



The Global State of Democracy 2017
Exploring Democracy's Resilience

Chapter

4

The changing nature of political
parties and representation

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This is an extract from:

The Global State of Democracy: Exploring Democracy's Resilience

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This publication has received support from International IDEA's Member States through the Institute's core funding. Grateful acknowledgement is made to the governments of Sweden and Norway, whose generous support made this publication possible.

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Design and layout: Phoenix Design Aid

Printer: Trydells Tryckeri, Sweden

ISBN: 978-91-7671-129-3



The changing nature of political parties and representation

Democracy relies on effective representation—responsive political leaders who can craft policy solutions for their societies. Yet particularly in well-established democracies, many citizens question whether traditional political parties can handle current challenges and crises, and this has increased apathy and distrust among voters. It has also encouraged many to support alternative paths of political action—thus triggering the rise of ideologically extremist parties and movements. Party systems in established democracies are under threat, and traditional political leadership is caught between the centralization of policy decisions on the one hand, and disaffected voters on the other hand. To examine how public trust in political parties, parliamentary institutions and political leaders can be restored, this chapter examines case studies from India, the United Kingdom, the European Parliament and Spain, as well as the use of referendums around the world.

Written by
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But if we're really to make democracy vigorous again, if we're ready to revivify it, we need to get involved in a new project of the citizens and the politicians. Democracy is not simply a question of structures. It is a state of mind. It is an activity. And part of that activity is honesty.

— Rory Stewart, OBE MP, British diplomat, politician and author (2012)

4.1. Introduction: representation under pressure

Traditional political representation is under increased pressure around the world: most people have little trust in political parties. Many European

countries and the United States have recently experienced elections and referendums with unexpected results that have caused a political earthquake among traditional elites. While political parties still offer a central conduit for democratic representation, old and new political parties alike must adjust how they operate to re-establish trust among the electorate.

Political parties must tackle four key challenges to survive in the changing political landscape: (a) deliver results to address multifaceted challenges such as global economic crises, international terrorism and refugee flows; (b) restore citizens' sense of inclusion, particularly among marginalized groups; (c) respond to populism; and (d) adapt to new ways of interacting with both party members and the electorate.

These challenges relate to the resilience of democracy. Signs of this resilience can be found

in the renewal of party systems (see Box 4.1), the novel ways in which citizens relate to new political organizations, and how existing political parties are reinventing themselves to relate to an electorate that is still finding its place in the context of changing economies and values. It is important to distinguish between political parties and party systems: the system represents the whole, in which parties are units. Many of the challenges presented in this chapter are broadly linked to the party system rather than failures of individual parties.

Do parties still perform a relevant function? Representation has traditionally been a central organizing principle for citizens in democratic societies. The Hobbesian notion that ‘people must agree to be represented if politics is to work at all’ is still relevant to striking a balance between increasing opportunities for citizens’ active political participation and representing their interests (Runciman 2014; Leterme and van der Staak 2016). As societies evolve and more than one social group gains political rights and legitimacy, representative institutions ensure that the ‘dominance of one social force [is made] compatible with the community of many’ (Huntington 1968). In other words, representation means that if different groups of citizens are treated equally, according to their numbers, then the main public institutions will be socially representative of the citizen body as a whole (Landman 2008: 11).

Political parties stay relevant as long as they mediate different interests and offer coherent visions, which they can advocate in elections and legislatures, and pursue them as a basis for compromise with other parties. They are often complemented by civil society organizations, which also represent different interests in society.

Political parties that fail to address the issues that citizens consider to be most important risk becoming irrelevant and disappearing from the political map. New parties have pushed old ones out of mainstream politics at different times and places, and for different reasons.

BOX 4.1

Renewal and resilience in party systems

Political parties and party systems have transformative power and the capacity to stay relevant by adapting and innovating their role and function in society. Resilient parties strike a careful balance between giving citizens a central role in their internal processes and making citizens the goal of their policy actions. Resilient parties address complex crises and policy challenges by pursuing coherent political visions, and can communicate these visions through decisive, savvy and electable leaders. Political parties can help increase public trust in democratic institutions by remaining responsive to the electorate between elections, including on the most difficult societal issues; pledging full transparency and integrity; engaging a wide range of social groups; renewing their leadership (in particular with women and young people); and by applying new approaches to citizen engagement.

This chapter examines the challenges driving the renewal of party landscapes in established democracies (those that were in place by the 1920s and 1960s) and third-wave democracies (which transitioned away from authoritarian rule in the 1970s and early 1990s). Most of these democracies are in Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, and North America, while a few are in Africa and Asia and the Pacific. Many European party systems have enjoyed a significant period of stability, but recent developments show that this stability may be under threat. This chapter discusses some of the many reasons why these systems have been affected, some of which may be linked to structural changes in the economy, cultural and value changes, and rapid digitalization.

Section 4.2 explores the broad markers indicating that the representation political parties provide is under stress. It also examines changing trends over time, such as forms of active citizenship that are on the increase, including protests and digital engagement. Section 4.3 looks at the difficulties politicians face in representing citizens’ views when dealing with transnational crises, especially where countries have advanced the integration or interdependency of their political, trade or financial systems. Section 4.4 addresses the challenges stemming from people’s declining trust in political parties, and their shifting support to new kinds of parties, some of which

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Politicians around the world are accused of being 'out of policy control' because they cannot influence policies as much as their voters would like, and they cannot respond to voters beyond the extent that their influence allows

offer new ways of interaction and alternative policies, or anti-establishment rhetoric and populist strategies.

Section 4.5 assesses the responses to the challenges of representation and provides recommendations on how to tackle them. The chapter argues that while political parties are notionally appropriate conduits of citizen representation, they must present clear political visions that give political expression to unaddressed interests in society; root out corruption and restore integrity; attract and groom skilled, electable leaders; and give citizens more influence (as some new types of parties are doing). The chapter discusses five case studies relating to democratic resilience: the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) in India, the Labour Party in the United Kingdom, engaging younger voters in Europe, the renewal of the party system in Spain, and the use of referendums around the world.

4.2. Challenges facing political parties

The challenge of results: dealing with crises and policy control

Since the 2007–08 global financial crisis, both emerging and established democracies have struggled to provide clear-cut solutions and policies to curtail multiple problems that are international in nature and severely challenge the status quo. Just as financial crises in Latin America and the Caribbean and East Asia in the 1990s played a part in shaking up politics and party systems, these current crises have placed similar pressure on European parties to adapt and change. As mounting debt added pressure to eurozone economies, governments also had to deal with the rising influx of refugees and migrants, and security threats, all crises at arguably their highest levels since World War II. An international consensus emerged on how to tackle the financial crisis, and supranational bodies overruled national governments such as Greece when they disagreed. Technocrats and civil servants at the World Bank, International

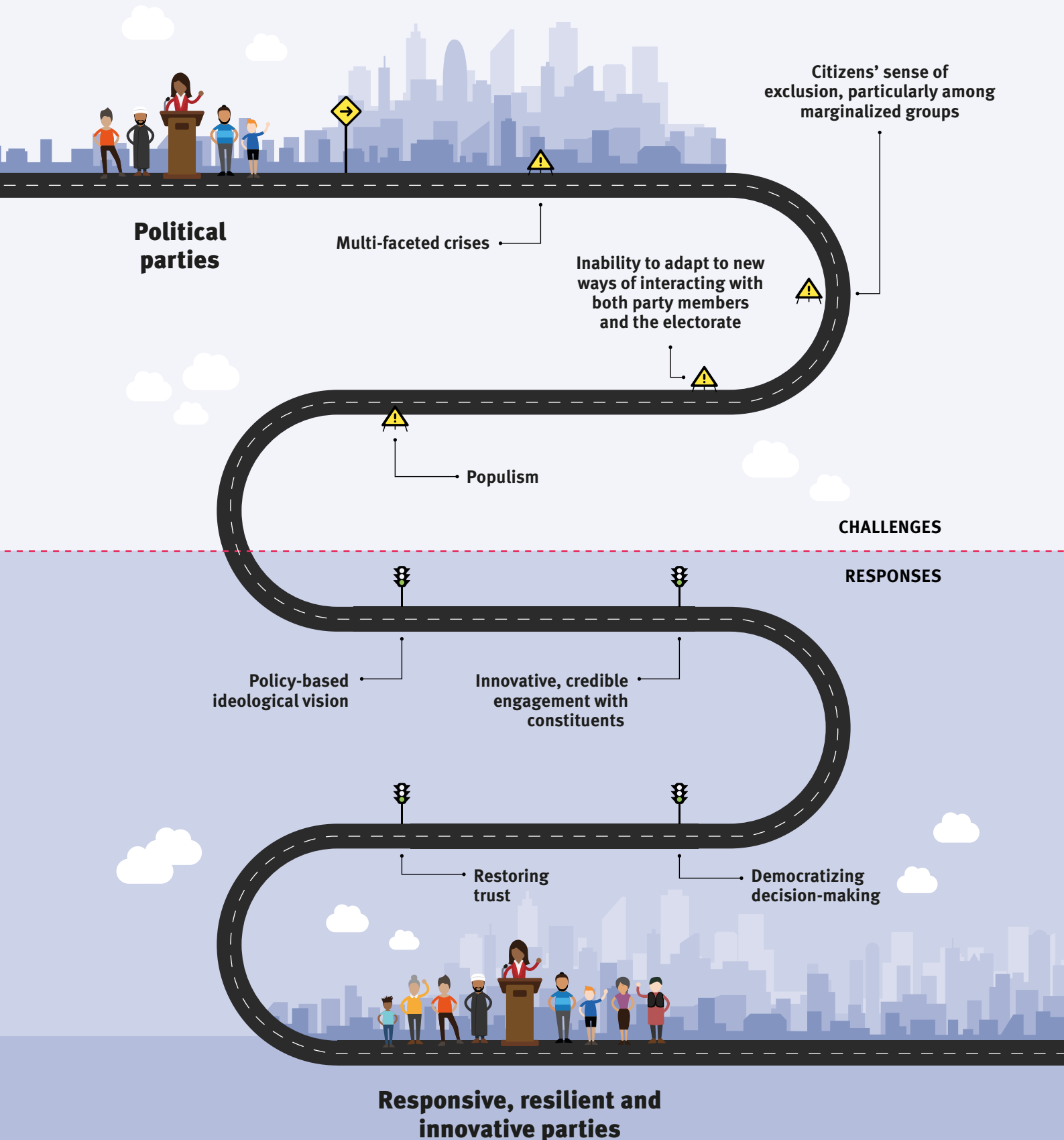
Monetary Fund, the European Union and the European Central Bank have made many of these decisions. By giving power to unelected officials, the politics of decision-making on financial issues has moved away from national democratic accountability.

As a result, politicians around the world are accused of being 'out of policy control' (Leterme and van der Staak 2016) because they cannot influence policies as much as their voters would like, and they cannot respond to voters beyond the extent that their influence allows. Some argue that politicians are signing away their rights to multi-national companies through broad free trade agreements, such as the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) between the USA and the EU and the Trans-Pacific Partnership between a number of Pacific Rim countries. Some believe that such moves only benefit wealthy cosmopolitan elites that have no interest in advancing the welfare of ordinary citizens.

Politicians must either oversell themselves during elections and sweet talk voters afterwards when their policies prove unfeasible, or attempt to take back the powers that have been transferred to the supranational level. Politicians in Europe are increasingly using the latter approach, as the Brexit referendum, objections to the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement, and increased border control have shown. In other European countries the opposite occurred: voting to join the EU entailed voting to transfer power from national legislatures to Brussels. If the people perceive a gap in democratic representation and feel they have insufficient ability to influence decision-making at the EU level, they may feel disillusioned.

The challenge for political parties is to offer a strong political vision that provides real choices, and to explain these problems to voters in clear and understandable language that conveys the underlying complexities. Populist politicians often offer unilateralist

Political parties' road to resilience



and simple solutions, to portray a controlled policy sphere that they claim to be able to directly influence. Yet operating in an isolated sphere of influence does not create more jobs, stronger economies or greater security. Many of today's global threats ignore borders: economic crises, international terrorism and refugee flows highlight how interconnected today's world is; handling these issues requires countries to work together.

The challenge of trust and inclusion

Citizens expect their governments to do more to deliver better results. Yet their elected representatives have lost some control over policies as power is transferred to technocrats at home or to supranational institutions. Representatives are less trusted to deal with the pressing issues of the day. Technological

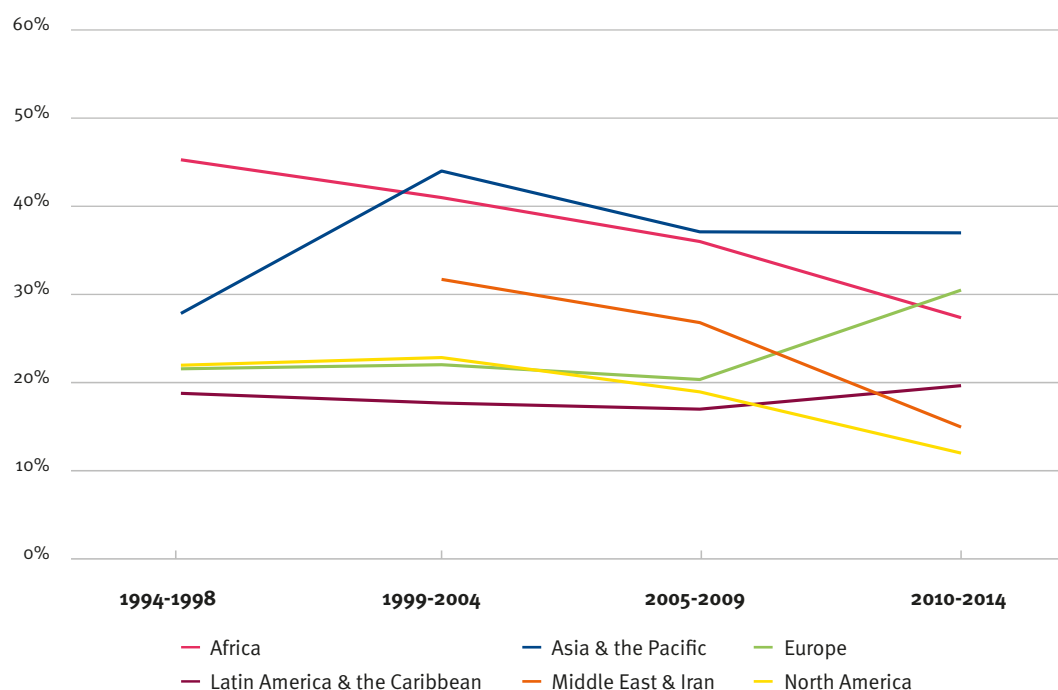
advancements have also increased the amount of information available to the public to scrutinize politicians' words and deeds (e.g. through Freedom of Information legislation in a number of countries), which has increased their vulnerability to corruption scandals and has the potential to enhance integrity and transparency. Citizens' lack of trust in parties is exacerbated by the (conscious and unconscious) exclusion of women and young people from decision-making positions and party hierarchies.

Declining confidence in parties

A wide variety of societal barometers from around the world indicates that political parties are among the least trusted institutions in society. Figure 4.1 shows that the level of trust in political parties in all regions at

FIGURE 4.1

Percentage of citizens with 'A great deal' or 'Quite a lot' of confidence in political parties, 1994–2014



Notes: All figures showing regional averages of World Values Survey data are based on all the countries included in the sample for a particular wave. Thus, 1994–98 is based on 52 countries, 1999–2004 on 37 countries, 2005–09 on 57 countries, and 2010–14 on 58 countries.

Source: World Values Survey Waves 1–6, 1994–2014.

least until 2014, except for Asia and the Pacific and Europe, has stagnated or declined since 1994. While the base level of trust in political parties in Asia and the Pacific is higher than in other regions, trust in parties is lower compared to other institutions. The Asian Barometer shows that political parties in East Asia, in particular, are not highly trusted; levels of trust have stagnated or are in decline (Chang, Weatherall and Wu 2015). More recent surveys by the Latinobarometer seem to confirm the long-standing low level of trust in Latin America: 20 per cent in 1995 and 16 per cent in 2016 declared to have high or some trust in political parties (Latinobarómetro 2016)

Trust in parties erodes when there is evidence of corruption, a failure in the delivery of services, the emergence of anti-establishment rhetoric, or a lack of inclusion and responsiveness to citizens' demands. It can also reflect a more sophisticated and critical way of thinking among citizens, and thus represent a positive incentive to reform.

Citizen trust is broken when politicians make lofty campaign promises or 'fact-free' statements that are spun by a biased media in polarized public debates. This took place in Latin America and the Caribbean in the 1980s, 1990s and 2000s, and most recently in the 2016 landmark Brexit referendum and the 2016 US presidential campaign. The democratic premise that citizens can make informed choices has been brought into question in the era of 'post-truth politics' (Davies 2016; Hochschild and Einstein 2015; The Economist 2016). The decline in trust can also be linked to corruption. For instance, in a 2014 EU opinion poll, only 3 per cent of citizens reported trusting political representatives to deal with corruption cases (European Commission 2014b). In Brazil, Pakistan and the Republic of Korea, corruption scandals have driven senior politicians out of office.

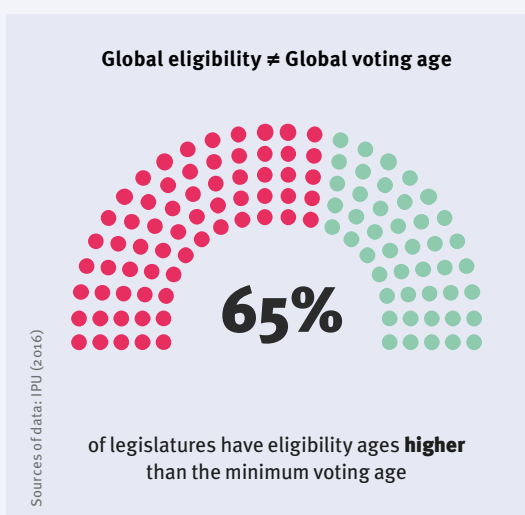
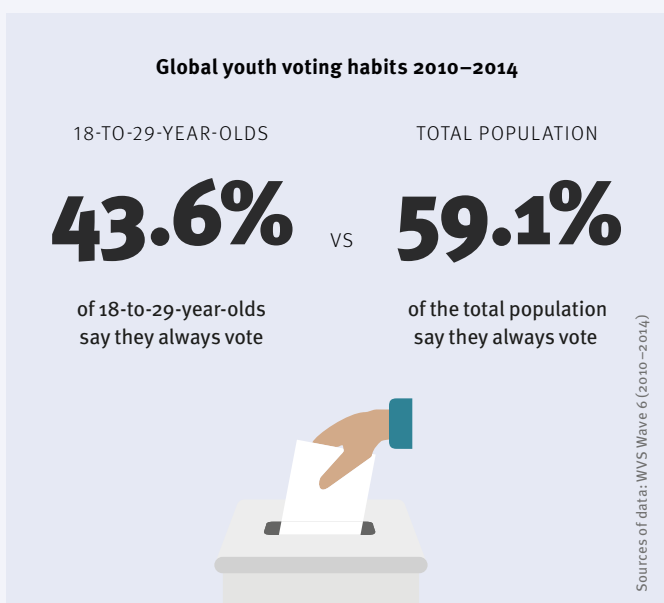
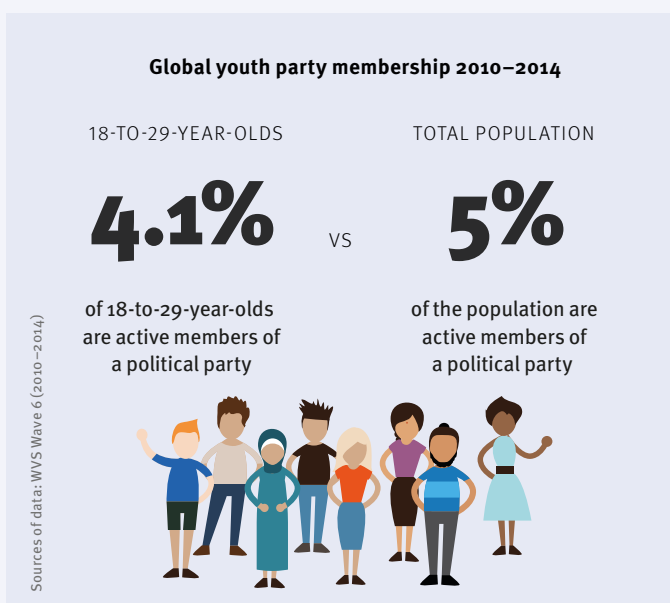
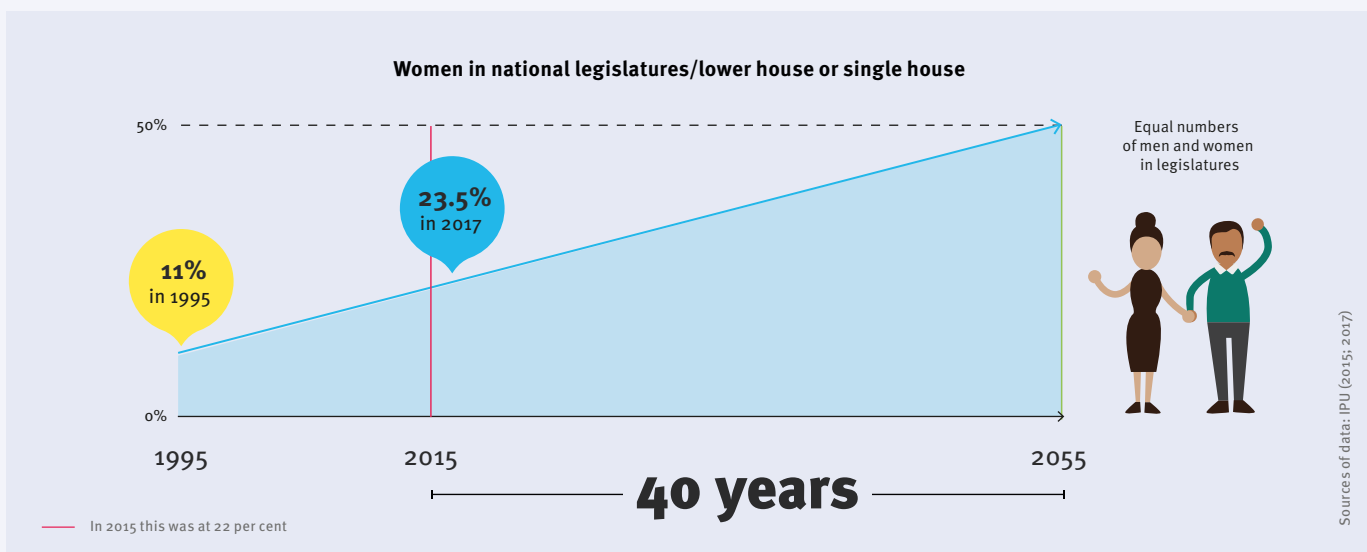
Marginalization of women and youth

A healthy, resilient democracy is based on inclusiveness, which political parties and representative institutions are in a key position to safeguard. Yet parties are finding it harder to sustain an atmosphere of inclusiveness, particularly as women and youth are largely excluded from representative institutions. Although women's representation in legislatures has more than doubled over the last 22 years—from 11 per cent in 1995 to 22 per cent in 2015, and 23.5 per cent in 2017 (IPU 2015, 2017)—at this pace it will take 40 years to reach equal numbers of men and women in legislatures. Women's access to legislatures is highest in the Nordic countries, at around 40 per cent, but progress is particularly slow in Asia. Women from minority groups represent 11 per cent of the world's population, yet account for only 2 per cent of its legislators. Parties' persistent marginalization of women undermines their empowerment and weakens democracy's resilience (IPU 2015, 2017).

Younger generations are insufficiently represented in party membership, leadership and legislatures. Their marginalization from, and decreasing trust in, traditional party politics is of particular concern, as young people can make or break future models of representation. According to World Values Survey data from 2010–14, only 43.6 per cent of those aged 18–29 reported that they 'always' vote (versus 59.1 per cent of the total population), and only 4.1 per cent were active members of a political party (5 per cent total average) (UN 2016). The World Values Survey data also revealed that youth party membership was particularly low in Europe and South America (1.8 and 1.5 per cent were active members, respectively). In Europe, this seems consistent with 2015 Eurobarometer survey findings that the majority of young people held political parties in low regard, and did not want to join them or any other political, societal or professional organization (European Commission 2015).

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Marginalization of women and young people



The low voter turnout among young people during the European Parliamentary elections in 2014 serves as an illustrative example (see Box 4.2).

Estimates of youth voter turnout at more recent, highly contested, polls in Europe show a mixed picture. For example, turnout figures for voters aged 18–24 in the United Kingdom have increased from 43 per cent in 2015, to 60 per cent in 2016 and 67 per cent in 2017 (Burn-Murdoch 2017), while 66 per cent and 61 per cent of Spanish voters aged under 35 turned out in the polls in 2015 and 2016, respectively, up from 58 per cent in 2011 (Camas García 2017). The first round of the 2017 French presidential elections

saw 71 per cent turnout among first time voters (aged 18–24) (Ipsos 2017a), and 66 per cent in the second round (Ipsos 2017b). This represents a slight decline from the 73 per cent and 72 per cent in the two rounds of the 2012 French presidential elections, respectively (Roudet 2013: 2, 4). The 2017 general election in the Netherlands may have seen a further decline in the number of youth willing to turn out to vote (Ketelaar 2017).

A survey of 126 parliaments by the Inter-Parliamentary Union carried out in 2014 and 2015 shows unsurprising levels of youth representation in legislatures: 65 per cent of legislatures have eligibility ages higher than the minimum voting age (IPU 2016).

BOX 4.2

Participation of young people in European Parliament elections: addressing the challenge of trust and inclusion

Turning out to vote is the most emblematic means of participating in the democratic process. Low turnout rates are often interpreted as a signal of dissatisfaction with the political decision-making process. In Europe, electoral turnout has been declining in both national and European Parliament (EP) elections, although four EU member states have compulsory voting (Belgium, Luxembourg, Greece and Cyprus). In 2014, turnout for the EP elections reached its lowest point ever (43 per cent, down from 62 per cent in 1979) despite the fact that the number of EU member states has steadily increased over the years (European Commission 2014a). The participation of young people (aged 18–24, Austria 16–24) in EP elections follows this trend: only 28 per cent cast ballots in the 2014 poll (EP 2014: 9).

Young people who voted in the 2014 EP elections stated that they did so due to their ‘duty as a citizen’ (39 per cent), because ‘you always vote’ (26 per cent) and to ‘support the political party you feel close to’ (21 per cent) (EP 2014: 31). The young people who did not vote explained their decision as a ‘lack of trust or dissatisfaction with politics in general’ (15 per cent), ‘not interested in politics as such’ (21 per cent) or ‘their vote has no consequences or vote does not change anything’ (10 per cent) (EP 2014: 61). The fact that many young people feel their vote does not matter, or express a lack of interest in politics, shows that political parties must do more to reach out to youth and engage them in their programmes and policies.

There is a perception that the EP lacks democratic legitimacy, and that it does not reflect the will of European citizens, including young people. Many citizens perceive EP elections as secondary to, and

less important than, national elections. More often, the electorate sees EP elections as an extension of debates on national issues rather than a vote on European integration and decision-making. While successive treaty reforms since the mid-1980s have increased the EP’s power and status in the EU institutional architecture, they have not been accompanied by increased citizen participation, including that of young people. The relationship between abstract policies and their local impact is not always clear. Some efforts have been made to make the work of the EU and the European Commission more accessible to European citizens, yet political parties could do more to offer space for young people to engage in policy debates.

Given European demographics, political parties do not pay sufficient attention to youth issues, and when young people’s interests are included, political parties and institutions often view them as a homogenous group. Manifestos of European political parties do not sufficiently capture the concerns of young people (Bouza 2014: 17), who tend to be preoccupied by socio-economic matters, such as access to employment and education. However, it would be wrong to assess young people’s involvement in political life based only on their participation in traditional and institutional politics or on their turnout at elections. This is because there is a disconnect between their preferred forms of political activism, involvement in political life and means of communication on the one hand, and those employed by political parties on the other (Dezelan 2015: 3).

According to projected patterns, electoral turnout will decline in EP elections given demographic changes in the electorate. However, collective efforts—and the application of innovative measures by political actors and institutions at the national and pan-European levels—can increase young people’s participation in political life in Europe. At a minimum, this would delay the declining turnout trend and promote intergenerational equity, which will further strengthen democracy.

In Latin America and the Caribbean, a surge of new parties and leaders has emerged since the early 1990s in response to popular frustration with corruption and the mishandling of the economy and the subsequent economic crises that deepened poverty and inequality in their countries

Almost one in three unicameral or lower parliamentary chambers and 80 per cent of upper parliamentary chambers have no members under the age of 30. This age group comprises just 2.1 per cent of parliamentarians in lower or unicameral houses globally, and North America, Latin America and the Caribbean, and Europe are the only regions that exceed these figures, with 3.4 and 3.1 per cent, respectively. Increasing youth representation generally involves lowering the eligibility age, and adopting quotas and proportional representation systems (IPU 2016).

4.3. The challenge of new parties and populism

When parties are perceived to have lost their policy focus, as well as the trust of the electorate, and party systems fail to adequately represent different groups in society, electoral support will tilt towards new parties and leaderships. Electoral challengers to the party establishment have been ubiquitous across regions in third-wave and longer-established democracies alike. These challengers have often successfully given political expression to real or perceived economic, social or cultural grievances. Challengers have come from both the left and the right, but have generally exploited a common set of contexts and sentiments to gain influence and use different methods to come to power.

In Latin America and the Caribbean, a surge of new parties and leaders has emerged since the early 1990s in response to popular frustration with corruption and the mishandling of the economy and the subsequent economic crises that deepened poverty and inequality in their countries. In dealing with these crises, governments faced the challenge of acting with both responsibility and responsiveness, but too often delivered on just one at the expense of the other (either plain austerity or spending largesse), or none. Their failure paved the way for the rise of new parties and leaders that triggered the collapse of the party systems in Bolivia, Ecuador, Peru and Venezuela. Similar frustrations have prompted the renewal of the

political party landscape in more stable party systems such as in Colombia, Mexico and, most recently, Chile.

In Europe, political challengers grew stronger after the 2007–08 global financial crisis, as traditional parties failed to keep up with rapid economic and cultural changes in society. Over the last four decades, economies in Europe have shifted from industrialized to service based (with the sharing economy and digital mega-companies innovating lifestyles); occupational roles have transformed, and there are growing inequalities between the traditional working and professional classes. These developments have disrupted the social configurations that provided the traditional support bases for mainstream political parties (e.g. churches and unions) (Kalyvas 1996; Bartolini 2000; Arzheimer 2006). A recent opinion survey, conducted in ten EU member states, shows that few political parties in Europe enjoy widespread appeal, with the exception of some established parties in Western European countries that suffered less economically in the years since the euro crisis (Stokes, Wike, and Manevich 2017).

Cultural changes have transformed societal values. Some argue that ‘the unprecedented global economic growth of the 1960s, which raised living standards, increased education, and greatly expanded the urban middle class’ (Huntington 1991: 13). However, others argue that a ‘country’s experience with democracy enhances self-expression values’ rather than the other way around (Dahlum and Knutsen 2017). When basic human needs are largely met, support has increased for ‘left-libertarian parties such as the Greens and other progressive movements advocating environmental protection, human rights, and gender equality’ in Western societies (Inglehart and Norris 2016). Yet like any revolution, this progressive shift has prompted a backlash, ‘especially among the older generation, white men, and less educated people, who react against the erosion of familiar and reassuring traditional norms and

actively reject the rising tide of progressive values' (Inglehart and Norris 2016: 2).

Amid this complex breeding ground for the rising challengers, new parties and leaders espouse anti-establishment tactics to connect with voters. Some do so within the limits of democratic pluralism, often assailing the establishment for economic problems or corruption, while others choose the flip side of it—populism. Populism can be defined as a mix of a divisive rhetoric that pits 'the people' against 'the elite'. When in office, populist politicians seek to undermine democratic pluralism and the checks and balances on government, which they perceive as obstructing the realization of the 'will of the people' (Mudde 2016).

Populism is neither new nor exclusive to well-established democracies. It has appeared in several regions in the last 30 years. In South America, president Evo Morales, as well as former presidents Hugo Chávez, Alberto Fujimori, and the Kirchners, used populist tactics, while in South East Asia President Rodrigo Duterte gained support in the 2016 Philippines presidential election by blaming the country's condition on the leadership of the mainstream political parties. Elements of populism have also been integral to African politics, although their shape and form have been constantly shifting. Most countries on the continent adopted multiparty politics in the 1990s, which was marked by the emergence of populist mobilizations by political actors seeking to carve out a niche for themselves against better-established competitors. The mobilization of ethno-regional and religious identities accompanied the introduction of populist positions on issues such as redistribution, socio-economic rights and justice into politics. More recently, populist pressures have built up around land issues (e.g. the actions taken by the Zimbabwe African National Union–Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) in Zimbabwe), the pursuit of the 'will of the people' and the empowerment of the black majority (as exemplified by the Economic Freedom Fighters in South Africa), and the

fight against corruption and indiscipline (e.g. the unorthodox methods and actions of the leader of the Party of the Revolution Chama Cha Mapinduzi in Tanzania).

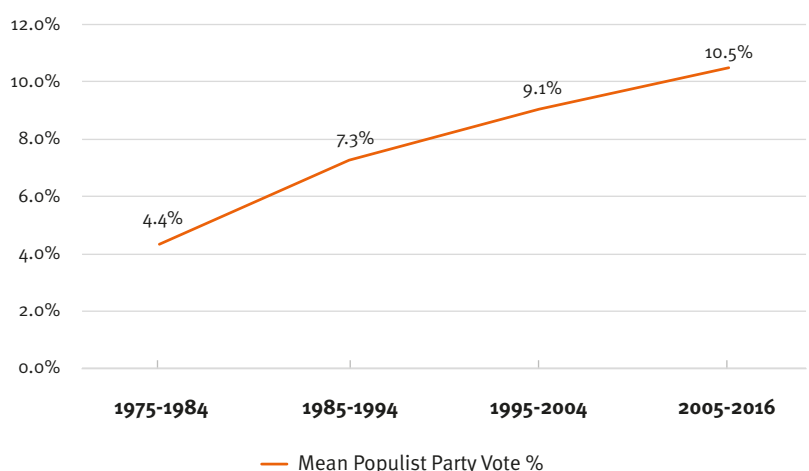
The Western European and US variants of populism are characterized by three features: 'anti-establishmentism', 'authoritarianism' and 'nativism' (Mudde 2007; Inglehart and Norris 2016: 5). Nativism in particular is difficult to place on the left–right ideological spectrum, which many argue no longer adequately describes the political spectrum. New political battle lines are drawn between 'open versus closed', 'globalist versus nationalist' or 'anywhere versus somewhere'; populist politicians most often advocate the latter (Edsall 2017; Goodhart 2017).

Populist parties and movements have been on the rise since the 1970s in Europe (see Figure 4.2). The National Front (Front National, FN) in France and the Coalition of the Radical Left (Synaspismós Rizospastikís Aristerás, Syriza) in

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FIGURE 4.2

Average vote share for populist parties in North and West Europe



Notes: This graph shows the average vote-share percentage of populist parties from 1975–2016 in North and West Europe (Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Sweden, Switzerland, UK). It illustrates that the average vote share for populist parties in these regions has more than doubled since 1975, and that from 2005 through 2016 the average populist vote reached over 10 per cent. Note that this represents average populist party support: it is not distributed evenly across countries or parties. This average includes populist parties such as the Swiss People's Party, which received 29.4 per cent of the vote in the 2015 Swiss federal election and the British National Party, which gathered only 1.1 per cent of the vote in the 2014 EP elections.

Sources: Parliaments and Governments (2016); Inglehart and Norris (2016).

Greece have both experienced rapid growth. The FN increased its vote share from 10.4 per cent in 2007 to 21.3 per cent in the first round of the 2017 French presidential elections (Ministère de l'Intérieur 2007; 2017). Similarly, Syriza's vote share grew from 4.6 per cent in the 2009 parliamentary elections to 16.8 per cent in 2012, and 35.6 per cent in 2015 (Ministry of Interior 2015). By 2016, populist parties had entered coalitions in 11 European countries (Inglehart and Norris 2016). Most importantly, they showed that reshaping politics did not require winning parliamentary seats (e.g. as shown by the Brexit referendum in the UK).

Political movements that grow out of citizen protest and stand out for their anti-establishment rhetoric are another rising phenomenon. Over the past ten years, these movements have most often transformed into political entities when their political goals required a hold on legislative power. From Italy to Spain, from the UK to the USA, and from Brazil to India, political outsiders have become involved in political establishments using new means to win elections and gain access to political party systems. Their campaigns use methods that may disturb the normal functioning of society in order to make a political point (see Tilly and Tarrow 2006).

Although some of these new formations largely operate in the same manner (and face the same

challenges) as traditional parties, they seem to be more innovative. For instance, they blur the distinction between members and non-members, and lower the (financial) bar to joining the movement. These new political 'movements' (many shun the term 'party') rely more on direct citizen engagement, for example through social media and other digital tools, than on traditional party gatherings. They are effective at mobilizing citizen participation and rewarding members with a strong sense of political representation (Stokes 2015). This new leadership tends to speak, dress and live differently from their competitors, which leads to a higher sense of public confidence than that bestowed on traditional politicians. Their direct engagement with citizens, as well as their unorthodox policies and calls for systemic change, mean that many of them are considered populists.

Political movements are located across the ideological spectrum. In Europe, while the left is occupied by Podemos in Spain or the Pirate Party (Píratar) in Iceland, the far right is represented by the AfD in Germany (see Box 4.3), the Golden Dawn (Laïkós Síndesmos—Chrysí Avgí) in Greece, and the Party for Freedom (Partij voor de Vrijheid, PVV) in the Netherlands. In the middle are political movements such as the Citizens party (Ciudadanos) in Spain, the 'Forward!' party (En Marche!) in France, and the Save Romania Union party (Uniunea Salva i România, USR) in Romania. Yet others, such as the Five Star Movement (Movimento 5 Stelle, M5S) in Italy, combine far-left social policies with anti-EU stances that are also popular among right-wing parties. Importantly, many have responded to the lack of policy alternatives that established parties offer and fulminate against the international institutions, globalized economy and international interdependence that curtail these policy alternatives, as described above. Interestingly, support for Eurosceptic parties does not automatically translate into support for leaving the EU. A 2017 public attitudes survey found that in France, 54 per cent of those expressing a favorable opinion about the

BOX 4.3

Alternative für Deutschland

The Alternative für Deutschland (Alternative for Germany, AfD) political party was created in 2013, and has taken reactive positions to the Eurocrisis and the refugee crisis. The party has also campaigned against what it calls the 'Islamification of Germany'. It has formed an alliance with the Freedom—Civil Rights Party for More Freedom and Democracy. The AfD party chairwoman, Frauke Petry (who has since quit the party), has likened the party to the Sweden Democrats and True Finns parties, as well as France's Front National, among others (Connolly 2016). As of spring 2017, few Germans saw the AfD in a positive light (Stokes, Wike, and Manevich 2017). However, exit polls following Germany's most recent federal elections, held on 24 September 2017, showed that the AfD was expected to enter parliament as the country's third-largest party, demonstrating the extent to which German voters stand behind the AfD's call for alternative policies.

National Front still prefer to stay in the EU. The same applies to Germany, where 69 per cent of those with a positive view of the AfD want Germany to remain in the EU (Stokes, Wike, and Manevich 2017).

4.4. The challenges of citizen engagement

Party membership numbers reflect how citizens relate to traditional party politics. Overall, party membership has declined since 1994 in Asia and the Pacific, Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, and North America, and in Africa since 2005. In contrast, in the Middle East and Iran, and North America, party membership appears to be on the rise (see Figure 4.3). In the period 2010–14, party membership was at around 14 per cent globally, only one-third of which was active (UN 2016). Political party membership in 27 countries of Europe, the birthplace of some of the oldest parties in the world, was 4.7 per cent on average by the end of the 2000s (van Biezen, Mair and Poguntke 2012), and fell to 2.4 per cent during 2010–14 (UN 2016: 70).

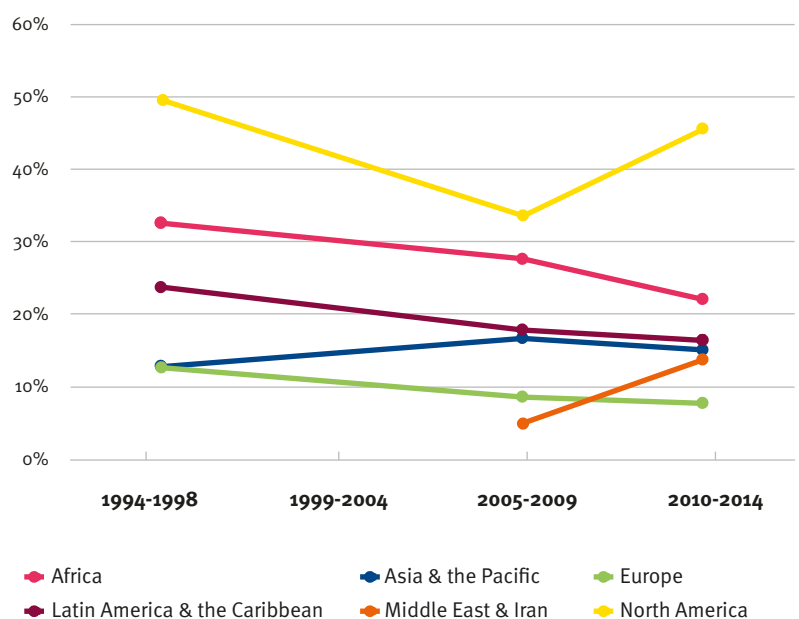
However, not all parties have lost members, and some efforts to attract new members have been successful. Membership of the Conservative Party, the Labour Party and the Liberal Democrats in the UK increased from 0.8 per cent of the electorate in 2013 to 1.6 per cent in 2016 (Keen and Apostolova 2017). The two traditional parties in France opened up their candidate nomination process to all supporters, rather than just members. The Socialist Party (Parti Socialiste, PS) first opened its party primaries to non-members in 2011; the French ‘Parti Républicains’ (Republican Party, PR) did so during the 2016 primaries. The French ‘En Marche!’ (today ‘La République En Marche!’ or LREM) has *adherents* rather than *members*.

Political parties are updating their internal cultures and operational structures to match the increase in online and street-based interactions and decision-making. Digital technologies enable citizens to voice their opinions much more directly than before,

which is creating horizontal rather than vertical spheres, with no hierarchies: everyone decides, and no one rules. Furthermore, politicians’ whereabouts, behaviour and decisions have become more quickly visible to the greater public—and can be influenced more directly. For instance, voter research shows that 46 per cent of youth in Europe regard social networks as progress for democracy, because they allow everyone to take part in public debates (EP 2016: 4). Digitalization, however, poses both opportunities and threats to citizen participation and representation. Those left outside of traditional representation because of their youth, disability, sex or minority status can benefit from these new avenues of meaningful engagement and exert influence from outside parties. Citizens who are less connected to the digital age—including older, poorer or less-educated individuals—may feel excluded from (and less represented by) parties

FIGURE 4.3

Membership in political parties as a percentage of the population, 1994–2014



Notes: This graph shows the percentage of the population that belongs to a political party. It illustrates that party membership declined or stagnated in all regions except the Middle East and Iran during this period. Party membership in North America declined from 50 per cent in 1994 to 34 per cent in 2005, after which it bounced back to 46 per cent.

Source: World Values Survey, Waves 1–6, 1994–2014.

Political parties are updating their internal cultures and operational structures to match the increase in online and street-based interactions and decision-making. Digital technologies enable citizens to voice their opinions much more directly than before

that increasingly engage in online decision-making. Since online participation can be easily manipulated, political parties must embrace ethical forms of online engagement while maintaining offline contact.

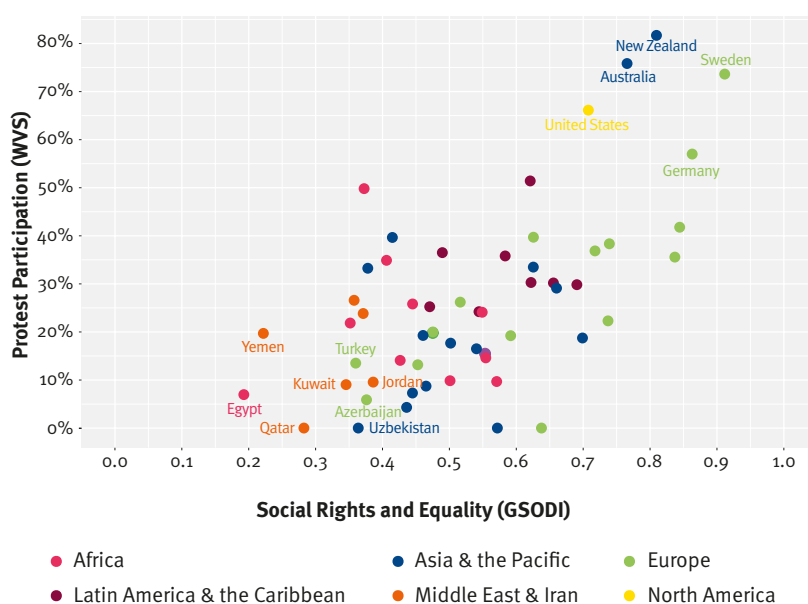
Leaders have recently deferred some decisions to the citizens themselves. There has been a slight increase in the global use of direct democracy instruments since 1975 (GSoD indices 2017: 5.3). The worldwide use of referendums, one of the best-known direct democracy instruments, has increased significantly over time: from up to 410 referendums in the period between 1945 and 1972, to as many as 1,846 national referendums between 1972 and 2015 (Topaloff 2017). Between 2015 and 2017 countries as diverse as Colombia, Côte d'Ivoire, Greece, Hungary, Italy, the Netherlands, Sudan, Switzerland, the UK, Tajikistan, Thailand, Turkey, Venezuela and Zambia used referendums to make decisions or influence decision-making. Referendum

questions were on issues including financial reform, independence, EU membership or an aspect of integration, international trade, immigration, taxation, civil and political rights enshrined in constitutions, peace treaties, and political and electoral reform. However, as Box 4.4 describes, political elites who use referendum outcomes to further their political agendas can also use direct democracy strategically.

An increase in protests challenges the accountability of representative institutions, some of which have grabbed global headlines in recent years. Their names refer to the squares they occupy (Tahrir in Cairo, Taksim in Istanbul, Euromaidan in Ukraine) or the colours and symbols that unite them (yellow umbrellas in the 2014 Hong Kong protests, pink hats in the 2017 Women's March). This 'march of protest', as *The Economist* introduced it in 2013, has moved the realm of politics increasingly to the streets (Cordenillo and van der Staak 2014).

FIGURE 4.4

Social Rights and Equality by Protest Participation, 2010–14



Notes: This graph shows the relationship between social rights and equality and protest participation. It illustrates that there is a slight positive correlation, which means that in countries with a higher level of social rights and equality, there tends to be a higher percentage of the population that have engaged in some type of protest activity. Pearson's correlation coefficient results: $n = 57$, $r = .612$, $p\text{-value} < .005$.

Sources: GSoD indices 2017 (Social Rights and Equality Index); World Values Survey (Wave 6) questions V85–V89.

While 59 large protests took place globally in 2006, 112 occurred in the first half of 2013 alone (Ortiz et al. 2013). Significant protest movements took place in an estimated 56.4 per cent of countries from 2009 to 2014 (EIU 2015). The Global Database of Events, Language, and Tone Project registered an increase in the intensity of protest between 2012 and 2015 to levels similar to those of the late 1980s (World Economic Forum 2016). Protests do not only help resist authoritarian governments; they are an increasingly popular and legitimate form of expressing political opinions in evolving democracies. Comparing data from the GSoD indices with data on citizen participation through petitions, boycotts, demonstrations, strikes and other forms of protest from the 2010–14 wave of the World Values Survey shows that countries with higher levels of social rights and equality also have a citizenry that more actively protests (see Figure 4.4). This suggests that countries with stronger and healthier democracies also have higher levels of protest participation.

BOX 4.4

Referendums: keeping politics out of direct democracy—addressing the challenges of citizen engagement and populism

Few recent democratic developments have better reflected the tension between citizen participation and citizen representation than the rise in popular referendums. In 2016 alone, referendums brought about political shock waves from Italy to the UK and from Hungary to the Netherlands. Each has sparked discussion about whether referendums give citizens more voice, or provide politicians a tactical instrument for political manipulation. How politicians formulate (and subsequently implement) direct democracy legislation will increasingly determine the relationship between citizens and their elected leaders.

Many prominent referendums have taken place recently. In 2016 and 2017, Colombia, Côte d'Ivoire, Hungary, Sudan, Tajikistan, Thailand, Turkey, Venezuela and Zambia all held referendums with significant political impact. However, the referendums that may have affected the global debate over citizen participation and representation the most were those held in established democracies with long-standing party systems. For instance, referendums struck down government-backed positions in the UK over EU membership, in Denmark over opt-ins to EU legislation, in the Netherlands on the approval of the Association Agreement between the EU and Ukraine, and in Italy over reform of the Senate. Many people have therefore come to see referendums as the best tool for angry citizens to whip their politicians back into line.

However, when looking more closely, many referendums have worked ambiguously to return power to the citizen. Instead of being a corrective force of representative politics, referendum outcomes have often created confusion over what citizens are asking for, and have led to further disillusionment among citizens for three reasons.

First, a wide variety of direct democracy instruments is too often lumped together under the catch-all term 'referendum'. In practice, some are citizen initiatives, while others are government-initiated referendums. Some are optional, and others are mandatory. Some are advisory, while others are binding; some have high and others low thresholds. All of these design factors affect how politicians interpreted and adhered to a referendum outcome. There is a general need to strengthen public understanding of the exact mandate of the referendum used in order to avoid disillusionment with its outcomes.

Thresholds in particular can blur the discussion. In the Netherlands in 2016, a citizens' initiative that just cleared the low 30 per cent turnout threshold forced the government to reluctantly reverse its position on an EU trade deal with the Ukraine. In Hungary soon afterwards, a referendum condemning the EU asylum quota was

rejected with a 44 per cent turnout rate. The government interpreted it as a victory nonetheless, as 98 per cent of those who had voted supported its stance. For these reasons, the Venice Commission (2007) has advised against using any form of thresholds.

The second reason for controversy and disillusionment are the many unintended outcomes that referendums tend to bring about. In 2016, prime ministers in the UK and Italy tied their political futures directly to referendums on other matters. Conversely, in the Dutch and Irish EU constitution referendums of 2005, elected leaders largely ignored the outcomes when they found that citizens had voted against an international treaty mainly to voice dissatisfaction with domestic government policy. Therefore, it seems that referendums tend to provide the right answer to the wrong question. Likewise, the 2016 referendum on the peace agreement in Colombia was very narrowly defeated amid a low turnout of 37 per cent. Some modifications were made to the peace agreement, after which the government signed the new deal without another referendum.

The third reason for citizen disillusionment with referendums is that elected politicians can use them strategically to further their political agendas. For instance, political parties can initiate optional referendums to take contentious issues out of an election campaign, or to demonstrate popular support for a government position. British Prime Minister David Cameron tried to do the latter when he conditioned a Brexit referendum on a general election victory for his party. The 2017 Turkish constitutional referendum was a successful attempt by the ruling party to strengthen the position of the ruling president and to extend his term. Such a tactical use of referendums by political parties to cement their power runs contrary to the purposes of direct democracy. In practice, mandatory referendums, invoked automatically when very important political issues are debated, may avoid political manipulation more effectively than optional referendums, which are held according to the whim of politicians.

What future do referendums have in established democracies? Many new political movements, and even some established parties, are now openly campaigning for the introduction of mandatory referendums in an attempt to regain citizens' trust. Switzerland offers a good example of how representative and direct democracy support each other.

In addition, to avoid citizen disillusionment with referendum outcomes, politicians should be clearer about the decision-making authority that is devolved to citizens directly, and the authority that remains with elected politicians. In practice, they should avoid treating advisory referendums as de facto binding, or adopting a policy based on a referendum with a turnout below the threshold. Finally, politicians should realize that the tactical use of referendums can delegitimize representative democracy and be politically risky.

4.5. Resilient responses to the challenges of representation

For centuries, the delegation of power from citizens to elected representatives has been one of the most powerful principles of organizing democratic societies. Political parties emerged to facilitate this delegation. Today, both established and third-wave democracies face pressure to tilt power back to the citizen.

This pressure is driven by the citizens themselves, and targets the traditional form of political organization—the party. Restoring parties' ability to represent citizens requires reclaiming the initiative to provide citizens with choice and influence, and successfully delivering positive policy outcomes. It also demands committing to (and practicing) higher standards of integrity and more effectively engaging with members and citizens, including through online technologies and other methods used by new political movements.

Political parties should adjust to the changing nature of representation: today's active citizens are less interested in the one-way participation of conventional political activity (party membership, rallies and voting). Many want to directly shape decisions by establishing horizontal relationships with leaders and representatives. Emerging political movements that use anti-establishment rhetoric that appeals directly to the people, and that have more flexible organizations, embody these new ideals better than traditional parties.

In order to stay relevant, political parties must demonstrate a renewed emphasis on citizen engagement. Citizens are not only the object of political persuasion (i.e. to get the necessary votes to win political office) but the ultimate target and the political parties' reason for existence as well. Resilient parties strike a careful balance between giving the citizen a central role in internal party activities and decisions, and making the citizen the goal of their policy actions.

Resilient party responses

Parties are considered an appropriate conduit to fulfil four main functions of representation: aggregating societal interests into policy agendas, mobilizing citizens around those platforms, recruiting leaders to advance the party's agenda and forming governments to implement them. While these functions remain essential, both established and third-wave democracies strive to overcome the challenges of representation by upgrading the infrastructures that parties offer to citizens. This section explores party responses that help democracy become more resilient and able to adapt to new challenges of representation.

Credible political actions: addressing the real issues

Political parties play an important role in a democratic system. It is important to distinguish between the parties themselves and the party system: parties sometimes disappear as a natural part of democratic evolution, generally because they have become ideologically irrelevant or are unable to respond to a significant challenge. New parties usually step in to take their place, which keeps the overall system of political parties resilient.

Delivering results requires more than technocratic decisions. Parties that pursue coherent political visions have been shown to be more likely to deal with complex government crises. Equally important, parties with successful programmatic platforms have been able to credibly communicate their political vision and message to the electorate through decisive, savvy and electable leaders. Successful leaders are able to explain complex issues and policies to voters and take responsibility for their implementation. They can also build broad coalitions of support with groups in society, tapping into their constituencies and agendas, and attract like-minded members through democratizing the party's internal decision-making process (Valladares, Sample and van der Staak 2014).

Parties need to be able to make decisions and implement them. However, this is becoming increasingly difficult, as key areas of decision-making such as public finances and immigration are transferred away from their sphere of influence to decision-making bodies dominated by non-elected technocrats inside and outside the country. Recent referendums in Greece, Hungary and the UK addressed citizens' perceptions that unaccountable and unelected civil servants in Brussels were deciding on their behalf. This trend is illustrated by the likely setbacks in negotiations for free trade agreements, such as the ongoing negotiations on the TTIP between the EU and the USA. Furthermore, the increased control along Europe's borders due to the Syrian refugee crisis has prompted some to call for the dismantlement of free movement within the Schengen Area. Yet, as discussed previously, while unilateralist approaches to such issues may seem appealing, in the long run closing countries off from the world makes it harder to address transnational problems. Skilled leaders must communicate these complex messages to the electorate in an engaging and understandable way.

Addressing policy challenges without compromising ideology

Populist parties thrive in policy vacuums, when traditional parties allow them to offer one-sided (populist) narratives. By engaging with citizens, traditional parties can disrupt the vacuum and offer compelling policy alternatives. As an example of a policy vacuum, Syrian refugees featured prominently in Slovakia's 2016 elections, even though the country only had 330 asylum applicants in 2015 (Eurostat)—considerably fewer than other EU countries.

Some established political parties are adopting the traits and practices of their successful populist rivals. Traditional parties are most effective when they can combine their strengths to formulate public policies and recruit new political leaders with the capacity to mobilize citizens and articulate their interests in clear-cut and bold terms. In Spain, modern

technologies are being introduced to keep up with the country's political newcomers (see Box 4.5). Traditional parties often argue that the only guarantee of realistic and consistent policies and political professionalism (in both parliament and government) are broad-based membership parties, supported by fee-paying

BOX 4.5

Spain: crisis, protest and technology renewing the party system—addressing the challenge of citizen engagement

An important element of resilience in representative democracy is finding new ways for citizens and political parties to interact. Spain provides an example of extreme pressure on a party system that managed to transform itself. The recession triggered by the financial crisis in 2007–08 nearly caused the collapse of the Spanish economy, and created a seismic shift in the party system. From the end of authoritarian rule in 1977 until the crisis, Spain had operated as a bipartisan system. In nearly half of the elections since then, one of these two parties won an absolute majority and could rule on its own. When they did not, a few key regional parties could break any deadlock in Parliament by siding with the party in government. During the recession citizens took to the streets to demand a response to the crisis. The social unrest was based on a perception that politics—and political parties in particular—were not doing enough to protect the population from the worst effects of the crisis. Corruption scandals started to emerge almost weekly, and involved mostly the two main parties, some of their former high officials and their internal party finances. A significant portion of the population started to identify the political class as one of the three main problems affecting the country (CIS n.d.). In response to these sentiments, new political movements emerged.

In 2011, a diverse group of (mostly young) people known as *Indignados* (the 'indignant') camped out in central Madrid to protest the economic situation, political elites and austerity measures, as well as to criticize young people's lack of access to education, employment or training. The movement defined the most important political cleavage as elites versus the people, rather than left versus right. It used technology to extend the debate and discussion online, which served as the basis for political change. The movement sparked an increase in political engagement and debate, and the formation of two new parties. A group of university professors launched Podemos ('We can') in January 2014, which captured the *Indignados* spirit. Less than five months later, the party won 1.2 million votes in the European elections using technology to consult widely with the population. A Catalonia-based party also came onto the national stage during this time on an anti-corruption and regeneration platform. The 'Citizens' (*Ciudadanos*) party innovatively used social and traditional media to quickly reach the whole country. New technologies helped the new parties carve out their own space in the political arena, and the old parties followed.

After the two new parties obtained substantial shares of the vote in the 2016 general election alongside the two main traditional parties, a coalition government was formed. As Spain continues to struggle with the consequences of the economic crisis, its party system has renewed. It now includes more actors, which has enhanced its ability to more accurately represent society and become more oriented towards dialogue. The country is also now at the forefront of using technology to engage citizens and to increase feedback and accountability.

members, which invest in the long-term development of ideologies, policies and leaders. While this may be true, in order to maintain citizens' support in the long run, parties will have to balance their traditional ways with innovative approaches to interacting with (and representing) a new breed of active citizens.

BOX 4.6

The AAP in India: from movement to party through integrity-based campaign strategies—addressing the challenges of trust and new parties

The Aam Aadmi Party (Common Man's Party, AAP) in India grew out of a protest movement against pervasive corruption in politics, and went on to win almost all the seats in the Delhi Legislative Assembly in 2015. Its experience illustrates the appeal of parties that pledge to restore integrity to politics.

Some Indian political parties have a history of engaging in clientelistic exchanges (Kitchelt 2012), trading the voters' political support for favours. This has contributed to the increased perception of corruption in politics. Suri (2007) discusses the challenge of maintaining high levels of support for democracy when citizens have low levels of trust in parties. The exposure of several prominent corruption scandals at the end of the 2000s increased public outrage over politicians' conduct. In this context, Anna Hazare, a citizen activist, started a hunger strike in 2011 calling for the creation of a wide-ranging anti-corruption agency in India (Sharma 2014: 39). The bill to create such an agency had been on the table since 1968 but had never become law. Hazare's movement advocated a Citizens' Ombudsman Bill with a wide remit to investigate corruption at the highest levels (Sharma 2014: 40–41).

India's lower house of Parliament passed a version of the bill, but it never passed the upper house. Hazare's movement faced a dilemma—whether to continue acting outside the traditional political sphere to pressure the government, or to engage directly in electoral politics (Sharma 2014: 43). The AAP was formally launched on 26 November 2012. The party's rules prohibited nepotism, promoted financial transparency and gathered plenty of grassroots support (Sharma 2014: 50–51). It contested the 2013 state elections in Delhi and won 28 out of 70 seats. It formed a coalition with the Indian National Congress, and Hazare's senior advisor, Arvind Kejriwal, became chief minister of Delhi. When the AAP was unable to secure the passage of an anti-corruption bill, Kejriwal resigned. In the 2015 Delhi state elections the AAP won 67 out of 70 seats, and Kejriwal became chief minister again (Singh 2015).

For the first year after the 2015 elections, the AAP had either fulfilled or was working to fulfil over half of its election promises and was yet to start on about one-third; it broke only two election promises (The Hindu 2016).

The AAP's transition from a protest movement to governing Delhi on an integrity platform is a good example of democratic resilience. The movement chose to redefine itself as a political party, and thus successfully continued its agenda from within the democratic system to advance a comprehensive approach to integrity. India has a long history of successful citizen protest, starting with Gandhi's call for self-rule from Britain. The AAP harnessed a strong anti-corruption sentiment across all socio-economic groups and turned it into a political victory at the state level; it has not yet had success in federal elections.

Restoring trust

Political parties are better able to retain citizen trust by presenting citizens with a comprehensive integrity agenda. Focusing only on the funding of political parties and campaign finance has failed to protect politics from corruption due to the complex networks and roles of money in politics (OECD 2016). Holistic, integrity-enhanced systems—that coordinate frameworks across different policy areas such as procurement, conflict of interest and party finance—increase resilience, which protects public policies and the state from narrow economic interests.

Trustworthy leaders can demonstrate a clean track record and credibly commit to implementing integrity-oriented rules and practices that apply within their parties and in government. By doing so, they deter misconduct in public office and the influence of narrow economic interests over policy. When high-profile scandals emerge, political parties face pressure to tackle corruption. Other groups have promoted their integrity in order to establish a presence in the political arena. India's AAP, for example, a protest movement that successfully transformed into a governing political party, won on a ticket promoting integrity-oriented policies (see Box 4.6).

Increasing a party's inclusiveness—particularly of women and young people, as discussed above—can also restore trust. To remain competitive, party leaders should reach out to both groups and ensure they are equally included in the party's internal democracy and decision-making. Parties should also have women's and young people's chapters and caucuses, promote the use of digital engagement tools, improve the gender balance in the leadership and use all-women shortlists.

Understanding the ways in which electoral systems and political party dynamics influence democratic representation is important in addressing the challenges of apathy, distrust, and scepticism that voters can feel when democracy does not appear adequately representative of them or their interests (see Box 4.7).

Democratizing decision-making

Political parties in both established and emerging democracies are adopting new technologies to reach out to members and non-members for help in undertaking traditional party tasks such as online policy formulation, voting and fundraising (see International IDEA's Digital Parties Portal). Democracy software such as Agora Voting or DemocracyOS (see Box 4.8) allows large groups of citizens to table proposals, and discuss and vote on them online. The 2008 and 2012 Obama presidential campaigns (as well as the 2016 US presidential campaigns) successfully used big data campaigning, which allowed them to better target potential voters and win swing states.

Political parties in India and Spain have introduced software to make their donations visible online in real time and thus win voters' trust. Meetup has become a common (and free-of-charge) instrument for parties in Italy and the Netherlands to bring citizens together for small, and sometimes larger, informal gatherings and debates. Social media such as Twitter, Facebook, YouTube and personal blogs have become a mainstay of any politician seeking interaction with constituents. Politicians are increasingly realizing that technology is a two-way street: it should not only 'mobilize the masses' but also allow the masses to 'mobilize politics'.

There are, however, also serious risks involved in the use of ICT by political parties. In the 2016 US and 2017 French presidential elections, senior politicians' email accounts were hacked and leaked to the media. Since the cybersecurity of political parties and candidates often falls outside the mandate of electoral authorities, these actors are often seen as the weakest link in safeguarding elections against hacking. Second, social and other digital media are used increasingly to spread misinformation. In 2016, the US presidential elections and the Brexit referendum were influenced by misinformation that originated from (or was endorsed by) political parties and candidates.

BOX 4.7

The effect of electoral systems: the Canadian majoritarian system

Some electoral systems may also cause a proportion of the electorate to feel disenfranchised or inadequately represented. Majoritarian systems—particularly first-past-the-post systems, in which the candidate with the most votes is elected—have tended to produce strong governments and more political stability since they give the winning parties a higher proportion of seats than their vote share. Those voting for smaller parties, or who live in a constituency consistently represented by another party, may feel disenfranchised.

The Canadian federal election of 2015 provides a good illustration of this. The two biggest parties, the Liberal Party and the Conservative Party, received 39.5 per cent and 31.9 per cent of the total vote, respectively, which together gave them 83 per cent of the seats (compared to their combined vote share of 71.4 per cent). In contrast, the Green Party received 3.4 per cent of the total vote and received one seat in the House of Commons (which represented 0.3 per cent of the total number of seats).

For a more in-depth analysis of different electoral systems see the Resource Guide accompanying this chapter, *Elections, Electoral Systems and Party Systems: A Resource Guide* (Sisk 2017).

BOX 4.8

DemocracyOS: redesigning democracy's operating system

Frustrated by the high entry costs and obstacles to influencing decision-making, in 2012 a small Argentinian start-up designed a new operating system to facilitate more open and participatory democracy. DemocracyOS is an open-source platform that users can access on their personal devices, including smartphones, tablets and computers (Finley 2014).

The software has three functions. First, it informs users of every bill presented in their Congress or Parliament in almost real time, and in their own language. It is available in 15 languages, and presents information using everyday terms that all citizens can understand. Second, the platform facilitates debate among citizens, using verified user accounts to ensure the quality of debate. Third, it allows users to vote—signalling to their (local or national) representative how they want them to vote on or handle particular bills (Scaturro 2014).

DemocracyOS has been used worldwide. In 2012 the Argentinean start-up morphed into the Net Party (Partido de la Red), on the platform that their representative would only make decisions informed by the DemocracyOS software; it fell short of winning a seat in the national Congress. In 2013 Tunisian civil society used the tool to debate the national constitution (Chao 2014), and federal and municipal governments in Mexico, Spain and three US states have adapted the tool for their own use. It also continues to facilitate direct engagement with voters in Argentina: in 2014, 'all 350 bills introduced in the Buenos Aires city legislature were debated on the platform' (Serna 2015), bringing local citizens closer to their representatives.

Political parties should use technology to facilitate their existing functioning, not to replace substantive debate and face-to-face interactions. In order to avoid a growing digital divide they should pay equal attention to offline innovations that stimulate citizen engagement, such as the broad citizen forums in Belgium and the Netherlands known as the G1000 and G500, respectively. The G1000, which first met in Brussels in 2011, gathered one-thousand randomly selected citizens to discuss the major challenges of democracy in Belgium, while the G500, a political youth organization founded in 2012, seeks to advance their youth agenda through established political parties

in the Netherlands (Van Reybrouck 2013; ColaM 2016; G1000 n.d.).

As mentioned in Box 4.8, parties such as the Net Party in Argentina base their mobilization strategy exclusively on open-source software. The open primaries that many of France's traditional parties have introduced, as well as the latest leadership election for the British Labour Party, are examples of efforts to attract like-minded individuals by increasing the incentives to join parties through decentralizing the power to elect leaders and candidates. However, such attempts to broaden citizen engagement in internal

BOX 4.9

The British Labour Party: a mainstream party reinventing itself—addressing the challenge of new parties and results

As an old mainstream party, the British Labour Party has reinvented itself in the past and is now in the process of doing so again (O'Hara 2016). Between 1979 and 1997, the party went from losing power (after being in government since 1974) and then losing subsequent elections in 1983, 1987 and 1992 to eventually rebuilding and reinventing itself, and returning to government in 1997. Similarly, after losing seats in every election since 2001, it bounced back in the 2017 elections with an increased number of seats.

In 1979, the UK was facing difficult economic circumstances. The 1973 oil crisis had forced it to temporarily adopt a three-day working week to conserve energy (Worthington 2014), and in 1976 it was forced to ask the International Monetary Fund for a bailout loan. Strikes by multiple trade unions during the winter of 1978–79 had further effects on the economy. The electorate, tired of almost a decade of turbulent economic times, expressed a desire for change in the May 1979 general elections by voting the Conservative Party, led by Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, into power. The election result plunged the Labour Party into disarray and triggered bitter arguments over its purpose and future course. The party split in 1981 when a group of MPs left to form the Social Democratic Party. The following general election, in 1983, saw Labour's worst result since 1918: it received a mere 27.6 per cent of the vote and the Conservative Party increased its majority to 144 MPs.

Following the 1983 election, Michael Foot resigned as leader of the Labour Party and was succeeded by Neil Kinnock, who sought to make the party electable again by appealing to a broader electorate. The party reformed its internal rules, which gave the leadership more latitude to pursue centrist policies. Within the party, Kinnock pushed for less reliance on trade unions, acknowledging that the party had been electorally damaged in the past by being perceived as too close to the unions (Matthijs 2011: 143).

While Kinnock did not personally succeed in bringing Labour into government, the party improved its standing in subsequent elections. In 1987, Labour's share of the vote increased to 30.8 per cent, and in 1992 to 34.4 per cent. Kinnock resigned after Labour lost the 1992 elections, and was replaced by John Smith. After Smith's death in 1994, Tony Blair became leader. The defeat in 1992 was interpreted as a signal that the electorate had broadly accepted many of Thatcher's policies. The implication was that in order to win, Labour would have to move closer to the centre and court 'Middle England' voters (Matthijs 2011: 153). This approach involved developing a 'third way' between socialism and neoliberalism—a reformed welfare state (Matthijs 2011: 157). Many see Blair's success in removing 'Clause 4' of the Labour Party Constitution—which committed it to national ownership of industries—as one of the biggest symbolic steps of reform (Radice 2010: 84). Labour's 1993 party conference adopted a policy to increase the number of female MPs. The policy was a success: the number of female MPs increased from 60 in 1992 to 120 in 1997 (Keen and Apolostova 2017). Labour won the 1997 general election by a landslide, gaining 43.2 per cent of the votes and a majority of 179 MPs.

Through a concerted effort to reinvent itself and relate to the everyday lives and concerns of the British people, Labour came back from the brink of irrelevance to rebuild itself and regain power in 1997. Its experience shows that the democratic system was resilient enough to enable the party to reshape itself and become relatable to the broader electorate. In 2017, the party faced a similar challenge. In the past, it had always chosen to engage with the parliamentary system and seek power through representation in the House of Commons. Yet in 2017 some supporters of Jeremy Corbyn, the party leader, argued that extra-parliamentary activities were perhaps more important (Williams 2016). Contrary to all initial polling figures, Labour galvanized its support in the 2017 general elections, with a 9.6 per cent increase in the vote share. Age played a critical role in this election result: the swing to Labour was mainly among people under the age of 44 and highest of all among 25–34 year olds, which is the biggest age gap seen in UK elections since the 1970s (Ipsos Mori 2017).

party affairs blur the difference between members and non-members, which could fundamentally change the way parties are funded, as well as how they behave and make decisions. One caveat is that in some primary systems, small but forceful minorities may be able to exercise disproportionate influence in selecting candidates or leaders. Nevertheless, many parties have few alternatives: they face serious pressure to adopt these innovations if they want to keep up with a new type of competitor—political movements.

Democratizing decision-making does not guarantee that political parties become more supportive of democracy and have better chances of getting elected. The reforms in the British Labour Party in the 1990s were successful to the extent that they struck a balance between giving members a greater say in party deliberations and leaving room for leaders to compromise and reach out to non-members (see Box 4.9). The primaries ahead of the 2017 French presidential election did not improve the party candidates' chances of winning the presidency.

4.6. Conclusions and recommendations: overcoming challenges to parties

This chapter highlighted four key challenges that both old and new political parties face in the changing political landscape, which includes handling multifaceted crises such as global economic crises, international terrorism and refugee flows. Parties must also restore citizens' sense of inclusion, particularly those from marginalized groups, in decision-making processes. Most importantly, as anti-establishment challengers pursue alternative avenues of political action, traditional parties are forced to adapt their methods and policies without alienating their supporters. Above all, populist politicians threaten the democratic values that enable political pluralism. The chapter finally addressed new ways of interaction between parties, their members and the electorate.

In spite of these challenges, parties remain the key conduit to deliver policies that benefit the population. Parties with a coherent political vision are better equipped to deal with complex crises, and can better transmit these ideas to the electorate. This requires parties that do not shy away from discussing sensitive topics: otherwise, these can be captured by populist voices. In addition, parties need to restore the electorate's trust: focusing on addressing corruption from within, increasing their inclusiveness and democratizing their decision-making processes are low-hanging fruits for parties to re-engage with their citizens and reinvigorate their bases.

To address the challenges posed by the changing nature of political representation, political parties, democratic institutions and civil society should consider the following recommendations.

Political parties

- *Communicate a strong political vision* and offer fresh and innovative programmes to address current issues.
- *Create alternative forms of citizen engagement* through alternative forms of membership, such as associate members or supporters.
- *Carefully consider the use of direct democracy instruments such as referendums.* Strengthen public understanding of the exact mandate of the referendum and be clearer about the decision-making authority devolved to citizens, and the authority that remains with elected politicians.
- *Remain responsive to the electorate between elections* by rethinking parties' communication strategies, and updating parties' internal cultures and operational structures to match the increase in online and street-based interactions and decision-making.
- *Encourage an atmosphere of pluralism and inclusiveness* by engaging and establishing links with a wide range of ideologically compatible social organizations, social

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movements and interest groups. Focus on engaging with women and young people.

- *Address the root causes of distrust by pledging full transparency of party finances, strictly regulating conflicts of interest, and implementing sound anti-corruption policies and internal party democracy mechanisms*
- *Ensure that leaders and democratically elected representatives reflect the demographics of the society by mentoring and recruiting more women and young people into key roles that lead to leadership positions.* Parties should also have women's and young people's chapters and caucuses, promote the use of digital engagement tools, improve the gender balance in the leadership and use all-women's shortlists.
- *Expand citizen engagement at all levels by using digital tools such as interactive websites and apps. This includes reaching out to members and non-members for help in undertaking traditional party tasks such*

as online policy formulation, voting and fundraising.

- *Increase the transparency of information about elected representatives* including providing access to transparent financial data about political campaigns and parties as well as the financial interests of representatives.
- *Ensure that broader parts of society are franchised* by introducing measures to ensure that women and young people can engage politically. Consider strengthening civic education and lowering the voting age.

Civil society

- *Engage with political parties* to translate public pressure into policies and engage with the legislative and executive branches of government through political parties.
- *Call for more transparency and constructive democratic debate.*

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