

NCCR Democracy (editor)

Yvonne Rosteck

# How Globalisation and Mediatisation Challenge Democracy



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# How Globalisation and Mediatisation Challenge Democracy

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# Foreword

Written with a broad readership in mind, this publication summarises the key findings of the National Centre of Competence in Research on Democracy (NCCR Democracy) project. In the course of the 12 years this project lasted, we studied the functioning, evolution, and quality of modern democracies and the challenges they face. What particularly characterises NCCR Democracy is the productive collaboration between the participating disciplines. It helped shed light, in an interdisciplinary manner, on democracy's multilayered structures and processes, and provided a conducive environment for developing innovative research paradigms. Moreover, the 12-year duration gave us the opportunity to devise a long-term research programme and study democracy in greater detail. The NCCR Democracy project also played a significant role in producing the next generation of researchers. Our doctoral programme and research projects have provided young researchers with advanced training and encouraged them to embark on an academic career. Today, these junior researchers work in Switzerland and abroad, forging successful careers in academia, the private sector, in public administration positions, and in international organisations. We would first like to thank the Swiss National Science Foundation and the University of Zurich, our two major donors, for making our work, and the support of these careers, possible. Our thanks also go to Yvonne Rosteck, our managing director, who compiled the source material and authored this book. We are very grateful to Laurent Bernhard, Frank Esser, Tina Freyburg, Gesine Fuchs,

Sandra Lavenex, Martin Wettstein, Werner Wirth and Dominique Wirz for their valuable comments and critical review of the manuscript, as well as to John Bendix for his help with the English version of the book.

Zurich and Florence, July 2018

Daniel Kübler, University of Zurich,

Director of NCCR Democracy, 2012–2018

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Director of the NCCR Democracy, 2005–2012

CHAPTER 1

# Introduction

Democracy is not a perfect form of governance. To date, however, and despite all its shortcomings, there exists no alternative form of government that is better suited to managing the way in which we live together. Democracy makes it possible to reach decisions in a collective and peaceful manner. It guarantees individual freedoms, self-determination, and the right to participate in political decision-making. Democracies experience longer periods of peace and are generally more affluent than non-democratic systems. The fact that many are still prepared to put up with large risks to fight for this political idea is evidence of its enduring appeal around the world. However, we must not take our democracies for granted. Democracy demands steadfast commitment on the part of the people and their elected representatives, and requires us to reflect upon and re-negotiate its rules repeatedly.

Democracy has been the most successful political idea of the 20th century, during which time it became a universal value. Yet both established and new democracies now find themselves under increasing pressure. Developments like globalisation, the transformation of the media system, and the recent upsurge in populism are testing its limits. Between 2005 and 2017 the National Centre of Competence in Research on Democracy ('NCCR Democracy') of the Swiss National Science Foundation and the University of Zurich examined how and why this is happening and what consequences it has for democracy.

When the NCCR Democracy project was launched in October 2005, our research focused on advanced western democracies. The starting point for this work was

the observed political malaise in these bastions of democracy and the hypothesis that the source of this disquiet was citizens' growing disillusionment with their political leaders and institutions. There is no doubt that since the 1990s, democracy has had to contend with a great many challenges, including demographic changes, increasing socioeconomic inequality, the consequences of ethnic diversity, and technological advances.

We further assumed that two phenomena in particular posed a challenge to democracy: globalisation and 'mediatisation'. Globalisation has weakened the importance of the nation-state, which is traditionally associated with democracy, because it has gradually shifted decision-making powers away from the national level to non-elected international, transnational, regional, and local actors. This leaves citizens with the feeling that they no longer have a say in the policy-making process. Consequently, their trust in public institutions and governments has been dwindling since the 1990s. The same period also saw the emergence of the media as an increasingly influential actor on the political stage. It has evolved into an independent, commercially-minded mass media that has transformed political communication and the rules of the political game. This phenomenon is referred to as 'mediatisation'. The aim of NCCR Democracy was to identify the challenges that globalisation and mediatisation pose for democracies. The research, which was spread over 12 years, benefitted from a broad multidisciplinary network of partner institutions, which made it possible to compile extensive data sets as well as study and compare multiple countries.

This final report sets out the key developments and research findings. During its 12-year run, some 140 NCCR Democracy researchers published more than 700 articles. Given that the present publication cannot do justice to the vast wealth of knowledge and insight that NCCR Democracy has generated, the decision was made to focus on how globalisation and mediatisation have contributed to the rise of populism in established democracies. This summary is supplemented by footnotes with references to broader current research. In the interest of clarity, references to the literature produced as part of NCCR Democracy appear in the running text and in the Bibliography. The report also has two media contributions by NCCR researchers in which they address specific issues in greater detail.

In Chapter 2, we look at whether democracy is actually in crisis, as is often alleged. To answer this question, it is investigated whether the number of democracies worldwide is falling, and whether the quality of established democracies has declined, and with it citizens' support. Although doubt has never been cast in Europe on the suitability of democracy as a model of governance, there is general dissatisfaction with how it is implemented. This is due to the fundamental dilemma inherent in democracy as a model of governance. As the following chapters show, globalisation and mediatisation further reinforce this dilemma. Chapter 3 shows how globalisation has led to the transfer of political decision-making powers from the national level in a country to international, transnational, regional, and local actors. This structural shift may be in the interest of more effective problem-solving, but it comes at a heavy cost for democracy. However, globalisation

also creates opportunities to spread democratic ideas. Chapter 4 describes the various approaches taken by the international community to promote democracy in authoritarian states, and the conditions that a country needs to have in place for democracy to take root. Chapter 5 examines the important role played by the mass media in democracies. It shows how the process of mediatisation has transformed politics in western democracies. The media itself has moved away from reporting on stories towards interpreting and analysing political events, following their own specific logic. For their part, political actors have gradually adapted to the rules by which the media operates. This, coupled with the changes in political decision-making ushered in by globalisation, has contributed to the recent upsurge in populism. Chapter 6 explores the subject of populism in greater detail. It investigates whether support for populist parties in Europe has risen in recent decades and to what extent political discourse and media reporting have become more populist. The chapter concludes by listing some of the reasons behind populism's success and the possible impact it could have on democracy.

CHAPTER 2

# Is democracy in crisis?

With the Cold War over, US political scientist Francis Fukuyama declared (in his seminal article *The End of History*) that liberal democracy had triumphed and would become firmly established worldwide as a model of governance.<sup>1</sup> Some 30 years later, there is a growing sense that there is a 'crisis of democracy'. Democracy seems to be in retreat and autocratic leaders are once again in power, including Vladimir Putin of Russia and Recep Tayyip Erdoğan of Turkey, who appear intent on subverting democracy. Over the last few decades, populists, who unlike autocrats do not question democracy as a model of governance but rather its central institutions, have enjoyed increasing success at the polls. With the election of Hugo Chavez in 1999, Venezuela became the first country in the 21st century to have a populist president at the helm. Populists have also become a familiar sight in governments across Europe, e.g. the Austrian *FPÖ* in 2000 and 2017 and the Norwegian *Progress Party* in 2013. In Switzerland, the right-wing *SVP* acquired a second seat on the Federal Council (Swiss cabinet) in 2003. More recently, populist parties have formed their own one-party governments. Since 2010 the fate of Hungary has been in the hands of the national conservative *Fidesz* party, led by Viktor Orbán. In Poland, the populist right-wing party *Law and Justice* (PiS), led by Jarosław Kaczyński, has held power since 2015. The populist upsurge culminated in 2016 with the election of Donald Trump as President of the United States. What has happened to democracy? Can we really say that it is in global decline?

## 2.1. The global spread of democracy

If we apply the minimalist criteria for a democracy – universal suffrage and regular multiparty elections – then it would be fair to say that the 20th century saw the widespread proliferation of this form of government. Indeed, the number of countries which satisfy these criteria has risen in three successive waves (Kriesi & Bochsler 2013).

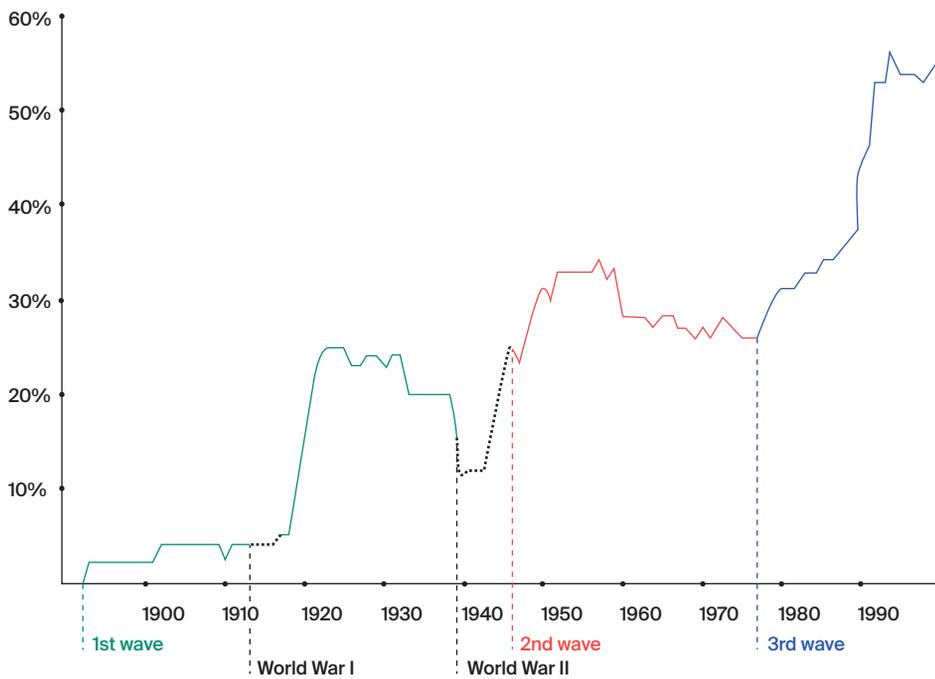
The first wave began with the American and French Revolutions, but more significant for the spread of democracy were the uprisings in 1830 and 1848. In their wake, many Western European countries introduced elected, representative institutions. However, granting the people sovereignty did not yet mean political equality. The first wave crested after the First World War when many countries also granted full suffrage to women and the poor. During the interwar years a large number of these fledgling democracies were overturned by autocratic military coups or fascist regimes. The end of World War II saw the second wave of democratisation when the western allies introduced democracies in areas they occupied. Democratic constitutions were adopted in Latin America and in a number of newly decolonised African states; democracy proved short-lived in most of them. This wave was followed by a second reversal in the fortunes of democracy, which began in the 1960s and principally affected Latin America. During this period, parts of Europe (Greece, Turkey), Africa (e.g. Nigeria) and Asia (e.g. the Philippines) also fell victim to military coups. The third and largest democratisation wave began in the 1970s with the end of military dictatorships in Southern Europe (Portugal, Greece, Spain), and swept across Latin America, Southeast Asia and a few African states. In 1989/1990 the communist regimes in the Eastern Bloc countries collapsed. The foreign policy interests of the US and accession talks between the then European Community and former communist countries played an instrumental part in this third wave. As history shows, democratisation is a long, drawn-out process, and the third wave did not lead to democracy everywhere. While almost all countries have held elections since the 1990s, many could not be considered free. Fledgling democracies protect individual freedoms less effectively than those western democracies which started to take root during the second wave. The third democratisation wave crested in the 1990s before entering a period of stagnation.<sup>3</sup> For a very brief time, it appeared that a fourth wave was in the offing due to the 'Colour Revolution' in Serbia, Georgia,

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1 Fukuyama, Francis (1989). *The End of History? The National Interest*.

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2 The graph borrows from the work of Doorenspleet, Renske (2000). "Reassessing the Three Waves of Democratization", *World Politics* 52, 384–406. On the growth of democracy, see also Huntington, Samuel P. (1991). *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century*, University of Oklahoma Press.

—  
3 Merkel, Wolfgang (2010). *Systemtransformation. Eine Einführung in die Theorie und Empirie der Transformationsforschung*. Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften.

Share of democratic states in the world (percent)

Figure 1: The three waves of democratisation<sup>2</sup>

Kyrgyzstan, Ukraine and Lebanon, and the ‘Arab Spring’. However, this new democratic awakening would take hold in only a few states, such as Tunisia.

While democracy has not won out over other forms of government, talk of its global decline is premature. It would seem that the frequently evoked ‘crisis of democracy’ refers rather to the growing dissatisfaction of citizens with their governments in established western democracies which has been observed over the last few decades.

## 2.2. Measuring the state of democracy scientifically

The question whether established democracies are in crisis can be answered in two ways: from the perspective of democracy researchers, and from the perspective of citizens.

Political science has developed various instruments<sup>4</sup> to measure the quality of democracy over time. Many are based on a minimalist definition of democracy and are not particularly differentiated. These indices are able to distinguish clearly between democratic and undemocratic regimes but are unable to identify the more subtle differences between advanced democracies as well as changes in the quality of democracy over time. To measure these fine distinctions, a sophisticated tool is needed that is capable of capturing democracy in all its complexity. Therefore, NCCR Democracy, together with the Berlin Social Science Centre (WZB), devised the Democracy Barometer.<sup>5</sup> It measures the state and stability of 70 established and new democracies since 1990 and captures subtle changes and differences in quality over time. The starting premise is that a democratic system tries to establish a good balance between the normative,

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4  
For example, the Freedom House Index <https://freedomhouse.org/> and the Polity Index <http://www.systemicpeace.org/polityproject.html>

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5  
[www.democracybarometer.org](http://www.democracybarometer.org)

interdependent values of freedom and equality, and that this requires control. To guarantee these three fundamental principles, and thus the quality of democracy, nine primary democratic functions need to be fulfilled.

The Democracy Barometer found that, in general, there was no significant decline in the quality of the top 30 democracies<sup>6</sup> between 1990 and 2014. However, considerable differences were found between countries in how well they guarantee the three fundamental principles (Merkel 2015).

The results show that, in general, these top 30 democracies performed best on the freedom principle which comprises the three functions of individual liberties, the rule of law, and the public sphere. While individual liberties saw a slight improvement, there was a small decline in the quality of the rule of law. This can be attributed to the lower values found for the independence of the judiciary and the dwindling confidence in the national legal system. Values for the public sphere, which include freedom of speech, the media offerings, press neutrality, and the degree to which societal interests are organised, remain relatively low. A slight downward trend was observed for media pluralism and the degree of organisation of societal interests through NGOs and associations.

According to the findings, the quality of the horizontal control of the government and pluralist political competition – two of the three functions which make up the control principle – has improved, albeit marginally. The opposite is true of the ability of democratically elected governments to shape policy: governmental stability has worsened slightly, government decisions have been implemented less effectively, and central banks have become more independent.

Of all three democracy principles, political equality has fared the worst over the last two decades. In contrast, the transparency of decision-making by democratic institutions has improved, as has the quality of representation.<sup>7</sup> The sole reason for the improved quality of representation is the rise in the number of elected female representatives. Despite this, women remain underrepresented in the parliaments of established democracies, although their share is increasing year after year. Having more women in the national parliaments is a boon for political equality and political participation. A comparative study of 30 European states shows that female parliamentarians serve as role models and inspire other women to participate in the political process (Bühlmann & Schädel 2012).

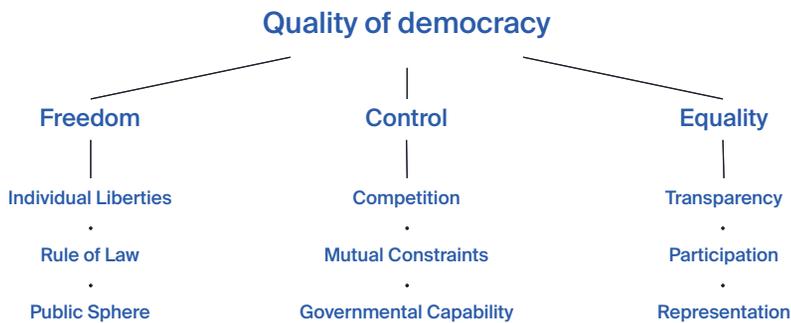


Figure 2: The Democracy Barometer: the first three layers of the concept tree

The Democracy Barometer measures the quality of established and new democracies using 100 indicators. These are assigned to one of nine democratic functions that guarantee the three central principles: freedom, control and equality. The graph illustrates the first three layers of the concept tree.

—  
6

They are: Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Costa Rica, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, and the US.

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7

The quality of representation reflects the quality of the relationship between the represented (i.e. the electorate) and their elected representatives, i.e. politicians. First, it is gauged by how representative of society the composition of parliament is. Are individual social strata, groups and genders adequately represented by members of parliament? Second, it is measured by the extent to which political actors reflect or adopt citizens' preferences and interests and how well they translate these into actual policies.

The higher the share of female parliamentarians a country has, the more politically interested and engaged its female population is. The Democracy Barometer data, however, show in general that political participation is shrinking due primarily to the stronger tendency among citizens in the lower income and education brackets to stay out of the political decision-making process. In doing so, this population group runs the risk that election outcomes will not reflect their preferences and that their interests will go unrepresented. Falling turnout at elections among this section of society has impaired the quality of its representation.

Overall, the findings of the Democracy Barometer show no serious loss of quality and thus no 'crisis of democracy'. Ultimately, it is the people who determine the legitimacy and stability of the democratic system in which they live. Do they rate it differently than the academic community?

### 2.3. How satisfied are Europeans with democracy?

All democracies require the endorsement of the people to survive. The success of a democracy rests on the people's belief (or lack thereof) that their democratic system is basically legitimate, fair, and deserving of their support (Merkel 2015). Public satisfaction with democracy is determined by the gap between what they expect from it and what they think it has delivered. Various opinion polls conducted among the European population show that there is still widespread support on the continent for the idea of democracy; little evidence was found to suggest that this stance is likely to change in the foreseeable future. Nonetheless, there are considerable differences between what the citizens of Europe expect from democracy and how they rate its performance. It is not uncommon for citizens to support democracy as a form of governance but remain

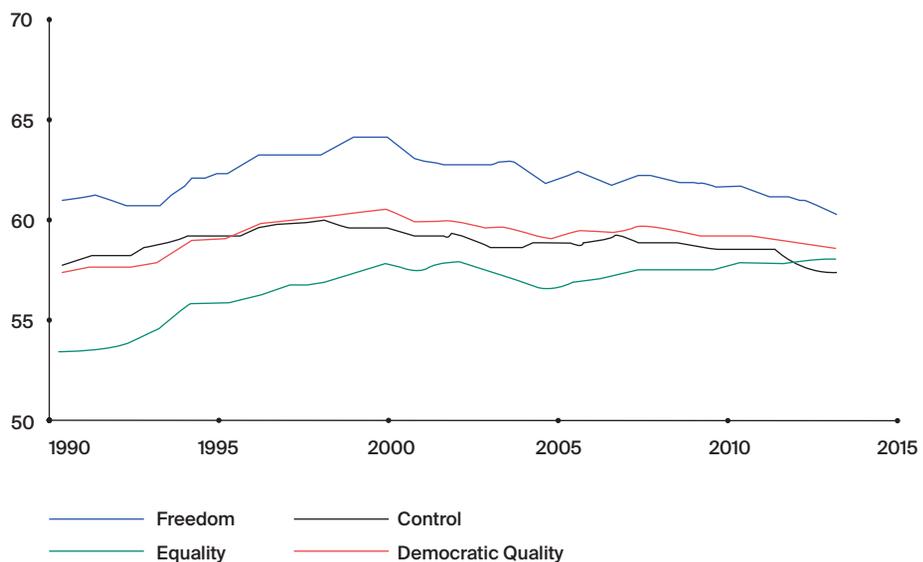


Figure 3: Development of democratic quality of the top 30 democracies between 1990 and 2014. Source: Democracy Barometer [www.democracybarometer.org](http://www.democracybarometer.org)

dissatisfied with how it works in their country. This gives rise to demands for (more) direct participation in the decision-making process (Mohrenberg et al. 2018). Some political scientists see disenchanted citizens as both a critical voice and a driver of democracy reform. Others argue that people tend to expect too much of politics in general and of democracy in particular.<sup>8</sup>

### Expectations...

The polls carried out by the European Social Survey<sup>9</sup> show that liberal democracy generally still enjoys broad-based support on the continent. According to the theoretical model, the components of a liberal democracy are regular, free and fair elections, the rule of law, checks and balances, and the safeguarding of individual liberties. Europeans' understanding of democracy goes beyond this basic model to include social democracy and direct democracy (Ferrin & Kriesi 2014). They consider free and fair elections and the justification of governmental decisions as crucial components of a democracy and expect their national governments to provide clear explanations for their policy choices. In terms of the liberal components, the survey found that Europeans consider equality before the law, a reliable media and checks and balances as prerequisites of a democracy. They also consider direct democracy, i.e. the direct participation of the people in the political process via popular vote, an important component. In contrast to many democracy theorists, European citizens believe that another function of democracy is guaranteeing social justice. To put it another way, they believe that two important missions of a democratic system of government are to offer protection against poverty and reduce income disparities.

### ...versus judgements

How citizens rate their country's democratic system varies considerably from region to

region (Ferrin & Kriesi 2014). Northern and Western Europe tend to rate their democracies positively, but admit that they could be better. In contrast, Southern Europeans have grown much more critical of their democracies since the economic and financial crisis of 2008. Eastern Europeans were consistently critical, but not because their values and ideas still carried the imprint of their communist past, as they generally support the principles of a liberal democracy.<sup>10</sup> But they are dissatisfied with how democracy in their country works, regardless of whether their country is an EU member state or not. As another study showed, citizens in younger democracies judge their system of government more on its economic performance or capacities. If they consider it weak, they are prepared to withdraw their support for the incumbent government (Bochsler & Hänni 2019). In general, citizens pay more attention to democratic ideals when they are unable to fully reap the benefits. Consequently, the primary source of Eastern European disillusionment is the lack of social and direct democracy. Their expectations in terms of social justice, a functioning social state, and greater say in political decisions are much higher than those of their Northern and Western European neighbours. In contrast, public expectations in Europe of liberal democracy have generally converged.

Overall, Europeans consider that their democracies fare particularly well when it comes to guaranteeing press freedom, free and fair elections, and the freedom of political opposition. In contrast, they rated most negatively the implementation of those components of a democracy which they consider very important – equality before the law, social justice, and justification of governmental decisions (Ferrin & Kriesi 2014). The economic and financial crisis, coupled with disenchantment with the government and the economy, has not weakened support for democratic principles. However, the expectations placed on democracy are now much higher, especially in Southern and Eastern Europe, and in particular with respect to the social dimension (Kriesi et al. 2016).

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8  
Cf. Norris, Pippa (1999). *Critical Citizens: Global Support for Democratic Government*, Oxford University Press versus Stoker, Gerry (2006). "Explaining Political Disenchantment: Finding Pathways to Democratic Renewal", *The Political Quarterly* 77(2), 184–194.

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9  
A regularly conducted, Europe-wide, social science-led comparative survey on a range of political and social topics: [www.europeansocialsurvey.org](http://www.europeansocialsurvey.org)

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10  
Cf. Borbáth, Endre; Theresa Gessler & Hanspeter Kriesi (2018). *The Hour of the Citizen – The Evolution of Eastern Europeans' Conceptions of Democracy*. Florence: European University Institute.

At the level of the individual, lower-income groups are more critical of the democracy they live in (Heyne 2017). Here, their perception of their own status is a key determinant: those who see themselves as the losers in society tend to be more dissatisfied and, therefore, the gap between their expectations and their assessments of democracy is wider. Given that an important concern of this group is greater social justice and more direct democracy, they attribute less value to the liberal components of democracy. In their eyes, social inequality and a lack of will, or ability, on the part of the government to tackle this problem undermine democracy.

### Shrinking trust in democratic institutions

Eurobarometer surveys<sup>11</sup> have found that the general approval rates for democracy have remained largely unchanged over the past 40 years. A more detailed analysis of the data, however, shows that trust in key democratic institutions is dwindling (Merkel 2015); public confidence in parliaments and governments is eroding, falling from an average of 50% to 30% in the period from 1994 to 2013. Trust in political parties stubbornly remains at a mere 20%. This highlights the paradox that citizens have little confidence in key democratic institutions which they elect but a high degree of confidence in the non-elected executive bodies of a democracy, i.e. the judiciary, the police and the military.

Specialist expertise, swift decision-making hierarchies, and a democratically unelected administration appear more important than a say in the policy-making process, pluralist competition, and parliamentary debate. Politically neutral, hierarchically structured, supposedly efficient and expert institutions are preferred over party bickering. Are citizens' values becoming more undemocratic? Citizens who have lost trust in their political institutions are probably less likely to vote. Between 1975 and 2010, voter turnout during elections in Western Europe dropped from 84% to 75%

on average. In Eastern Europe, it plummeted by around 22% between 1990 and 2010; only half of the electorate in these countries actually go to the ballot box. In all democracies, it is primarily those in the lower income and lower education brackets who opt out of the political process. These groups also tend to be less certain about their political preferences and do not know which parties represent their interests. As a result, their preferences and positions are under-represented (Weßels 2015), whereas those of the top 30% of society are over-represented. To put it another way, social inequality leads to political inequality, thus violating the fundamental democratic principle of equality.

### 2.4. The fundamental dilemma of democratic governance

Although approval for democracy remains high in Europe, there is dissatisfaction with how it is implemented. Citizens expect politics to address their concerns more effectively. However, globalisation and mediatisation make it harder for political actors to satisfy these demands. As a governance model, democracy must meet two requirements. According to the principle of popular sovereignty, governments are required to respond to the needs and concerns of its citizens, turn these into draft policies and see these through to their successful conclusion ('responsiveness'). At the same time, governments must devise effective policies and fix prevailing societal problems ('responsibility'). However, there are limits to the actions they can take. For example, sometimes governments cannot easily reverse decisions made by their predecessors or find themselves having to accommodate the opinions of coalition partners. Added to this is the fact that many problems are transnational in nature, which means that they cannot be tackled effectively by the national government alone and therefore require vesting other levels with decision-making powers. The democratic dilemma<sup>12</sup> persists in societies and economies that are subject to external influences

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11  
A public opinion poll commissioned by the European Commission and conducted at regular intervals in EU countries: <http://ec.europa.eu/commfrontoffice/publicopinion/index.cfm>

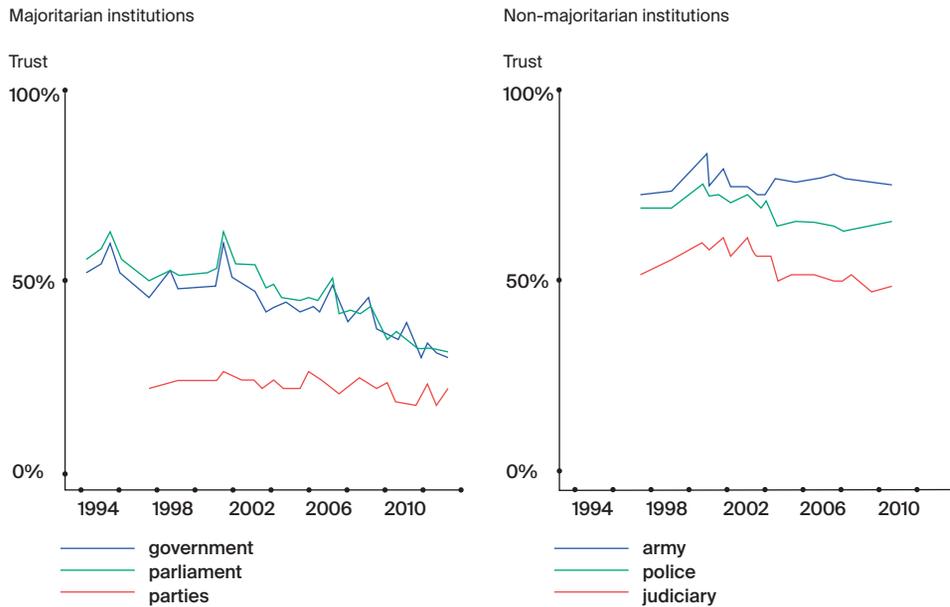


Figure 4: Level of trust in democratic institutions among European citizens  
Trust in democratically elected (majoritarian) institutions falls while non-elected (non-majoritarian), bureaucratic law enforcement authorities rises (Source: Merkel 2015, based on Eurobarometer data, 1994–2013).

over which they have no control. The capacity to solve problems is at odds with the people's ability to participate in the political process and hold the decision-makers accountable.

The stability and legitimacy of democracies is contingent on the capacity of an elected government to be both responsive and responsible. In the interest of their long-term success, political actors need to fulfil or at least strike a balance between the two. The problem is that these requirements can be hard to reconcile because effective solutions to problems may not match the ideas held by the majority of the people. The art of democratic governance lies in bridging this divide. However, this gap has grown wider in recent years, a situation that is exacerbated by globalisation and mediatisation because they make it harder for political actors to strike a healthy balance between responsiveness and responsibility. Globalisation has led to a progressive shift of decision-making powers from the nation-state

to international or transnational actors. This development goes against the core principles of democracy because decisions are made by non-elected officials and are therefore not legitimised by those who will be affected by the outcomes, namely the citizens. Added to this is the fact that the decision-making process itself takes place behind closed doors. As for mediatisation, it increases the pressure on politicians to accommodate the needs and concerns of the people. One symptom of this globalisation and mediatisation-driven development is the success of populist parties and politicians. Citizens have grown more dissatisfied with mainstream political parties and politicians. So, in this era of globalisation, who is actually running the country?

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See Dahl, Robert A. (1994). A Democratic Dilemma: "System Effectiveness versus Citizen Participation", *Political Science Quarterly* 109(1), 23–34.

## 2.5. Conclusion

The spread of democracy around the world is a success story, at least in terms of numbers. Talk of its global decline is premature. Furthermore, neither Democracy Barometer data nor opinion polls point to a crisis in the established democracies of Europe. Approval for democracy remains consistently high, though what the people expect from democracy and how they rate its performance diverge, particularly on matters of social and direct democracy and particularly in Southern and Eastern Europe. Citizens are unhappy with how democracy works in their country and, at the same time, political participation and trust in the traditional institutions of democracy (parliaments, governments, and political parties) are shrinking. If democracy is to continue to enjoy approval as a model of governance and function well, it must produce the right policy outcomes and follow the right decision-making processes. In particular, citizens call for greater social justice and more direct participation. Also, politics must respond better to the concerns, demands, and requests of the people. However, globalisation and mediatisation have made it extremely difficult to fulfil these requirements because they make it harder to achieve the delicate balancing act inherent in a democracy: ensuring responsible governance while being responsive to the needs of its citizens.

CHAPTER 3

The impact of  
globalisation on  
democracy

# Regulatory agencies – independent, but accountable?

The wave of liberalisation and privatisation that began in the 1980s led to the delegation of key regulatory functions from the national level to independent regulatory agencies which operate outside the government bureaucracy and are not bound by directives. They are considered to have the necessary technical, economic, and legal expertise to ensure efficient regulation in an ever more complex world. They are expected to safeguard legal and planning security for the economy and reassure market players that the rules of the game will not change due to political interference (e.g. when a new government takes office). They draw their legitimacy from the fact that they are divorced from politics and organised interests and deliver better outcomes than democratic institutions. It is difficult to say whether the latter claim is true for two reasons. First, these agencies pursue multiple goals, the relevance of which differs from one segment of society to the other. Consequently, their success is highly subjective. Second, the impact of regulatory decisions is difficult to ascertain and depends on myriad factors (Biela et al. 2011).

## Steadily gaining in power

Independent regulatory agencies have progressively gained more powers and widened their mandate (Maggetti 2012). Their expertise and regular exchanges with the industry they regulate means that they carry considerable weight in their specific area of competence. The role played by these agencies has long extended beyond the technocratic exercise of regulatory functions; they now participate in all phases of the political decision-making process. Their membership in international regulatory networks has allowed them to accumulate more power. Regulatory agencies in EU countries and in some non-member states like Iceland, Norway and Switzerland belong to European regulatory networks. These bridge the regulatory gap created by the fact that, despite the existence of a common European market, these nation-states have not ceded powers in certain policy areas to the EU.

The four most important networks deal with the regulation of the finance, energy, and telecommunications sectors as well as competition policy. They have been highly effective in harmonising regulations at the transnational level. Even though these networks can only issue recommendations and non-binding guidelines, their soft rules are often adopted at the national level

The relationship between democracy and globalisation, in other words the increased interdependence of societies and markets around the world, is an ambivalent one. Problems that transcend national boundaries cannot be resolved by one state alone. To put it another way, globalisation undermines the problem-solving capacities of democratically elected national governments. Yet, at the same time, states have to adapt to this changing landscape by stepping up their transnational cooperation and by adopting a more global outlook if they are to stand any chance of winning back these capacities. Globalisation has led to the emergence of institutions 'beyond' the nation-state which are charged with devising better and more effective solutions to current problems. Increasingly, these institutions make politically-binding decisions independent of national governments and parliaments, thereby diminishing the importance of nation-states.

### 3.1. The three decision-making levels beyond the nation-state

The transfer of executive powers away from the national level goes in three directions: upwards to the international level, downwards to regional and local levels, and sideways to the transnational level or to independent regulatory agencies.

The upwards shift is reflected in the emergence of numerous international organisations which have seen their decision-making powers expand in recent decades, including the World Trade Organisation (WTO) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). The internationalisation of political governance has advanced furthest in the European Union (EU) which enjoys wide-ranging powers in various policy areas and has its own bodies, including the European Commission, the European Parliament, and the European Court of Justice. Furthermore, EU law directly affects the national legislation of member states.

In recent decades globalisation has also led to the emergence of vast urban regions that extend beyond the confines of cities, regions, and

even nation-states. In the interest of more effective management, political powers are increasingly transferred downward to the local and urban-regional levels. However, the decision-making processes of these new complex structures and networks that govern city regions suffer from a lack of transparency.<sup>13</sup>

The last few decades have also seen the rise of independent regulatory agencies as key political actors. This is an example of a sideways delegation of decision-making powers, whereby specialist bodies rather than national governments assume responsibility for the regulation of certain policy sectors. Since the financial crisis, the public has become more aware of the existence of regulatory authorities such as *Finma* in Switzerland and the *FSA* in the UK. In most instances, the core mission of these agencies is to safeguard competition in the financial, energy, and telecommunications markets; they are given considerable powers and a high degree of autonomy to accomplish this mission. By dint of their specialist expertise and independence from politics, they are considered more trustworthy and more efficient at regulating the markets. Independent regulatory agencies are often part of transgovernmental networks, which are themselves an example of the sideways transfer of decision-making powers. The aim of these transnational networks, whose members can also include government officials from various countries, is to formulate a set of common regulatory standards for specific policy areas and to implement them in the participating countries. In this way, they supplement and, in certain cases, supplant the actions of national governments.

The decisions made by these institutions have a major bearing on the day-to-day lives of citizens in modern democracies. Yet, they evade democratic control because the decision-makers are not elected and therefore cannot be held accountable by the people. This flouts one of the key principles of democracy: the people have not legitimised the decision-makers and therefore have no say in the decision-making process and its outcomes. So, what impact do these developments have?

(Maggetti & Gilardi 2011; Maggetti & Gilardi 2014). This is due to the successful “lobbying” of independent regulatory agencies in their respective countries, which cite arguments such as their obligations vis-à-vis the network and the need for efficient cooperation. As a result, they have acquired ever greater powers (Maggetti 2014). This is consistent with the goals of these networks which, in the sense of sharing best practices, promote an organisational model that typically grants independent agencies extensive regulatory powers.

In reality, the distinction between the political arena and the supposedly depoliticised independent regulatory agencies which provide objective, technical expertise is blurred and artificial (Maggetti 2012). Once in place, these agencies take on a life of their own. Given their growing powers, how can the work of independent regulatory authorities be monitored and how can they be held accountable for the impact of their decisions?

## Independence and external control

Just how independent regulatory agencies are from governmental actors varies across countries and sectors. Their formal independence, as prescribed in the constitutions of the agencies, is not a sufficient condition for explaining these variations. Two other key factors are the presence of veto players in the political system<sup>15</sup> and the life cycle of the given agency (Maggetti 2012). Their informational advantage and in-depth acquaintance with the subject matter allow them – over time – to operate with greater autonomy, as does their inclusion in an international network. As a general rule, independent regulatory agencies in Western Europe appear to enjoy considerable autonomy from political actors and institutions as well as the industries they regulate.

Governments and parliaments formally oversee independent regulatory agencies. Their oversight ranges from the appointment of officials to budget resolutions, and up to overturning decisions. Studies of a number of European states have found that political actors, for various reasons, do not necessarily exert these rights<sup>16</sup> (Maggetti & Papadopoulos 2016). It could be that informal relations offer them a more effective means to steer the behaviour of independent regulatory agencies. It could be that the benefits of independence outweigh the costs of control. If an independent regulatory agency is held in high esteem, then this builds trust and hence political actors may see no reason to meddle in the agency’s affairs. In some instances, it is due to political actors lacking the capacity and expertise to properly exercise their control functions. Or political actors may be interested in being able to pass the blame for unpopular decisions onto an organisation which is perceived as independent.

Owing to the fact that independent regulatory agencies operate in a complex environment that includes regulated industries, other regulatory bodies, co-regulators (such as competition authorities), tribunals, and the media, they can also be held accountable by other actors. Safeguarding their good reputation is a central concern for independent regulatory agencies because it affords them more latitude and political influence (Maggetti & Papadopoulos 2016). Being part of international networks therefore helps independent regulatory agencies to mitigate the risk of being influenced by the industry they regulate. Another positive effect is that members bring peer pressure to bear in order to preserve their reputation and to advance international cooperation (Maggetti 2012). This focus on reputation means the mass media have a key role to play, because they can use their reporting to hold independent regulatory agencies accountable. News media in Western Europe constantly report on their activities and assess how well they have met their official objectives: reliable regulations and efficient decision-making (Maggetti 2012). Likewise, independent regulatory agencies use the media to justify their actions to the public, raise their profile and even, though rarely, send a message to those being regulated (Puppis et al. 2014). However, this alone does not ensure accountability. It will fall to future research to determine the mechanisms needed to achieve such accountability. It is clear that independence and accountability are compatible objectives; striking the right balance between the two is more difficult (Maggetti et al. 2013).

### **3.2. Is politics out of touch with voters?**

In this era of globalisation, politics increasingly overlooks the needs and concerns of the people. There are many reasons for this, including the diminished power of national parliaments. This loss is the executive branch's gain because the role of national governments and their administrations as the country's representative in international bodies and to the outside world generally lends them greater significance, though their scope for action at the international level is limited. Another factor is the growing influence of new actors which include independent regulatory agencies that base their decisions and actions more on professional and technocratic considerations than on political criteria.

#### **Shift in the balance of power: the downgrading of national parliaments**

According to political scientists, national parliaments are one of the biggest losers from globalisation. It is often claimed that there is now a 'double democratic deficit': not only are parliaments weakened by the delegation of decision-making powers to international organisations, but national governments also are able to evade parliamentary scrutiny at the international level. It is less problematic when the decision-making process results in agreements that must first be ratified by the national parliaments. However, this is not always the case. For example, the national parliaments of EU member states are required to directly implement EU legislation. This means that, in effect, EU law changes national legislation.

Likewise, members of parliament are not immune to globalisation influences. An analysis of the strategies adopted by Swiss parliamentarians during the legislative process found that they took less account of the concerns of the electorate when internationalised policy matters were involved (Landerer 2015).

A shift in the balance of power has also been observed between the executive branch and national interest groups. Several NCCR studies (Afonso et al. 2014) found that the impact of this trend varies considerably across countries and policy areas. One study looked at the effect of the European integration process on the Swiss political system and its decision-making processes. It compared several policy areas in Switzerland and three other small European states.<sup>14</sup> The findings suggest that the influence which EU policy exerts on national policy hinges more on the balance of power between the political actors in the given policy area than on whether a country is an EU member state or not. So, for example, certain interest groups succeeded in pushing through their demands, particularly on issues that were the subject of fierce public debate (e.g. the Swiss trade unions regarding questions of labour market policy), and saw their influence rise as a result.

### The ‘technocratisation’ of politics

As a result of globalisation, experts, or technocrats as they are also called, are a growing presence in day-to-day politics. The thinking goes that their deep understanding of the subject equips them to handle ever more complex problems and assignments. As the findings of NCCR Democracy indicate, the delegation of decision-making powers to levels beyond the nation-state also leads to the technocratisation of politics.

In the early 1980s, about 20% of European states had set up independent regulatory agencies in the areas of financial, electricity, telecommunications, and competition policy; by the mid-1990s, the share had risen to 90% (Gilardi 2005). The European Union has been a major driver of this trend because EU law requires member states to have their own independent agencies to regulate certain sectors. They, in turn, must network and share best practices with their counterparts across Europe. The desire to minimise risk and improve the quality of life has also contributed to the

growing presence of these independent authorities on the international political stage (Papadopoulos 2013). The aim of delegating powers to independent regulatory agencies is to remove specific policy areas from the political decision-making process. The argument is that their independent status makes them not only more credible and trustworthy than vote-chasing politicians but also better placed to undertake long-term commitments. Also, by dint of their expertise, they are deemed to have better problem-solving abilities. Consequently, the technocratisation of specific policy areas is an explicit goal, and neither politicians nor the electorate should have a say in these matters.

There is a gradual move towards technocratisation at the regional/local level as well. Bolstering the coordination and problem-solving capabilities of metropolitan areas leads to the de-democratisation of certain policy areas, typically those that require inter-regional coordination on economic and political grounds, including spatial and urban development, environmental protection, transport, and economic development. For example, one NCCR Democracy researcher tracked changes in the steering of transport policy in Swiss metropolitan areas over time (Koch 2011). He found that between 1945 and 2000 the democratic right of participation declined and, in some instances, was even abolished. At the same time, city parliaments found their capacity to act curtailed while the executive branch and its administration acquired more decision-making powers. The opportunities for debate between political parties have dwindled because experts from the public administration now dominate the political governance process. Sound, actionable, and objective solutions were considered as sufficient arguments to justify the policy.

### 3.3. Democratisation efforts

How, in the absence of elected representatives, can the participation of the people in governing beyond the nation-state be guaranteed? Have international decision-making processes already incorporated democratic principles?

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For example, the *Verein Metropolitanraum Zürich*, the *Kommunale Nachbarnschaftsforum Berlin-Brandenburg* and the *Métropole du Grand Paris*.

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Austria, Belgium and Ireland. The study looked at five policy areas which are regulated to varying degrees on the European level: free movement of workers, liberalisation of the electricity market and reform of competition law (tightly regulated), as well as occupational pension provision and unemployment protection policy (loosely regulated).

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There is a higher number of veto players in federal states and states with a bicameral parliament, for example.

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Thatcher, Mark (2005). “The Third Force? Independent Regulatory Agencies and Elected Politicians in Europe”. *Governance* 18(3), 347–373. Schillemans, Thomas & Madalina Busuioc (2014). “Predicting Public Sector Accountability: From Agency Drift to Forum Drift”. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory* 25(1), 191–215.

### Efforts by national parliaments to regain control

The declining influence of national parliaments is most evident in the context of the European Union. The EU is well suited for studies of how, and whether, parliaments attempt to compensate for these losses. How hard do the national parliaments of EU member states work to exert control over their governments in EU decision-making and how do they bring their preferences to bear in these decision-making processes? One NCCR study (Winzen 2012a) found that national parliaments have indeed responded to the challenges posed by European integration and are taking action to regain control. Parliamentary oversight of the national government has been rising steadily since the end of the 1950s;<sup>17</sup> the Maastricht Treaty of 1992, in particular, accelerated this trend. The resulting amendments may not have restored decision-making powers to national parliaments, but they do guarantee them key participatory and oversight rights (Winzen 2012b). Nonetheless, the major differences between national parliaments indicate that domestic factors, particularly the strength of Eurosceptic feeling in the country, largely determine the rights vested in the legislative branch. Parliamentarians in EU-sceptic member states are particularly keen to acquire more rights and powers (Winzen 2017).

### Growing number of parliaments at international level

Since the 1990s international politics has undergone a gradual 'parliamentarisation'. A growing number of international organisations have established their own parliament or parliamentary bodies in order to improve the democratic legitimisation of their decision-making processes. The more power an international body has, the greater citizens' expectations are that this power is justified. In the 1990s, only 10% of all international organisations had a parliament; today the share stands at 30%. To

date, the competencies of these parliaments have been limited, often amounting to nothing more than information and consultation rights (Rocabert et al. forthcoming). It is important, therefore, not to overestimate these efforts to make international policy-making more democratic. In-house parliamentary bodies do not have sufficient power to control the decision-making processes of a given international organisation. The sole exception is the EU Parliament: it carries more weight because it is able to co-determine a range of matters and enjoys important budgetary powers. Yet, in terms of legitimacy, the European Parliament does not fare well because turnout at EU elections is low, and because it cannot rely on a core European citizenry, one whose constitution has thus far remained elusive (Cheval et al. 2015).

### Democratisation trends in transgovernmental networks

The mission of transgovernmental networks is to coordinate specific policy areas and devise efficient and effective solutions. They are shielded from political debate and the public gaze, and thus operate with little outside interference. These networks, whose members include ministerial officials from various countries and experts, largely manage to circumvent the influence and oversight of national parliaments and citizens. One study found that transgovernmental networks also have begun to take tentative steps towards democratisation. These networks are not merely technocratic constructs; they also incorporate democratic principles and procedures into their decision-making processes (Freyburg et al. 2018). The study focused on the three most important international networks and their European counterparts in three policy areas: banking, competition, and the environment.<sup>18</sup> It applied the three legitimacy criteria typically used in democracy research<sup>19</sup> to determine how democratic the policy decision-making and implementation processes of these networks have been.

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The level of parliamentary oversight was measured against various criteria, such as information rights and access to EU documents, parliamentary decisions on EU affairs that are binding/non-binding for the national government concerned, memoranda submitted by the national government to its own parliament in which it sets out its negotiating strategy as regards the EU, and the establishment of parliamentary committees on EU affairs.

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For the banking sector, these are the *Basel Committee on Banking Supervision* (BCBS), the *Committee of European Banking Supervisors* (CEBS) and its successor, the *European Banking Authority*. As regards competition policy, the principal networks are the *International Competition Network* (ICN) and the *European Competition Network* (ECN); for environmental policy they are the *International Network for Environmental Compliance and Enforcement* (INECE) and the *EU Network for the Implementation and Enforcement of Environmental Law* (IMPEL).

The first criterion is 'input legitimacy'. This presupposes that those affected by regulations are integrated in the decision-making process and that their interests and preferences are incorporated in this process. The second is 'throughput legitimacy'. This concerns internal decision-making; the process enjoys greater legitimacy if it is transparent and decision-makers readily identifiable. A further important factor for throughput legitimacy is the quality of the political discussion process. The third and final criterion is 'output legitimacy', which refers to the outcomes generated by the process and the effectiveness and efficiency of the measures taken.

The adoption of democratic principles and procedures varies from network to network. Generally, priority is given to output legitimacy, which is measured by how effectively and quickly solutions are found. Likewise, the networks' statutes contain provisions designed to guarantee that the decision-making process is transparent, traceable and accountable, and allows for public consultations and the inclusion of interest groups. Among the networks studied, the *European Banking Authority* (EBA) was found to have the most democratic decision-making processes. It was set up in response to the financial crisis and from the outset was vested with wide-ranging powers to ensure that the European banking industry was managed properly. Its mission was to shore up the financial stability of the EU. The founding regulation of the EBA, which is shaped by the Lisbon Treaty of 2009 (itself supposed to lead to institutional reforms intended to make the EU more democratic, transparent and efficient), draws heavily from the *European Code of Good Administrative Behaviour*.<sup>20</sup> The study findings suggest that democratic principles and procedures are more deeply embedded in transgovernmental networks with far-reaching powers and whose members come from democratic states. However, the latter is a condition that is not sufficient in itself. European transgovernmental networks are not automatically more democratic simply because their members are drawn exclusively from established democracies. One

possible reason is that their primary goal is to resolve problems. Democratic decision-making is regarded as something which is primarily guaranteed 'back home' and therefore taken for granted.

### 3.4. Public support for democratic procedures

Several NCCR Democracy studies illustrated how important it is for political decisions taken 'beyond the nation-state' to be the result of a democratic process (Bernauer et al. forthcoming, Freyburg et al. 2017; Strebel et al. 2018). A number of surveys found that people in Europe tended to be more in favour of policy-making at the international or the regional/local level if democratic procedures are followed. This finding challenges a hypothesis advanced by political scientists that political decisions and measures are deemed legitimate and supported if they produce the right outcomes (output legitimacy). These surveys, however, found that citizens attach importance not only to the solution itself but also to the processes that led to it.

#### What form do citizens think decision-making processes at the international level should take?

Although citizens in democracies understand that global problems require international cooperation, they are critical of the fact that they themselves are involved only indirectly in policy decision-making through their elected national government representatives. In the eyes of many, international governance therefore suffers from a democratic deficit; hence the mass anti-globalisation protests around the world and the positive reception given to populist criticism of globalisation. Democracy theory has long looked at how decision-making procedures at the international level can be made more democratic so as to improve its legitimacy and acceptance. What type of negotiating procedure would generate increased

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Scharpf, Fritz (1999). *Governing in Europe: Effective and Democratic?* Oxford: Oxford University Press.  
Schmidt, Vivien (2013). "Democracy and Legitimacy in the European Union Revisited: Input, Output and 'Throughput'", *Political Studies* 61(1), 2–22.

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This Code sets out guidelines on creating a more efficient, accountable, transparent and ethical administration. EU citizens as well as businesses, unions and other organisations can file a complaint with the European Ombudsman if they suspect maladministration (at [www.ombudsman.europa.eu](http://www.ombudsman.europa.eu)). The European Ombudsman may impose enforcement measures, also with the backing of the European Parliament.

public acceptance of international agreements? Which actors should be involved in decision-making processes – state officials and elected parliamentarians only, or independent experts, non-governmental organisations, (NGOs) and private sector delegates too?

Surveys conducted in four European democracies<sup>21</sup> asked the public how international negotiations on three major global concerns – climate change, financial market regulation, and refugees – should be conducted to secure their acceptance of the resulting agreement. Clear preferences emerged (Freyburg et al. 2017). Respondents were strongly in favour of decisions being made at the international level. At the same time, they also considered it important that the process itself was democratic. The findings show that respondents were in favour of representatives of their national government or parliament leading the negotiations, and that approval was higher if non-governmental organisations were involved in these processes, whether as observers or, preferably, with the right to speak. However, respondents also stated that the final decision should rest with the national government representatives. They also expressed a desire that independent experts should be included, particularly in climate negotiations, but resoundingly rejected the involvement of private sector business delegates in global governance. Despite criticism of the current international decision-making processes, the survey findings suggest that respondents did not have a clear preference for any of the alternatives to the status quo that were put to them. The results of the study are independent of the degree to which decision-making powers were delegated from the national to the international level.

In another study (Bernauer et al. 2017), a representative survey in Germany and the UK focussed on possible solutions to the problem of transboundary air pollution in Europe; both countries are among the largest emitters in Europe. Respondents said that they would support policy efforts to reduce air pollution, especially if they delivered good results. In other words, they would back these efforts if

the solutions were efficient and cost-effective and if their respective country enjoyed higher relative benefits. Acceptance rises if the negotiation process is transparent, if environmental groups and independent experts are involved, and if the agreement requires approval by the respective national parliament before implementation. These procedural preferences do not hinge on the quality of the outcomes. To put it another way, generating positive results does not automatically guarantee that undemocratic decision-making processes will be accepted. Conversely, the process improvements do not offset poor output performance. This notwithstanding, it would be in the policymakers' own interests to improve international governance processes, because greater transparency, the inclusion of NGOs and experts, and increased involvement of national legislatures would boost public support. This is particularly the case for environmental policy which involves introducing measures that are often tedious, cost-intensive, have no immediate impact, and run a considerable risk of failing.

### Democratic decision-making in metropolitan areas

Likewise, a study at the regional/communal level (Strebel et al. 2018) confirms that citizens value democratic decision-making procedures. In an experiment, respondents in eight European metropolitan areas<sup>22</sup> were asked to evaluate different policy-making processes, of which each was aimed toward improving the public transport network in their respective conurbation. The public is generally less well-acquainted with policy-making processes in metropolitan areas than at the national level, and is also less interested in them. For this reason and because of the fact that the main concern in the public is the efficiency of public transport provision services, it is reasonable to assume that the public would attach importance to the output generated by a transport policy measure. To put it another way, citizens would be more concerned with the delivery

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The surveys were conducted in Britain, France, Germany, and Switzerland. They were chosen because they have stable democracies that afford a comparable degree of political liberalisation and are affected by globalisation to a similar degree.

of an efficient service than with the political processes that led to it. Yet again, the survey findings indicate that citizens attach great importance to the democratic nature of the process, regardless of the quality of the outcomes it generates. While cost-effective solutions to transport-related problems were the main priority for respondents, they nonetheless wanted the decision-making process that led to them to be democratic. They attached slightly more importance to transparent, internal decision-making (throughput legitimacy) than to the possibility of participating in the process (input legitimacy).

### 3.5. The media: an important watchdog of democracy

When decision-making processes are not subject to democratic control, the media can compensate for this lack of oversight by providing a forum where political actors can be held publicly accountable. This is why the media are referred to as the watchdog of democracy or the fourth estate (alongside the executive, legislative, and judiciary branches). Several NCCR studies confirm the increasing importance now attached to the role of the media at the three decision-making levels beyond the nation-state.

Participants in international climate negotiations consider media reporting of the process important. Consequently, they invest heavily in public relations and have progressively stepped up their communication activities. At the same time, national governments increasingly include civil society organisations in the negotiating process in order to bolster the legitimacy of the resulting decisions. The degree of influence varies considerably from one interest group to another. For example, business groups try to directly lobby official delegates, while environmental groups tend to use the media to circulate their message among the public (Böhmelt et al. 2014).

Independent regulatory agencies also largely evade the oversight of the electorate, but they cannot avoid pressure from the me-

dia, and by extension the public, to justify their policies. Consequently, they have intensified their communication activities in order to win public approval. Although they were initially decoupled from the political process precisely so that they could act independently, independent regulatory agencies cannot escape the oversight of the media (Maggetti 2012).

This trend has also been observed for governance networks in metropolitan areas. The actions of these networks, often made up of a mixture of elected representatives and non-elected experts, also come under media scrutiny. Some studies (Christmann et al. 2015; Hasler et al. 2016) found that the local media play an important role in safeguarding democratic oversight. Such local media explain the complex structures and processes of these networks in an accessible way, and therefore help to improve the transparency and legitimacy of their decision-making processes. However, there is one marked difference: although media reporting provides a clear picture of the actors involved in the decision-making process, it tends to point the finger for policy failures much more frequently at elected actors than at their non-elected counterparts (Hasler et al. 2016). It would seem that elected politicians make for better headlines. Given that decision-making has long ceased to be the sole preserve of elected officials, the media's uneven apportioning of blame is problematic. If the oversight function of the media is to rectify the democratic deficit at all three levels beyond the nation-state, it is crucial that they provide quality reporting.

### 3.6. Conclusion

While the transfer of ever more decision-making powers from the national level to other levels may improve problem-solving capabilities, it does so at the cost of democracy. Policy-making is increasingly out of step with the will of the people: globalisation has weakened institutions whose representatives are elected by the people, namely national parliaments, while strengthening the influence of

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The capital region and one other major metropolitan area of each of the four countries were selected: Germany (Berlin, Stuttgart), France (Paris, Lyon), Britain (London, Birmingham) and Switzerland (Bern, Zurich). The countries differ with respect to traditions of local and metropolitan governance.

non-elected actors. Given that more effective problem-solving is a primary concern, these new actors are explicitly orientated towards making decisions that are primarily based on professional criteria. Consequently, technical norms and rules have progressively taken precedence over being in close contact to the people and democratic oversight. Decisions are made outside of the political process. This democratic deficit has not gone unnoticed by citizens, who value the use of democratic processes to reach and implement policy decisions. Efficient solutions may be a priority for citizens, but they do not always take the view that the end justifies the (undemocratic) means.

Tentative steps have already been taken to 're-democratise' decision-making processes: national parliaments are trying to take back some control at the international level, and a growing number of international organisations have established their own parliamentary bodies. Networks charged with the transnational coordination of certain policy areas incorporate democratic principles and procedures in their decision-making processes. Despite these efforts, most have been merely symbolic and their value should not be overestimated. For their part, the media have a key role to play in compensating for the lack of public oversight and remedying the democratic deficit. Hence, the growing importance of quality news coverage.

## “Sceptics bolster EU democracy”

The EU must not only meet the challenges posed by the economic crisis but also gain the support of EU-sceptical citizens for ‘Project Europe’. According to Francis Cheneval, the EU will have to become more democratic and more in touch with the people. Interview by Thomas Gull.

Mr Cheneval, the yes vote on the *Swiss People’s Party’s* ‘Stop mass immigration’ initiative gave many politicians in Europe food for thought because they could have faced the same outcome if the referendum had been held in their countries. Many EU citizens have become Eurosceptics and are disenchanted with the idea of Europe. So what ails Europe?

Francis Cheneval: The view that European integration, as it now stands, lacks alternatives irritates many citizens because it offers few prospects for actively shaping democracy.

How is the ideology of a united Europe compatible with reality?

Cheneval: The reality has turned out differently. At present, the institutional level the EU has reached lies somewhere between a federal state and an international organisation like the UN.

Yet the trend is to move towards greater integration.

Cheneval: There are opposing forces at play here. There are those who seek more integration for economic or political reasons, and others who want more power vested in national governments. As things stand, the competing interests of these two camps largely cancel each other out. European integration therefore has settled at a level which we at the University of Zurich refer to in our research as a ‘demoicracy’, or in other words, a democracy made up of multiple peoples. Individual peoples do not want to merge into a single pan-Eu-

ropean demos but prefer to retain a high level of autonomy. Yet, they also want to overcome shared problems using shared institutions. Europe as it stands, with its long-established traditions and cultural diversity, is not congruent with the idea of a centralist federal state. However, a large majority do not want to see Europe revert to a collection of nation-states or abandon ‘Project Europe’.

But isn’t this precisely the goal still being pursued, at least by the political elites?

Cheneval: I think there is a desire to keep the process of European integration moving forward, as well as a fear that ‘Project Europe’ will implode. It is like the over-used metaphor of the cyclist who falls off his bike as soon as he stops pedalling. Nonetheless, there is recognition that greater flexibility is needed. Currently, German Chancellor Angela Merkel and others tend to favour a Europe made up of multiple peoples who have common institutions with specific competencies. In other words, they are not committed to a centralist, dirigiste Europe.

What would the alternative look like?

Cheneval: Europe is a de facto ‘demoicracy’, a democracy made up of multiple peoples. Yet we have to ask ourselves how to make it function more effectively. How can national democracies be linked together and collaborate more constructively with one another and with EU institutions? If we see the situation in these terms, new opportunities emerge that do not involve abandoning ‘Project Europe’.

Where do we need to start?

Cheneval: For example, with the national parliaments and the courts. National parliaments should have a greater say in the formulation of pan-European rules.

When should national parliaments intervene?

Cheneval: They already have the power to control subsidiarity in the EU, and could be included in agen-

da-setting or controlling processes. For example, a defined number of national parliaments could submit a legislative proposal to the EU parliament or form a qualified blocking majority against an EU law.

The EU itself has little interest in increasing the influence of national parliaments. This goes against the natural tendency of institutions to expand their power.

Cheneval: National governments are represented in the EU Council. When they realise that the powers of their national parliaments, and not those of the EU parliament, can be strengthened, then these reforms become entirely feasible and relatively easy to communicate at the national level.

You cited the courts as the second arena where reforms should be undertaken. What could be done at this level?

Cheneval: Germany's Federal Constitutional Court in Karlsruhe repeatedly comments on the European integration process. This is a good thing because the Constitutional Court thereby fulfils its duty to protect German and European democracy. What is less good is that it is the only court to do so. It would make more sense if the constitutional courts of the EU member states would talk with one other and create a council of constitutional courts that could issue opinions, ones also directed at the European Court of Justice. This means constitutional jurisdiction should be structured in such a way so as to mediate between the national and the EU levels.

So what you are calling for is greater inclusion of national parliaments and courts in the EU's decision-making processes?

Cheneval: Member states do not only have a national government but also have parliaments and courts. All of these institutions represent the people. Democracy means all bodies which represent the people should be involved in the decision-making processes.

That sounds very cacophonous: every EU state and their respective parliaments and courts should have a say in EU business. Wouldn't that lead to total paralysis?

Cheneval: Not necessarily. Of course, democratic processes involving many actors are perforce some-

what slower, and there is a tendency to maintain the status quo. Yet, the agreements these kinds of democratic processes reach are much longer-lasting. In contrast, dirigiste top-down decisions may come about more quickly, but are vulnerable over the longer term because they are not adequately grounded in the citizenry. That is exactly the danger for the EU today. In the last 20 years, a great deal has been achieved in a very short space of time. However, much of this is inadequately anchored in the population, and this can carry costs during crises and can itself trigger a crisis.

You are thinking this way because you are Swiss. If you were French, such considerations would be rather alien.

Cheneval: The French have been part of this Europeanization process for over 50 years. In that time, they have realised one thing: French-style centralization cannot be transposed onto the EU – unless we want France to go under.

The EU has all the characteristics of a modern democracy. Why do you talk of a democratic deficit?

Cheneval: Because of the weak ties the democratic institutions of the individual member states have with one another and with EU bodies. There has also been a mobilisation deficit until now. Voter turnout in EU elections has been very low, and few are interested in what is being negotiated in the EU parliament. However, one consequence of the crisis is that European institutions are becoming politicised. The next EU parliament elections will be much more contentious, and this will have stronger effects on mobilisation. The paradox is that the higher voter turnout is, the more the EU parliament is democratically legitimized, and that is true even if EU-critical parties win seats. This means the mobilisation deficit could shrink considerably in the next round of elections precisely because many Eurosceptic parties are successful at mobilising their voters.

Isn't the basic problem that what is negotiated and decided in Brussels is far removed from the everyday lives of citizens and that EU citizens do not understand how they are affected by Brussels decisions?

Cheneval: That could change. Increased mobilisation will also lead to increased media coverage. This

means one will know better what is being discussed in the EU parliament, and citizens will realize what this means for them.

One has the impression that the EU parliament has little influence on what happens in the EU.

Cheneval: That has not been the case for a long time. In terms of legislation, the EU parliament can have its say and is on an equal footing with the EU Council. Its increased political significance is also the reason why Eurosceptic parties are keen to win seats in the EU parliament. They don't want to go there to bring down the EU parliament (and thus lose their newly won power) but rather to steer the debate. Precisely by doing so, they will help bolster European democracy.

The EU has become larger over time. Eastern European applicant countries undertook political reforms when the EU offered them a real prospect of membership. Can this also work in the future, or is the EU not biting off more than it can chew, say, with Ukraine?

Cheneval: I don't take such a pessimistic view. The problem is corruption and a weak or absent rule of law, as one can see in Bulgaria, Romania, and other states. However, the Eurocrisis, for example, is not a crisis in the Eastern European economies but rather of certain 'older' EU states. Poland, by contrast, has been a success story. Eastern enlargement has not been an economic problem for the EU. The main problem with the possible accession of Ukraine is not economic but is instead connected to the rule of law. If corruption is not curbed, states like these will be Trojan horses of corruption in the EU.

Was the EU overly lax about this in the past?

Cheneval: Yes, also with longstanding members like Greece. However, it also shows that Brussels needs to have robust competencies to do something if the rule of law fails in a member state, or if the most powerful EU country fails to comply with the rules.

How do you see the EU's future: will it implode or flourish?

Cheneval: I don't believe in either scenario. In the medium term, the EU will not be continuously success-

ful, but it also won't disintegrate. It will survive but with lowered ambitions. First, it must recover from the crisis and regain its stability. On this point, it seems to be making headway. Neither its predicted collapse nor hopes for major successes have materialised.

What will the relationship of Switzerland to the EU look like in the future?

Cheneval: If European integration continues, Switzerland will not be able to avoid taking a much clearer position. For example, to state explicitly that we do not belong to the single market of the EU and hence also accept the consequences. Or to say: yes, we will join in and participate in this process. It will increasingly amount to having to say yes or no. In this, Switzerland is increasingly forcing itself to take an either/or stance, as the results of the vote on limiting immigration showed. The Federal Council and other political circles want to save the bilateral agreements with the EU because we are comfortable with this yes-and-no stance.

Do we have ourselves to blame for this predicament?

Cheneval: I believe so. Even without this particular vote, in the future Switzerland will have to take a clearer stand on whether to be within or outside the EU. My assumption is that even with the fast pace of technological change, it will not be possible to cut Switzerland out of Europe like a piece in a jigsaw puzzle and relocate it somewhere in Southeast Asia, alongside Singapore, in the middle of the ocean.

Interview by Thomas Gull with Francis Cheneval, Professor for Political Philosophy at the University of Zurich. Appeared in UZH Magazin of the University of Zurich 2/2014.



CHAPTER 4

Globalisation  
and the spread  
of democracy  
worldwide

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See O'Loughlin, John et al. (1998): "The Diffusion of Democracy, 1946–1994". *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 88(4), 545–574.  
Huntington, Samuel P. (1991). *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century*, Norman: University of Oklahoma Press.

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As a general rule, all non-democratic systems are labeled as "autocracies" and sub-divided into either authoritarian or totalitarian regimes. A totalitarian regime attempts to inculcate the people with its ideology and exert complete control over them, whereas an authoritarian regime places much less value on ideology and even tolerates a limited degree of pluralism. In contrast to mass mobilisation in totalitarian regimes, authoritarian rulers rely on the political passivity of their citizens (see Linz, Juan J. (2003). *Totalitäre und autoritäre Regime*, Potsdamer Textbücher Band 4, Berlin: Berliner Debatte Wissenschaftsverlag). Given that totalitarian regimes like North Korea not only stifle political participation at home but also isolate themselves from the rest of the world, promoting democracy in these places would very likely require the use of force. Consequently, such regimes are not suitable recipients of peaceful democracy promotion efforts (cf. Merkel, Wolfgang (2010). *Systemtransforma-*

As a number of studies have shown, the transition to and collapse of democracies tend to occur in geographical and temporal clusters.<sup>23</sup> If we were to look at a map of the world, we would find large areas with a high concentration of either democracies or autocratic<sup>24</sup> states. Figure 1 provides a clear illustration of how these waves of democratisation occur over time. Frequently, several countries in the same region simultaneously embark on the democratisation process or experience the collapse of their democratic structures. This suggests that the transition from one regime to another can have an impact on, and even be at the mercy of, neighbouring areas. The more a state is surrounded by democracies, the likelier it is to move towards a more democratic regime. Conversely, a lone democracy surrounded by non-democratic regimes is more likely to move towards authoritarianism.<sup>25</sup>

How and why does democracy spread? Political science views democratisation primarily as an internal process because the transformation of a society and political regime requires a willingness on the part of multiple domestic actors.<sup>26</sup> The root causes of democratisation are many and differ depending on the prevailing context. Generally speaking, internal and external factors combined with the political actions of various protagonists – those who hold power, the opposition, and the public – lead to the collapse of an authoritarian regime. Internal causes include mass public protests sparked by economic inefficiency, public calls for a greater say in politics brought about by the modernisation process, and political turning points like the death of a dictator or internal conflicts. External causes include interactions with other states, such as a military defeat or the withdrawal of an important external source of support.

The transition to democracy may also be inspired, initiated and advanced from the outside. In this case, the increased interconnectedness of societies, politics, and markets due to globalisation can act as a driver of democratisation. On the one hand, mass protests may spread to countries with similar characteristics. On the other hand, international organ-

isations, individual governments or private actors endeavour to promote democracy in a more targeted way by offering economic and political support and by strengthening civil society.

#### 4.1. Transnational protests and the political opening of authoritarian regimes

Protests are one of the few ways by which people living under authoritarian rule can express their discontent. History is full of instances where public protests have consumed entire regions: the European Revolutions of 1848; the revolutions in Central and Eastern Europe in 1989; and the Arab Spring of 2010/2011 which extended from Tunisia right across the rest of North Africa and the Middle East. Why did these mass protests spread across so many countries and why did some ultimately fail?

When an authoritarian regime is challenged by its own people, this confrontation sends a powerful message to neighbouring countries with similar regimes. The balance of power in many authoritarian states is often fragile. Protests are a sign that this balance may have shifted. Opposition forces in other countries might conclude that their protests could succeed, so they begin to mobilise. In such situations, a high degree of uncertainty reigns. Information in authoritarian regimes is scant and far from reliable, so the people tend to resort to cognitive shortcuts.<sup>27</sup> In other words, they focus on specific aspects of a situation and disregard others. Consequently, they draw hasty, simple, and not entirely logical conclusions that can lead them to overestimate the significance of the ousting of the despot next door, or misjudge the similarities between their country's plight and that of their neighbour. Protests can quickly come unstuck when the mobilised masses are politically inexperienced and not part of a larger social movement, or when the opposition does not assume political leadership.

Mass protests can be the catalyst for political reforms, especially when it is no longer

possible to suppress them. Information and communication have always played a key role in the spread of protests across national borders. New communication technologies can act as a facilitator of mass protests because they drastically shorten the time it takes to send information over long distances and to build networks. It is not surprising that in the early days of the Arab Spring new media channels were hailed as 'liberation technology' and hopes were high that these electronic means would help advance the spread of democracy.

### The internet and democracy promotion – help or hindrance?

Thanks to boundary-crossing communication via the internet, social media, and satellite television, there are only a few places in the world that are completely cut off from democratic ideas. The spread of the newest information and communication technologies is seen as an opportunity for liberalising societies. The internet offers users the (for many, unprecedented) possibility to express their personal opinions and discontent publicly, simply interact with like-minded individuals, become active, and help shape political processes. Opposition groups and activists in authoritarian states are able to spread information quickly and widely, organise themselves, launch protests, and seek support outside their country.

Conversely, authoritarian regimes know how to leverage the internet to further their own aims and thus cement their hold on power. Research has found that the internet has served more to suppress than liberate societies.<sup>28</sup> All online communication and searches leave a data trail, thus making it possible to identify the user with a high degree of accuracy based on location, time, and IP address. Regimes can use the internet to quell opposition in a highly targeted way, or to spread propaganda and false information. One of the most prominent users of these techniques is China. With the help of a sophisticated censorship apparatus, the communist regime has been highly effective at neutralising online mobili-

sation efforts. Thanks to the internet, the Chinese government has access to valuable information that allows it to keep track not only of the latest problems affecting society but also of the activists who are organising and mobilising the population to act. The Chinese government uses the internet to react to and effectively influence public opinion; this is how China has controlled and quashed nascent political protests to date. The internet therefore helps to preserve the political regime in China (Dong et al. 2015).

Whether a state can use the internet as a tool of political repression depends on whether or not it controls the physical infrastructure supplied by internet service providers (ISP) (Freyburg & Garbe 2018).<sup>29</sup> These include hardware components such as servers, routers and cables that are needed to transmit data; ISPs can restrict or block access to the web. In China, the ruling communist party has made sure that all critical nodal points are under state control. The Chinese state is the (majority) owner and manager of the entire Chinese telecommunications infrastructure, the supervisory authorities, and the ISPs. Tough licensing agreements and regulations mean that foreign and domestic content providers have become self-censoring. *China Unicom*, one of the largest ISPs in the country, for example, automatically severs an internet connection as soon as an attempt is made to send encrypted information.

In African states, internet shutdowns and blockades have become a popular tool of ruling governments to control the flow of information, particularly at election time and during anti-government protests.<sup>30</sup> However, this requires either the authoritarian state to be the majority owner of the physical infrastructure, or a willingness on the part of private ISPs to limit or entirely block access to the internet. Given the high costs involved in building a telecommunications structure, many African states rely on foreign direct investment, and therefore grant private foreign firms authorised market access. In order to safeguard state control of the flow of digital information and communication, authoritarian leaders force

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The study received financial support from the Swiss Network for International Studies (www.snis.ch).

# Do failed democracy movements have a lasting impact?

History teems with examples of failed democracy movements. Whether in Iran and China or during the Arab Spring, hopes ran high that regime changes would eventually usher in democracy. Time and again they failed, and for many reasons. In some cases, positive outcomes came too slowly or failed to materialize, thereby derailing the democratisation process. In others, the dictators successfully fought to hold on to power, or they were supplanted by a new tyrant. In some instances, the democratic transition was stymied by intervention from external forces. However, rather than vanishing without a trace, a NCCR Democracy study found that even failed democracy movements leave a lasting mark on society (Desposato & Wang 2017). The researchers looked at the largest student democracy protest in history – the 100,000 plus Chinese students who took to the streets of Beijing in early 1989 to demand greater freedom and democracy. The movement ended abruptly after two months when protestors were violently halted by the Chinese military in Tiananmen Square. Shortly afterwards, the Chinese regime tightened its grip on civil society and public communication, restricting the rights and freedoms of the Chinese people in a bid to forestall future protests and reform movements.

Nearly 30 years later, it is as if this democracy movement never existed. An unwritten law forbids the Chinese media from discussing the subject, very few Chinese openly admit to having taken part in the protests, and the Chinese regime has done everything in its power to erase these events from collective memory. A survey among individuals who were students at the time and subsequent generations of students, however, shows that the democracy movement and the Tiananmen Square massacre left their mark. Those who were exposed to or participated in the movement are much more critical of the current regime and less likely to identify it as democratic than their younger counterparts. While both groups consider democracy to be a model of governance that is well suited to China, their understanding of the concept differs. Students from the democracy movement era consider political rights and civil liberties as the cornerstones of a democracy; for the subsequent generation, the primary role of a democratic state is to support economic growth. Information and learning processes may explain these differing stances. Those with direct exposure to the democracy movement had extensively discussed democracy and the reforms needed in China; subsequent generations, by contrast, grew up

private ISPs, often through legislation or by ‘voluntary agreement’, to comply with their demands. Empirical studies have found that the manipulation or shutdown of internet services is more likely to occur if the ISPs are close to the ruling elites, are owned by other authoritarian regimes, or are headquartered in fast-growing developing countries with ambitious expansion strategies like India and South Africa (Freyburg & Garbe 2018). ISPs that are based in or majority-owned by established democracies are subject to national legislation and thus international human rights standards, too. If they were to turn off or manipulate access to the internet, they would run the risk of criminal prosecution or, at the very least, public condemnation.

New media have not lived up to the original hope that they would become an instrument of liberalisation and democracy promotion. The internet offers only as much freedom as those in power allow it to.

## 4.2. International organisations and democracy promotion

A multitude of actors contribute to democracy promotion efforts. They include almost all established democracies, private stakeholders, non-governmental organisations, and foundations. International organisations like the United Nations, the World Bank, and the EU also play a key role. With varying degrees of success, they have supported pro-democracy advocates in civil society and endeavour to bring their influence to bear on non-democratic governments. The United Nations, for example, focuses its efforts on the promotion of peace and democracy in regions marred by ethnic conflict and civil war. For its part, the most successful EU efforts to date have been to promote and support the democratisation process in neighbouring European countries.

Generally speaking, three strategies are deployed to promote democracy (Lavenex 2013). The most widespread is indirect support for social and economic change in non-democracies through development policy. Here, the

underlying assumption is that an increase in wealth and education will also lead to demands for greater rights to participate politically. The success of this strategy is difficult to gauge due to the profound societal changes it aims to bring about. An added issue is that this approach can lead to tensions with authoritarian regimes and is therefore rarely pursued consistently. Civil society groups can only benefit from such support if the ruling powers permit it. Also, it is sometimes impossible to predict which social groups, such as radical Islamist forces, would benefit from democratic reforms. The EU, for example, has been pursuing this approach since the mid-1990s as part of its *Euro-Mediterranean Partnership* with North African countries. At times, though, the EU took a rather hesitant and ambivalent stance out of concern that democratic reforms could destabilise these countries.

A more direct approach to democracy promotion is linking financial assistance or future membership in an international organisation to the implementation of democratic reforms. This strategy is pursued primarily by the EU. Since the accession to the EU of Greece, Portugal, and Spain in the 1980s, all those countries previously run by dictators or military juntas, states may only join the EU if they comply with democratic standards such as the rule of law, the protection of human rights, and the creation of a well-functioning market economy. The real prospect of EU membership, coupled with the European Commission's monitoring of the democratisation process, has also led to the rapid political transformation of the younger EU member states in Central and Eastern Europe. Thanks to this 'political conditionality' approach, countries which received a credible offer of EU membership have successfully made the transition to democracy; association agreements and partnerships with the EU alone had little impact. Another key success factor was if the ruling elite in the applicant country had already taken first steps towards political liberalisation (Schimmelfennig & Scholtz 2008).

A general criticism of this strategy is that it contributes nothing to the development of a democratic culture and civil society because

in an environment where information was strictly controlled. The fact that these differences persist after almost 30 years, despite the Chinese government's best efforts to ensure that the democracy movement is erased from the country's collective memory, is evidence that protest movements, even when they fail, have a lasting impact on attitudes to democracy, at least among those with first-hand experience of them.

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In recent years, this was especially the case in sub-Saharan countries like Burundi, Cameroon, Chad, Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Gambia, Togo, and Uganda.

its focus on cooperation means that success hinges on whether the regime believes that the benefits of democratic reforms outweigh the disadvantages of relinquishing power. However, rational cost-benefit calculations are not the only factor that influences whether a country introduces reforms or not. First and foremost, the conditions that the applicant country must satisfy need to be compatible with its national identity, i.e. the criteria stipulated by the EU must be seen as appropriate and acceptable (Freyburg & Richter 2010). This explains why the strategy proved less successful in South-eastern Europe than in Central and Eastern Europe. Countries with a history of ethnic conflict, such as the successor states of former Yugoslavia place an exceedingly high value on issues of national identity. For example, the government of Croatia long refused to cooperate, or only cooperated half-heartedly, with the International War Crimes Tribunal in The Hague, even though this cooperation was an explicit condition for the country's accession to the EU. Handing over war criminals to the court was contrary to Croatia's self-conception as a blameless party in the Balkan Wars of the 1990s. Therefore, such an action was viewed as a betrayal of the nation. Ultimately, the EU cannot use the strategy of political conditionality alone to affect changes in national identities and values. If so, the end result could be the creation of a formally functioning democracy that is not underpinned by a democratic culture and a functioning civil society.

A third and more recent strategy for promoting democracy is policy-specific cooperation at the administrative level (Freyburg et al. 2015). Generally speaking, the problem with robust authoritarian regimes is that they rarely permit reforms that could threaten their survival. What incentive could be enticing enough for authoritarian leaders to embark on such a potentially risky path? An indirect and incremental strategy that promotes sector-specific cooperation at the administrative level may be the answer. Since 2003 the EU has pursued this approach as part of its European Neighbourhood Policy, which is targeted at states in close geographic proximity to the EU but with no

prospects of acceding to it. An NCCR Democracy study looked at some of these countries: Jordan, Morocco, Moldova, and the Ukraine (Freyburg et al. 2011). The primary aim of the EU was to help these states adopt legal and administrative standards, in specific policy areas, which approximated those of the EU. A further major aim was to familiarise administrative officials from authoritarian and democratising states 'through the back door' with democratic principles, norms and procedures that included transparency, participation, and accountability. Enshrining these in national legislative and administrative practice greatly helps advance the transition from an autocratic form of governance to a democratic one. Research findings show that this strategy has led these four countries to adopt EU norms in the policy areas examined by the study (environment, migration, and competition policy); their enforcement, however, remains patchy.

Nonetheless, the Morocco case study offers an optimistic assessment (Freyburg 2011). Participation in cooperation programmes with specialists from the public authorities of EU member states had a positive influence on the attitude of Moroccan state officials to democratic decision-making processes. As part of this programme, European and Moroccan officials worked together to devise solutions and establish the legal foundations for specific policy areas that were based on the legal and administrative standards of EU countries. Moroccan government officials who were able to spend time in an EU country and observe democratic, administrative governance in action had a more favourable attitude towards it. Of course, a change in attitude in no way implies that political institutions will become more democratic and that regime change is underway. Nonetheless, the adoption of democratic principles, norms, and procedures by a public administration can help bolster for eventual democratic changes in the respective country an administrator works in.

The transition to democracy is a highly complex and drawn-out process that requires long-term commitment and action.<sup>31</sup> There is no one-size-fits-all approach. To succeed, each

strategy must be tailored to the given context, i.e. to the domestic policy conditions and the phase of transformation in the given country, and consistently implemented. Under certain circumstances, democratisation can lead to violent conflict. Statistical studies have shown that democratisation processes are associated with an increased risk of civil war (Cederman et al. 2010).

### 4.3. Why democratisation not infrequently leads to civil war

If a democracy is to work, the people who live together in a state must perceive themselves as part of a political community. There must be consensus on who the constitutive people are. Since the French Revolution, nationality has become the decisive criterion for determining these constitutive people. Nationalism, the formative political ideology of the modern age, has led to the constitutive people of a state often being equated with an ethnically defined community, and only those who belong to this community are considered part of the nation and are granted political rights. This can become problematic if the same national territory is home to multiple ethnic groups, as is the case for most countries in the world today. Equating the people of a state with a specific ethnic group and accentuating the differences between individual groups can have serious repercussions, from ethnic discrimination up to genocide. Clashing notions of a state's people lie at the heart of many political conflicts. The question of who belongs to the demos and enjoys political rights is of central importance, particularly during democratisation processes (Schimmelfennig & Vogt 2013).

#### Elections foment conflict

A country making the transition from an authoritarian regime to a democratic regime has to hold elections sooner or later. While they are a cornerstone of democracy, elections can also sow the seeds of political violence. They

raise the issue of which ethnic groups belong to the political community and who has the right to vote. Ruling heads of state can deliberately exploit elections to fan ethnic hostilities or spread nationalist propaganda in order to consolidate their power. Frequently, they resort to active discrimination, intimidation, and even ethnic cleansing to remain in government. During election campaigns, the mood of the voters can be fired up as the various political actors attempt to secure their support. Likewise, the outcome of elections can lead to violence due to suspected or confirmed irregularities or because the losers refuse to accept the official result. The organisation of free and fair elections is one of the first measures that democracy promotion actors call for. The equally important task of post-election mediation tends to be overlooked.

Empirical studies conducted as part of NCCR Democracy confirm that the risk of conflict is high after a competitive election in emerging democracies and can lead to the break out of ethnically motivated conflicts and civil wars (Cederman et al. 2012). The risk is particularly high during the very first elections that the country holds, or the first elections that are held after a prolonged period without them. The risk of conflict is also high when groups are excluded from power. Two types of conflict typically occur after elections. The first are over governmental power, which are mostly fought between larger groups and are rarely ethnically motivated. The second are over territory, and tend to involve smaller, marginalised ethnic groups who seek autonomy (or even to secede) but who do not necessarily seek positions of power in the national government being elected.

#### The role of the media in transition processes

When the run-up to an election is marred by violent conflict between different ethnic groups, what role do the media play here? The media are clearly a powerful instrument that political actors can try to leverage to win the

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Merkel, Wolfgang (2010), *Systemtransformation. Eine Einführung in die Theorie und Empirie der Transformationsforschung*. Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften.

support of the electorate. In states on the path to democracy, the media may still be controlled by the old elites, or may be in the hands of other actors. Compared to the conditions they had to contend with under the previous authoritarian regime, the media enjoy greater independence, even if journalistic practices can still be coloured by the authoritarian experience. Do the media amplify nationalist discourse and therefore make elections more polarised? An NCCR Democracy study looked at this question by examining the role of traditional media in Georgia's democratisation process (Abzianidze 2017). The study sifted through over 1,000 articles published between 1991 and 2012 for evidence of nationalist discourse. It found that it was not particularly pronounced and featured in only one-eighth of the articles. However, nationalist rhetoric spiked during election campaigns, particularly in the early phases of the democratisation process. The media primarily addressed ethnic-related issues, adopting a confrontational and overbearing tone when discussing matters regarding the exclusion of certain groups, and often portrayed certain actors as a threat to, or as enemies of, the nation. In the latter phases of democratisation, ethnically-charged discussion gave way to more pragmatic reporting on economic and political issues. As in the Cederman study, the likelihood of conflict was found to be greater during the early phases of the democratisation process. It observed that nationalist discourse waned over time but that journalists, regardless of the newspaper they worked for, played a central role in encouraging it.

#### 4.4. What does it take for democratisation to succeed?

Political stability can only be achieved if all individuals, regardless of their ethnic identity, have the opportunity to participate in the democratic process. In addition to economic development,<sup>32</sup> one of the key determinants of whether a country successfully transitions to a democracy is the presence of a broad-based

demos, i.e. the representation and integration of all population segments or groups in the political process. In the past, the political exclusion of ethnic groups was the primary cause of civil war, as borne out by studies of civil wars since World War II (Bormann et al. 2013). Societies which are composed of different ethnic groups therefore have to accept that they are a multi-ethnic demos, and the possibility of running for political office, and participating in the decision-making process, must be open to everyone.

#### Power-sharing in multi-ethnic societies

Multi-ethnic societies adopt three strategies to determine which individuals and groups belong to the demos (Bormann et al. 2013): dominance, partition, and power-sharing. The most frequently practised strategy is the domination of one group over all others. To date, the countries of the Middle East and North Africa have applied this approach, almost exclusively. Their systems of government are characterised by ethnically homogenous bureaucracies and armies, the absence of negotiations between the different ethnic groups, and the not infrequent use of coercion as a political tool. Turkey and Israel, too, largely overlook the rights of their ethnic minorities; their respective protracted civil wars are an indication that extensive and repeated violence is often a consequence of ethnic dominance.

A second strategy is to divide up the country along ethnically distinct lines. The two-state solution, for example, has long been discussed as a means of resolving the Israel-Palestinian conflict. However, formal partition and the creation of new states are rare; Southern Sudan, Kosovo and Eritrea are recent exceptions. The reason is that a central concern of the international community is to maintain existing borders so they are reluctant to raise the issue of the self-determination of minorities (Schimmelfennig & Vogt 2013). Many powerful states with ethnic minorities, including China and Russia, have no interest in sup-

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The more prosperous a society is and the less people must struggle to survive, the more they strive for individual freedoms and democracy. Many studies have already identified the link between economic prosperity and the emergence and stability of democracies. See, for example, Lipset, Seymour Martin (1959), "Some Social Requisites of Democracy: Economic Development and Political Legitimacy", *American Political Science Review* 53, 69-105; Vanhanen, Tatu (1984), *The Emergence of Democracy. A Comparative Study of 119 States, 1850-1979*, Helsinki; Inglehart, Ronald & Welzel, Christian (2005), *Modernization, Cultural Change, and Democracy. The Human Development Sequence*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

porting such independence efforts. Experience with partition to date shows that it can cause a multitude of problems, especially ‘matryoshka nationalism.’ In other words, every newly-founded state itself contains ethnic minorities who are likely to assert their right to self-determination, forcing the newly-founded state to further self-divide. For example, the secession of South Sudan from North Sudan in 2011 has led to the outbreak of civil war in this newly-founded state. New and also established states are often heavily dependent on each other for their economic development, which can lead to disputes about the distribution of profits.

Given the obvious problems associated with both dominance and partition, NCCR Democracy concluded that ethnic power-sharing is a more promising strategy. Since the 1990s, many post-civil war regimes – South Africa, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and Northern Ireland – feature power-sharing elements. The research suggests that this approach increases the probability of achieving lasting peace. Of central importance here is the inclusion of representatives of all ethnic groups in the ruling coalition. Ethnic differences are officially acknowledged and, in some cases, even protected under the constitution. Each ethnic group is guaranteed equal rights and autonomy in their specific region. Minorities are granted veto rights on policy matters in which they have a particular stake. In this way, the political preferences of minorities are taken into account, an important prerequisite for the peaceful and democratic evolution of a nation-state.

### Protecting minorities

Democracy is often associated with the principle of majority rule; a democracy is a system in which the majority decides. This is an overly narrow vision of democracy because majority rule in fact refers to one of many decision-making procedures that a democratic system follows. There is an inherent risk that the political views and interests of important political groups are excluded. A prerequisite

of the majority rule principle is that political majorities can change, so that majorities can become minorities and vice versa. What about ethnic, linguistic, and religious minorities who will never have the chance to become the majority? If certain groups permanently remain in the minority and cannot assert their preferences, it can put domestic peace at risk. Politics must reflect the concerns and the will of all citizens, including minorities. Democracy also demands that minorities be protected from the supremacy of the majority. NCCR researchers therefore support more inclusive models of democracy which take into account a larger number of citizen preferences (Bochsler & Hänni 2017). This does not mean that the preferences of minorities take precedence over those of the majority but rather that their preferences should carry more weight in decisions of particular relevance to them.

### 4.5. Conclusion

Geographic proximity and global interconnectedness help promote democratisation processes. New communication technologies make it possible to share information quickly and on a global scale and can accelerate the spread of mass protests. However, research indicates that the internet does not per se have a democratising effect. The hierarchical organisation of the physical infrastructure of the internet enables authoritarian regimes to control the flow of information and communication through it to great effect.

The transition from an authoritarian to a democratic regime is a highly complex and drawn-out process which is shaped by a multitude of external and internal factors. Ultimately, democratisation can only be achieved if the country’s stakeholders actively participate in the process. When it comes to democracy promotion, there is no one-size-fits-all approach that can be applied to different countries. The international community pursues a variety of strategies with varying degrees of success, and rarely in a consistent way. Strong incentives and a long-term vision are needed to achieve

the desired effect, as the case of the European Union shows. It successfully contributed to the democratisation of neighbouring countries each time that it extended a credible offer of future membership to them.

One of the most important conditions for the establishment and consolidation of democracy is the political participation of all groups in a country, regardless of their ethnic identity. A primary reason why democratisation processes often lead to violent conflict is because the demos is defined on the basis of ethnic identity, and certain ethnic groups may thereby be excluded from the political process. The danger of civil war is particularly high during the early stages of democratisation, immediately following the country's first elections. Nationalist, ethnically-charged discourse is particularly pronounced during this period. If democracy is to stand a chance of surviving, ethnic groups in a given country must share power. The decision-making process should take on board the concerns of minorities, particularly when they have a considerable stake in the outcome.



CHAPTER 5

The role  
of the media in  
democracies

Modern democracy relies on communication between politicians and citizens, and the mass media play an important role in connecting both. Through their political reporting, the media provide the public with the information about politics they need to form their own opinions and make an informed choice at the ballot box. At the same time, they enable politicians to keep abreast of the views, interests, and concerns of the public. Last but by no means least, the media also hold policymakers accountable by offering critical analyses of policy, highlighting successes and failures and naming those responsible.

This description of the role of the media in a democracy refers to an ideal scenario. In practice, there is a disconnect between this vision and reality. The media are not merely impartial purveyors of information; they pursue their own interests, too. Over the last 40 years their influence on politics has steadily risen – a phenomenon referred to as ‘mediatisation’. This is a two-way process. On the one hand, as the media have become more assertive, their political influence has grown: they initiate certain policy issues, interpret them and suggest solutions. On the other hand, political actors see through the rules of the game laid down by the mass media and begin to use them for their own ends: to obtain more coverage, mobilise voters, and highlight or downplay certain issues when competing against their political opponents.

### **5.1. Mediatisation: how the media have changed the rules of politics**

In 19th century Europe, newspapers were the mouthpiece of either political parties or the church. Newspapers with party-political or ideological ties dominated the press landscape until the 1970s, when the media gradually began to emancipate from political and social institutions, evolving into commercially-driven enterprises. In 2010 the share of press outlets with clear ties to political or social actors stood at 0% in the UK and France, 1% in Germany and 2% in Switzerland (Udris & Lucht 2014). The grow-

ing political autonomy of the media paved the way for mediatisation. It is only by becoming independent from political institutions that the media have been able to bring their influence to bear on politics. This independence is reflected in the fact that they now apply their own logic to the selection, presentation, and interpretation of political news stories.

This logic is underpinned by three determinants (Esser 2013). The first is the professionalisation of journalism and the resulting formulation of professional norms and values which are sometimes at odds with the calculus and professional norms of political parties and politicians. The higher the degree of professionalisation, the more journalists consider themselves advocates of the public interest. They see it as their mission to cast a discerning and critical eye over the political process and to exert pressure so that politics responds to public demands. Journalists see their profession as one which is not accountable to political forces, and unilaterally decide what they want to report on and how. Given this self-image in the profession, coupled with the quest for recognition and a successful career, some journalists may seek to exert greater influence. Consequently, it is not the voice of political and social actors that drive the news but that of the journalists themselves.

The second determinant of this logic is a commercial calculus. Their pursuit of economic independence and freedom from political interference means mounting exposure to market forces. So much so, in fact, that listed media companies have become commonplace across Europe. In Switzerland, for example, their share rose from 0% in 1990 to 47% in 2010 (Udris & Lucht 2014). A corollary of this trend is a business strategy driven by circulation numbers and audience ratings. Attention is a rare commodity, so the media increasingly resort to strategies involving dramatisation, emotionalisation, targeted provocation, and ramping up conflicts. Political news reporting, too, is now governed by the laws of ‘attention economics’.

The third determinant of news logic is technological advances. The way in which po-

# Pre-election TV debates – an example of mediatisation

One example of how the media exert their influence over the presentation and public perception of politics are televised head-to-head debates between leading candidates in an election. These were created to satisfy the desire of the media to draw election campaign events into their studios, or rather into their sphere of logic. Although TV debates are by no means a new phenomenon, over the last 20 years they have come to be seen as a key campaign event. They originated in the USA where they have been an integral part of presidential election campaigns since the 1960s. Germany, for example, only held its first head-to-head TV debate during the 2002 parliamentary elections, which set incumbent Chancellor Gerhard Schröder (SPD) against challenger Edmund Stoiber (CDU/CSU). In many countries, these televised debates have now been elevated to national media events. They attract more public attention, media coverage and analysis than any other election campaign event. Staged as a verbal duel, these debates better satisfy the needs of the TV stations than those of politics. The media influence the debates (Strömbäck & Esser 2009) by speculating in the days leading up to the broadcast about the positions of the candidates, their chances of success, and the strategies they are likely to pursue. In doing so, they shape public expectations. The candidates play along with the game, although they do try to limit potential damage by entering into complex negotiations with the programme editors beforehand. They know that the outcome, meaning the general assessment of who ‘won’ the debate, depends heavily on how the media and their commentators interpret it. As a result, the post-debate analysis is as important as the debate itself; political candidates adopt strategies designed to reach not only the viewing public but also journalists and media commentators. The media have various means at their disposal to influence how the candidates and their performance are perceived. In the US, for example, selected tweets from viewers as well as graphics today are included in the live feed to show whether specific groups, hand-picked by the broadcaster, endorse what they are hearing or not. Media logic prevails particularly when televised debates have become institutionalised and political candidates have no choice but to participate. These debates are not presented to the public in a neutral, unfiltered way but are actively shaped by the media. Public knowledge and opinion are therefore determined by what information the media chooses to communicate to the public.

Political stories are presented depends on the medium of communication used: print, radio, TV, and the internet. Journalists adapt to the demands of the given medium and capitalise on its specific advantages. Digitalisation has radically changed journalism. Speed, interactivity and multichannel publishing are now part and parcel of everyday journalistic practice. New and traditional media have become increasingly interconnected, whether as rivals or as an amplifier of the other’s reporting. Due to the growing presence of social media, traditional mainstream media have lost their role as the public’s information gatekeeper. Today, anyone can use the internet to share their concerns, which means that the communication process is less top-down and more bottom-up, and thus increasingly influenced by individual internet users and well-networked groups.

Politics is a complex world that rests on the subtle interplay between ‘polity’ (institutions), ‘policy’ (content), and ‘politics’ (process). Political actors cannot expect media coverage to reflect this complexity. Therefore, journalists focus on covering specific parts of a story, following the news media’s own logic. To attract attention and the support of the public and to legitimise their decisions, political actors, who are heavily dependent on media attention, adapt to this logic, try to anticipate what the public expects from them, and take appropriate actions.

Mediatisation becomes problematic when the media no longer contribute to the functioning of democracy. This is the case when they apply their own logic to determine which societal problems are important and, by doing so, heavily influence the political decision-making process. Problems also arise if the media do not honour their mission as an information provider and neglect issues which concern society in general, e.g. when they cover more ‘soft news’, which focuses on human interest rather than public interest stories. Mediatisation also becomes problematic when impartial reporting and rational analysis is supplanted by simplification, dramatisation, emotionalisation, and scandalisation in a bid to grab the attention of the public.

## 5.2. How strong is the media's influence on politics?

NCCR Democracy investigated the scale of mediatisation in western democracies based on the question to what extent the media's own logic has shaped political news and whether that logic has been co-opted by political actors and organisations (Esser & Matthes 2013).

### Media logic increasingly shapes the content of political news

How do the media report political news stories? NCCR Democracy studies found that mediatisation does exist and that it is increasing. A comparison<sup>33</sup> of over 6,000 newspaper articles which appeared in Germany, France, Great Britain, Italy, the US, and Switzerland show that political news is increasingly packaged to appeal to the public (Umbricht & Esser 2016, Esser & Fretwurst 2017). Journalists adopt an ever more interpretive style in their political news reporting. Sober, fact-based articles have given way to narratives journalists frame to attract more attention.

Journalism deploys five stylistic devices to make news more entertaining and engaging for the wider public. First, politics is presented in a negative light; the tone of the reporting is generally pessimistic and conflates politics with crisis, frustration, and disappointment. Second, political actors are treated with scepticism and there is an implication that they are incompetent. Third, journalists knowingly give more attention to the sensational aspects of the news story in order to create tension and drama. Fourth, reporting increasingly focuses on political scandals and presents these as morally reprehensible. Fifth, and finally, politics becomes an emotionally charged subject and media coverage describes and evokes emotions in order to make them easier to understand.

There are two reasons behind the growing tendency of the media to adopt a more interpretive reporting style. On the one hand, the focus on circulation numbers and audience share ramp up the pressure on journalists. As a

result, commercial considerations take centre stage and journalists find themselves locked in a battle to garner as much public attention as possible in order to stop circulation numbers from shrinking further. On the other hand, journalists are committed to their role as critical reporters of the news, which prompts them to paint a sceptical and sometimes cynical picture of politics. Criticising politics fosters journalists' self-image as independent purveyors of information and critical authorities, with the added advantage that it attracts more public attention. Political news reporting in many western democracies is now more commercialised and critical than ever before.

A content analysis shows that in the selected six countries political news are increasingly packaged to attract public attention. To illustrate this trend more clearly, we single out three indicators, namely 'sensationalism', 'scandalisation' and 'emotionalisation' (see pages 52/53):

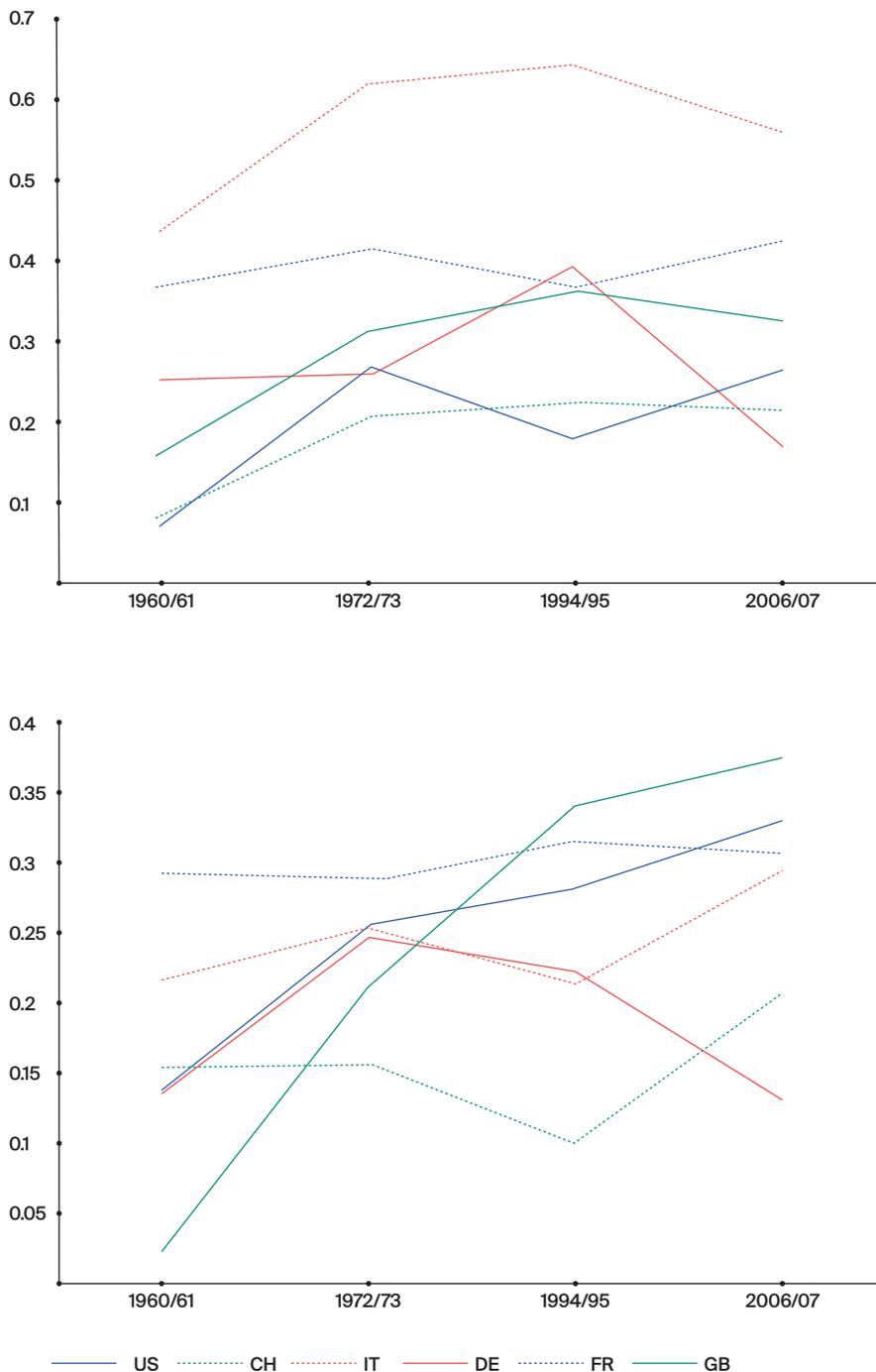
The drift towards attention-grabbing political news reporting varies considerably across countries. These differences can be explained by the relative level of commercialisation, regulation of the press market, and journalistic autonomy in the given country. Other contributory factors include the communication culture and the traditional power of the popular press. The media in the US and UK are much more market-driven; state intervention is rare, hence their high degree of commercialisation. The news logic in these countries follows the rules of infotainment. On the one hand, this is a rather disconcerting trend because the adoption of a more entertaining style may be at the expense of substantive reporting and could lead to voter cynicism and non-participation.<sup>34</sup> However, evidence of this effect is not the same across the six countries (Esser & Matthes 2013). On the other hand, blending information with entertainment has its merits in that it imparts knowledge about politics to an otherwise uninterested public. In France and Italy, sensationalist journalism and scandalisation are much more commonplace. The popularity of print journalism is traditionally low in these countries, as reflected in poor circulation numbers and the dependence of many newspapers on state subsi-

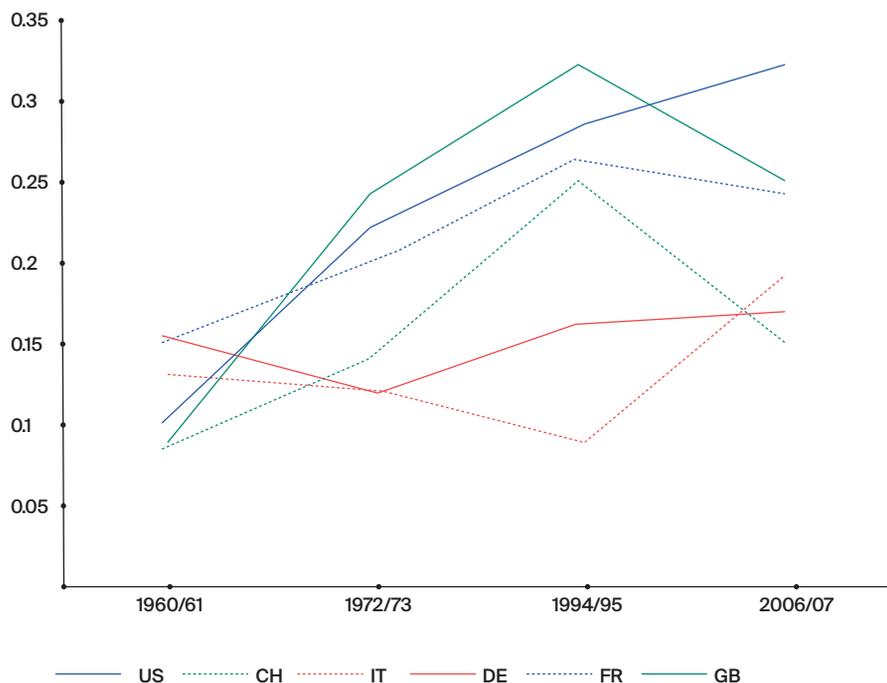
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The analysis looked at the content of political reporting which appeared in 18 national and regional daily papers between 1960 and 2007. The countries which were selected represent the three common types of news systems that predominate in western democracies: the liberal model (Great Britain, USA), the democratic-corporatist model (Germany, Switzerland), and the polarised-pluralist model (France and Italy). The study excluded the popular press, as its aim was to find out whether the quality press increasingly adopts an approach similar to that of its tabloid counterparts. The analysis also included regional papers because they have decisively shaped the evolution of the press market in the West.

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Cappella, Joseph N. & Katherine Hall Jamieson (1997). *Spiral of Cynicism. The Press and the Public Good*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Figure 5: Prevalence of sensationalism in news reporting

The graph shows the percentage (0.1 = 10%) of politics-related newspaper articles published in the selected six countries which feature sensational content, e.g. exaggeration, dynamic verbs, vivid imagery and emphasis on dramatic, unusual and spectacular aspects of a political event. On the vertical axis, 0 = no evidence found of sensational content in any of the politics-related press articles from the given country; 1 = sensational content found in 100% of the politics-related press articles from the given country. Overall, the share of press articles with sensational content has risen over the last 50 years.





Opposite page bottom:

Figure 6: Prevalence of scandalisation in news reporting

This concerns coverage that expresses indignation, public outrage and criticism or condemnation of political actors' behaviour. 0 = no evidence of scandalisation found; 1 = scandalisation found in 100% of the investigated articles for the given country. The share of the British press, for example, which makes use of this stylistic device increased from 2% in 1960/1961 to 38% in 2006/2007 (green line).

Above:

Figure 7: Prevalence of emotionalisation in news reporting

Indicators for this reporting style are the use of emotive language with powerful adjectives designed to trigger either negative emotions (e.g. anger, irritation, disappointment) or positive ones (e.g. joy, pride), and a focus on the human drama dimension of the story. 0 = no emotionalisation; 1 = emotionalisation found in 100% of the investigated articles for the given country.

dies. Consequently, parts of the press deploy this stylistic device to boost their readership numbers. The quality press in Germany and Switzerland are the least likely to package political reporting in an attention-grabbing way. The fact that their political systems are more strongly gear-orientated towards consensus is reflected in their public communication culture, whereby the public and journalists so far have tended to shun sensationalism, scandalisation, and emotionalisation. Their respective press industries are also less commercialised (Umbricht & Esser 2016). However, further analyses, not shown in the graphs above, found that Germany and Switzerland are not immune to the growing tendency towards a more interpretive approach to political news reporting and the inclusion of their personal viewpoints.

The growing role of the media in shaping the content of political news is also evidenced by the fact that politicians now have fewer opportunities to explain their positions on TV news broadcasts (Esser 2008). The time they have to speak uninterrupted in pre-election TV programmes has shrunk over the decades. Today, journalistic commentary makes up around three quarters of the coverage of a political news story – an indication that journalists increasingly steer public discourse and assume the role of public spokespersons.<sup>35</sup> What the public knows about the candidate rarely comes from the candidates themselves. Instead, the latter are shown in voiceless image bites, with the only words spoken being those of the journalist providing the commentary off-camera. Here, powerful – discrediting or flattering – images are used to illustrate the story. The choice of images greatly determines how viewers rate the candidate. Although the approach adopted by the media in Western Europe is now closer to that of US culture, distinctions remain between national news cultures in the West (Esser 2008).

### Political actors and organisations adapt to the media logic

Professionalism in dealing with the media has become a much higher priority for political ac-

tors and organisations in recent decades. Does this mean that they have adopted the media logic and, if so, to what extent? NCCR Democracy studies<sup>36</sup> (Donges & Jarren 2014) found that political parties now attach greater importance to their media relations. In the early 1990s, many parties did not have any public relations staff; today the communication department is an integral part of the party apparatus. Despite dwindling membership and income, political parties have invested substantial financial and personnel resources in their communication activities and the communications unit sits near the top in the party's organisational hierarchy. This development is a reaction to the perceived growing power of the media. However, not all political organisations have changed their communication policy. Associations and interest groups<sup>37</sup> use the mass media less because attracting public attention is not their chief concern. Their primary focus is communication with their own members, specialist media and the target public, as well as lobbying away from the spotlight.

Equally, governments have adapted to the changing media system and progressively aligned their communication activities with media logics (Vogel 2010).<sup>38</sup> To keep up with the increasingly fast pace of media reporting, government spokespeople now have to react more quickly to events and be available around the clock. Complexity must be reduced and the message must be put across to the public as concisely and incisively as possible. This makes it difficult to offer nuanced reporting that covers a variety of angles

### Who sets the political agenda?

One NCCR Democracy study addressed the question of the influence of the mass media on politics by looking at who decides what issues are discussed in the public and political spheres. Do the media pick up on talking points created by political actors? Or do the media raise a particular issue and political actors react to it? Many studies have shown that the mass media shape the political agenda of

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The analysis looked at the content of pre-election TV news reporting in Germany, France, Great Britain, and the USA during the first decade of the 21st century.

36  
To find out how traditional parties have changed in terms of their organisational structure and communication activities, the study looked at the largest people's parties in four countries: Germany (CDU, SPD), Great Britain (Conservatives, Labour), Austria (ÖVP, SPÖ) and Switzerland (CVP, FDP, SP and SVP). Alongside an analysis of the parties' annual reports, yearbooks and organisation charts, the researchers also interviewed their organisations and communications directors.

37  
Interviews were conducted with communications directors of interest groups in Germany and Switzerland.

38  
The issue of whether and how government communication has changed in Germany, Great Britain and Switzerland was investigated by means of a document analysis and interviews with experts.

democracies. In doing so, the media agenda exerts a stronger influence over the parliamentary agenda than the other way round (Vliegthart et al. 2016). The strength of this influence depends on the country's political system. In countries<sup>39</sup> with a single-party government like the UK and Spain, the media exert more influence on the political agenda. This is because it is easier to hold single-party governments accountable for political decisions. The opposition has a clear target for their attacks and uses the media to weaken the government through negative coverage. In coalition governments, decision-making and accountability are less clear-cut. Since media coverage of a government tends to be rather negative – highlighting failures more than successes – parliamentarians whose party rules alone are generally more reticent to interact with the media. However, in coalition governments, parliamentarians of the ruling parties tend to use the media to challenge their coalition partners. The results of the study show that political actors deliberately use the media to further their own strategic goals. They have adapted to the media logic, but only insofar as it is to their benefit.

### Do the media influence political decision-making?

The extent to which politics has become mediated is also reflected in the influence that the media can bring to bear in parliamentary decision-making processes and political negotiations. In election and referendum campaigns, the strategies adopted by the political actors are unambiguous: they are chasing votes and therefore interact intensively with the media. Their strategies are less clear-cut during the legislative process. In terms of parliamentary activities, there is an inherent tension between political and public-orientated strategies. While the first aim to find long-term solutions to political problems, the second are driven by the need to respond on a constant basis to the short-term preferences of the electorate. With a close eye on opinion

polls, politicians adapt to the demands of the media and their specific logic to build and sustain a media profile in order to reach the widest possible groups of voters.

Using Switzerland as a case study, one NCCR Democracy research project (Landerer 2015)<sup>40</sup> investigated the extent to which the media influence the legislative process. It found that mass media considerations are very much part of the day-to-day work of Swiss parliamentarians; they give a great deal of thought to how they can attract the attention of the media and make the news. However, the degree to which they focus on the mass media varies across parties. Those in the centre (BDP, CVP, FDP, GLP) – which prevailed in all three legislative processes investigated here – were less media-orientated and audience-orientated than parties on the left and right edges of the political spectrum (GPS, SP, SVP). The latter were more strategic in their media dealings and perceived the influence of the media and their coverage as less important.

Perceptions also differed across the three decision-making processes. Parliamentarians were the least audience-oriented on foreign policy matters and most audience-oriented on purely domestic policy issues. This is due to the fact that the Swiss parliament has limited latitude on international issues, which in turn reduces the opportunities for parliamentarians to act strategically. In terms of the outcomes of these processes, the media were implicitly held accountable for failures. Regardless of party, members of parliament who had not been able to assert themselves in the decision-making process perceived the influence of the mass media as more problematic.

In politics, discretion and mutual trust are essential if negotiations are to succeed. They require participants to refrain from high-profile public communications, at least temporarily. Compromise is easier if the negotiating partners keep the details to themselves. Yet, in a democracy there is a justified interest in having transparent decision-making processes because those responsible for the outcomes can be held accountable. The media try to satisfy this need for transparency

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Seven European countries (Belgium, Denmark, France, Great Britain, Netherlands, Spain, and Switzerland) were studied over a period of 20 years. They represent different political systems and they guarantee a high level of media freedom.

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The study looked at the following three (Swiss) legislative processes: the “too big to fail” banking legislation reform (2010/2011), the reform of disability insurance 6a (2009/2010), and the taxation agreement with Britain and Germany (2011/2012). All three processes were very heated because at least one of the ruling parties took a stance that was at odds with the majority position. None of the parties held a majority, so everyone had to deviate from their original positions in order to pass the law. All three processes were also the subject of intense debate in the mass media which exposed the members of parliament to intense public pressure.

# Direct democratic campaigns in Switzerland - manipulating or enlightening?

The media play an especially important role in direct democracies because citizens are regularly called upon to decide on substantive issues. A comprehensive study undertaken as part of the NCCR Democracy project looked at direct democratic campaigns in Switzerland (Kriesi 2012), in particular at the strategies deployed by the political actors, media coverage of the campaigns, and how the voters formed their opinions.<sup>45</sup> The study concludes that the general conditions framing direct democratic campaigns in Switzerland are still good. The campaigns tend to be enlightening: both politicians and the media are highly experienced in handling these campaigns and politicians make a substantial contribution to the debate. In all of the cases studied here, discussions focused primarily on the content of the proposal and rarely featured references to political rivalries, personal attacks on the opposing camps, or attempts to stir up conflict. Supporters and opponents alike had the opportunity to outline their main arguments in the public debate. They also addressed the opposing positions, particularly if the subject matter was relatively straightforward. However, the study did find that both sides co-opted opposing arguments in order to diminish them and undermine their persuasiveness (Schemer 2009). Media reporting on individual issues was of high quality, very intensive and balanced. Here, the media tended to play a reactive role. It was the politicians who shaped the debate and, as such, the media adopted the arguments and content put forward by the political actors.

Generally speaking, media reporting had no direct effect on voters' decisions. One exception was the referendum on the corporate tax reform of 2008 (USR II) which involved a complex proposal on a subject with which only a tiny minority of the electorate was familiar. In this case media reporting had a direct impact on how people voted. This suggests that media coverage can systematically influence the opinion-forming process when the subject of a proposal is exceedingly complex (Bernhard 2018). Nonetheless, the USR II was an atypical case; proposals of such complexity and perplexity rarely come before the people.

The main influence on voters' choices were the arguments put forward by the camps in favour and against during the campaigns. Intensive and heated public debate had a positive effect on voters' level of knowledge. Emotions were also a contributory factor, particularly in the complex and difficult-to-understand USR II campaign. It seems paradoxical that a complicated and

by raising public awareness of the process. So, how do political actors reconcile these two demands? To answer this question, an NCCR Democracy study surveyed bargaining officials in three key negotiating processes<sup>44</sup> that took place in Germany under Chancellor Schröder (Spörer-Wagner & Marcinkowski 2010). All three processes concerned redistribution measures and were the subject of intense media scrutiny. One of the general findings of the study was that the political actors involved deployed a variety of instruments to deal with media interest and safeguard the negotiation process. According to the self-reporting of those involved, the atmosphere was negatively affected by the heavy presence of journalists near to the negotiating venue and by their relentless, highly dynamic reporting. They also criticised the indiscretion of members of the negotiating team and their violation of the pre-agreed news management rules. Communication with the media became a negotiating tool by itself, and certain participants used targeted contact with the media to try to force through specific decisions. As a result, compromises were hard to reach. The presence of the media per se did not make the bargaining process difficult. Instead, it was the exchanges between the media and individual negotiators that made it harder to reach efficient compromises.

All of the studies show that mediatisation is a two-way process. The media are omnipresent and political actors cannot avoid them in their day-to-day work. The media have become one of the most influential players in politics. Conversely, political actors use the media to serve their own needs and interests. In doing so, they adopt the media logic when it is to their advantage, i.e. one can say they 'self-mediatise'. This makes certain political institutions or phases of the political process more susceptible to mediatisation, depending on how reliant they are on public attention. Politicians in election campaigns are more willing to play the media game than those involved in negotiating processes, where compromise is the first and most important order of business (Marcinkowski & Steiner 2014).

### 5.3. Do the media influence public opinion?

The unhindered formation of a political will and opinion is essential for the sound functioning of a democracy. The media play a key role as they act as an intermediary between politics and the public, and are a source of extensive and wide-ranging information. At the same time, the media have the potential to heavily influence the formation of public opinion through the news stories they choose to cover and the emphasis and weighting they give to their content. As a result, certain issues can be considered more important than others. The media also determine the angle from which an issue is approached, how it is interpreted, and what should be emphasised or disregarded ('framing'). It is not always easy for the audience to discern whether reporting on a given event is from a specific perspective or whether it includes a variety of viewpoints. To dissect reporting in this way may require the audience to be very attentive, interested, and have a high degree of media literacy. The influence of media content on public opinion and attitudes is therefore an issue of paramount importance. Can the media or the political actors who use the media manipulate public opinion?

Research has identified various media effects.<sup>42</sup> The impact of media content is extremely complex and is determined by the interplay of multiple factors that are specific to the prevailing media environment and to the personality and the social environment of the media user. Media content can have an impact on knowledge, attitudes, opinions, emotions, and behaviour. It can trigger, change or reinforce something and lead to the acquisition of new information. As regards political communication and, by extension, democracy, media effects fall primarily into four categories (Wettstein & Wirth 2017). The first, and fundamentally positive, effect is the acquisition of novel information and the opportunity to learn about the context and relevance of issues, about arguments, interpretations, and evaluations. However, the choice and pre-

highly specialised subject would be capable of triggering emotions. Nonetheless, the findings show that citizens relied more on their gut instincts when they did not fully understand the subject matter or when they were not particularly motivated to intensively engage with it.

The generally positive conclusions of the study are attenuated somewhat by two further observations. The first is a growing trend towards personalisation in Swiss direct democratic campaigns, whereby the media increasingly focuses on the members of the Federal Council who are responsible for putting the proposal to the people. This openly flouts Switzerland's political tradition which obliges the federal government to take a backseat in direct democratic campaigns; their job is simply to provide the electorate with balanced information and not actively contribute to the opinion-formation process. Nonetheless, there is a growing tendency in the Swiss media to hold individual members of the Federal Council to account and expect them to publicly defend the government's proposal (Kriesi 2009). The second trend, which could be problematic in the future, is the rising popularity of the tabloid press and free newspapers (which now have the largest readership in Switzerland) at the expense of the regional press. These are much more market-driven and devote little space to the analysis of political news. If they were to become the only source of information for many voters, the quality of public debate in the media would deteriorate dramatically.

41  
The three negotiating processes took place within the framework of the *Kommission für die Nachhaltigkeit in der Finanzierung der sozialen Sicherungssysteme* [Commission for Sustainability in Financing the Social Security Systems] (Rürup Commission) 2002/2003; the *Kommission für moderne Dienstleistungen am Arbeitsmarkt* [Commission for Labour Market Reform] (Hartz Commission) 2002; and the Red-Green Government Coalition Committee 2002–2005.

42  
For an overview of the state of the research, see Bonfadelli, Heinz & Thomas Friemel (2017). *Medienwirkungsforschung*. Konstanz: UVK Verlagsgesellschaft.

43  
The study looked at referendum campaigns in Switzerland (see pages 56/57), public debate on unemployment in six European countries and the effect of populist media content on users in four European metropolitan areas. Three panel surveys, supplemented with a media content analysis and several experiments were conducted as part of this research.

sentation of a subject has a bearing on what and how to think about it. The second effect is the triggering of emotional reactions and behavioural responses. When actors deliberately provoke these to garner more attention and whip up public sentiment, it presents a challenge for democracy as it can induce hasty and emotionally-driven decisions. Third, media content can change opinions, political attitudes or behaviour through repeated coverage of a particular issue, biased reporting, interpretation in relation to it, and suggesting that the majority rallies around a particular position. Fourth, media content can also reinforce attitudes, opinions, thought-patterns, and reactions.

NCCR Democracy extensively investigated media effects on public opinion in a variety of contexts.<sup>43</sup> All of the studies found that citizens' opinions remain relatively stable; they either ignore or question media content that challenges their personal views. They corroborate findings from earlier research that media content reinforces rather than dramatically alters existing opinions and attitudes. This is due to the fact that human beings, by and large, pay more attention to media and news which is in line with their views. In certain circumstances they allow themselves to be influenced, if not won over, by arguments that concur with their fundamental values (Schemer et al. 2012). Emotions triggered by news stories that are emotionally framed can also exert an influence (Kühne & Schemer 2015). Emotion of any kind can lead an individual to interpret and react to the facts in a particular way. Political news is still capable of triggering emotions even if it does not use emotive language, tonality, subject matter, images or music. Media content can elicit emotions by merely highlighting or conflating certain aspects of a political issue. This finding suggests that political topics have an intrinsic emotional dimension and that neutral reporting which does not trigger emotions is the exception rather than the rule (Kühne 2015).

The diversity of the media offering and its use limit the power of the media to influence or manipulate public opinion. Given that the us-

er's individual predispositions and social environment is a key determinant of the effect that media content has, it is difficult for political actors and the media to predict whether news coverage will have an impact or not. Whether targeted political news and advertising on social media that take into account personality traits and preferences of the user<sup>44</sup> are capable of influencing voters' decisions, is a subject for future research.

## 5.4. Conclusion

Mediatization is a real-life phenomenon. Today, the media shape the content of political reporting much more than they did in the past. They have a growing tendency to interpret rather than describe political events. Here, they apply their own logic, which itself is driven by commercialisation, technological advances and professionalisation in journalism. This logic is reflected in their increasing use of stylistic devices like simplification, emotionalisation, dramatisation, and scandalisation in order to reach the widest public possible.

Media logic has found its way into politics, and political actors and organisations have adapted to the rules of the media business. Whether the media had, in fact, become more powerful and influential was less crucial; the mere perception that they were was enough. The media is never far from the thoughts of politicians in their day-to-day work, and they use these channels of communication strategically. The mediatization of politics has thus been ushered in partly by changes in the media system and partly by its voluntary appropriation by political actors. As such, political actors now 'self-mediatise'. Of course, not all do so to the same degree; some depend more on attention from and presence in the media. Mediatization is a two-way process: politics and the media are co-dependents, using each other for their own specific ends. This symbiotic relationship is the bedrock on which populist parties and politicians have built their recent successes. The mass media can reinforce political opinion and attitudes through

their reporting. At the same time, they cannot easily change these opinions and attitudes because the individual predispositions of media users and their interactions with their social environment heavily influence how they make up their minds on a given political issue. This does not mean that media content is ineffectual; it derives its importance from interactions and communication with other people. It will fall to future research to determine whether political campaigns and advertising on social media that are micro-targeted at voters according to their personalities and preferences will fundamentally alter the effect that the media have.

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The marketing firm *Cambridge Analytica* claimed to have influenced the US presidential election in 2016 and the Brexit vote. The firm used data from over 50 million Facebook users. See: <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/03/17/us/politics/cambridge-analytica-trump-campaign.html> and <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2018/mar/17/data-war-whistleblower-christopher-wylie-facebook-nix-bannon-trump> (downloaded on 23 March 2018).

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Three referendum campaigns were analysed: the tightening of the asylum law (September 2007); corporate tax reform II (February 2008); and the popular initiative "For a more democratic naturalisation process" (June 2008). Researchers analysed the political campaign material and media reporting on each one and surveyed politicians, media professionals, and voters in German-speaking and French-speaking Switzerland.



CHAPTER 6

# The rise of populism

The term “populism” is widely used today, though its precise meaning is unclear; it comes in many different forms. Generally, populism is associated with political actors from both the extreme left and the extreme right, and with new protest movements. Yet, politicians from traditionally moderate parties may also speak in populist ways. The term is often used in political debates to disparage the opposition or to negate from the outset an – often entirely justified – criticism of a policy. The accusation of populism can then itself seem populist. Populism is thus a phenomenon which is hard to grasp and difficult to study. What are its characteristics? What do populists like Marine Le Pen in France, Beppe Grillo in Italy and Evo Morales in Bolivia have in common? Has populism become so widespread that we can speak of a ‘populist zeitgeist’? What impact does populism have on democracy?

### 6.1. What is populism?

The public, the media and academics each understand populism differently. In recent years, the definition suggested by political scientist Cas Mudde has become the standard, and research carried out in the NCCR Democracy program has used his definition as a point of reference. Mudde describes populism as an ideology which assumes that society is divided into two groups: a “pure people” in opposition to a “corrupt elite”.<sup>46</sup> In this definition, populist ideology has three characteristics. First, the people are seen as a homogenous entity made up of “simple citizens” who all share the same interests and views. Second, the people and the elite – those who occupy privileged and powerful positions in politics, culture, and the economy – are viewed as mutually antagonistic. While the people are always portrayed in a positive light, the elite are depicted as corrupt and arrogant, concerned only with their own interests; they do not represent the people. Third, populists demand full popular sovereignty, a claim they derive from their assertion of the people’s moral superiority. Because the people are abler than the elite, they should

be responsible for making political decisions and should rule unchallenged.

The question who, exactly, belongs to the people or to the elite remains open. As such, populism is a ‘thin ideology’ augmented by elements taken from other ideologies. In some cases, there is a fluid boundary between populism and extremist ideas. The ideology underpinning right-wing populists, such as the *Front National* in France, *UKIP* in Britain and the *SVP* in Switzerland is nationalism. This defines the people by ancestry and cultural traditions, which is why immigrants do not belong to the people. Right-wing populists call for political and cultural boundaries so as to protect the people and their identity. To them, “internationalists”, those who approve of the EU and those who support globalisation belong to an elite intent on curtailing the independence of the country and they threaten the sovereignty of the people.

Left-wing populists draw on socialism. Here, “the people” are those who work hard and struggle to survive economically. Global capitalists, bankers, and ‘fat cat’ swindlers count among the elites. Left-wing populists also call for borders, particularly economic, with regulations so as to wall off the domestic economy from outside assault and thus protect the working population. Left-wing populists are very prominent in Latin America and in Southern Europe (e.g., *Podemos* in Spain and *Syriza* in Greece).

However, individual populist movements and new protest parties do not fall into clear categories and may offer a colourful potpourri of right-wing and left-wing ideas. The *Movimento 5 Stelle* in Italy is one such example. With its unconventional amalgamation of political attitudes and beliefs, this party was able to become one of the most powerful political forces in the country in a very short time. Its central demand is to implement the unchallenged power of the people using direct democratic forms. It is ideologically mutable on all other issues. In that respect it really does incarnate a ‘thin’ ideology and can be regarded as a populist party in its purest form (Manucci & Amsler 2018).

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46  
Cas Mudde (2004).  
“The Populist Zeit-  
geist”. *Government  
and Opposition*  
39(4), 542–563.

## 6.2. Populist ideology: an amalgam of democratic and authoritarian elements

The key populist message is that the people should rule. On this point, the populist worldview is compatible with a democratic understanding of the state. At the same time, populist ideology has an illiberal and undemocratic side (Kriesi 2014) in that it criticises the institutions of liberal democracy charged with safeguarding freedoms and upholding the rule of law. Populist ideology repudiates restrictions of any kind on the will of the people. It calls the principle of checks and balances into question. It mistrusts institutions which have a degree of autonomy, such as the courts and central banks. It does not accept the constitutionally-guaranteed protection of ethnic, cultural and religious minorities. It also rejects institutions like political parties that broker between the people and the political system, accusing them of not representing the people. The mass media are portrayed as enemies who manipulate and lie to the people.

Populist ideology also does not acknowledge that there are different interests and viewpoints in a society. Debates are superfluous because the people are always right. Compromises are a betrayal of the will of the people. In order to preserve this view of the people as a homogenous entity, images of enemies are constructed, and myths contributing to the sense of identity (e.g. William Tell, Joan of Arc) are conjured up.

Calls for the introduction or expansion of direct democracy are made in order that the people can regain control over politics. Some populist movements cultivate the notion that a charismatic leader who has internalised the will of the people can reinstate their sovereignty. This person understands the people, their concerns and needs, and is the sole link needed to power. Although populists reject political representation and parties as the mediators between the people and the powers governing them, they nevertheless need to organise themselves if they are to enter parliament.

Their solution to this contradiction is to declare and present themselves as outsiders who do not belong to the establishment, and then to found “protest parties”.

Populists claim they want to restore democratic ideals. Yet democracy rests on finding a balance between responsible governance – respect for the rule of law, individual liberties, and societal pluralism – and responsive governance – taking into consideration the concerns and interests of the people. Populists seek to disrupt this balance in favour of the supposed homogenous will of the people.

## 6.3. Measuring populism

It is difficult to measure populist mentality, but it is expressed in communication. Even actors who do not subscribe to populist ideology may use populist language tactically. The conceptualization of populism developed in the NCCR Democracy project (Wirth et al. 2016) makes it possible to measure whether someone supports populist ways of thinking as well as how widespread populist assertions are in politics and in the media (Schulz et al. 2017). Three political ideas can be derived from this definition of populism, and these are reflected in communication strategies.

The first idea is that the people are homogenous and good. This is clearly shown in statements ascribing a uniform will to the people or excluding certain groups from it. Such declarations also emphasize the virtues and moral superiority of the people. A populist actor stresses how close he is to the people, underscoring it by adopting a down-to-earth manner, or using colloquial language. For only if he is perceived as ‘one of the people’ can he be entrusted with the mission of representing the will of the people in the political system.

The second idea is that government, parliament, and other elites are hostile to the people. This is reflected in black and white rhetoric: the people are good, the elite are bad. Members of the elite are not regarded as part of the people and are generally depicted as incompetent, corrupt, and deceitful. They are

held responsible for the ills in society. This type of communication is marked by dramatizing and scandal-mongering. During political debates prior to elections, it typically leads to mudslinging.

The third idea is that the people should rule unchallenged. This is reflected in calls for the ruling elite to be replaced by the people. This often figures in statements emphasizing the sound common sense of the ‘simple man on the street’ who knows, by dint of his moral superiority, what is right and true. It is also suggested that there are simple solutions for complex political problems. Here, populist actors claim they want to give the people their rights back which the power-hungry elite stole from them.

An ideology only qualifies as populist if it combines all three ideas and systematically expresses them. Not every critic of the elite is a populist. Such a critic must also be convinced there is only one true people, that they should replace the ruling elite, and that they should exercise unchallenged power. This conviction must be repeatedly voiced.

The mass media can also make populist assertions, not just political actors, and it is for this reason that the populism model developed in the NCCR Democracy project includes the role of the media. The media exert strong influence on how prevalent populist communication is in the public sphere: as gatekeepers, they can disseminate or ignore populist assertions. They can lend greater or lesser importance to populist statements, and support or reject specific claims. On their own initiative, the media can communicate populist content. On the basis of such considerations, several NCCR Democracy studies investigated the degree to which populism was reflected in media coverage. The evidence for populist communication in political discourse was analysed by examining election manifestos, press releases, speeches, interviews, and articles by politicians in social media outlets. Data from 11 countries<sup>47</sup> was investigated in an effort to determine whether populism is more widespread today than in the past and how pronounced it is in individual countries.

#### 6.4. Are we living in a populist era?

There is no doubt that populism is a major component of current politics. Public interest in the subject has risen steadily in recent decades. The mass media in Western Europe have brought up the term with increasing frequency since the 1990s, and by 2015 it seems to have become ubiquitous. The research interest in populism has also risen sharply since 2000.

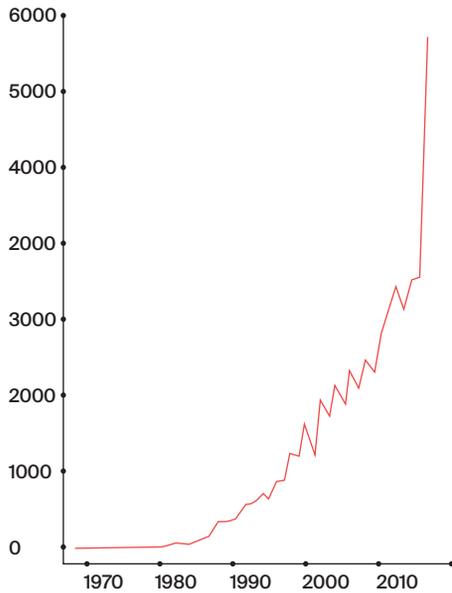
Can one today speak of a ‘populist zeitgeist’? First, whether populism is more strongly supported now than in the past is reflected in the share of the vote won by populist parties in Europe. Second, one can ask whether political communication has become more populist. To what extent do politicians in established parties employ populist rhetoric or styles? Does the mass media foster populism?

#### Populist parties are firmly established in Europe

The first appreciable surge in populism in Europe occurred during the 1970s. Since then, new political parties have been established both on the left and the right, emerging in many countries as a reaction to and rejection of the established mainstream conservative, liberal, and social democratic parties. In the 21st century, right-wing and left-wing populist parties have seen their share of the vote rise sharply, though their success varies considerably across countries and over time.

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The analysis looked at 54,900 texts from the following countries: Austria, Bulgaria, France, Germany, Great Britain, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, Sweden, Switzerland, and the USA. The authors extracted 160,000 individual statements on political issues and actors from these texts. This, to date unique, collection made it possible for researchers to comprehensively and cross-nationally investigate populist communication.

Newspaper articles mentioning populism



Academic articles mentioning populism

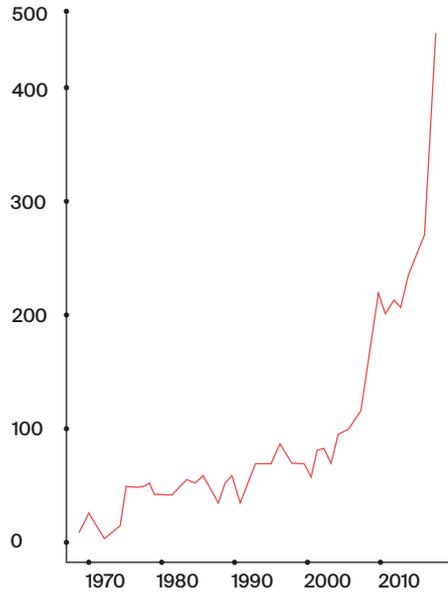
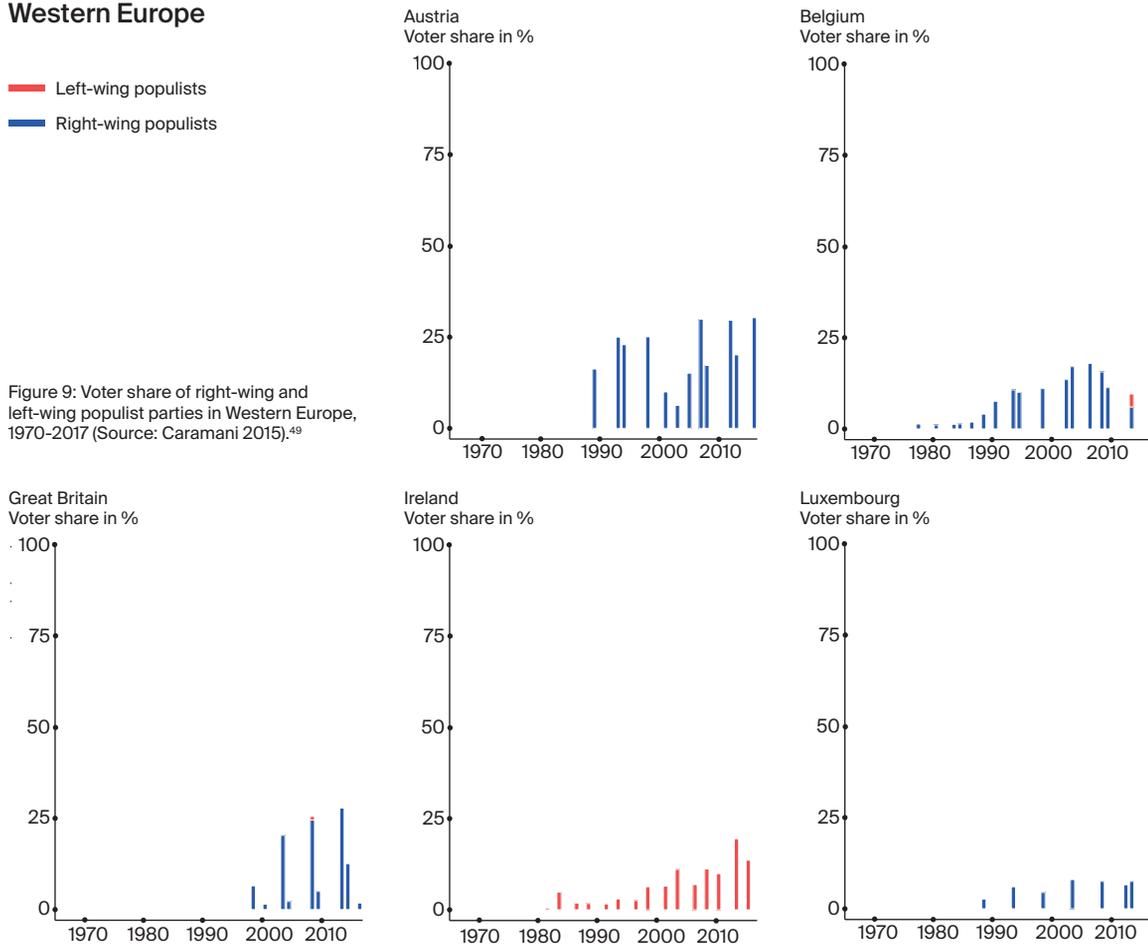


Figure 8: Number of newspaper and academic articles mentioning populism. Since the 1990s, “populism” has been employed with ever greater frequency in Western European newspapers. Populism has been a subject of academic research since the 1970s, but it has only been since the early 2000s that it has been discussed more intensively (Source: Manucci 2017a).

## Western Europe

— Left-wing populists  
— Right-wing populists

Figure 9: Voter share of right-wing and left-wing populist parties in Western Europe, 1970-2017 (Source: Caramani 2015).<sup>49</sup>



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48  
Kriesi, Hanspeter et al. (eds) (2012). *Political conflict in Western Europe*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

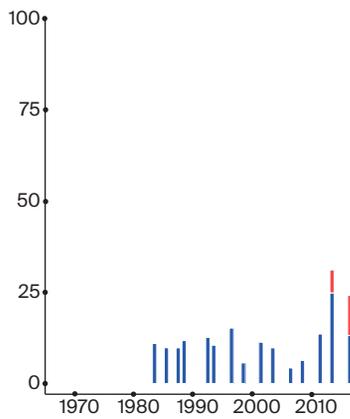
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49  
The figures are based on the results of the respective national parliamentary and European elections. See also Kriesi & Pappas (2015) for a detailed analysis of the rise and demise of populism in several European countries.

In Western Europe, it has been primarily right-wing populist parties which have become firmly established in the political system. They primarily mobilise globalisation losers, appealing to them less on economic or social issues than by stoking fears of being overwhelmed by foreigners and thereby losing their native culture.<sup>48</sup> Since the early 1990s, these parties have gained ground even in countries without a history of a strong populist tradition (e.g. Great Britain and Germany).

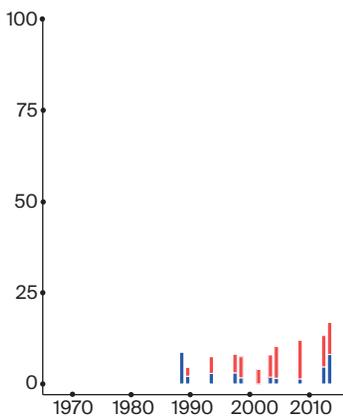
Electorally, right-wing populists saw distinct gains in the various elections held during 2017, though not always the desired success. In the Netherlands, for example, Geert

Wilders' *Party for Freedom* (PVV) failed to become the largest political force in the parliamentary elections held in March, though their 13.1% of the vote put them in second place. In France, Marine le Pen lost the presidential race in May to Emmanuel Macron, but with 21.3% of the vote in the first round achieved the best result for the *Front National* party in a presidential election. In Germany, the *Alternative für Deutschland* (AfD) became the first right-wing populist party to win a seat in Germany's federal parliament. With 12.6% of the vote in the September elections, it was Germany's third-largest political party. In Austria, the right-wing populist *FPÖ* party received 26% of

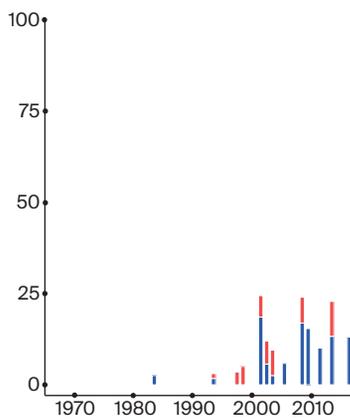
France  
Voter share in %



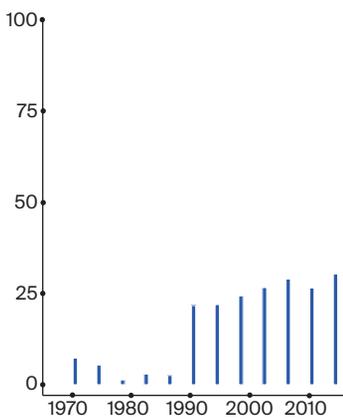
Germany  
Voter share in %



The Netherlands  
Voter share in %



Switzerland  
Voter share in %

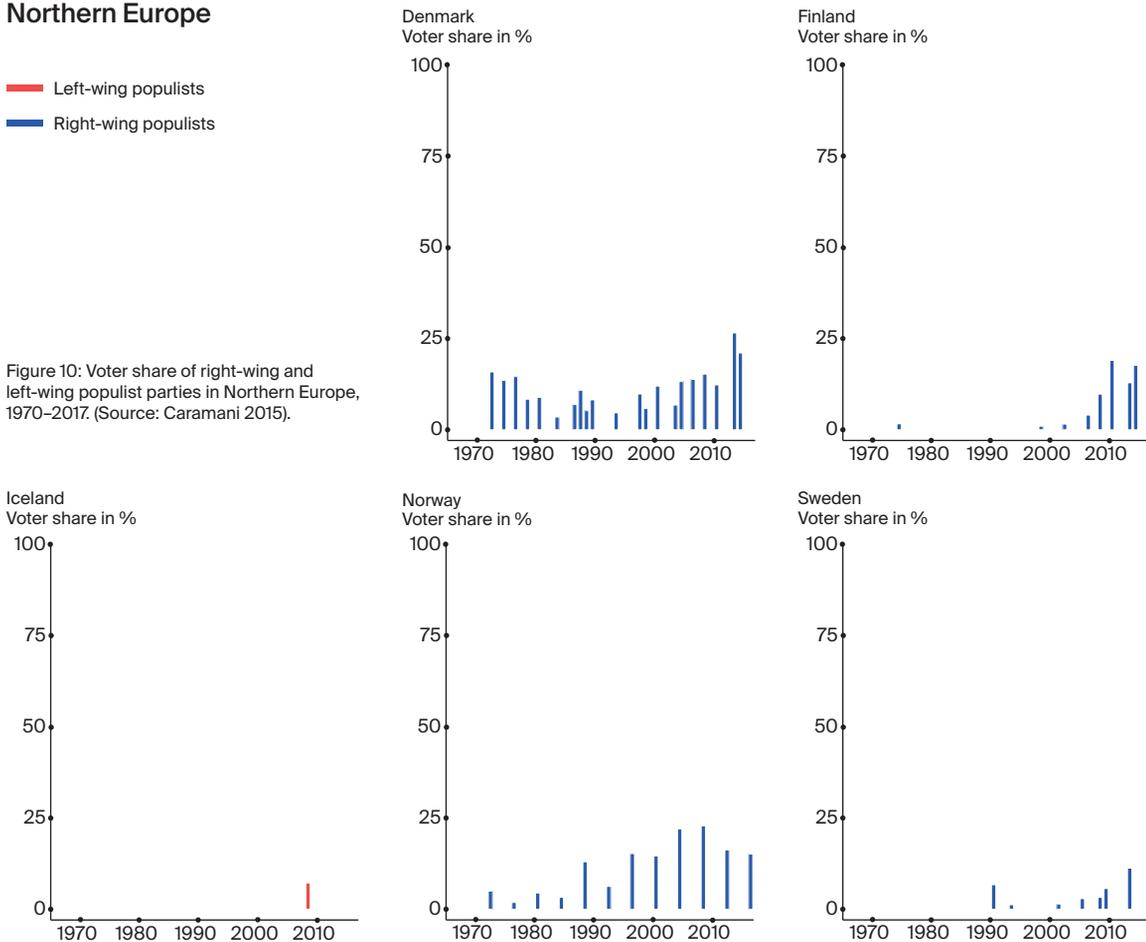


the vote, nearly the same share as the Social Democrats. The *FPÖ* is now part of a coalition government with the conservative *ÖVP*. Only the *United Kingdom Independence Party* (UKIP) suffered a clear loss in the wake of the Brexit referendum, with the British electorate withdrawing their support: the party lost its only seat in the House of Commons.

## Northern Europe

— Left-wing populists  
— Right-wing populists

Figure 10: Voter share of right-wing and left-wing populist parties in Northern Europe, 1970–2017. (Source: Caramani 2015).



Right-wing populists have enjoyed increasing success in recent years in Scandinavia as well. While right-wing populist parties have long been a feature of politics in Denmark and Norway; it is a more recent phenomenon in Sweden and Finland.

In Sweden, the right-wing *Sve- den Democrats* won 5.7% of the vote in the 2010 elections, catapulting them into parliament for the first time. Four years later, the party's share had already reached 13%. In Finland, The *Finns Party* entered parliament with 18% of the vote in the 2015 elections, and have ruled in coalition since then in a centre-right government. In Denmark, the right-

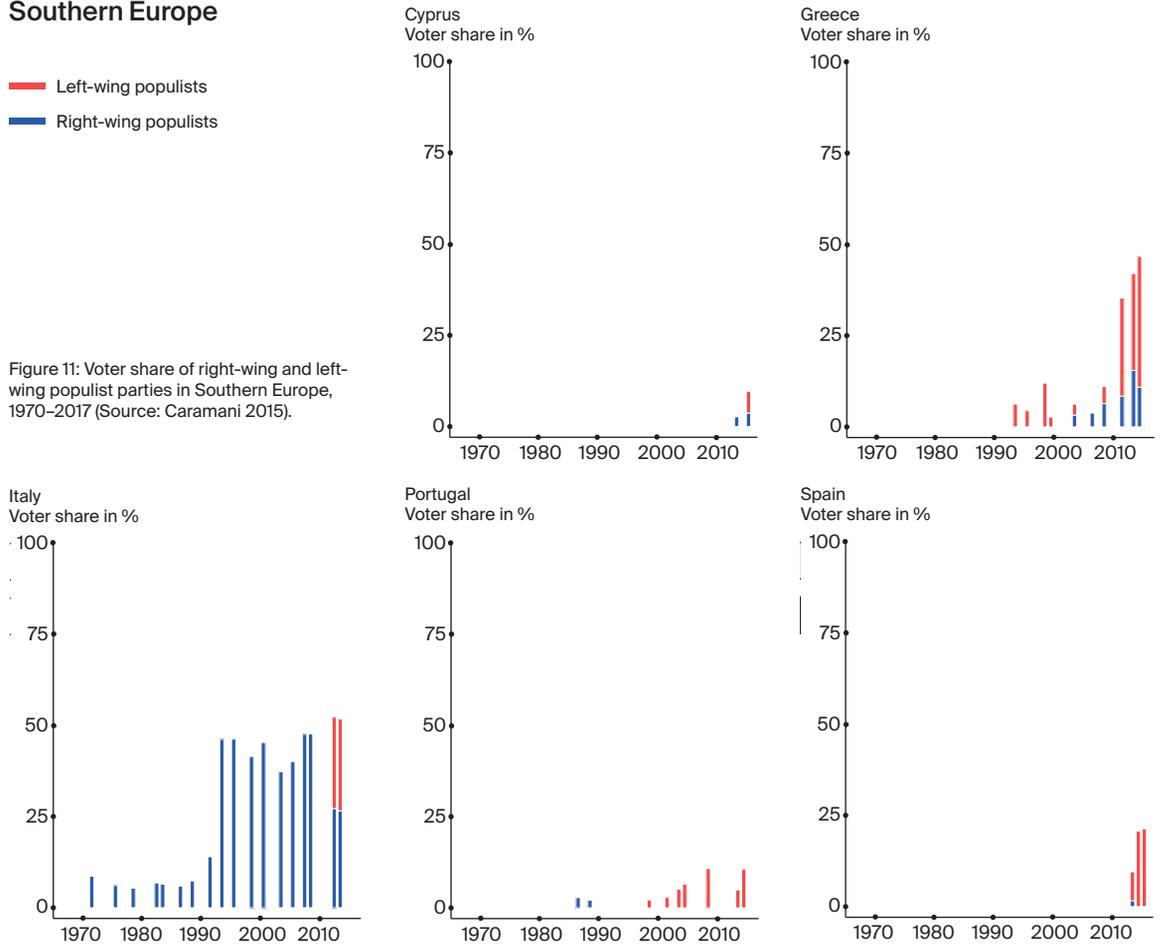
wing populist parties have retained a stable voter share since the 1970s. In 2014, the largest of them, the *Danish People's Party*, won over 26% of the vote in the European elections, making it the largest political force in Denmark for the first time in its history. In the 2015 parliamentary elections, the party was able to increase its share and became the second largest party in Denmark with 21.1% of the vote. In Norway, the *Progress Party* won its first parliamentary seat in 1973, the year it was founded. In 2013 it entered government for the first time, forming a coalition with the *Norwegian Conservative Party* which remains in power.

50  
In the graph, the M5S is classified as a left-wing populist party, although it also expresses right-wing ideas.

## Southern Europe

— Left-wing populists  
— Right-wing populists

Figure 11: Voter share of right-wing and left-wing populist parties in Southern Europe, 1970–2017 (Source: Caramani 2015).



In Southern Europe, it has been the left-wing populist parties which have enjoyed greater electoral success in recent years. Before 2010, populist parties had little success in Greece because the mainstream parties had long used populist strategies to attract voters during their election campaigns. However, in the wake of the national debt crisis, new left-wing and right-wing populist parties emerged (Kriesi & Pappas 2015). The most successful of them, *Syriza*, convincingly won the 2015 parliamentary elections with 35% of the vote, and has governed since then with the right-wing populist party *Independent Greeks (ANEL)* – the first

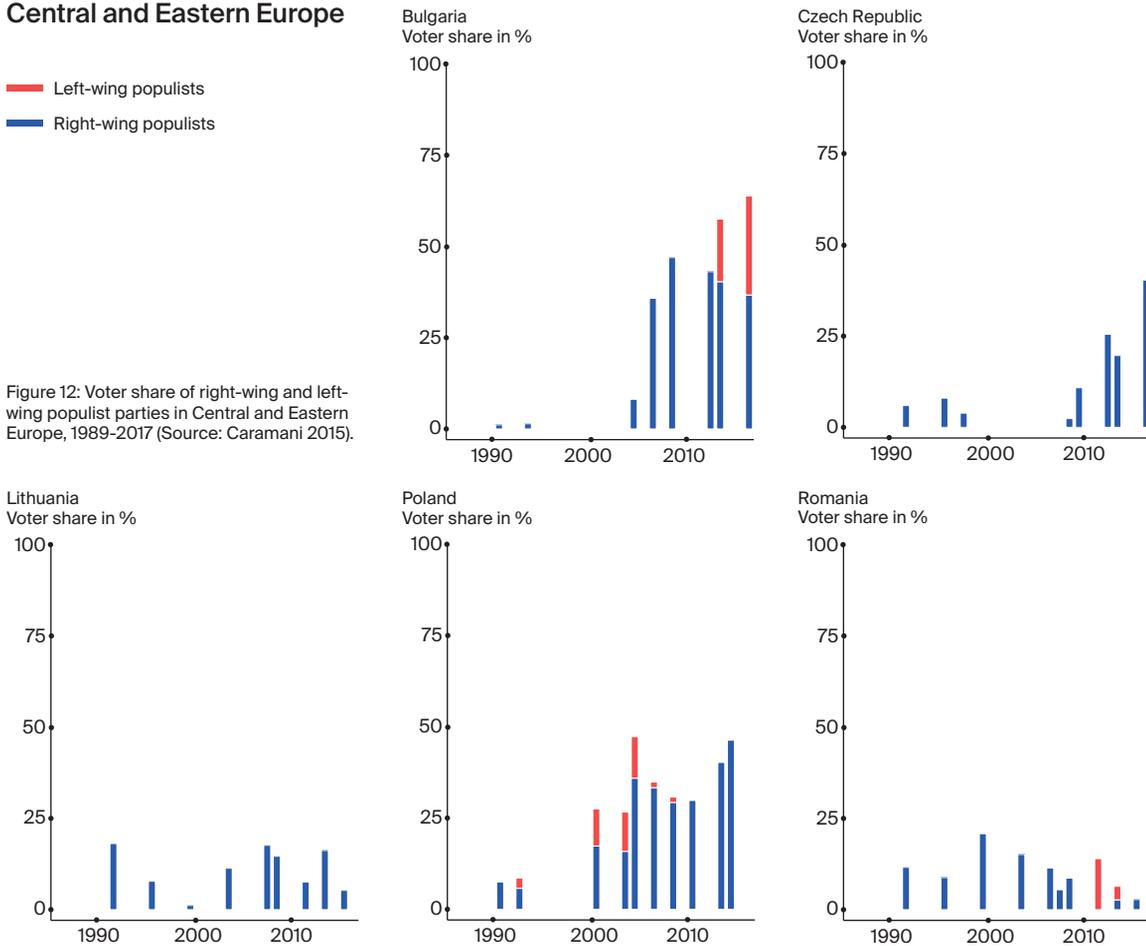
ever coalition of right-wing and left-wing populist parties in Europe. Before 2014, Spain had no populist parties. That changed with the rise of the *Indignados* movement and the *Podemos* [“We can”] party. Only four months after it was founded, *Podemos* won its first European parliamentary seat, and after the 2015 and 2016 elections it emerged as the third largest party in the Spanish parliament. In Italy, by contrast, right-wing populism dominates. In no other country in Europe have populist parties been as successful. The share of the vote for *Forza Italia (FI)*, *Alleanza Nazionale (AN)* and *Lega Nord (LN)* already stood at around 10–20% each

in the 1990s, and *FI* and *LN* participated in several coalition governments. The populists received a further boost through the *Movimento 5 Stelle (M5S)*<sup>50</sup> which had achieved 25% of the vote the first time its members ran for parliament in 2013, and became the second largest political party in Italy. These elections were also the first time that more than 50% of Italian voters cast their ballots in favour of a populist party.

## Central and Eastern Europe

— Left-wing populists  
— Right-wing populists

Figure 12: Voter share of right-wing and left-wing populist parties in Central and Eastern Europe, 1989-2017 (Source: Caramani 2015).



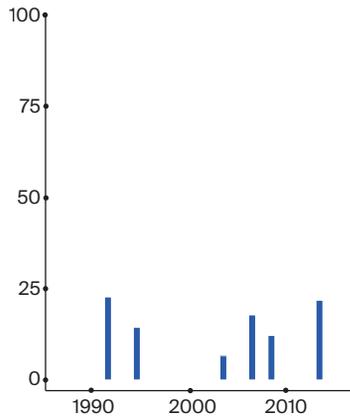
Populism has also spread and increased in Central and Eastern Europe since 1989. However, many of the populist parties founded after the fall of the Berlin Wall failed to take root in the political system. Though there were some initial successes, these parties soon disappeared from the political landscape, only now to be replaced by new populist parties. Right-wing populism has now become firmly established in the region. In Hungary, for example, *Fidesz – Hungarian Civil Alliance* led by Viktor Orbán has continuously increased in strength since the early 1990s, its ideology shifting from moderate conservatism to

right-wing populism. In the 2010 parliamentary elections, the party won 53% of the vote and has since governed alongside its coalition partner, the much smaller *Christian Democrat* party. Right-wing populists have also been in power in Poland for a number of years. The *Law and Justice (PiS)* party of Jarosław Kaczyński won an absolute majority in the 2015 parliamentary elections and has governed the country alone since then. It had already been part of a coalition government between 2005 and 2007. In the Czech parliamentary elections of 2017, a right-wing populist party emerged victorious for the first time. Led by

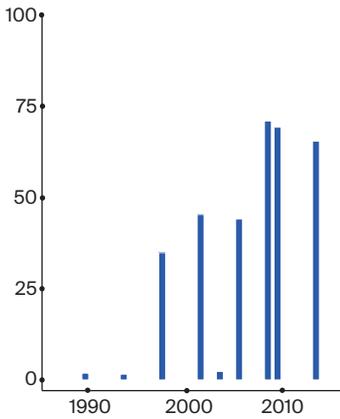
Andrej Babiš, the *Action of Unsatisfied Citizens (ANO)* took 30% of the vote. In Bulgaria, *GERB [Citizens for European Development of Bulgaria]* is now the country's ruling party for the third consecutive time. In its first parliamentary elections in 2009, it emerged as the leading political force in the country; *GERB* has governed in coalition with two smaller right-wing populist parties since 2017.

As already described in Chapter 2, satisfaction with the achievements of democracy and trust in the political elite is generally low in Central and Eastern Europe countries. Coupled with political and eco-

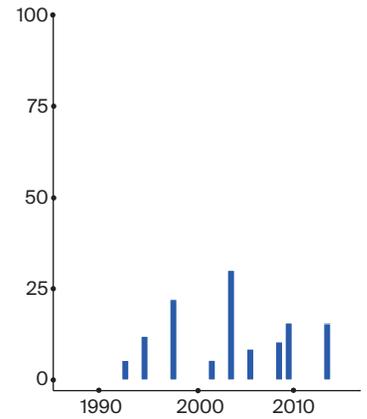
Estonia  
Voter share in %



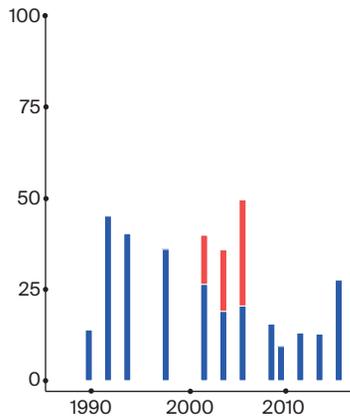
Hungary  
Voter share in %



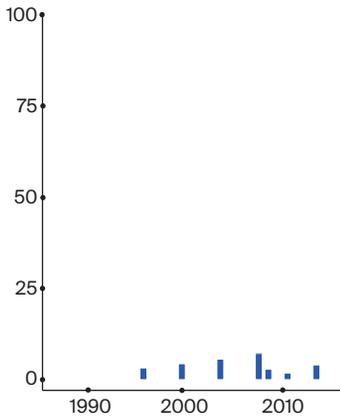
Latvia  
Voter share in %



Slovakia  
Voter share in %



Slovenia  
Voter share in %



conomic crises, this has contributed to the upsurge of populism (Kriesi & Pappas 2015).

Previous research indicated that those who vote for populist parties in Europe are politically engaged but generally disenchanted with democracy and the political establishment. It is not just this dissatisfaction which influences their electoral choices; their political orientation is itself strongly populist.<sup>51</sup> For example, those who have deep-seated reservations about immigration are more likely to support right-wing populist parties, whereas those who are less prejudiced against immigrants are more likely to vote for

left-wing populists. Populist parties in Europe, therefore, are not elected solely to express protest. The ideas and political positions they represent also reflect what European populations demand.

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51  
Van Hauwaert, Steven M. & Stijn van Kessel (2018). Beyond protest and discontent: a cross-national analysis of the effect of populist attitudes and issue positions on populist party support. *European Journal of Political Research* 57, 68–92.

## Populism and political communication

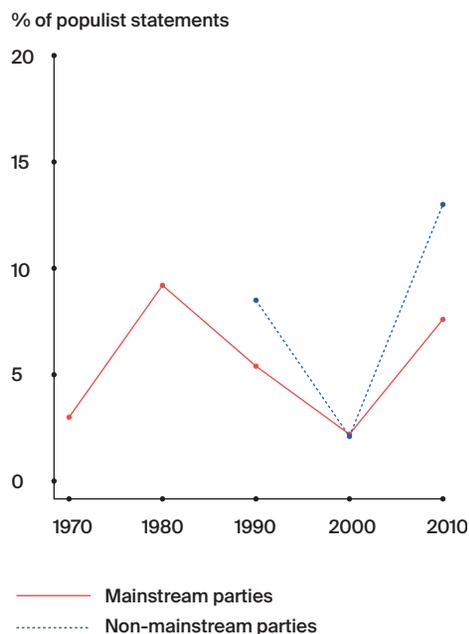
Has political discourse generally become more populist owing to the emergence of new political parties? How have the established parties responded to this challenge? Have they been influenced by these new fellow-combatants, and have they increasingly incorporated more populist issues in their party programmes?

Election manifestos are particularly well suited as sources for analysing the party ideology over a longer period of time. Issuing an election manifesto has been standard practice for political parties for decades. In most cases, these are the only documents in which a party agrees on a common, nationwide standpoint. An NCCR Democracy study concluded that in those Western European countries investigated, election manifestos have generally become more populist since 2000 (Manucci & Weber 2017).<sup>52</sup> The results also indicate that populist discourse is not a new phenomenon in Western Europe but instead occurs cyclically. In the United Kingdom, the highest proportion of populist content was found in 2010 (on average across manifestos, 10%), though the country had previously reached a relatively high level in the 1970s (7%). Germany (16%) and Austria (12%) had the highest proportions in their 2013 election manifestos, though populist statements had reached nearly the same levels in the 1980s at 11% and 9%, respectively. In Switzerland, it was the political manifestos from 1990 which had the highest share of populist content (7%). In the Netherlands, the proportion has remained relatively stable, and at under 5% at a low level over the last 40 years.

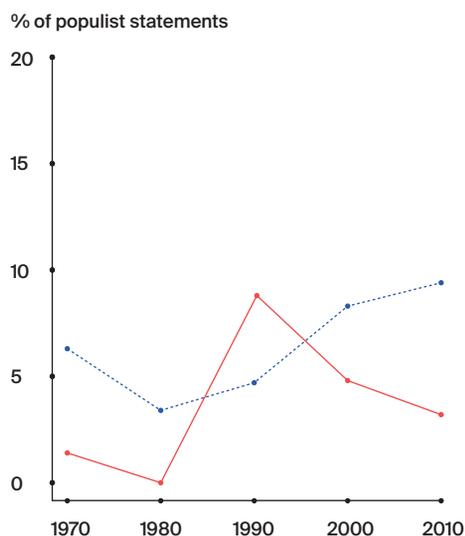
It is chiefly the newly-founded parties which have increasingly made populist assertions since 2000 – in the sense of criticizing the elite and calling for the unchecked power of the people. In contrast, the proportion of populist content in the election manifestos of the established parties has not risen significantly in the last decades.

Another cross-country study<sup>53</sup> looked at the ideological orientation of parties which make

### Austria



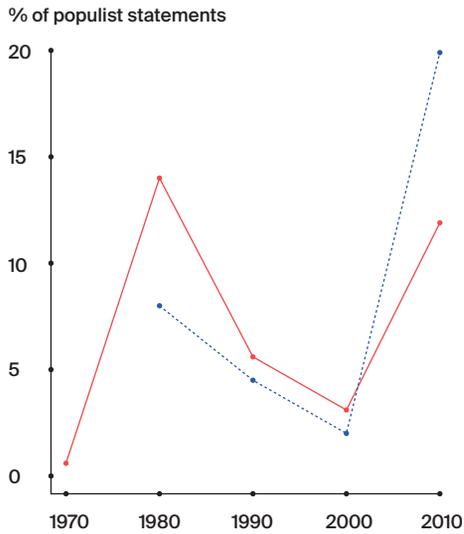
### Switzerland



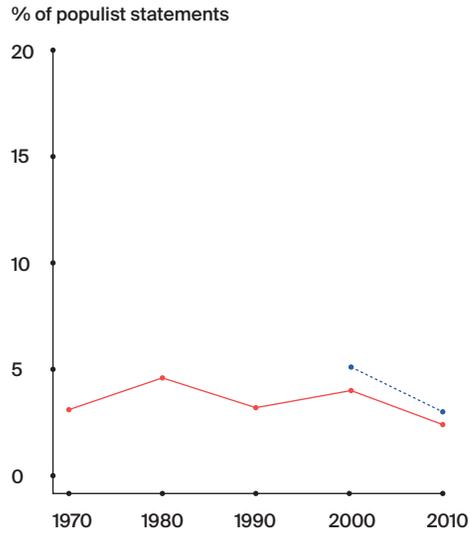
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The study looked at five countries where right-wing populist parties have enjoyed varying degrees of success. In Switzerland and Austria they are long-established. In contrast, they have only recently gained a foothold in Germany and the United Kingdom. The Netherlands is a borderline case. The populist content of party election manifestos was quantified using the populism concept elaborated in the NCCR Democracy project. The study only included parties which had won at least 3% of the vote in national elections between 1972 and 2013 (or at least 5% in the Netherlands). It should be noted that most of the new protest parties were established only in the 1990s; many parties were excluded from the survey because they did not reach the 3% (or 5%) threshold.

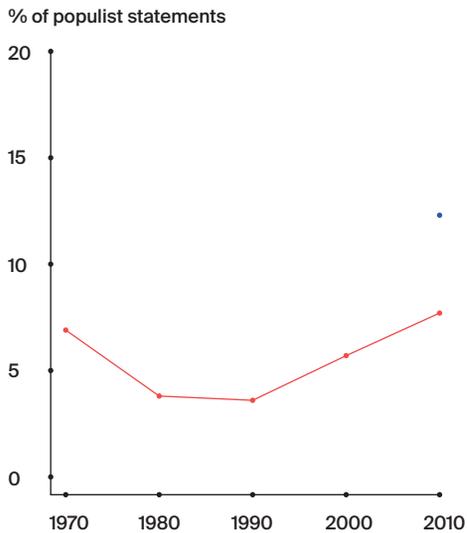
## Germany



## Netherlands



## UK



## All 5 countries

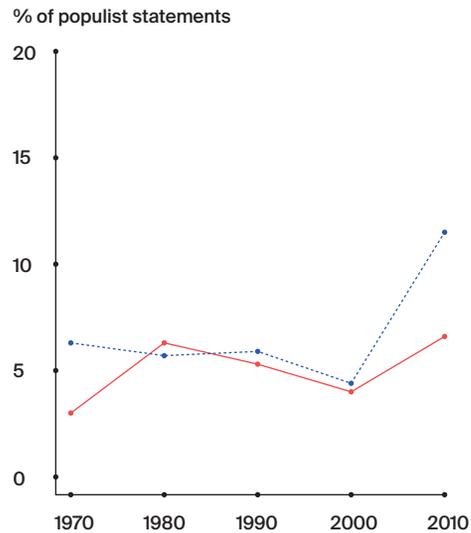


Figure 13: The proportion of populist statements in the election manifestos of mainstream parties and newly founded non-mainstream parties.

The graphs show the mean values for the five countries investigated – Austria, United Kingdom, Germany, the Netherlands and Switzerland – from the 1970s to the 2010s. It should be noted that the Swiss SVP and the Austrian FPÖ were regarded as mainstream until the end of the 1980s. However, as both parties became more radical in the early 1990s, both were also re-classified as non-mainstream from that point onwards.

use of populist communication (Bernhard & Kriesi 2019). It found that it was primarily radical right and radical left parties which communicated in a populist manner. Notwithstanding a few exceptions, this is seldom the case among mainstream parties. Generally, the political parties covered by the study predominantly made statements against the elite, followed by statements about the unitary will and moral superiority of the people. Calls for the unchallenged sovereignty of the people were the least common. The study also found that radical right-wing parties focus more strongly on cultural issues in their populist communication. However, there was no confirmation that radical left-wing parties tended to resort more to populist rhetoric on economic matters. In this area, both equally use populist rhetoric. In light of the economic crisis, this could be due to radical right-wing parties emphasizing populism more in economic topics. Likewise, the study also did not find Southern Europe parties communicating in a significantly more populist way than their Northern European counterparts. The political parties in crisis-stricken Greece were the exception, with populist rhetoric outdoing all other parties in Europe, particularly with respect to economic topics. Italian parties are also above, and Spanish and Portuguese parties well below the European average.

### Does the mass media prop up populism?

The traditional mass media are among the favourite enemies of the populists. In angry tweets, Donald Trump attacks the mainstream media that purportedly spread “fake news;” time and again, his actions evince his disregard for the freedom of the press. The rise of the *Pegida* movement and *AfD* in Germany began with their inveighing against the “lying press.” Seldom has an accusation resonated this much with the public. This has been true elsewhere in Europe as well, with populist parties regularly accusing the media of being corrupt and distorting the truth. Such parties feel ignored or unfairly treated by the media be-

cause they claim journalists give them few opportunities to express themselves.

At the same time, the media are criticised in public discourse for contributing to the rise of populist parties and more generally bolstering populist ideology. Since populists provoke, stoke conflicts, and break taboos, they are more newsworthy, which is why it is claimed that the media, driven by commercial imperatives, throw open their doors to them. In the battle for attention, both seem to depend on and need the other. This “complicity” between the media and populists has long been the subject of research. Do mass media outlets promote populism by offering its proponents a public platform for their provocative and radical declarations?

### Populism in the press

In most western democracies, it is rare for journalists to actively defend populist ideology. Instead, they indirectly convey populist ideas, whether intentionally or not. As gatekeepers, journalists decide whether to afford populist actors the opportunity to disseminate their message through the media. Journalists also interpret news stories and can, at their discretion, present populist issues in a negative, positive, or legitimate light. In keeping with how they understand their *métier*, journalists may raise populist issues on their own as they see journalism as the voice of the people and a counterweight to the political establishment.

A cross-national NCCR Democracy study<sup>54</sup> looked at how prevalent these three journalistic roles were in European and US newspaper coverage (Wettstein et al. 2018).

Do the news media give populists too much coverage and attention? No uniform picture emerged in the countries examined. On immigration reporting, for example, the views of right-wing populist parties receive much media coverage in England, Italy and the Netherlands. Compared to other countries, the German and Italian media afford left-wing populists more coverage on labour market issues. In general, though, the print media tend

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Given that political communication strongly increases in the run-up to elections, the study looked at the press releases by political parties during the campaign. The study encompassed national parliamentary and presidential elections in Austria 2013; France 2012; Germany 2013; Great Britain 2015; Greece January 2015; Italy 2013; the Netherlands 2012; Portugal 2015; Spain 2015; Sweden 2014; and Switzerland 2015. Only press releases from parties with at least 4% of the voter share in that election were included.

to give populist actors few opportunities to speak about 'their' political issues. Although they may try to dominate the debate on 'curbing immigration' and 'securing jobs', and claim they have the solutions to these problems, populist parties receive little media coverage on 'their' views of such issues. Journalists tend to exercise their gatekeeper role in a rather restrictive way, regardless of whether they work for quality newspapers or for tabloids. Newspapers in countries where the mainstream parties refuse to work with populist parties (as in Germany, France, the Netherlands, and Sweden) rarely give populists an opportunity to have their say. The claim that the press provides populists with a largely uncritical platform is thus not confirmed.

Do the media support, criticise, or challenge populists? The data show that most of the print media investigated are highly sceptical of populist actors and view them in negative terms. However, non-populist politicians do not fare much better. The Swedish and Dutch press took the most negative stance toward populists, only in Austria and Bulgaria is the tone rarely dismissive and is actually slightly more positive than the attitude they show to other politicians. Where populists are cited in a news report, the quality newspapers generally tend to contradict them, attack them, and depict them in an unflattering light. Here, the German, English and French press are the most critical. In contrast, the tabloid press are generally less critical and take less exception to populist contents and style.

To what extent do journalists themselves become populist actors? The research found that there was indeed a journalistic tendency to depict 'the people' positively and portray themselves as their mouthpiece and representative. Concurrently, mainstream political elites were often shown in an unflattering light, and treated sceptically. While the tabloid press use populist rhetoric to show they are in touch with the people, weeklies do so in order to cast themselves as critics of the elite. The only exceptions are journalists in Britain and Sweden; they do not make 'the people' so central in their reporting. The same is true of

Italy, which tends to have a positive attitude towards the elite.

All in all, the print media take a rather inconsistent stance with respect to populism. On the one hand, they limit the coverage they give to populist actors, but on the other, they themselves introduce populist ideas and messages into public discourse.

If one compares election manifestos and newspaper coverage during political campaigns (Manucci & Weber 2017), one finds that newspapers rarely reflect the populist rhetoric of the political parties (see pages 76/77). In the past, the press in the five Western European countries covered by the study contained very few references to populist statements. Unlike election manifestos, press coverage of populist declarations has remained relatively limited since the early 1970s, and it has only been since the early 2000s that the incidence of populist statements in newspapers has risen, albeit slightly.

Despite the omnipresence of web-based media, the traditional mass media remain the primary source of political information in western democracies. To date, the print media have tended to help stem rather than encourage the flow of populist discourse. Whether this also applies to TV news reporting, which is driven by a different logic, will be the subject of future research. Social media, nonetheless, provide an ideal channel for populist communication.

### Social media – the perfect communication tool

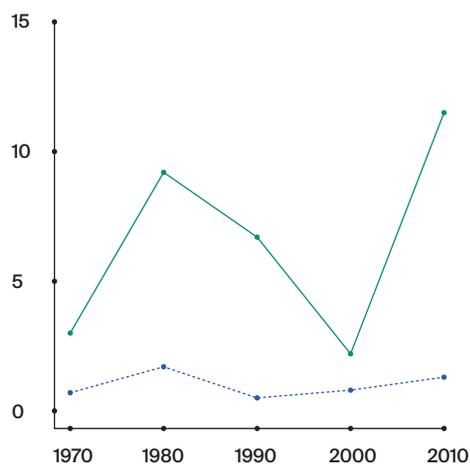
The traditional mass media still steer public discourse, though the advent of the internet and social media means populist actors no longer need to rely solely on them. They are now able to disseminate their message, unfiltered, and circumvent the traditional channels of communication. This direct communication with the public allows them to nurture their self-image as approachable politicians with a direct connection to ordinary people. The informal and colloquial nature of communica-

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The analysis looked at 9,000 press reports published between 2014 and 2015 about immigration and labour market policy. Both topics were selected because they are among the preferred talking points of both the left-wing and right-wing populists, and because they place particularly high demands on responsible journalism. In total, 59 quality, tabloid, and weekly papers in 10 European countries (Austria, Bulgaria, England, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, Sweden, and Switzerland) and the US were examined.

## Austria

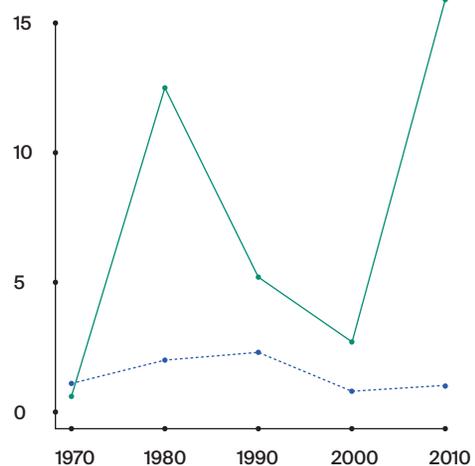
% of populist statements



— Election manifestos  
 ..... Press articles

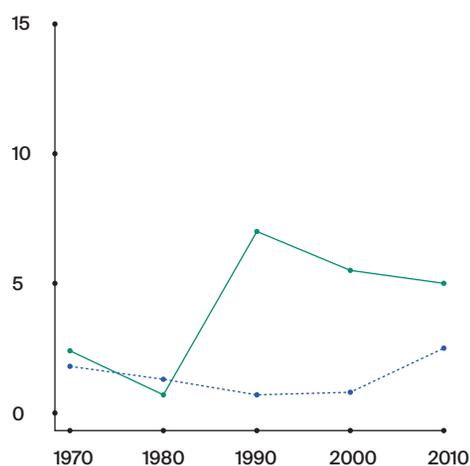
## Germany

% of populist statements



## Switzerland

% of populist statements



## UK

% of populist statements

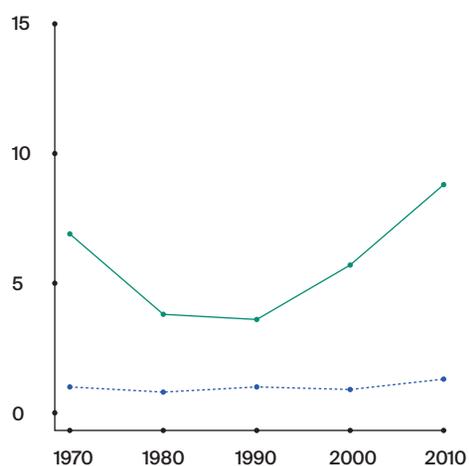
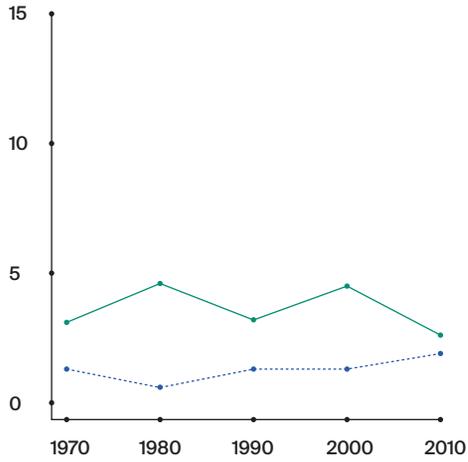


Figure 14: A comparison of the proportion of populist statements in newspapers and election manifestos in established and newly founded parties.

The graphs show the mean values for the five countries covered by the study – Austria, United Kingdom, Germany, the Netherlands, and Switzerland – from the 1970s to the 2010s.

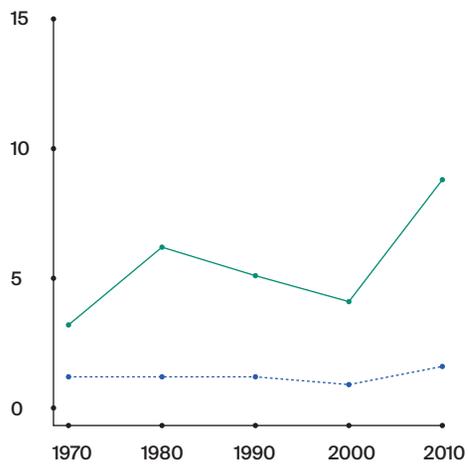
## Netherlands

% of populist statements



## All 5 countries

% of populist statements



tion on social media fits well with the populist style of communication, one characterised more by emotion than logical thinking. Since like-minded people and ‘kindred spirits’ can connect on social networks, their common enemies can be attacked using particularly harsh language (Engesser et al. 2017). Politicians using social networks not only reach their core public, but indirectly also reach other target groups as “followers” or “friends” share the posts. This potential should not be underestimated given that those who follow political actors often have high visibility on Facebook and Twitter.

Social media are not only the ideal communication tool but also allow populist parties to actively integrate their supporters in the decision-making process. *The Movimento 5 Stelle (M5S)* communicates almost exclusively via the party’s blog. Like *Podemos* in Spain, it uses various online tools to try to put their ideas on direct democracy and popular sover-

eignty into practice. However, there is a major disconnect for both parties between these ideas and their extremely hierarchical organisational structure which is dominated by Beppe Grillo and Pablo Iglesias, their respective leaders (Manucci 2017b). Decision-making is a top-down process, which lets *M5S* claim that the citizens decide based on information from experts and detailed discussions. The expert opinions, though, are (often) in support of the proposals posted on the party’s blog, which Grillo controls. If this expert opinion deviates from the official party line, doubt is cast on the specialist’s knowledge and there is talk of alleged interference (Manucci & Amsler 2018). How the “will of the people” is to be realized also lies in the hands (and discretion) of the party leadership. Populist movements and parties may provide its base with the tools to take part in the decision-making process but this does not mean they implement them correctly.

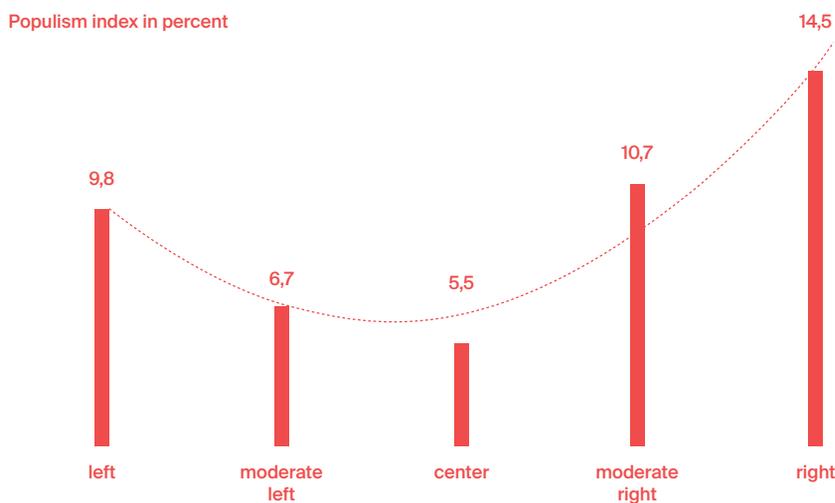


Figure 15: The share of populist statements in the Facebook and Twitters posts of 88 leading politicians in England, France, Germany, Italy, Switzerland and the USA in 2015, grouped according to left, right and centre parties.

How widespread are populist statements on the two social media platforms most used by politicians, Twitter and Facebook? NCCR studies found that one in ten posts by politicians on Facebook and Twitter in 2015 was a populist assertion (Ernst et al. 2017a).<sup>55</sup> Parties at the ends of the political spectrum used populist communication strategies more frequently on these platforms. However, centrist and moderate left-wing parties made populist statements, too, though more seldom.

Overall, there were more populist statements on Facebook than on Twitter. In part this is because Facebook allows users to share news, thus bringing them closer together and making communication more intimate. To befriend another user or to “like” a post implies more of a commitment than following someone’s Twitter feed. Populist actors capitalise on the closer link Facebook makes possible because they can then demonstrate to potential voters that they are in touch with the people. Compared to Facebook users, the average Twitter user is younger, better educated, of a higher socioeconomic status, and usually lives in a urban centre. Twitter is used more to share information relevant to professionals, including among journalists. Furthermore, there is no word limit for Facebook posts, whereas tweets were limited to 140 characters when the study was conducted. All in all, political actors seem to consider Facebook a platform more suited for disseminating harsh rhetoric and emotionally-charged messages.

Generally, Twitter and Facebook posts contained only snippets of populist ideology, the most common of which were statements directed against the elite. While members of left-wing parties primarily attacked the economic elite, their right-wing counterparts directed their ire chiefly at the media elite and particular social groups. Calls to protect the sovereignty of the people were the least common (Ernst et al. 2017; Engesser et al. 2017). It is possible that populist messages were delivered in piecemeal fashion so as to make them easier to understand. However, it also might have been a deliberate strategy designed to

reach a wider audience and make it more difficult for critical observers to notice the populist nature of the posts.

A comparison with political talk shows on television also showed that social media are the ideal communication channel for populist actors (Ernst et al. 2017b). Both platforms provide politicians with an ideal platform for self-promotion, one largely uninterrupted by journalistic gatekeepers. In talk shows, journalists intervene as debate moderators, but much less often than in hard news formats. The findings<sup>56</sup> show that politicians tend to express themselves in more populist ways on social media than on political talk shows on television. This can also be seen as further evidence that journalists help somewhat in toning down the level of political discourse, though the US is the exception here. The American talk show culture is more liberal and journalists intervene less frequently, giving their guests from the world of politics more opportunity to use populist rhetoric. There is little difference here between Republicans and Democrats. Certain Democratic representatives, like Bernie Sanders, scored very highly on the populist rhetoric scale. On average, a total of 38% of the statements made in the six countries covered by the study featured a populist message. Criticism of the elite was the most frequent, and calls for the unrestricted sovereignty of the people the rarest. Generally, newly founded parties and parties at the ends of the political spectrum communicate in a more populist manner.

## 6.5. What are the reasons for the success of populism?

Populism is not a new phenomenon. This form of protest has existed since the late 19th century. The first modern populist party was the ‘*People’s Party*’, founded in 1891 in the US, born out of a movement led by farmers who saw their livelihoods as threatened by industrialization. History shows that populism is always successful when segments of society are threatened, or feel threatened, due to

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The study looked for populist assertions in the Facebook posts and tweets of leading politicians in six countries (England, France, Germany, Italy, Switzerland, and the USA). In each country, five parties were chosen: four parties with the largest number of parliamentary seats and one which was the most influential populist party. From each party, those politicians were selected who occupied a high-ranking position at the time (heads of state, party leaders) and/or had high visibility on social media.

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The study analysed political talk show appearances by 98 politicians, as well as their Facebook and Twitter accounts, for populist statements in 2015. The two most influential weekly TV talk shows in six countries (France, Germany, Italy, Switzerland, United Kingdom, and USA) were examined. The politicians represented a total of 31 political parties.

# Populism in Switzerland

Today, populism in Switzerland is largely a right-wing phenomenon, but this was not always the case. In the first three decades after World War II, Swiss left-wing parties were by far more populist than their right-wing rivals; in the 1980s right-wing parties began to supplant them at the national level (Weber 2017). Switzerland now has three populist parties (Bernhard 2017): The *Swiss People's Party (SVP)*, the *Lega dei Ticinesi (Lega)* and the *Mouvement Citoyens Genevois (MCG)*. The largest and electorally strongest is the *SVP*. Its rise had begun in the late 1970s when Christoph Blocher took over the leadership of the party in the canton of Zurich. Before then, the *SVP* was moderately conservative and represented the interests of farmers and tradesmen. Under Blocher, it became more radical by the early 1990s, creating a party profile that has since become a role model for right-wing populists in other parts of Western Europe (Bernhard et al. 2015). With its relentless campaigns against immigration and against European integration, the party has carved out a new political niche. Its uncompromising stance proved successful at the ballot box, and its voter share more than doubled between 1991 (11.9%) and 2015 (29.4%). The *SVP*'s success fundamentally changed and polarized the Swiss party landscape.

The *SVP*'s populist discourse strongly depends on the subject under discussion (Bernhard et al. 2015); its core issues are the country's policy toward foreigners, Swiss-EU relations, and institutional issues such as the precedence of national over international law. These are communicated in a particularly populist manner. On economic issues, however, it strikes a decidedly less populist tone. For example, it did not ratchet up its populist communication during the economic and financial crisis after 2008. In fact, the party largely ignored the issue because it considered the federal government's proposed rescue package for the *UBS* bank as vital to the survival of the Swiss banking industry. It did touch on the subject from time to time, but only to drive forward its overall agenda. This was the case during the first round of voting to fill the *SVP* seat on the Federal Council in December 2008; the *SVP* trumpeted Blocher as the candidate best equipped to steer the country through these "times of severe crisis". *SVP* populist communication is particularly pronounced during referendum campaigns. This was also the case when the party had only one seat on the Federal Council, or, after Christoph Blocher failed to be re-elected in 2008, when it was not represented on the Council at all.

While the intensity of the *SVP*'s populist discourse varies depending on the subject, there is far less fluctuation in the populist political communication of *Lega* and *MCG*. In contrast to the *SVP*, the two smaller parties also express themselves in a populist fashion with respect to economic issues. In the *MCG*, social and health policy issues, in particular, elicit the most strident populist stance; for the *Lega*, it is the subject of banking secrecy.

economic, cultural, or political changes. A number of populism researchers have argued that serious crises act as a key catalyst for the (re-)emergence of populist movements.<sup>57</sup> Populism is only possible in democratic systems. Economic and cultural crises serve to mobilise populists, as the public loses confidence in the ability of the political system to address the crisis. Populism therefore owes its success primarily to political crisis, or more specifically, to a crisis of political representation (Kriesi 2018).

## When political representation malfunctions

Globalisation has transformed governing. Decision-making powers have been increasingly transferred from the national to other levels, or entrusted to experts. In Europe, citizens perceive politics as increasingly technocratic, opaque, and distant from the people. The emergence of populist parties in Europe since the 1990s can be traced back to a fundamental problem in democracy, namely the need to govern conscientiously ('responsibility') while simultaneously taking the needs and concerns of the people into account ('responsiveness'). The advent of globalisation means the latter has diminished (see Chapter 3), while responsible governing, within the prevailing constraints, has increased. Parties, traditionally the intermediaries between the people and the government, are now more concerned with exercising political power. For all intents and purposes, they are no longer receptive to the needs of voters who correspondingly then feel alienated from the parties. The established parties in Western Europe find themselves increasingly unable to mobilise their voters; both membership numbers and voter share have declined significantly (Kriesi 2014). For example, core supporters have increasingly turned away from Social Democratic parties, as they have increasingly focused on integration and multiculturalism rather than on their traditional socioeconomic issues. Other parties have al-

so distanced themselves from their base, and with the political positions of the established parties increasingly converging, many voters feel there is no difference between them anymore. Consequently, populist parties have been able to position themselves successfully as a fresh alternative. In Eastern Europe, populists are successful for other reasons. Here, moderate parties do not adequately represent their voters because they are not yet stable enough or sufficiently anchored in society. This, coupled with the still limited capacities of national governments, has provided a fertile breeding ground for populist parties (Kriesi & Pappas 2015).

Globalisation has made it much more difficult for political actors to straddle the responsiveness-responsibility divide (Kübler & Kriesi 2017). Mediatisation widens this gap further by putting more pressure on politicians to meet the demands of the people. The communication style of political actors mirrors that of the mass media in many respects, even when the media do not subscribe to a populist ideology. As they understand themselves to be the fourth estate, the media contributes to anti-elite communication. Mediatisation has also changed the party system (Kriesi 2014), and nowadays politicians mobilise their voters directly via the mass media. As such, the party apparatus has become less important. The success of a party hinges increasingly on the communication skills of individual leaders, with charisma playing a highly important role, and not just in populist parties.

### The reinforcing effect of economic and cultural crises

In the 20th century, globalisation and modernisation have massively accelerated changes to the economic and cultural landscapes. Production processes have been outsourced abroad, jobs have been rationalised and state-owned companies privatised. In many countries, cuts to welfare state provision have further widened economic and social inequality.

A content analysis of party newsletters between 2009 and 2015 found that the use of populist communication was significantly stronger in these three radical right-wing parties than in the other Swiss parties (Bernhard 2017). Their leaders – Christoph Blocher, the late Giuliano Bignasca (*Lega*) and Eric Stauffer (*MCG*) – played a decisive role here, leveraging their unquestionable talent for portraying themselves as the voice of the people. They also were clearly more populist in their assertions than other members of their respective parties. No other Swiss party leaders enjoy the same cult status as these three men, though such a cult of personality is at odds with Swiss political culture, one in which strong leaders have been treated with a high degree of suspicion.

The image of the *SVP* in the media is one of an energetic, powerful, and politically disruptive party. It also has the highest media profile of all Swiss political parties. Even when the reporting is negative, the *SVP* profits by accusing the media of giving the other parties preferential treatment (Ernst et al. 2016). Whether in election manifestos, on Twitter and Facebook, or on televised political talk shows, the *SVP*, of all Swiss parties, expresses itself the most strongly in populist ways (Manucci 2017a; Ernst et al. 2017b). However, as the content analysis of election manifestos since 1970 (Manucci 2017a), and the analysis of Facebook posts and tweets by Swiss politicians in 2015 (Ernst et al. 2017c) found, both the *Greens (GPS)* and the *Liberals (FDP)* also use populist rhetoric. Left-wing parties tend to emphasise the people, while their right-wing counterparts prefer to criticise the elite. While the *Social Democrats (SP)* have made populist assertions in their election manifestoes since the 1970s, they are more reticent on social media and in talk shows. The small proportion of populist content here is presumably due to the presence of an active youth party. The *Juso [Young Socialists Switzerland]* makes greater use of populist communication than its parent party and tends to play up the antagonism between the people and the elite.

# The importance of political parties

What do populists and technocrats have in common? They share the idea that the people are a homogenous group and that society is monolithic, not pluralistic.

Populists claim they embody the will of the people, whereas technocrats seek rational solutions to societal problems. Yet nowadays experts who see the world as increasingly threatened by populism also seem to have some things in common with them: a lack of trust in representative institutions and in the competition between political parties.

In the eyes of populists, political parties distort the will of the people and therefore call for politics to be guided exclusively by the will of the people. The expression of this will should not be limited by the separation of powers, the protection of human rights, or the dictates of international law. They also criticise the failure of parties to be responsive to voters, claiming they are elitist, out of touch, and no longer appropriately represent their interests. Parties have responded to these criticisms by bowing to the demands of mediatisation and adapting their style of communication accordingly.

For their part, technocrats criticise political parties for not having the specialist knowledge needed to identify and resolve societal problems. In their eyes, parties respond too strongly to the vagaries of public opinion in their effort to win votes. They complain that the parties are only interested in power and in obtaining votes. The criticism is directed towards the lack of responsibility shown by the parties, meaning their unwillingness to engage in the unpopular actions technocrats deem necessary. It is true that parties do indeed delegate unpopular decisions to technocrats so as to devote all their energies to election campaigns.

Torn between calls to show greater responsiveness on the one hand and to demonstrate more responsibility on the other hand, the established parties have lost their way. This is bad news given the central role parties play in modern democracies. They bring together, under one umbrella, differing positions and demands of various groups in society, they articulate these groups' interests and preferences, they formulate political programmes, and make it possible to have a pluralist competition between ideas. However, populists and technocrats base their views on different premises: populists assert that democracy is what the people decide, whereas technocrats regard democracy as what is best for the people.

Structural changes produce losers and foment fears of social decline. The winners of globalisation are unevenly distributed within and across countries. In consequence, the movement of migrants has continually increased, and that globally. Migration leads to cultural change, which generates insecurities and is seen as threatening.

Populist parties and movements understood how to capitalize on these neglected issues and respond to the anxieties in society. The economic and financial crisis of 2008–2012, considered the worst global crisis since the Great Depression of the 1930s, gave populist parties a new impetus (Kriesi & Pappas 2015). Not every region was equally affected by the crisis, and populism was not equally successful in every country at the time. In Western Europe, the crisis had relatively little impact, with populism in fact slightly declining both in terms of the share of the vote and in terms of the level of populist discourse. The exceptions were France and England. Although France weathered the financial crisis rather well, the *Front National* still managed to gain ground. In contrast, England, a country in which populism barely existed previously, was hit hard by the crisis, leading to increased support for the Eurosceptic *UKIP* party. The populist surge was most notable in countries that not only had to contend with an economic but also with a political crisis, brought about by poor and inefficient governmental leadership and corruption. This was primarily the case in Southern, Central and Eastern Europe. Ireland was an exception here, for though severely hit by the economic and financial crisis (only Greece fared worse), triggering a political crisis in its wake, no new populist parties emerged. This might be because all Irish political parties generally cultivate populist discourse, especially when they are in the opposition.

## Is the success of right-wing populism due to historical reappraisals?

Along with economic and political developments, cultural factors also influence the prev-

alence of populism in a given country. The culture of remembrance – how the history of World War II is processed – plays an important role, as historical events have the power to influence the present and future development of a society. They can colour the interpretation and assessment of the current state of affairs. How a country understands and explains who bears responsibility for the rise of fascism<sup>58</sup> in Europe (1922–1945) may be a determinant of the presence or absence of populist parties and movements. An NCCR study<sup>59</sup> found that the prevailing culture of remembrance can explain the electoral success of right-wing populist parties in certain Western European countries (Caramani & Manucci forthcoming). Although the two ideologies differ considerably on many points, particularly in terms of their radicalism, right-wing populism appropriates certain fascist elements. Both are based in nationalism and share an anti-liberal, anti-pluralist notion of state and society. During the fascist period in Europe, every European country had to take a position about this illiberal form of rule, even countries that were officially neutral. How the role of a country at that time is now seen has a bearing on the acceptance of populist actors in that country today. There are four ways that countries come to terms with their past: they can see themselves as having been victimized, having been heroes, they can blame themselves, or they can ignore the issues.

Victimhood is the dominant approach in Italy, Austria, and France. They accept little responsibility for their own fascist past and/or collaboration with fascist regimes; the blame lies squarely with others. The NCCR Democracy study found that right-wing political parties in Austria and Italy are more prevalent than in the other investigated countries. In France, right-wing populism is somewhat less pronounced, perhaps owing to the existence of a second narrative focused on resistance and thus on the heroic fight against fascism.

The heroic role England played in World War II is firmly rooted in collective British memory. The country sees itself as the defender of democracy and freedom, and is

As a result, both assume ‘the people’ are a homogenous group and that a uniform social interest exists. Society is seen as monolithic, not pluralistic. Partitioning society into different groups is bad; competition between these ‘components’ is not only inconceivable but wrong. Both populists and technocrats are anti-political because defining interests and finding appropriate solutions should be uncontroversial. In their opinion, the plurality of opinion is unnecessary chatter. The problems and their solutions are clear and to argue otherwise is either dishonest or irrational.

Both positions are illiberal and undemocratic. Populists conflate the will of the majority with the will of the people, and technocrats do not even seek to secure the support of a majority. Opposition is regarded as illegitimate, as populism reduces pluralism down to the people versus the elite. Opponents are portrayed as corrupt. In a technocracy, opponents are portrayed as irrational and pluralism is reduced to right versus wrong.

The instruments of political accountability, such as elections, play only a small role in these two perspectives. For populists, this is because they see themselves as embodying the interests of the people. For technocrats, it is because the people are not regarded as competent to judge what experts do. Nonetheless, populism and technocracy have differing visions. Among populists, it is unthinkable that experts know what is best for the people. Among technocrats, it is unfathomable that the people are capable of making decisions about complex issues.

Democracy, however, requires a balance between having a mandate from the people and taking advantage of expertise, or in other words between responsiveness and responsibility. Political parties are in a good position to reconcile these competing demands. On the one hand, they permit the interests of the voters to be incorporated into the political process and, at the same time, responsibly carry out their role as experts. They formulate visions for society which speak to all its segments, and they recruit and train politicians and their staff. They are entrusted with affairs of state, and have experience in political campaigns and in communicating political topics. Populism and technocracy overlook the important bridging functions political parties play. Unfortunately, in their search for consensus and governmental power, political parties have neglected this function. In this context, the criticisms levelled by populists and technocrats can serve as a corrective by reminding political parties of their central role – namely to strike a balance between responsibility and responsiveness.

Guest op-ed by Daniele Caramani in the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, 10 February 2017. (Based on Caramani 2017.)

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For example, Ernesto Laclau. See Howarth, David (2015). *Ernesto Laclau: Post-Marxism, populism, and critique*, London: Routledge; Canovan, Margaret (1999), "Trust the people! Populism and the two faces of democracy". *Political Studies* 47(1), 2-16; Taggart, Paul A. (2000). *Populism*. Buckingham: Open University Press.

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The term also refers to National Socialism, the German variant of fascism.

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In the interests of comparability, the researchers selected eight Western European countries: England, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Sweden, and Switzerland. The study analysed the relevant scientific literature on how these countries have come to terms with their past as well as the election results of populist parties since the 1970s. It was only after this point in time that a wide-reaching debate on Europe's fascist past began in earnest. Eastern European countries were excluded from the study owing to their own narratives about the fight of communists against fascists. Their coming to terms primarily focuses on their communist past(s).

proud to have fought on the right side. Alternate or more nuanced points of view are not tolerated or are regarded as irrelevant. Even in today's society, it is not acceptable to hold views or support values antithetical to those the country fought for in the past with great sacrifice. For this reason, right-wing populist parties were long relegated to the political fringe. *UKIP* won its first parliamentary seat in 2015, only to lose it again two years later.

Germany has accepted responsibility for its Nazi past and has actively worked to come to terms with it. Generations of Germans have internalised the country's admission of guilt. Other narratives which, for example, emphasize German resistance or portray the German people as victims, are either barely accepted or actively resisted. For decades, Germany was therefore a hostile environment for right-wing populist parties; the electoral success of the *AfD* in 2017 was the first time such a party surpassed the five-percent threshold needed to win a seat in parliament.

Sweden, the Netherlands, and Switzerland have largely ignored their own role in the rise of fascism. Broad public debate on the subject has not taken place, and no authoritative narrative has emerged to shape their respective cultures of remembrance. They do not see their own pasts in negative terms and so have no need to come to terms with it. However, the research findings leave unclear what impact this stance has had on the success of right-wing populist parties. Whether the conditions are good or bad for their success also depends on the prevailing political and socio-economic climate.<sup>60</sup>

The more a country associated its role during the fascist period of European history with blame or heroism, the less success populist parties had during the last 50 years. Does this explanation still hold despite their electoral successes in 2017? Although Germany has long been exceedingly critical of its National Socialist past, the *AfD* was able to enter the federal parliament in 2017. This case clearly shows that cultures of remembrance are not carved in stone and taboos can be broken. The dramatic changes to political and socio-

economic conditions which globalisation has ushered in have diminished the power of the culture of remembrance to keep populism in check. Many segments of the European population no longer feel that their interests and concerns are still being represented. Still, even if historical events begin to fade, the cultures of remembrance in the various countries remain. Perhaps, here and there, they might help in providing early warning signs of danger.

### Why does populist communication win over voters?

The electoral success of populist parties in recent years shows they are also able to appeal to those who are not part of their usual base. How are they able, using their rhetoric, to attract new voters?

One characteristic of populist communication is its emotional appeal. Research on the impact of the media has shown that emotions can influence a person's opinion on a particular subject. Is the extra dose of emotion provided by populist communication particularly convincing? Can it actually change political attitudes? The focus on 'gut feelings' rather than on fact-based and rational argument has often been regarded as a key factor that can explain the success of populist parties.<sup>61</sup> One experiment, conducted as part of a NCCR Democracy study,<sup>62</sup> confirmed previous research findings that populist statements evoke strong feelings. Populist communication is by its very nature more emotional than non-populist communication (Wirz 2018a). Emotions amplify the force of a message, which is why the message has a particularly persuasive effect. If one blames the elite for something, it elicits fear and anger. If one emphasizes the virtuousness of the people, then one awakens feelings of hope and pride. But in this experiment, only anger and hope led people to be convinced by a populist assertion. The stronger both feelings were, the more a person would change their opinion, even those individuals who had not previously subscribed to a populist ideology. People with pronounced populist

attitudes felt an especially large amount of anger. This finding indicates that anger, in particular, is a significant element in the success of populism; the recently coined term ‘Wutbürger’ [enraged citizens] is justified.

To expand their base, political actors repeatedly refer to values which are actually those propounded by their political opponents. Values are central to populist actors because populist discourse thrives on distinguishing the people from the elite, the friend from the foe, and the good from the bad. Since populism is a ‘thin’ ideology, it is perhaps easier for populist political actors to express contradictory values. A further study therefore investigated whether right-wing populist parties win over new voters when they evoke values that are usually more closely associated with their political opponents (Wirz 2018b). Research has shown that individuals can change their attitudes towards a subject when it is ‘framed’ in a way that is consistent with their values.<sup>63</sup> For this to occur, they must be able to recognise the values at hand, evaluate their appropriateness, and factor them into their decision-making. What happens if a political actor takes a stance that actually is not associated with him? Is he still convincing? The two experiments<sup>64</sup> conducted as part of the study in Switzerland found that contradictions between previously held values and those which are actually expressed are rarely perceived. For people with a traditional value set, right-wing populist statements are more persuasive when they feature the values typically associated with right-wing populist actors, such as tradition and security. Left-wing voters, however, could also be convinced by right-wing populist declarations, especially when they contained typically left-wing values, such as humaneness and universalism.

The NCCR Democracy experiments demonstrate that populist rhetoric has the power to win over individuals to populist arguments, regardless of their political leanings. Yet how large a role does populist communication play in the propagation of populist ideology? What role do the media play in this process? As another study<sup>65</sup> showed, the an-

swer depends on the convictions individuals already hold (Müller et al. 2017): the less the media challenges or critically analyses populist declarations, the more extreme opinions become. This trend is even more pronounced among individuals who already hold populist views, as it serves to intensify their convictions. In contrast, individuals who do not subscribe to populist ideology reject it more strongly the greater their exposure to populist rhetoric is. The findings therefore suggest that the frequent and uncritical dissemination of populist statements by the media contributes to the polarisation of society.

## 6.6. What impact does populism have on democracy?

Populism can be both good and bad for democracy. On the one hand, the success of populism is a symptom of a situation in which the traditional elite no longer act in the interests of the citizens and fail to adequately represent their concerns. Populist actors exploit this representation deficit by adopting overlooked or unsavoury issues and, in doing so, mobilise voters disappointed with the established parties. One study of elections held in 31 European countries between 1990 and 2014 found that right-wing populist parties have indeed succeeded in re-engaging voters in the lower-income and education brackets and brought them back to the polls. However, it found no evidence that the populist parties represented their preferences better once elected to parliament (Huber & Ruth 2017). Populist parties do force the established party system to adapt to the new conflict structures created by globalisation (Kriesi 2004). In this sense, the rise of populism can be seen as a positive challenge to democracy and an opportunity for democratic renewal.

Populism poses a threat to democracy when populist actors achieve positions of power and dismantle the institutions that uphold freedoms and the rule of law. These include freedom of expression and of the press, the protection of the rights of minorities, and hori-

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For example, the Swiss system of direct democracy offers favourable conditions for populism. The popular initiative is an instrument that allows political actors to bring their issues onto the political agenda, and this can resonate strongly with the people. The referendum campaigns leave much room for populist rhetoric. Sweden, by contrast, had long been regarded as less vulnerable to populism. It is possible that the welfare state and the principle of social solidarity helped inoculate the country. The unexpected success of the *Sweden Democrats* since 2010, however, led experts to attribute their success to the ideological convergence among the established parties. Since the *Sweden Democrats* have also moderated their discourse since 1988, they have been able to position themselves as an acceptable alternative (Kriesi & Pappas 2015).

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For an overview of the state of research, see Wirz 2018

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For this experiment, a political demand for a fairer distribution of wages in society was interpreted and displayed in a variety of ways on three sets of posters. Two groups of posters reflected different populist communication strategies. Set 1 prominently displayed greedy executives, while

Set 2 showed ordinary, hard-working people. The third set emphasized individual differences and therefore offered a pluralist, non-populist view of the issue. After they had looked at the posters from one of the three sets, participants (exclusively from German-speaking countries) were asked to explain the emotions the posters evoked and were asked to explain their attitudes about fairer wage distribution.

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See, for example, Druckman, James N. (2001). On the limits of framing effects: who can frame? *Journal of Politics* 63(4), 1041-1066.

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The aim of these experiments was to ascertain whether certain values that were raised in a right-wing populist context were recognised as such and whether they had any persuasive power even if they were incompatible with the participant's own values. Experiment 1 focused on whether participants were able to recognise value references in newspaper articles. The researchers wrote two articles on a (fictitious) group of Sinti and Roma living on a campsite in Switzerland; both included references to conservative values like tradition and security and values of openness like universalism and humaneness. Both articles described the group as loud and chaotic and reported that local

zontal checks. The latter include, among other things, the oversight that parliament or an independent judiciary has over the executive. Populist actors demand direct influence over politics or policy by the people and see themselves as the embodiment of the popular will. It is thus in their self-interest to tip the balance of power in favour of the executive branch. Populist ideology rejects anything that restricts decision-making by the majority, a stance that can lead to the erosion of a system of checks and balances. The notion that the people have a unitary will leaves little room for pluralism and opposition. Groups that do not fit into the populist worldview are marginalised. Surveys in England, France, Germany, and Switzerland found that citizens with populist views demand more direct democracy and more strongly reject constitutionally-based limitations such as the rule of law or guaranteeing the rights of minorities (Mohrenberg et al. 2018).

### The practices when populist parties take power

Governing means to pursue responsible politics and that includes making unpopular decisions. A populist party which takes on the responsibility for governing will also need to defend its policies more strongly. Instead of criticising, it has to prove itself and show that it lives up to its promises. Once in office, populists might moderate their views and adapt their political programmes accordingly. Empirical studies found that the extent to which this happens depends heavily on the context. The political system, in particular, plays a role. Does the populist party govern alone or does it have to share power and be reined in by its more moderate coalition partners (Kriesi 2018)? Consensus democracies that involve power sharing (in coalition governments) and have proportional representation (such as Austria, Germany, the Netherlands, Switzerland, and the Scandinavian countries) tend to curb the power of ruling populist parties. In majoritarian democracies, where power is concentrated in the executive, and which are char-

acterised by a two-party system and majority voting systems (such as Hungary and Greece), it is more possible for a populist party to govern alone or with a junior coalition partner. Likewise, presidential systems (US and Latin America) and semi-presidential systems (e.g. France and Poland) make it easier for populist actors to exercise undivided power; the political system can therefore facilitate such an outcome. Whether populist parties who govern alone can abuse their power also depends on the existing system of checks and balances, the presence of other political forces (e.g. parties) and, last but not least, on the electorate (Kübler & Kriesi 2017).

### Populists in power – Europe

Where populist parties were the junior partner in a coalition government with established parties, their positions were softened. For example, populist parties in Scandinavia dampened their populist discourse as soon as they became a member of a coalition government, or at least had a real prospect of doing so. Likewise, the *FPÖ* in Austria toned down its populist rhetoric once it joined the coalition government in 2000; it immediately reverted to its pronounced populist discourse when it was thrown out of government in 2005 (Kriesi & Pappas 2015). In contrast, the stronger integration of the Swiss *SVP* in the executive and its (co-)responsibility for governing has not clearly led to more moderation. Parties represented in the Federal Council (the national executive) are not obliged to back proposed bills. Consequently, the *SVP* pursues a hybrid strategy: it is both part of the national executive and yet also one of its most vocal critics in opposition. The party's most prominent spokesman, Christoph Blocher, plays a key role in its political communication and has considerable latitude in advancing the party's populist discourse (Bernhard 2017).

The cases of Poland and Hungary show that populist parties which govern alone become more authoritarian if the institutional framework is too weak to prevent abus-

es of power. In 2015, the right-wing populist *PiS* party in Poland first won a majority in the presidential election, and shortly thereafter won an absolute majority of seats in the parliament. In consequence, it has been able to ram a reform of the judicial system through parliament, one which largely stripped the constitutional court of its independence and powers of oversight. This is a serious violation not only of the democratic principle of having an independent judiciary clearly separated from the legislature and executive but also of the Polish Constitution. By changing the law governing the constitutional court, an important safeguard of the political system was hollowed out.<sup>66</sup> Claiming it was engaged in a battle against the old post-Communist elite, the party pursued their nationalist line with even more vigour than before they had taken office. *PiS* has also gradually chipped away at another of democracy's cornerstones: the freedom of the press. A major reform of media legislation is underway as part of an effort to prevent critical reporting, including nationalising radio stations which operate under public law. Not long after they had taken office, the *PiS* government passed a 'minor media law' which stripped the Broadcasting Council of power and replaced the independent directors of radio and television stations with journalists who towed the party line. The EU has so far been unable to prevent these developments. The crisis in the EU seems to have made the Polish government unreceptive to EU criticism. In any case, the EU has few options for dealing with member states who flout democratic values.

In Hungary as well, the right-wing populist party *Fidesz* lost little time when they came to power in 2010, quickly passing a new constitution which, among other things, limits the scope and powers of the country's constitutional court. Prior to this, the new government had already tightened media legislation and imposed restrictions on press freedom. It was able to do this because of its overwhelming success in the parliamentary elections in which it won two-thirds of the seats and was able to form a one-party government. The

Hungarian Constitution contains no provisions to counter the possible abuse of power by a large majority. One could argue that *Fidesz* was sure of being supported by a large percentage of the electorate – though one certainly cannot say its voters authorized these changes, as the party made no mention of such plans during the election campaign.<sup>67</sup> The *Fidesz* government made additional changes to the new constitution over the years and fast-tracked hundreds of laws that further undermine the independence of the judiciary, curtail freedom of expression and other civil rights, and place the media under government control. *Fidesz* also changed the country's electoral law to their advantage by manipulating the electoral districts. As a result, *Fidesz* was able to deal a further blow to the already weak opposition in the 2014 parliamentary elections and cement its grip on power. Given the extensive networks it had built in Europe in its previous incarnation as a mainstream party, *Fidesz* managed to shake off pressure exerted by the EU. Added to this was the strong leadership of Prime Minister Viktor Orbán who has been able to exercise the party discipline needed to push through controversial and far-reaching changes.<sup>68</sup> In his view, the future of Hungary is as an 'illiberal democracy', which he claims is superior to the incompetent liberal democratic system.<sup>69</sup>

Between 1994 and 2011, Italy was governed by four different right-wing populist coalition governments, all led by Silvio Berlusconi. The quality of Italian democracy deteriorated over this period. In particular, existing problems in the rule of law increased (Merkel 2015). During his second term in office (2001–2006), Berlusconi attempted to introduce various judicial reforms with the intent of changing the composition of the judiciary, which he had accused of political bias. However, this met with resistance from the judiciary itself. The Italian president also asserted his power in a number of critical situations, thus limiting the scope of what Berlusconi's government could undertake. During Berlusconi's second government, the concentration and control of the media increased substantially. One of his first acts upon assuming office was to replace the heads of

residents felt uneasy and threatened (tradition and security). They also cited locals who said that all were welcome and that everyone should have the same chances and opportunities (universalism and humaneness). One article framed this information in a right-wing populist context, emphasising the inability of the local government to handle the problem and using exclusionary rhetoric towards the Sinti and Roma people. The second described the situation in a neutral way and underlined the willingness of politicians to work with the community on finding a good solution to the situation. Participants were given one of the two articles to read and were then asked which values were addressed in the text. Although both articles referred to all four values, the neutral text made far more reference to humanist values than the right-wing populist text. The second experiment focused on the persuasive power of evoking values. Once again, the researchers wrote two articles. In both, a (fictitious) politician criticized the political asylum crisis in Western Europe and called for stricter asylum laws in Switzerland (a typical right-wing populist stance). In Article 1, he appealed to conservative values, in Article 2 to humanist values. Participants were given one of the two articles to read and then were asked how much they agreed with the demand for more stringent asylum legislation. Individu-

als who subscribed to conservative values tended to be more in favour if they had read Article 1 (conservative arguments) and less in favour if they had read Article 2 (humanist arguments). For individuals who subscribed more to humanist values, it did not make any difference which article they read: they were generally less in favour. A closer look at the findings, however, revealed that individuals who took a more humanist stance and who had a lower level of educational attainment were more in favour of tightening the law if they had read the text featuring the humanist reasoning (Article 2). In other words, they were won over by an argument that was not consistent with these values. The same was not found among individuals with a higher level of educational attainment.

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This consisted of an analysis of the content of newspaper articles (print and online editions) and a panel survey in four metropolitan regions in England, France, Germany, and Switzerland. The focus on metropolitan regions has two advantages: it made it possible to include regional and local newspapers as well as national papers in the analysis, and the inclusion of rural and urban areas in the panel survey (Paris/Ile de France, Berlin/Brandenburg, City of Zurich/Canton of Zurich and London/Greater London and Buckinghamshire).

the RAI 1 television station, whereupon RAI 1 and RAI 2 changed their political line. This meant Berlusconi now controlled five of the six main television channels, three of which were privately owned and part of his own media empire. He was powerless to act against the highly critical print media. However, the Italian newspaper market is extremely underdeveloped and television dominates the media landscape. Still, there were only limited options available for manipulating public opinion. Many viewers were conscious of the political orientation of the news coverage, and switched television channels (Merkel 2015). Ultimately, the Berlusconi government collapsed in 2011 in the wake of the financial and economic crisis, and in part due to its inability to carry out key reforms and honour election promises. Numerous scandals also undermined public confidence in politics (Kriesi & Pappas 2015).

*Syriza* in Greece is a political novelty for two reasons. Thus far it is the only left-wing populist party to govern a European country. Since 2015 it has done so alongside its much smaller and radical right partner *ANEL* – the only coalition of its kind in Europe to date. *Syriza*'s resounding victory at the polls can be ascribed to the country's ongoing economic crisis, the decades-long favouritism practiced by the ruling parties, the excessive national debt, and the austerity policy imposed on it by external actors. Since 2010, the 'troika', comprising the European Commission, the European Central Bank, and the International Monetary Fund, has compelled Greece to take drastic cost-cutting measures. Despite their otherwise opposing ideologies, *Syriza* and *ANEL* are both critical of the austerity policy and the established parties, blaming them for Greece's economic woes. The electorate feels the same way, which is why it gave *Syriza*'s party leader Alexis Tsipras the latitude to enter into a coalition with a party from the radical right.<sup>70</sup> The populist government has thus far been unable to honour its most significant election promise of ending the austerity policy; nonetheless, it remains in power. This is chiefly because *PASOK* and *ND*, the two old

popular parties, remain discredited. Another reason is that the populist discourse in Greece lays the blame for policy failures at the door of international actors. It is hard to predict what impact the populist government will have on Greek liberal democracy. According to initial assessments, the *Syriza-ANEL* government has softened its position due to the pressure exerted by the country's ongoing economic difficulties and by the commitments imposed by its obligations as a member of the European Monetary Union.<sup>71</sup>

### Populists in power – Latin America

Populist parties have been in power longer in Latin America than in Europe. Once in office, do they actually fulfil the typical election promise of representing the needs of the people better than the old elites? The impact of populism on democratic representation in this part of the world is contradictory (Ruth & Hawkins 2017). On the one hand, almost all populist presidents in Latin America have had a positive effect on the political participation of disadvantaged groups. On the other hand, they do not act more in the interests of the people than non-populist presidents have. True, populist presidents do tend to increase social spending – though with negative results. For example, Hugo Chavez was able to reduce poverty in Venezuela within a few years thanks to his social programmes. However, clientelism and corruption meant that many of the poor were unable to profit from them. In addition, no clear picture emerges in these Latin America cases with respect to the key election promise of populist parties: fighting corruption as soon as they themselves have replaced the 'corrupt elite' in office. Populist and non-populist presidents in this regard have similar track records of success and failure.

What is most alarming is that once in power, some of these populist presidents began hollowing out democratic institutions by introducing sweeping reforms.<sup>72</sup> Under what condition was this possible? The risk that

populists start dismantling democracy is particularly high in presidential systems.<sup>73</sup> As the executive is directly elected, populist governments in such systems benefit from a high degree of legitimacy. At the same time, populist presidents are under considerable pressure to prove their credibility once they are in power, particularly when they lack a parliamentary majority. When executive, legislative, and judicial branches keep each other in check, thereby blocking populist presidents from pursuing their political agendas, there is a great temptation to enact major institutional changes. Studies (Ruth 2017) show that Latin American presidents always took this kind of action when they did not have a parliamentary majority because there was an incentive to tilt the playing field in favour of the executive. However, they were only able to defy the political opposition to such a move if they had sufficient popular support and the strength of the traditional elites was severely weakened, such as when the party system had collapsed. The findings indicate that populist actors are unable to hollow out the institutions of a liberal democracy if the country has a stable party system. Established parties have a dampening effect not only when in opposition but also when the populist president is from their own ranks. Another decisive factor in the ability of a populist president to dismantle or safeguard democratic institutions is public support. When there was a conflict between a populist president and the legislative branch controlled by the opposition, the study found that it was the people who ultimately cast the decisive vote.

## 6.7. Conclusion

Populism is an ideology that places the will of the people above all else and pits the people, which it sees as homogenous and virtuous, against the supposedly corrupt and power-hungry elite. As a thin ideology, it is fleshed out by elements of left-wing and right-wing belief systems. Populist actors call for the unrestricted sovereignty of the people, claim-

ing this will restore the ideal of democracy. At the same time, populist ideology contains anti-democratic elements, as it disavows the institutions which guarantee freedoms and the rule of law in a liberal democracy. Populism, additionally, is a communication strategy that is used even by actors who do not share this ideology.

Populism is not a new phenomenon. It has always fared well when segments of society feel threatened by rapid change, such as the transformations ushered in by globalisation. By the turn of the millennium, at the latest, populism appears to have become socially acceptable again in Western democracies. In Europe, right-wing and left-wing populist parties have seen their share of the vote rise. They have enjoyed success even in countries where, for historical reasons, populist parties had never previously taken root. Populist ideas and messages are more prevalent in election manifestos, particularly among parties at the ends of the political spectrum, and in the mass media. The more often individuals are exposed to populist statements in the mass media which lack accompanying critical analysis, the more entrenched their existing opinions become. This encourages an overall polarisation of public opinion in particular and of society in general. Populist communication stirs up emotions like anger and hope, and in doing so may also be able to convince those who have never previously supported populist ideology. At least with respect to the print media, however, no supporting evidence for the claim that the mass media willingly provide a platform for populist actors could be found. Journalists generally afford populists few opportunities to voice their opinions, though of their own volition they introduce populist messages into public discourse. In contrast, social media offer the perfect conditions for populist communication and are readily used for such ends by members of populist and established (albeit with lesser frequency) parties. The most common populist messages posted on social media are attacks on the elite.

Populism can reinvigorate a torpid democracy. It is a symptom of a system of political

The responses therefore reflect a broad spectrum of society.

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Bucholc, Marta & Komornik, Maciej (2016). "Die PIS und das Recht. Verfassungskrise und polnische Rechtskultur". *Osteuropa* 1-2, 79-93.

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67  
Cf. Batory, Agnes (2016). "Populists in government? Hungary's system of national cooperation". *Democratization* 23(2), 283-303.

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68  
ibid.

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69  
Cf. Viktor Orbán's speech given at the 25th Băile Tușnad Summer University (Romania) on 26 July 2014. In illiberal democracies the judiciary has limited control over the executive and the legislative branches. As such, individual liberties can no longer be completely guaranteed.

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Andreadis, Ioannis & Yannis Stavrakakis (2017). "European populist parties in government: How well are voters represented? Evidence from Greece". *Swiss Political Science Review* 23(4), 485-508.

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71  
Aslanidis, Paris & Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser (2016). "Dealing with populists in government: the SYRIZA-ANEL coalition in Greece". *Democratization* 23(6), 1077-1091.

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72  
They include Hugo Chavez in Venezuela, Rafael Correa in Ecuador, Alberto Fujimori in Peru, and Evo Morales in Bolivia.

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Cf. Linz, Juan (1994). "Presidential or parliamentary democracy: does it make a difference?" In Linz, Juan & Arturo Valenzuela". *The failure of presidential democracy*. London: Boulder, 3–91.

representation that is working poorly. Populist actors capitalise on crises and the failures of established parties to address the concerns of and issues raised by particular segments of society. Populist parties mobilise the under-represented, yet there is no evidence that their preferences are better represented by populists once they are in power. Populism poses a threat to democracy when ruling populist parties start to curtail civil freedoms and undermine the fundamental principles of the rule of law; this is currently the case in a number of Latin American countries, Poland, and Hungary. These examples demonstrate that populist parties can become a danger for democracy when the country has a presidential or a majoritarian electoral system. In these systems, there is a higher likelihood a populist party will rule alone and abuse the power it has been granted. Consensus democracies, by contrast, tend to integrate populist parties better into the political system: populists there generally rule in coalition, and moderate their politics over time.



CHAPTER 7

# Final remarks

The findings of the NCCR Democracy project indicate that democracy, as an idea, is not in crisis. Democracy continues to spread and find approval; the world has never had as many democracies as it has today. Yet though many of these ‘democratic’ political systems meet only the minimum demands of democracy, it is important to remember that democratisation is a highly complex process which takes a great deal of time to mature. The quality of the established Western democracies has remained relatively constant in recent decades, and liberal democracy as a form of government still enjoys widespread public support in Europe. Democracy has lost none of its appeal as a model for governing a state.

Yet there is a paradox. Though the people support democracy, their trust in parliaments, governments, and political parties has declined. They now place more confidence in unelected implementing authorities than in the democratic institutions whose representatives they can elect. Technical expertise and an unelected administration appear to be more important than having a say in the political process and more important than pluralist competition or parliamentary debate. While the people still attach great importance to free and fair elections, over the last few decades voter turnout has been declining across Europe. Surveys highlight a considerable disconnect between what the people expect of democracy and their evaluation of its actual performance. Citizens in their respective countries are generally dissatisfied with how democracy works, and call for more direct participation in political decision-making processes and for more social justice.

In the last decades, political decision-making processes have increasingly shifted away from the national level, and the influence of institutions which are not democratically legitimated has sharply increased. Decision-making and governing today mostly take place in newly created institutions at the international, transnational, regional, and local levels. Members of these bodies are not elected, meaning they also cannot be called to account for the consequences of their decisions by voters. The shift in decision-making authority has occurred in order to address, if not solve, the ever more complex transboundary and even worldwide problems which have arisen in the global age. The result has been a technocratic turn in politics. Experts, expected to solve problems by dint of their specialized knowledge, increasingly shape political practice. The nation state and its national parliament, traditionally the pillars of democracy, have lost significance.

Globalisation has changed governing and has estranged citizens from politics. The gap between what is expected from democracy and what it actually delivers has widened. That decision-making powers have shifted away from the national level may have improved the problem-solving ability of national governments, but it imposes greater constraints on them and makes it more difficult to respond to the needs and concerns of their citizens. Furthermore, this shift violates fundamental democratic principles; those who are affected by a decision are no longer involved in the decision-making process itself. Even if the aspiration is utopian, particularly at the international level, as the demands on knowledge, comprehension, and information on the part of the citizenry would be too high, the democratic

principle of transparency needs to be guaranteed. Nevertheless, important decisions continue to be negotiated 'backstage', without the necessary information being made public. Technocratic problem-solving is paramount, not democratic deliberation.

The process of mediatisation has also changed politics in western democracies. Democracy relies on good political journalism and a diverse media landscape. Over time, the mass media have evolved into an independent, commercially-orientated actor. Compared to a few decades ago, their political reporting is more heavily shaped by their own internal logic. Instead of reporting neutrally, they provide their own interpretation of political news and deliver it up in effective packages the public consumes. The tendency to engage in negative, emotionally charged or sensationalised reporting may be, depending on country, more or less pronounced. Generally speaking, the mass media increase the pressure on political actors to respond to the needs and concerns of the citizenry. Digitalization also means the traditional media have lost their 'gatekeeper' role relative to the public. Political discourse is now more heavily determined by the public through social media which makes it possible to spread unfiltered information. Political actors have adapted to these new conditions, as well as to the internal logic of the media, and use the various media in strategic ways. For these actors, the focus is on political competition rather than political content, in altercations that rely on polarisation; the result is inflated political promises that can scarcely be fulfilled given the complexity of the problems to be faced. Political actors raise expectations which cannot, in the end, be met.

Globalisation and mediatisation processes thus have contributed to the surge in populism. Political representation through established parties functions badly, with parties barely responsive to voters' concerns, making all parties seem alike in the eyes of voters. People have also lost confidence in the ability of the elite to resolve crises, and populist parties exploit this gap in representation by taking up neglected or unwelcome issues. As the rising voter share of populist parties in Europe indicates, there is a 'demand' for populism even in countries where populist parties had never managed to gain a foothold in the past. Populist parties are elected not just as a protest against the established parties but also because their political ideas resonate. Political discourse has generally become more populist, and populist ideas and messages in election programmes and in the mass media, especially in social media, have increased. Even politicians in more moderate parties make strategic use of populist rhetoric. Still, the principal purveyors of populist communication are the radical left and the radical right parties.

Mediatisation processes have led the mass media itself to regard politics and political actors more negatively. There are many similarities in the communication styles of populists and the mass media: both play on emotions, polarisation, personalisation, and bash the elites. One should not underestimate the influence this communication style can have on public opinion. Research on the impact of the media has found that statements which evoke strong emotions are deemed more persuasive. Populist statements therefore have the potential of winning over individuals who had not previously supported populist ideology. Additionally,

populist messages can reinforce existing attitudes the more frequently people are exposed to them and when these messages are not contradicted or questioned. This encourages increasing polarisation both in society and among opposing camps of opinion.

Even if populist parties legitimately raise certain political issues, the propagation of anti-democratic ideas crosses a red line. Democracy is far more than the sovereignty of the people. It also encompasses the rule of law, checks and balances, and individual liberties. Populism can become a threat to democracy when these democratic institutions are attacked and dismantled. The risk is more pronounced when the political system allows for one-party government and when other factors such as checks and balances, a multi-party system or the electorate do not rein in populists when they are in power. That it is possible even in today's Europe to chip away at the cornerstones of democracy, as has been the case in the EU member states of Poland and Hungary, shows just how fragile democracy is. It is not a condition where, once achieved, one can be eternally sure of its future.



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## About NCCR Democracy

The National Centre of Competence in Research (NCCR) Democracy was launched by the Swiss National Science Foundation and the University of Zurich in 2005. The programme examined two current developments which are fundamentally transforming democracy: globalisation and the growing role of the media in politics, or 'mediatisation'. Since then, social scientists affiliated to a range of universities in Switzerland and abroad have worked together on over 50 research projects in order to understand which challenges and new opportunities for democracy these trends entail. During its 12-year run, more than 700 works were published and over 80 doctoral students successfully completed their PhDs. Together with the Swiss city of Aarau, the Canton of Aargau, the University of Applied Sciences Northwestern Switzerland (FHNW), and the University of Zurich, NCCR Democracy founded the Centre for Democracy Studies Aarau (ZDA) in 2009 in order to permanently institutionalise democracy research in Switzerland. It specialises in research on the forms, qualities, and challenges of democracy from the perspective of political science, jurisprudence, and political education/history didactics. It is also the home institution of the NCCR 'Democracy Barometer' project, which measures the quality of democracy in established democracies.

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## Duration of NCCR Democracy

October 2005–September 2017

## Directors

2005–2012: Prof. Hanspeter Kriesi, University of Zurich

2012–2017: Prof. Daniel Kübler, University of Zurich/Centre for Democracy Studies Aarau (ZDA)

Co-directors:

2005–2007: Prof. Otfried Jarren, University of Zurich

2007–2017: Prof. Frank Esser, University of Zurich

Managing director: Yvonne Rosteck, University of Zurich

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## Disciplines

Political science, communication and media research, sociology, political philosophy, computer linguistics, civic and history education.

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## Research network

In Switzerland: Universities of Bern, Geneva, Lausanne, Lucerne, St. Gallen, Fribourg, ETH Zurich, University of Applied Sciences and Arts Northwestern Switzerland (FHNW), Zurich University of Applied Sciences (ZHAW).

International: Berlin Social Science Centre (WZB), European University Institute Florence, Universities of Amsterdam, Greifswald, Mainz, Münster, Stuttgart, Hamburg, and University of California San Diego.

## Funding 2005–2017 (CHF)

	2005–2008	2009–2012	2013–2017
Funding source			
Swiss National Science Foundation	7,100,000	7,500,000	5,250,000
University of Zurich	3,279,922	3,624,131	2,991,311
Self-funding from project partners	4,143,681	5,923,382	3,093,876
Third parties	974,579	264,684	523,162
Total	15,498,183	17,312,196	11,858,349

## NCCR Democracy spin-offs:

- Centre for Democracy Studies Aarau (ZDA): [www.zdaarau.ch](http://www.zdaarau.ch)
- Democracy Barometer: [www.democracybarometer.org](http://www.democracybarometer.org)
- Interdisciplinary doctoral programme 'Democracy Studies' at the University of Zurich: [www.ipz.uzh.ch/en/studium/phd/structured/democracy-studies-program/doctoral-program.html](http://www.ipz.uzh.ch/en/studium/phd/structured/democracy-studies-program/doctoral-program.html)
- Swiss Summer School in Democracy Studies: [www.ipz.uzh.ch/en/studium/phd/structured/democracy-studies-program/swiss-summer-school-democracy-studies/about.html](http://www.ipz.uzh.ch/en/studium/phd/structured/democracy-studies-program/swiss-summer-school-democracy-studies/about.html)

## Professorships created at the University of Zurich:

- Professor of Democracy Research and Public Governance
- Professor of Political Theory
- Assistant Professor of Democratisation (tenure track)
- Assistant Professor of Political Communication (tenure track)

## Knowledge transfer:

NCCR Democracy has also devised a series of educational tools to improve the standard of civic education in Switzerland:

- A role-playing game 'Ja-Nein-Vielleicht. Demokratie bewegt': [www.ja-nein.politischebildung.ch](http://www.ja-nein.politischebildung.ch)
- A civic education app Aushändeln – das Demokratiespiel: [itunes.apple.com/us/app/aus-handeln-das-demokratiespiel/id981120457?mt=8](https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/aus-handeln-das-demokratiespiel/id981120457?mt=8)
- A role-playing game 'Politik.Macht.Gesetz' which simulates the Swiss legislative process: [www.politik-macht-gesetz.ch/](http://www.politik-macht-gesetz.ch/)
- An online learning tool 'Politikzyklus' for civic education lessons in Swiss lower-secondary schools: <http://politikzyklus.ch/>
- A website [www.politiklernen.ch](http://www.politiklernen.ch) for civic education lessons in Swiss schools.

NCCR Democracy has also published a visual reader 'Democracy: An ongoing challenge', written with a general audience in mind: [www.lars-mueller-publishers.com/herausforderung-demokratie](http://www.lars-mueller-publishers.com/herausforderung-demokratie)

Democracy was the most successful political idea of the 20th century, as the high number of democratic governments around the world bears out. Today, though, it seems that it is experiencing a reversal of fortunes. Populist parties are on the rise in democratic states. At the same time, some countries are sliding towards autocracy. Elsewhere, politicians reframe election victories as a claim to absolute power. There is no denying that democracy is under pressure. Globalisation, populism and mediatisation, the growing influence of the media on politics, are testing its limits.

Launched by the Swiss National Science Foundation and the University of Zurich in 2005, the National Centre of Competence in Research on Democracy (NCCR Democracy) examined how and why this is happening and the consequences it has for democracy. The final report details the key findings of the 12-year research programme.



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