

Governing in the Name of the People: Democratic Leadership, Constitutional Authority, and the Discipline of Power

Manuel Galiñanes and Leo Klinkers



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Dedication

To all who believe that political power derives from the people, is limited by constitutional principles, and must always be exercised in the service of the common good.

May every generation possess the wisdom and civic courage to govern in the people's name with justice, integrity, and humility.

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Prologue

Every democratic generation faces a recurring, fundamental question: whether institutions designed to express the people's will will remain instruments of liberty or gradually become mechanisms for exercising power without adequate awareness of its limits. This book has argued that democracy cannot be reduced to elections, procedures, or constitutional texts alone. Its durability depends equally on the competence of those entrusted with governing within these frameworks.

Contemporary democracy faces a paradox that is both familiar and increasingly urgent. Never before have so many political leaders come to power through formally democratic means, yet confidence in democratic governance has rarely seemed so fragile. Electoral victories mount, yet legitimacy erodes. Institutions endure, yet public trust declines. Laws are enacted, yet justice is often perceived as absent. Across political systems—established and emerging, consolidated and fragile alike—citizens sense that something essential is missing from political leadership, even when procedures are followed and mandates are claimed.

Historical experience suggests that political systems rarely fail solely because of flawed institutional design. More often, they deteriorate when those who exercise authority misunderstand—or disregard—the principles that give institutions meaning. Formal rules may endure, constitutions may continue to be invoked, and elections may still occur. Yet when leaders lack the intellectual and ethical preparation required for responsible governance, institutions gradually lose their capacity to safeguard liberty.

This dynamic was already recognized in classical political thought. Polybius' theory of *anakyklosis*—the cyclical transformation of constitutional forms—offers one of the earliest systematic accounts of political decay. In his account, regimes do not merely change; they degenerate: monarchy becomes tyranny, aristocracy becomes oligarchy, and democracy becomes ochlocracy. Crucially, this transformation arises not only from institutional structure but also from the erosion of the virtues and understanding required to sustain it. Political decline, in this sense, is cognitive, ethical, and structural.

The Roman Republic's experience illustrates this insight with particular clarity. Long before its collapse, Rome faced repeated crises rooted in tensions between elites and the broader citizenry. The *Secessiones Plebis*—collective withdrawals by the plebeian population—were not merely episodes of social unrest but constitutional turning points. By suspending participation in the political and economic life of the republic, the plebeians compelled institutional reforms, including the creation of the tribunate and new mechanisms for representation and protection.

These episodes reveal a broader pattern: constitutional crises often stem not from inadequate institutional arrangements but from the conduct of those who operate them. The Roman system did not fail for lack of balancing mechanisms; it faltered when those in authority ceased to exercise power in accordance with republican principles. Institutional resilience, therefore, depends not only on structural design but also on leaders' capacity to act within its normative constraints.

Modern constitutional democracy is the product of a long historical effort to address this enduring problem. The gradual transfer of sovereignty from rulers to peoples—articulated in foundational moments such as the *Magna Carta*, the *Act of Abjuration*, the *American Declaration of Independence*, and the *French Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen*—was not merely a legal transformation. It reflected an evolving recognition that political authority must be limited, accountable, and grounded in principles that protect citizens' rights and dignity.

From this transformation emerged the institutional architecture of contemporary democracy: separation of powers, representative government, federal arrangements, judicial review, and oversight systems designed to constrain the misuse of authority. Each innovation addressed a recurring historical tendency—the drift of power, when exercised without restraint or understanding, toward domination.

Yet the existence of such institutions does not guarantee their effective functioning. Their performance ultimately depends on those who inhabit them. Leaders who misinterpret constitutional limits may centralize authority in the name of efficiency; those unfamiliar with institutional balance may weaken checks and balances while claiming democratic legitimacy; and others may adhere to formal procedures while undermining the spirit of constitutional governance.

In this context, the central argument of this book is to highlight a frequently overlooked dimension of democratic resilience: the competence of political leadership. While democratic systems have developed sophisticated mechanisms for selecting leaders through elections and inter-party competition, they remain comparatively underdeveloped in ensuring that those leaders possess the intellectual preparation necessary for responsible governance once in office.

Competence, as understood here, does not imply technocratic domination or adherence to any particular ideological orientation. Rather, it denotes a fundamental grasp of the principles that legitimize democratic authority: popular sovereignty, constitutional limitations, institutional accountability, and the ethical responsibilities inherent in the exercise of public power. Without such understanding, authority risks becoming detached from the framework that justifies it.

This requirement becomes especially pressing during periods of systemic stress. Economic crises, geopolitical instability, technological transformation, and social polarization place extraordinary demands on democratic institutions. Under such conditions, leaders lacking conceptual clarity may mistake decisiveness for legitimacy or interpret electoral support as a mandate for unlimited authority. By contrast, those grounded in constitutional principles are better equipped to confront conflict without eroding the institutional foundations of democratic order.

The development of such competence is not the sole responsibility of individual leaders. Political parties are essential guardians of democratic authority. Through their processes for selecting, training, and evaluating

candidates, they shape the intellectual and ethical quality of those who govern. When parties prioritize loyalty, charisma, or media visibility over institutional understanding, they weaken the very systems they are meant to sustain.

Citizens also play a decisive role. Democratic legitimacy depends on the public's capacity to evaluate leadership beyond rhetoric and short-term promises. When competence remains invisible to voters, it ceases to be a meaning criterion for selection. Conversely, when citizens demand knowledge of constitutional principles and respect for institutional limits, the incentives that shape political leadership begin to shift.

For this reason, the conceptual framework developed in this book is intended not only for political actors but also for citizens, educators, journalists, and scholars. By identifying core domains of democratic knowledge—popular sovereignty, constitutionalism, federalism, accountability, and ethical governance—it seeks to establish clearer standards for evaluating political leadership beyond electoral success.

Historical experience further suggests that political orders rarely collapse abruptly. More often, they deteriorate gradually as institutional understanding fades and power is exercised without sufficient regard for its limits. Yet this same historical record also points to the possibility of renewal. The most significant advances in constitutional governance have emerged from periods of reflection when societies reassessed the principles that legitimize political authority.

The challenge facing contemporary democracies, therefore, is not unprecedented. It is ensuring that those who hold public power have the intellectual preparation to exercise it responsibly. Democratic legitimacy cannot be sustained by procedures alone; it requires leaders who understand both the institutions in which they operate and the principles that justify their authority.

Governing in the name of the people is thus not simply a matter of winning elections. It is the exercise of power, grounded in knowledge, moderation, and fidelity to the constitutional order, that makes democratic self-government possible. Where this understanding exists, institutions forged over centuries can continue to protect freedom. Where it is absent, even the most carefully designed systems risk gradual erosion.

The future of democracy will therefore depend not only on how leaders are chosen but also on the depth of their understanding of the authority they hold and the responsibilities it entails. In that recognition lies the enduring possibility that democratic governance—tested repeatedly throughout history—can adapt, endure, and remain worthy of the people it governs in their name.

Introduction

This book begins with a demanding yet necessary premise: democracy depends not only on institutional design and procedural integrity but also on the competence of those who exercise authority within those structures. While democratic theory has long emphasized constitutional arrangements, the separation of powers, and electoral accountability, it has often relied—implicitly or explicitly—on the assumption that those elected to govern possess the intellectual, ethical, and institutional capacities for democratic leadership. That assumption is no longer tenable.

The Problem: When Democratic Procedures Outpace Democratic Competence

Modern democracies have developed increasingly sophisticated mechanisms for selecting leaders. Yet they remain comparatively underdeveloped in preparing those leaders to govern in accordance with democratic principles. Electoral competition rewards visibility, rhetorical effectiveness, identity alignment, and mobilization capacity. It rarely assesses whether candidates understand the foundations of popular sovereignty, the limits of public authority, the internal logic of constitutional systems, or the ethical constraints inherent in the exercise of power (Linz 1990; Levitsky and Ziblatt 2018; Mounk 2018).

This imbalance reflects a deeper conceptual ambiguity in democratic leadership. On one level, competence is often equated with narrow knowledge: formal education, technical expertise, professional experience, or policy specialization. On another level, democratic governance requires what may be termed suitability: the capacity for judgment, ethical restraint, empathy, compassion, and the psychological disposition to wield power responsibly—including resistance to traits such as narcissism, impulsivity, or authoritarian inclinations (Kahneman 2011; Sunstein 2015).

Contemporary systems tend to prioritize the former while neglecting the latter. Yet the effective exercise of democratic authority depends not only on what leaders know but also on how they interpret, apply, and restrain that knowledge in institutional and social contexts.

For analytical clarity, distinguishing between knowledge and suitability is initially useful. However, this book does not treat that distinction as a rigid divide. Instead, it adopts a broader conception of knowledge—one that encompasses both cognitive competence and the ethical and psychological capacities required for democratic leadership. In this wider sense, knowledge includes not only technical understanding but also judgment, self-restraint, and the ability to respond to diverse and often conflicting constituencies.

The consequences of this deficit are both concrete and cumulative. Leaders lacking constitutional understanding may weaken checks and balances while invoking democratic legitimacy. Those unfamiliar with federal or decentralized systems may centralize authority in the name of efficiency. Leaders who fail to distinguish between legality and legitimacy may adhere to formal rules while subverting their underlying purpose (Dicey 1982[1885]; Fuller 1965; Waldron 2016). Others, lacking epistemic humility, may govern with unwarranted certainty, dismissing experience, evidence, and dissent (Popper 1935; Tetlock 2006).

The result is rarely an immediate democratic collapse. More often, it takes the form of democratic backsliding: a gradual erosion of accountability, representation, and trust through actions that are formally legal yet substantially corrosive (Ginsburg and Huq 2018; Levitsky and Ziblatt 2018). In this sense, democracy fails not only through breakdown but also through the slow erosion of the knowledge required for responsible leadership.

Why Leadership Knowledge Is a Democratic Safeguard

This book argues that certain forms of knowledge are not optional attributes of political leadership but are constitutive requirements for the legitimate exercise of authority in systems grounded in popular sovereignty.

From Aristotle's reflections on civic virtue to Rousseau's theory of the general will; from early constitutional limits on monarchy to modern theories of federalism, accountability, and public reason—democratic thought has evolved in response to recurring failures in the exercise of power (Aristotle, *Politics*; Rousseau 1997[1762]; Madison, Hamilton, and Jay 2003[1788]; Rawls 1993). Across these traditions, a persistent concern runs: how can authority be exercised without degenerating into domination?

Within this intellectual trajectory, different accounts explain how the knowledge required for responsible leadership is acquired. Rousseau emphasizes the formative role of social experience and civic life, suggesting that judgment develops through contact with the lived realities of inequality, dependence, and cooperation: *the learning by nature*. By contrast, Quentin Skinner underscores the role of formal education, intellectual training, and the disciplined study of political ideas as conditions for understanding the language and limits of power: *the learning by formal education* (Skinner 1997).

These perspectives are best understood as complementary rather than competing. Political judgment itself shows how the two dimensions overlap. While formal education may provide conceptual tools, historical awareness, and analytical discipline, the capacity to apply them prudently in concrete circumstances often depends on experience in social and political life. A leader may possess extensive theoretical knowledge yet lack the practical sensitivity required for democratic governance, just as practical experience without reflective understanding may lead to short-sighted or inconsistent decisions. Judgment therefore emerges from the interaction of intellectual formation and lived civic experience rather than from either dimension alone.

Democratic leadership requires both experiential learning and structured education. It is shaped by participation in social life and refined through systematic reflection. Together, these processes cultivate the intellectual and ethical capacities to understand power, its limits, and its responsibilities.

Yet the knowledge accumulated across these traditions remains fragmented. It is dispersed across philosophy, law, political theory, and institutional practice, and rarely consolidated into a coherent framework for leadership competence. As a result, those who exercise public authority often encounter this knowledge only partially, if at all.

This book seeks to address that fragmentation by reconstructing democratic thought as a coherent body of knowledge directly relevant to political leadership.

The Contribution of This Book

The principal contribution of this work is reframing democratic theory as a framework for leadership competence. Rather than treating political philosophy, constitutional design, and governance studies as separate or purely academic domains, the book integrates them into a systematic account of what democratic leaders must understand to exercise legitimate authority.

Specifically, the book aims to:

1. *Identify the core domains of democratic knowledge*, including popular sovereignty, constitutionalism, federalism, institutional accountability, and ethical governance.
2. *Demonstrate their practical significance* by linking theoretical principles to recurring patterns of leadership failure and democratic decline.
3. *Translate abstract concepts into operational terms*, demonstrating how misunderstanding or ignorance leads to tangible institutional consequences.¹
4. *Connect leadership competence to assessment frameworks*, particularly the Political Party Democracy Index (PPDI) (Galiñanes and Klinkers 2026c), which evaluates not only democratic outcomes but also internal party structures, candidate selection processes, and governance behavior.
5. *Provide a shared evaluative language* for politicians, parties, citizens, educators, journalists, and institutions seeking to assess leadership beyond electoral success.

In developing this framework, the book does not advocate a particular ideological orientation. Rather, it articulates a normative foundation for democratic competence that applies across political traditions. Disagreement over policy, ideology, or institutional design is inherent to democracy; ignorance of the principles that justify authority is not.

For Whom Is This Book Written?

This book is intended for four primary audiences.

First, it speaks to political leaders and candidates for public office. It treats political leadership not as a purely strategic endeavor but as a

¹ In this respect, the book also addresses the tension between claims of direct popular identification and the demands of responsible representation. Contemporary leaders frequently invoke plebiscitary mandates to justify concentrating executive authority, portraying intermediary institutions as obstacles to the popular will. Yet democratic accountability depends precisely on representative institutions that serve as deliberative filters rather than merely ratifying executive preferences. Parliamentary committees, for example, can play a crucial role by scrutinizing legislation, incorporating expert testimony, and subjecting executive claims to reasoned public scrutiny. Far from constituting “obstructionist” elites, such mechanisms help preserve the distinction between immediate political popularity and responsible governance on behalf of the citizenry.

demanding practice requiring intellectual preparation, ethical awareness, and institutional understanding.

Second, it addresses political parties. As gatekeepers of democratic authority, parties shape leadership quality through candidate selection, training, and internal governance. Yet they often prioritize loyalty, electability, or media visibility over competence (Levitsky and Ziblatt 2018). This book offers a framework for systematically assessing and cultivating leadership capacity.

Third, it is directed to citizens, civil society actors, and the press. Democratic accountability depends on the public's ability to distinguish between leadership that merely claims legitimacy and leadership that meets its substantive requirements. By clarifying the knowledge foundations of democratic authority, this book seeks to make competence a criterion for political judgment.

Fourth, it engages the judiciary. Courts are increasingly called upon to interpret the constitutional limits of political authority amid democratic strain. Questions about electoral integrity, institutional boundaries, and fundamental rights are likely to intensify. By articulating the conditions of legitimate governance, this work contributes to the broader interpretive framework for such decisions (Dworkin 1986; Waldron 2016).

Structure of the Book

The book builds a cumulative argument that progresses from normative foundations to institutional design, from governance practice to systemic complexity, and ultimately to democratic renewal.

Part I (Chapters 1–8) lays the foundations for popular sovereignty and democratic legitimacy, tracing the historical and conceptual transformation of authority from divine or dynastic rule to government by the people.

Part II (Chapters 9–12) elaborates on the philosophical architecture of democracy, examining theories of freedom, pluralism, public reason, and political judgment.

Part III (Chapters 13–18) applies these principles to institutional design, examining how constitutional arrangements influence incentives, accountability, and system resilience.

Part IV (Chapters 19–22) focuses on governance in practice, analyzing how institutions operate in real-world contexts and how ethical responsibility is exercised within those contexts.

Part V (Chapters 23–25) addresses systemic complexity, including interactions between domestic and global governance structures.

Part VI (Chapters 26–30) focuses on democratic renewal by integrating leadership competence, institutional reform, and civic regeneration into a forward-looking framework.

Across these six parts, the book advances a unified thesis: democratic legitimacy is not secured at a single constitutional moment but depends on the ongoing alignment of principles, institutions, leadership, and citizenship across evolving systems of governance.

How to Read This Book

This book does not prescribe what readers should think; it clarifies what democratic leadership requires. It is intended to serve as both a conceptual framework and an analytical tool.

Each chapter begins with a statement about democratic competence—not as an ideological claim but as a reference point. Readers are invited to assess whether political authority is exercised with the understanding and restraint that democratic legitimacy requires.

The structure allows multiple entry points. Readers may begin with philosophological foundations, institutional design, or governance practice. Nevertheless, the argument is cumulative: later chapters build on earlier conceptual groundwork.

Throughout, the emphasis is on translating theory into judgment. Political ideas matter not as abstract doctrines but as practical guides for how power is exercised, contested, and limited.

A Final Word

This book does not assume that democratic leaders must be philosophers or that formal education alone ensures sound judgment. It does, however, insist that ignorance is incompatible with responsible governance.

At a time when democratic systems face pressure not only from external threats but also from internal distortions, reconnecting political leadership to the intellectual and ethical foundations of democracy is no longer optional—it is essential. Ultimately, it is a condition for democratic survival.

Part I.

**FOUNDATIONS OF
POPULAR
SOVEREIGNTY AND
DEMOCRATIC
AUTHORITY**

Part I lays the normative and institutional foundations of democratic authority. It begins with a premise that is both simple and historically transformative: political power is legitimate only when it emanates from the people, a principle that *all sovereignty rests with the people*. Popular sovereignty marks a decisive break with forms of government grounded in divine sanction, hereditary privilege, or coercive domination. Yet once sovereignty is located in the people, a fundamental problem emerges: how can collective self-government be organized, limited, and sustained without undermining the very authority from which it derives?

The emergence of democratic authority is inseparable from the historical processes that institutionalized consent. Revolutions, founding charters, and constitutions transformed the abstract principle of popular sovereignty into enduring frameworks of governance. Through legal codification, representative institutions, and procedural safeguards, the will of the people was converted from a normative aspiration into structured authority. For consent to endure, however, it must not only be established but also continuously reproduced through practices that render it intelligible, effective, and legitimate.

At the same time, democratic systems have always developed amid uncertainty, conflict, and vulnerability. Periods of crisis—whether economic, social, or geopolitical—often prompt demands for concentrated authority and decisive leadership. The tension between freedom and security, and between self-government and the desire for order, is therefore not incidental but constitutive of democratic life. Constitutionalism is a disciplined response to this tension. It does not negate popular sovereignty; it structures it. Authority must be exercised within legal limits, and power must remain accountable to those in whose name it is exercised. The separation of powers, checks and balances, and judicial oversight are thus not external constraints on democracy but internal conditions of its durability.

Democratic authority is further shaped by the problem of pluralism. In complex societies, “the people” do not constitute a unified will but rather a plurality of interests, identities, and normative commitments. Representation is the institutional mechanism that translates this plurality into collective decision-making. Properly understood, representation does not diminish sovereignty; it renders it operative. It enables political leaders to navigate the tension between responsiveness and responsibility—between reflecting preferences and exercising judgment within constitutional limits.

Within this framework, political parties play a central institutional role. They organize political competition, articulate alternatives, and mediate between society and the state. More fundamentally, they serve as guardians of democratic authority by shaping how political leadership is selected, trained, and evaluated. Through these processes, parties influence the level of knowledge and competence brought to the exercise of public power. Their role is therefore not merely procedural but also normative. Accepting electoral defeat, recognizing legitimate opposition, and adhering to constitutional limits are not formalities; they express a deeper commitment to the principles that sustain democratic authority. When parties fail in this role, democratic systems become vulnerable to the personalization of power, institutional erosion, and factional radicalization—conditions under which the logic of “might makes right” begins to displace constitutional governance.¹

¹ One of the least discussed yet most important democratic virtues is the capacity to lose. Democratic systems endure not because every political actor prevails, but because competi-

Finally, democratic governance rests on an irreducible foundation of judgment. Popular sovereignty presupposes not only participation but also informed, responsible judgment. Public deliberation requires shared standards of truth, accountable communication, and leadership capable of addressing complexity without distorting it. In this sense, the competence of political leadership—understood as knowledge in its broadest sense—becomes integral to democratic authority. Leaders must not only reflect public preferences but also interpret them within a framework of constitutional principles, empirical realities, and ethical constraints.

This moral dimension takes on particular urgency in the present moment. The expansion of plebiscitary politics, the fragmentation of information environments, and the erosion of shared factual reference points place increasing strain on democratic institutions. Under these circumstances, the integrity of public discourse becomes inseparable from that of democratic authority. When communication is detached from truth and leadership prioritizes mobilization over understanding, citizens' capacity to exercise sovereignty meaningfully diminishes.

Part I advances a cumulative argument. Popular sovereignty is the source of legitimate authority, but it is not self-executing. It must be institutionalized through constitutional design, mediated by representation and political parties, constrained by law, and sustained by civic responsibility and leadership competence. Democracy begins with the recognition that authority belongs to the people; it endures only when that authority is structured, disciplined, and exercised within a framework that integrates institutional constraints, accountability, and informed judgment.

tors remain committed to constitutional rules even when electoral outcomes disappoint their preferences and ambitions. This norm faces mounting pressure in today's digital environments. Social media platforms, partisan information ecosystems, and algorithmically amplified political messaging often cast elections in existential terms. Opponents are portrayed not merely as rivals with different policy views but as threats to the nation's future, fundamental values, or collective identity. When political competition is framed this way, electoral defeat can feel less like a temporary setback and more like a permanent loss of status, security, or belonging. Under such conditions, the democratic discipline of accepting defeat becomes harder to sustain. Citizens and leaders may be tempted to question electoral outcomes, reject opponents' legitimacy, or view constitutional restraints as obstacles to political survival. Yet democracy depends precisely on political actors' willingness to accept that no victory is permanent and no defeat is final. Political parties play a crucial role in preserving this norm. They can strengthen democratic resilience by preparing supporters for the possibility of defeat, affirming the legitimacy of constitutional procedures, rejecting unfounded claims of electoral fraud, and emphasizing that political change remains possible through future elections. In doing so, parties help shift political competition from a zero-sum struggle to an ongoing process of democratic contestation. Rituals of concession are especially important in this regard. Concession speeches, public recognition of electoral results, orderly transfers of authority, and symbolic affirmations of constitutional loyalty serve purposes that go beyond political etiquette. They remind citizens that allegiance to democratic institutions must ultimately transcend allegiance to any particular leader, party, or faction. In polarized societies, these rituals help preserve trust, normalize peaceful transitions, and reaffirm that the system's legitimacy does not depend on the victory of one's preferred side.

Popular Sovereignty as the Source of Legitimate Power

1.

A democratically competent political leader must begin with a foundational premise: all legitimate political authority originates with the people. Office, law, force, tradition, and even electoral victory may generate power, but they do not, in themselves, confer legitimacy. The central task of democratic leadership is therefore to distinguish between holding power and being authorized to exercise it—and to act consistently with that distinction.

Authority and Power: A Foundational Distinction

Political communities cannot function without power. Decisions must be made, conflicts resolved, rules enforced, and collective goals pursued. Yet political thought has long insisted on distinguishing *de facto* control from rightful rule. Democracy depends on preserving that distinction.

Power may be seized, inherited, delegated, or legally acquired. By contrast, authority requires justification. In democratic systems, that justification rests on a single principle: ultimate sovereignty resides with the people. Governments do not own political power; they exercise it conditionally, within limits, and subject to withdrawal (Vitoria 1991[1528–1539]; Rousseau 1997[1762]; Kelsen 1945).

The modern concept of sovereignty took shape in early modern political thought, particularly through the contrasting contributions of Jean Bodin and Johannes Althusius. Bodin defined sovereignty as the supreme, per perpetual, and indivisible authority within a political community (Bodin 1992[1576/1586]). By contrast, Althusius developed a conception of authority grounded in association and shared governance, in which sovereignty arises from the consent of communities and is distributed across multiple levels (Althusius 1995[1603/1614]).

This divergence remains foundational. Bodin clarified the unity and coherence of sovereign authority, while Vitoria emphasized the community as the original bearer of political power and Althusius anticipated the institutional distribution of sovereignty across multiple levels of governance. Modern democratic constitutionalism synthesizes these traditions: sovereignty is unified in source, ultimately located in the people, yet plural in its institutional expression.

The failure to maintain the distinction between power and legitimacy remains a persistent danger. Electoral mandates are often treated as unconditional authorization, legal office as a moral entitlement, and majority support as equivalent to sovereignty. Democratic competence requires resisting these conflation.

Civic Foundations, Popular Sovereignty, and the Common Good

The normative roots of popular sovereignty trace back to classical political thought. Aristotle locates political authority within the *polis*, understood as a community oriented toward the common good (Aristotle ca. 350 BCE/1998). Rule is legitimate only insofar as it serves the shared interests of the political community rather than the private interests of rulers.

This principle holds that authority is purposive. It exists to advance the public good and remains accountable to the community it governs. When leaders equate the state with themselves or their supporters, they depart from the civic logic underpinning democratic legitimacy.

Between classical political thought and the emergence of modern democratic theory, the sixteenth-century Spanish theologian and jurist Francisco de Vitoria laid important foundations for popular sovereignty. Writing within the natural law tradition, Vitoria argued that political authority does not originate in rulers themselves but in the political community (*res publica*), which possesses authority prior to and independent of those who govern. While all legitimate authority ultimately derives from natural law, rulers exercise power only because the community entrusts it to them (Vitoria 1991[1528–1539]; Brett 2011).

This insight marked a significant departure from dynastic and absolutist conceptions of rule. For Vitoria, political power belongs originally to the community and only derivatively to magistrates and governors. Government therefore has a fiduciary character: rulers hold authority in trust for the common good rather than as a form of personal ownership. He further maintained that communities can determine their own political arrangements and that collective decisions may legitimately be made by majority judgment rather than by unanimity (Vitoria 1991[1528–1539]; Brett 2011).

Although Vitoria wrote centuries before the rise of modern democracy, his work established an important intellectual bridge between medieval constitutional traditions and later doctrines of popular sovereignty. His conception of authority as delegated, conditional, and oriented toward the common good anticipates many principles that later became central to constitutional government and democratic legitimacy.

The Democratic Recasting of Sovereignty

The decisive transformation occurs within modern democratic thought. Rousseau argued that sovereignty resides with the people and cannot be alienated; law is legitimate only when those subject to it regard themselves as its authors (Rousseau 1997[1762]).

While Rousseau emphasized the indivisibility of sovereignty, subsequent constitutional practice has shown that authority can be institutionally distributed without losing its normative unity. Federal systems demonstrate that sovereignty can be exercised across levels while remaining grounded in a common source (Elazar 1987).

Rousseau's enduring contribution is the principle of collective self-legislation. Sovereignty expresses political equality rather than domination. Leaders who invoke "the will of the people" while dismantling institutional constraints appropriate the language of sovereignty while violating its substance.

Carl Schmitt's analysis further clarifies the risks inherent in this tension. By defining sovereignty as the power to decide the exception, he shows how crises can facilitate the concentration of authority (Schmitt

End of Sample



Manuel Galiñanes and Leo Klinkers

Manuel Galiñanes, MD, PhD, and Leo Klinkers, PhD, bring together distinguished expertise in biomedical science, public administration, constitutional reform, and federal governance.

Dr. Manuel Galiñanes is a cardiovascular surgeon, biomedical scientist, and political scholar. He earned his medical degree from the University of Salamanca, specialized in cardiovascular surgery at the Complutense University of Madrid, and received his PhD in Biochemistry and Physiology from the University of London. He currently serves as President of the Federal Alliance of European Federalists.

Dr. Leo Klinkers played a foundational role in establishing public administration as an academic discipline at Utrecht University. He later founded Klinkers Public Policy Consultants, advising on complex governance and policy matters within national, European Union, and United Nations contexts. He is the co-founder and first President of the Federal Alliance of European Federalists.

Together, the authors combine their extensive academic, professional, and institutional experience to examine the political, constitutional, ecological, and democratic challenges addressed in this book.

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