

– WORKING PAPER –

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Democracy as tolerance or solidarity:

Disentangling normative frameworks for the study of political communication

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25 May 2017

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## **Abstract**

In an effort to better specify what democracy means in the service of studying political communication, this paper examines the implicit values within two overarching frameworks that are well-established in the study of political communication: liberalism and civic-republicanism. The implicit values that undergird these frameworks are correspondingly tolerance and solidarity. We indicate how tolerance limits political communication theory to an image of individuals as “unencumbered” (Sandel, 1984) entities who voluntarily enter political associations when it promotes their private-interest, thus neglecting the cases where political actions may not be amenable to such motives. Solidarity on the other hand focuses scholarly attention to an image of individual political decisions as determined, at least in part, by deeply inscribed involuntary social bonds – attachments to one’s family, community, or nation. These commitments may invoke political actions that do not appear rational to the privately-interested individual but are supportive of a civic-republican demand for social justice. Disentangling the liberal model from the civic republican model and their corresponding values of tolerance and solidarity, we suggest, also helps enrich the conceptual possibilities for explaining political communication.