtargeting. There is a reason to believe that agonism would endorse the use of microtargeting in

political campaigns, but also a reason to reject it. The first reason is the same as the one we saw resulted from the model of protective liberal democracy. The agonistic view of preference formation is radically individualistic. It is, therefore, not required that campaign messages appeal to some formulation of the common good. In fact, agonists deny that something like the common good even exists. That a political party appeals to something Bob finds important, but Alice believes would be detrimental, without trying to create a message that can appeal to both of them, is what agonists believe politics is about in the first place. An agonist would argue that there likely is, or at least should be, another party that defends what Alice believes is important. There is no requirement that parties try to reconcile these views in election campaigning. In this light, efficiency-based microtargeting does not seem problematic for agonism at all. There is something about it, however, that might make it questionable. Although agonists defend the possibility of fundamental disagreement and conflict, they also believe that, in order to govern such a society, channels through which these views can clash should exist. This form if microtargeting, however, would reduce exposure to those conflicting views rather than increase it. The more Bob and Alice get drawn into their own 'bubbles', the larger the risk becomes that the start seeing each other as enemy rather than adversary. There is, of course, parliament that can function as the primary channel of confrontation. We should ask ourselves, however, whether parliament would function in the desired way if the general public becomes increasingly polarized, or whether they will merely replicate that polarization in their debates, thereby increasing it even more.

5.2.4 Developmental liberal democracy

A consideration of the model of *developmental liberal democracy* also yields two opposing conclusions. Developmental liberal democracy gives us a reason to defend efficiency-oriented microtargeting, but also a reason to reject its use. I will discuss the argument in favour of this type of microtargeting first. Developmental liberal democracy values citizen participation in politics. I would argue that participation with political campaigns would at least be part of the political participation developmental democrats envisage. Participation, here, should not be understood as contributing actively to a campaign, for example through spreading campaign messages or taking part in a ground campaign. For most citizens, this would already be far more participation than they are used to. Instead, what I envisage for participation in election campaigning is more that voters are enticed to discuss political matters prevalent in the campaign at home, with friends, at work, or at school. Efficiency-based microtargeting could be instrumental in making citizens participate in campaigns in this way. And if it does, it could support the process of developing political capabilities in citizens. I will again give an example to clarify. Suppose that Bob is dissatisfied with the condition he is living in. His house might be more expensive than he can afford, and he could have problems finding a job close to where he lives. Developmental liberal democrats suppose, in contrast with protective

liberal democrats, that Bob might not immediately know what politics has to do to improve his situation. In fact, this might lead Bob to withdraw from politics entirely. According to developmental liberal democracy, however, Bob could develop the skills to effectively participate in politics by practicing: exposing himself to political debate and preferably participating in political discussion as well. Now consider that through microtargeting, political campaigners increasingly become aware of the individual situations of voters. They might be able to predict that Bob is a disengaged voter and reach out to him for that reason. Campaigners could show him what they plan to do about his situation, call on him to vote, or ask him to come to a rally that the party holds in his neighbourhood. If microtargeting allows campaigns to effectively 'activate' voters to participate, it could contribute to the goals of developmental liberal democracy.

There is, however, a drawback. The argument which we have seen leads protective liberal democrats to support this form of microtargeting simultaneously would lead developmental liberal democrats to reject the practice. Developmental liberal democrats believe political debate should revolve around formulations of the public rather than the private interest. To develop an understanding of what is in the public interest, however, one needs to be exposed to different arguments, beliefs, and interests. Developmental democrats would argue that both Bob and Alice might not know what party to vote on because they are not sure what is the best way forward for their country. In order to develop an understanding of that public good, it would be best if they are exposed to different arguments and interests. The more they are, the better they become in deciding what is important in politics and which party represents the public interest best. In political campaigns, therefore, it is important that Bob and Alice are exposed to as many different campaign messages as possible, so that they can form a good picture of what each individual party wants. Efficiency-based microtargeting, however, could achieve the opposite by making political advertisements increasingly individualistic. It might lead to a kind of 'filter bubble' where different groups of citizens get shown different and political advertisements, resulting in reduced debate between competing visions about the respective costs and benefits of those proposed policies. It could thus pose a threat by limiting the range of views that Bob and Alice are exposed to.

So what to make of these two conflicting arguments? I think we can find the answer if we take a broader view of the campaign environment. If all campaign messages that citizens see are tailored to their individual preferences in this way, I think it would be a serious problem for developmental liberal democrats. But in reality this is not the case. People do not receive all campaign messages through social media, nor are all social media campaign messages targeted to individual preference in this way. There are televised debates, newspaper advertisements, and ground campaigns. For those reasons, I think developmental democrats

would conclude that microtargeting type I is something to be careful with, but not necessarily impermissible. It could even be beneficial, as the first argument showed, to get people involved with political campaigns.

5.2.5 Participatory democracy

Considering efficiency-oriented microtargeting from the perspective of *participatory democracy* yields the same conclusions. Participatory democracy, I have argued, is primarily focused on creating new channels of participation for citizens. Although we cannot understand this type of microtargeting as a new participatory channel, it could be instrumental in increasing participation nonetheless. Microtargeting, through tailoring advertisements specifically to the situation or interests of certain groups of voters, could increase the participation of voters with political campaigns. It can thus be instrumental towards realizing the goal of increased participation. When this form of microtargeting is aimed towards efforts to bring out non-voters to the ballot box, it should even be endorsed by participatory democrats. On the other hand, again, microtargeting could reduce the information diversity citizens get exposed to in political campaigns, which might impair their process of preference formation. If efficiency-based microtargeting, however, does not focus on appealing to individual preferences, but aims towards realizing more participation with elections, I would argue that it should be endorsed by participatory democrats for that reason.

5.2.6 Deliberative democracy

The emphasis placed by *deliberative democracy* on processes of deliberation is central to understanding the permissibility of microtargeting in election campaigns from their perspective. Deliberative democracy places a strong value in the process of preference formation. Election campaigns, they argue, are a crucial part of preference formation in representative democracies (Groen-Reijman, 2018). Yet because deliberative democracy believes that this process itself is crucial for the legitimacy of political decisions, less is permitted for deliberative democrats than for most other models of democracy. The risk is that campaigns become more strategic than they are informative (Groen-Reijman, 2018). The question, therefore, is whether efficiency-based microtargeting enhances the strategic or the informative element of political campaigns. As we have already seen, it can do both. We can comfortably conclude that, from the perspective of deliberative democracy, the use of microtargeting to appeal to existing individual preferences only is not permissible. There is no guarantee, deliberative democrats would argue, that these preferences are informed. The same goes for diversifying campaign messages for specific voter groups. Formulating common goals from differing individual perspectives is what democracy is about for deliberative democrats. It should not be permitted, therefore, that parties stop that effort in order to appeal more to individual or group preferences.

Yet for deliberative democracy as well, there can be forms of efficiency-based microtargeting that are consistent with the goals of this model of democracy. It can be used, I argue, to increase the engagement with political campaigns while still paying attention to inclusion and whether people are informed. A central tenet of deliberation is that all participants should be able to follow the discussion and understand what is going on. Otherwise, sensible participation becomes impossible. This requirement, I believe, also applies to election campaigns. If parts of the citizenry have difficulty in understanding what is going on, their vote might be based on unjustified reasons, or they might become disengaged with political campaigns altogether. Both cannot be endorsed from the perspective of deliberative democracy. Microtargeting, however, could be instrumental in resolving this problem. Suppose that Bob is not politically active, nor is he highly educated. Bob, and many like him, could have difficulties in understanding what political campaigns communicate about, say, their vision of the tax system. Through microtargeting, however, campaigns might be able to adjust their messaging to the background, education, even the language of the receiver. Doing so might improve the collective understanding of the citizenry about what options they can choose from, thereby contributing to the goal that political campaigns meet the demands of deliberative democracy.

5.3 Is microtargeting morally permissible?

This chapter has shown that the question whether microtargeting in election campaigns is morally permissible results in multiple answers. It is not the case that we cannot permit any form of microtargeting, whatever model of democracy is used to judge the practice. On the other hand, we also cannot conclude that its use is permissible for all of these models. Whether we can permit the use of microtargeting in election campaigning depends, instead, on the specific use of microtargeting and the model of democracy we adopt to judge it.

C6: Conclusion

ICT is quickly transforming the way political campaigns are carried out. That development poses significant questions for political theorists, especially those in the field of democratic theory. The practice of microtargeting within election campaigning has received much attention in general debate over the last few years, but has yet to receive significant attention of political theorists. In this thesis, I have tried to answer the question whether the practice of microtargeting in election campaigning is morally permissible in a democracy. What complicates this question is that democracy is not a concept that we can easily test practices against. There are many different models of democracy, and they are often at odds with one another. Arguing that microtargeting is or is not morally permissible according to some model of democracy, therefore, leaves open the question whether that rejection or endorsement of the practice is due to the specifics of that model, rather than democracy in general. In order to avoid this, I have provided six distinct models of democracy. Three forms of liberal democracy have been discussed: protective, developmental, and equilibrium liberal democracy. Next to those, I provided models of participatory, deliberative, and agonistic democracy. These models differ in at least two respects which are relevant to judge the practice of microtargeting: their view on what the capabilities of voters are, and their opinion on how citizens should form their political preferences.

I have used these models to assess the moral permissibility of two forms of microtargeting: based on either persuasion or efficiency. We can conclude that persuasion-oriented microtargeting is not permissible for any model of democracy save agonism. This is due to the fact that agonism is the only model of democracy that legitimizes emotions as a basis for preference formation. From all other models it follows that this form of microtargeting either distorts the preferences that people have, or the process through which they come to hold political preferences. Efficiency-oriented microtargeting, on the other hand, is permissible for more models of democracy. Those models that believe preference formation is a personal process would not object to political campaigners that tailor advertisements to what they predict voters are already interested in. It could merely help parties draw people to the ballot box. This way of political advertising fits with the models of protective liberal democracy as well as equilibrium liberal democracy. For the other four models of democracy, it is more complicated. Efficiency-based microtargeting could be permitted for all of them, but only under certain conditions. For agonism, it should be ensured that diversified campaign advertising would not breed polarization and take away channels of confrontation. This form of microtargeting could be made to fit deliberative democracy if it was aimed at inclusion and improving the public's understanding of the issues at hand. It could be endorsed through participatory and developmental liberal democratic models as well if microtargeting is used to increase political participation and the development of political capabilities.

We can draw an important general conclusion from considering the practice of microtargeting in this way. Using it to increase the persuasiveness of campaign advertisements is, from the perspective of most of democratic theory, not permissible. The only model that might allow it, agonism, does so largely because it is the 'most-likely case' for it. The lack of consensus about values that is inherent to agonism provides the conceptual space to allow much into the sphere of what is permissible in the first place. The second conclusion, however, is that we can certainly conceive of ways in which microtargeting could legitimately be used. Some forms of efficiency-based microtargeting, for example targeting voters in such a way that they are more likely to participate or simply to vote, would be defensible for all models of democracy I have provided.

Many questions surrounding the use of microtargeting however remain unanswered in this thesis. Some of those questions are empirical in nature. One is whether the use of microtargeting could indeed succeed in achieving more participation, in order to advance models of participatory or developmental liberal democracy. Another is whether microtargeting could make political advertisements appeal to a wider range of citizens, a use deliberative democrats would applaud. Other questions are of a more theoretical nature. The entire use of microtargeting could be impermissible for other reasons than democratic ones. A fierce privacy debate is taking place about whether we can allow companies and/or political parties to gather this much personal information about people at all. When this data is used for the construction of psychological profile, a discussion on whether this constitutes involuntary psychological assessment should also follow (Bay, 2018). Another direction for future research is to closely study the practice of microtargeting itself. We have seen that microtargeting is based on the construction of so-called voter- or personality profiles. This yields an epistemological concern as well as a procedural one. Epistemologically, we should further investigate what personal information is used to construct these voter profiles, whether this information can be called correct, and whether we should mind if it is. The procedural concern is how all that information is then analysed, weighed, and put together into a voter profile.

We might also turn the question of this thesis around. We should ask ourselves not only what democratic theory can tell us about the moral permissibility of microtargeting, but also what the practice of microtargeting shows about the state of democratic theory. One answer to that question is that election campaigns are undertheorized within democratic theory. Often, the question of what is permissible in election campaigning remains at a very basic level. Dahl's criteria are regularly cited, for example by Elklit and Svensson (1997). These criteria, however, are very general and insufficient to deal with the technological developments within election campaigning. Therefore, more focused research, like Groen-

Reijman's study (2018) of deliberative norms within election campaigns, should be performed. ICT use, as Moor (1985) wrote some time ago now, is more likely than not to create new situations and moral problems that, for now, remain largely unaddressed in democratic theory.

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