Is support for democracy in the United States robust enough to serve as a check against undemocratic behavior by elected politicians? In order to answer this question, Milan Svolik (in joint work with Matthew Graham) develops a model of the public as a democratic check and evaluate using experiments as well as natural experiments, including a series of original, nationally representative candidate-choice experiments, in which some candidates adopt positions that violate key democratic principles. Respondents’ choices allow us to infer citizens’ willingness to trade off democratic principles against other valid but potentially conflicting considerations such as political ideology, partisan loyalty, or policy preferences. The findings suggest that the viability of the U.S. public as a democratic check is strikingly limited: only a small fraction of Americans are willing to prioritize democratic principles in their electoral choices and their tendency to do so is decreasing in the strength of their partisanship, policy extremism, and candidate platform polarization. These findings echo classic arguments about the importance of political moderation and cross-cutting cleavages for democratic stability and highlight the dangers that political polarization represents for democracy in America.

Prof. Dr. Milan Svolik is Professor of Political Science at Yale University. His research and teaching focus on comparative politics, political economy, and formal political theory. Svolik has authored and co-authored articles on the politics of authoritarian regimes, democratization, and democratic backsliding. He is the author of *The Politics of Authoritarian Rule* (Cambridge University Press, 2012), which received the best book award from the Comparative Democratization Section of the American Political Science Association. His latest research examines why ordinary people support politicians that undermine democracy. Svolik holds a Ph.D. and M.A. in Political Science from the University of Chicago, as well as an M.A. from the Central European University in Budapest and a B.A. from Comenius University in Bratislava.

**Research Seminar**

**Democracy in America?**

Partisanship, Polarization, and the Robustness of Support for Democracy in the United States

**Milan Svolik**

Yale University

Hochschule für Politik München - Room H.001

Richard-Wagner-Straße 1, Munich

31 October 2019 – 12:15 - 13:45