

Of Factions and Proportional Voting: Madison and Mill on 'tyranny of the majority'

It is no secret that many democratic theorists have distrusted democracy. Although often defended as the best response to state tyranny, democracy is nonetheless subject to tyranny of a different type, that of the majority over the minority. The fear of majority tyranny has led many democrats to support limited democracy, one that has some sort of minority protections built in. James Madison, for example, suggests that the solution to majority tyranny lies in creating a large republic with numerous regional interests that prevent the formation of permanent majorities. Writing seven decades later, John Stuart Mill indirectly critiques the Madisonian model, arguing instead for a proportional system of representation, today called the single transferable vote. In this paper, I examine both Madison's and Mill's solution to the problem of majority tyranny, arguing that Madison's large republic, while perhaps appropriate for an 18th century agrarian society, is less useful today, and that Mill's proportional voting more effectively prevents majority tyranny.

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