

People have different ideas about the best form of democracy, and this often involves weighing the pros and cons of different democratic principles. For instance, in democracies with proportional representation electoral systems, votes are turned into seats in a fair way, but this does not necessarily mean that voting always has a clear impact on determining who gains power (Kam et al., 2020). Given these trade-offs, political scientists have either avoided taking sides and simply pointed out the existence of these issues, or have claimed that certain democratic principles are more important regardless of what the general public believes. Limited use has been made of appeals to public opinion, since public knowledge of different types of democracy is often quite limited. This project studies beliefs and opinions of one population group which is well-qualified to evaluate different democracies: migrants. Migrants – particularly adult migrants from democratic countries – often participate actively in the politics of both their origin and host countries (Peltoniemi, 2018). They can therefore make informed comparisons between levels of proportionality, government identifiability, accountability, promissory and descriptive representation in their origin and host countries. As migrants come from places with different political systems and governments, they can express preferences between institutional forms, and thereby act as informed observers (Mill, 1863/1987). This project will make use of the experiences of migrants, as measured using surveys of migrant values and attitudes, to establish the “just-noticeable differences” (JND) that exist among the public on the issue of democratic principles. JNDs can be understood as the smallest difference in democracy that people actually take account of: that is, a change big enough for people to notice at least half the time. Establishing these quantities can help us understand which trade-offs in democracy are more significant from the perspective of the public, regardless of their abstract level of knowledge about those differences. By looking at both the JNDs and the preferences for different systems, this project aims to use what migrants know about different kinds of democracy to gain a clearer understanding of what makes a democracy work well.