Representation and Accountability

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Representative democracy in Europe depends on the capacity of parties to offer political alternatives, integrate the demands of voters into their platforms and responsibly translate them into policies when elected into office. Elections, thus, are the key element in the representative model that offer voters the chance to both articulate by whom they would like to be represented and to hold elected officials accountable via the threat to revoke this authorization (Pitkin, 1967). In recent decades, this model of representative democracy has come under substantial pressure. Long-term processes of social change related to cultural liberalism and globalization have transformed the policy concerns of the electorate (Kriesi, 2016). The established parties previously engaged in representing the interests of a majority of citizens along the traditional left-right dimension of political conflict, however, had difficulties to respond to these changing demands of voters. Since the 2000s, established parties found themselves increasingly challenged by new political actors including populist radical right and radical left parties, Green parties, and "valence populist" parties (Zulianello, 2020) in Eastern Europe. The rise of these new challenger parties, is not only an expression of the declining representative capacity of mainstream parties. It is also intrinsically connected to the different economic and political crises that Europe has been witnessing over the last 20 years (Kriesi and Pappas, 2015; Hutter and Kriesi, 2019).

The new political actors across Europe have in common that they call into question the sustained capability of mainstream parties to represent the interests and preferences of European citizens. While mainstream parties mostly emphasize issues related to the economic dimension of political conflict, challenger parties tend to run on political platforms that emphasize issues related to the policy challenges arising from an increasingly globalized world and interconnected European Union. In doing so, some of the challenger parties also adopt a decisively anti-system or populist strategy of appealing to voters (Hopkin, 2020).

This chapter examines how political representation and accountability across Europe has been affected by the changes that European party systems have been witnessing over the last decades. It sheds light on the drivers of these changes and the resulting implications for the representation of citizens' political preferences. The chapter has six sections. The first discusses the most important long-term processes of social change that have shaped European societies and politics over the past decades. The next four sections show how these processes found their reflection in transforming political

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space in Europe. Not only did they contribute to the electoral decline of mainstream parties who previously used to represent the interests of a large majority of the electorate along the traditional left-right dimension of political conflict. Coupled with the consequences of multi-level competition in the European Union, they also gave rise to the success of new challenger parties. These challenger parties represent both the new substantive demands of citizens that map on a new, cultural cleavage of political competition. Many of them also articulate voters' political distrust towards the mainstream political elite. Finally, this chapter shows that challenger parties across Europe have increasingly participated in government, allowing them to represent voters' new demands in cabinet.

Long-term processes of social change and the transformative impact of recent crises

According to the seminal account of Seymour Martin Lipset and Stein Rokkan (1967), party systems are the expression of deep-seated conflicts that exist in society, which are commonly referred to as "cleavages". Cleavages can be understood as persistent disagreements of interest between social or political groups that may give rise to open conflict (Rae and Taylor, 1970, pp.1–21). Such cleavages reflect not only the socio-structural divides within a society, but also related sets of conscious beliefs about these divides as much as their articulation and mobilization by political actors and organizations (Bartolini and Mair, 1990, pp.213–20). One cleavage has proven to be particularly resilient in Western European societies and has lent the party systems a remarkable stability from the 1920s onward, making some scholars even speculate the party systems had been "frozen" (Lipset and Rokkan, 1967, p.50; Mair, 1997, p.82). This resilient cleavage revolves around questions of economic redistribution, commonly referred to as "class cleavage" or "left-right cleavage". It has been most pronounced in Northwestern Europe while it has been less manifest in Southern Europe and the countries of Central Eastern Europe (CEE) for reasons related to their regime legacies and their belated democratization (Deegan-Krause, 2007; March, 2012), which took place only in the second half of the 1970s in Southern European countries (with the exception of Italy) and in the 1990s in the CEE countries.

Owing to an ongoing process of social transformation that most societies have witnessed starting in the late 1960s, however, this traditional cleavage has been complemented by another critical divide within societies. Scholars have chosen different names to refer to this cleavage (e.g. 'GAL-TAN' cleavage (Hooghe et al., 2002), which is short for "Green, Alternative, Libertarian" and "Traditional, Authoritarian, Nationalist", or 'integration-demarcation' cleavage (Kriesi et al., 2008)). As this cleavage internally divides the respective social groups pitted against each other by the class cleavage (i.e. the cleavage cuts across – or is "cross-cutting" – the class cleavage), most scholars argue that European party competition has become two-dimensional. Central to the formation of this cultural cleavage are processes of social transformation brought about, first, by ongoing value changes among European societies and, second, by continuously accelerating levels of globalization.

In his famous account on value change, Ronald Inglehart (1977) argues that a "silent revolution" took place in many Northwestern European countries. At the heart of this silent revolution lie the high levels of material security that shaped Western societies in the post-war period, socializing an entire generation into the absence of any existential threat to their physical and material survival, thereby naturally fueling their interest and curiosity for so-called "post-materialist" values like self-autonomy, the expression of preferences related to life-style and emancipative values and to common goods

like climate and the environment. This silent revolution was facilitated by the occupational changes within post-industrial societies, most notably with the rise of higher education, the feminization of the labor force, increasing levels of employment in the service sector and a growing number of highly skilled, non-routine professional workers (Oesch, 2006). These processes were conducive to an intergenerational value change. As the dominant mainstream parties did not take on the new demands of the post-war generation, parties from the so-called "New Left" started to form and gain traction. This wave of the New Left lies at the heart of the formation of many Green parties across Northwestern Europe.

Closely related to the changes that gave rise to the "silent revolution", European societies have also increasingly been subject to transformations resulting from processes of "de-nationalisation" (Zürn, 1998) and globalization, more generally. Levels of exposure to globalization have greatly varied not only across European countries and the different European regions, but, importantly, also within the different countries. These varying levels of exposure to globalization have impacted individuals and their lives to different degrees, triggering different attitudinal consequences. While some individuals feel that the various aspects of globalization mostly contribute to enhance their lives, others perceive negatively of the economic and cultural changes that are responsible for rapidly transforming their environment and everyday lives. Not only did these socio-economic benefits and risks of global and European economic integration become increasingly salient since the 1990s, with growing levels of intra-European migration and growing numbers of migrants arriving to the EU coming from third countries, the public became aware of the cultural implications of the opening-up of national boundaries, inciting political demands for a protection against the perceived perils and threats resulting from the inflow of non-native persons, ideas or traditions (Mudde, 2007; Arzheimer, 2018). As mainstream parties neglected these political concerns, starting from the 1980s, European party systems experienced a so-called wave of the "New Right". Populist radical right parties like Front National in France or the Freedom Party of Austria took on the culturally conservative policy demands of voters.

The Great Recession, the ensuing European financial crisis and the European migration crisis have put the social ramifications of European integration and globalization further in the spotlight of public attention, contributing to the politicization of related conflicts. When the governments of crisis-ridden Southern European countries were forced to implement strict austerity measures imposed by international and European donors during the sovereign debt crisis, Eurosceptic radical left challengers attracted considerable electoral support by articulating their opposition to further European market-integration (Holmes and Lightfoot, 2016; Kriesi, 2016; March, 2016; Hopkin, 2020). In Northwestern European countries, in contrast, the European financial crisis gave rise to Euroscepticism from the New Right. Its success was further fueled by the ensuing migration crisis, which started to unfold from late 2014 and early 2015 onward and offered radical right actors ample opportunities for instrumentalizing the European project in nativist terms (Pytlas, 2020). It remains unclear in which ways the experience of the COVID-19 crisis, the related most recent trends of democratic backsliding observed during the pandemic in some of the CEE countries, and the expected large-scale decline of European economies resulting from the policy measures to contain the pandemic will impact party competition. The pandemic could boost the success of populist radical challengers of different types across the continent.
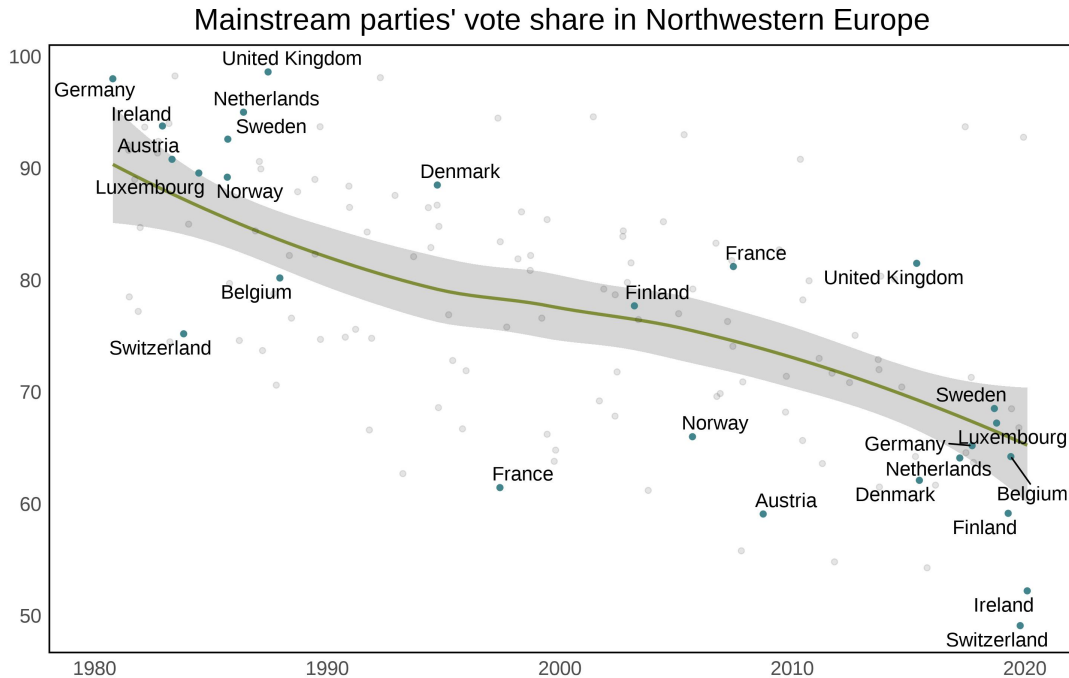
Marked dots show max./min. share of vote obtained by mainstream parties in national elections from 1980-2020. Data: Parlgov database (Döring and Manow, 2020).The classification of mainstream parties is based on party families (all parties belonging to the family of agrarian, Christian democratic, conservative, liberal and social democratic parties. The 'True Finns' and the 'Swiss People's Party' are not included in the family of mainstream parties, but are classified as populist right parties, while the party 'Independent Greeks' is not classified as populist radical right party).

Figure 1: Vote share of mainstream parties in Northwestern Europe, 1980-2020

The electoral decline of mainstream parties

The electoral success of mainstream parties across Europe has been on decline, pointing to a decreasing capacity of these parties to represent voters' policy demands. This development can be traced both to the long-term structural changes and the sequential crises experienced by European countries during the 2010s discussed above. While the long-term changes contributed to a shrinking electoral core constituency of mainstream parties, after being part of the government during the various crises, in addition, several of these mainstream parties have also been punished by voters for their lack of sufficient accountability.

Figure 1 shows the vote share that mainstream parties achieved in all national elections that have been held between 1980 and 2020 across northwestern European countries. As Figure 1 clearly shows, the vote share of mainstream parties has been steadily decreasing across all countries in Northwestern Europe. In a majority of countries, mainstream parties achieved the highest vote share (marked points with country labels) in the decades prior to 2000s, while their electoral performance was on an all-time low (marked points with country labels) in the national elections held since 2015.

The electoral fate of social democratic parties has been particularly affected by the challenges posed by social transformation across Europe. As post-industrial societies are characterized by the rise of highly skilled, non-routine workers, the traditional core clientele of social democratic parties is declining. Today, social democratic parties draw their electoral support mostly from a highly educated, new middle class support base (Kitschelt, 1994; Gingrich and Häusermann, 2015). Starting from the mid 1990s, social democratic parties emphasized supply-side economic management, balanced budget

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while also attaching greater salience to social liberalism and environmentalism, a strategy that has been called "third way" or "new middle" and is associated with the decline of social-democratic parties. While this decision on the part of social democratic parties to turn their attention to more left-libertarian issues and to endorse market integration in Europe had been motivated by an attempt to meet the demands of their new electoral support base, this approach entailed the risk, however, to further lose some of their former core electoral clientele, i.e. manual and routine workers who demand a protection from the exposure to global market competition. Feeling alienated by some of these progressive values and looking to preserve their social status against the risks of globalization and labor market competition resulting from international integration, the off-shoring of production sites in foreign countries and the influx of low-skilled production workers from third countries, these low-skilled voters increasingly opt for parties from the New Right who promote a different type of egalitarian social policy, defined exclusively in terms of citizenship (Houtman and Derks, 2008; Oesch and Rennwald, 2018). As a consequence, between 2000 and 2017 most social democratic parties secured their lowest levels of support since the period of democratization in the respective countries (Benedetto et al., 2020).

Multi-level competition in the EU and its effects for national party politics

Next to the socio-structural transformations and crises experiences that have shaped European societies in the past decades, the multi-level structure of political competition within the European Union has also contributed to party system change across Europe. The expanding scope and breadth of European integration has contributed to an increased salience of the new cultural cleavage, thereby further decreasing the appeal of mainstream parties who mostly continue to represent voters' interests on the traditional left-right dimension of political conflict. The institution of direct elections to the European Parliament (EP) has also contributed to a process of increasing fragmentation of national party systems (Dinas and Riera, 2018; Schulte-Cloos, 2018). Readily coined "second-order" national elections by scholars in response to the results of the first EP elections in 1979 (Reif and Schmitt, 1980; Eijk et al., 1996), even after nine legislative rounds and a total of 175 European electoral campaigns held in the different member states, the supranational contest is still marked by lower levels of popular participation, lower campaign efforts by mainstream political parties and a related lower barrier-to-entry into the European legislature for small and newcomer parties.

Figure 2 shows that since the first EP elections in 1979, across all three European regions, turnout has consistently been lower in the EP elections than in the respective preceding national election within a given country. There are less than 10 observations that reported a higher level of popular participation in the supranational elections than in the previous domestic contest. In the last EP elections in 2019, the negative differential of electoral turnout in the EP and national elections appears very similar across all three regions - and less pronounced than in previous European elections among Northwestern and Eastern European countries. While turnout levels in national elections tend to greatly vary across European regions and public participation rates are much lower in CEE countries than in the rest of Europe, there is a converging trend across European regions regarding the negative differential levels of turnout in the supranational and the preceding national contests.

The lackluster public interest in the European elections suggests that this institution, to date, has not met the objective to instill a European political identity among citizens (Tindemans, 1975). While attracting little public attention and excitement, research shows that the European elections, and party

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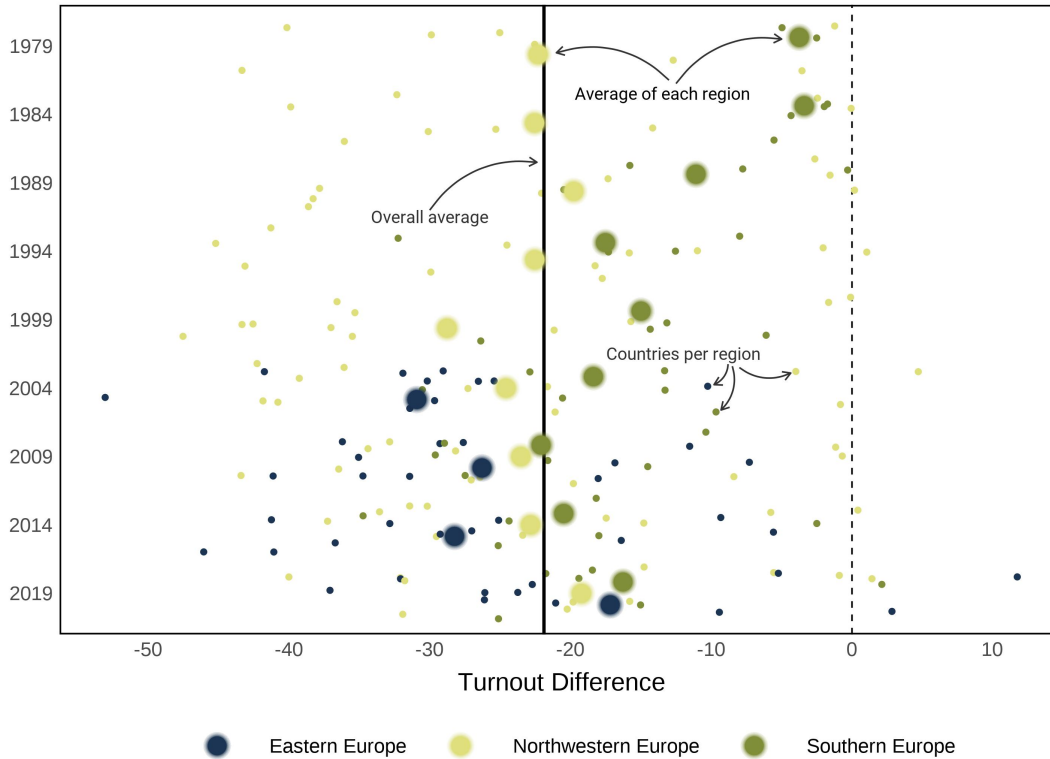
Figure 2: Turnout difference in EP elections compared to national elections in EU member states, 1979-2019

politics at the European level, more generally, however, increasingly contribute to shape national politics and party competition at the national level (Kriesi, 2016). Following their success in the EP elections, for instance, populist right parties enjoy greater visibility within national politics and manage to succeed also in domestic contests (Schulte-Cloos, 2018). The permissive electoral formula applied in the EP elections (proportional representation) has also facilitated the rise of the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) in the European elections, which critically added to the salience of the membership question in British domestic politics and ultimately increased a related intra-party conflict among the Conservatives to the extent that then Prime Minister Cameron promised a public referendum on this issue (Bremer and Schulte-Cloos, 2019). Partisan politics at the European level also played an important role for domestic politics in Hungary. Facing the threat of electoral decline at the European level, for years, the Conservative mainstream European party group (European People's Party, EPP) had been reluctant to sharply criticize the 'democratic backsliding' and authoritarian attacks by the ruling party Fidesz of Hungarian Prime Minister Orbàn, thereby contributing to stabilize his government (Kelemen, 2017).

Thus, while public interest in the EP elections remains very limited, the multi-level structure of the EU increasingly contributes to shape party competition at the national level. Notably, this works in favor of such party actors who aim to represent voters' skepticism towards European integration and their demands for a greater protection of national sovereignty.

New party formations in EU member states from 1980-2020. Data: Parlgov.
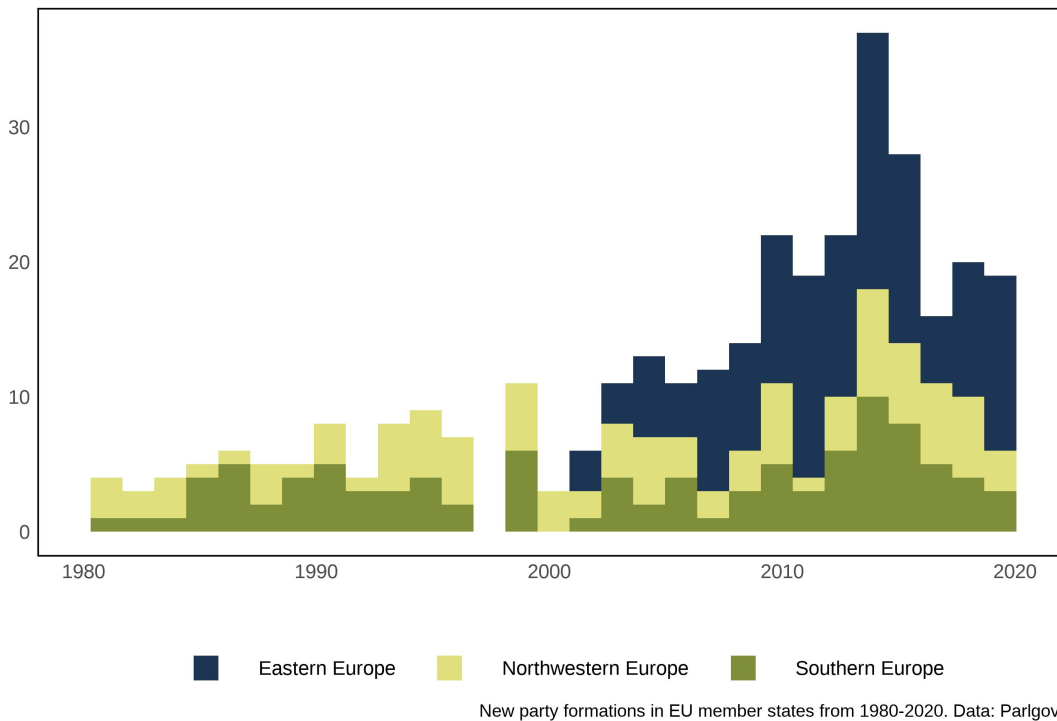
Figure 3: The foundation of new parties in EU member states, 1980-2020

New challenger parties and party system fragmentation

The decline of mainstream parties and the growing demand of voters for representation of issues related to the "new" cleavage is also evident in the trend of new parties that have been formed across all three regions of Europe. As seen in Figure 3, the number of newly founded political parties has been steadily on the rise since the early 2000s. While the level of new party entry has been highest in Eastern Europe, reflecting the prevalent lower level of party system institutionalization (Kitschelt, 1992; Mair, 1997), Southern and Northwestern Europe also saw a notable increase in party formations in the course of the Great Recession and the subsequent European financial crisis (Hernández and Kriesi, 2016). These newly formed parties include populist left parties like Podemos in Spain or Levica in Slovenia, they include Green parties like ORaH in Croatia or the Portuguese party "People Animals Nature", populist right parties like the German AfD and some noteworthy anti-establishment and anti-corruption newcomers taking a liberal-centrist and somewhat populist position, like the Lithuanian National Resurrection Party or the Czech party "Action of Dissatisfied Citizens", most frequently found in the CEE countries (Sikk, 2012, p.467; Engler et al., 2019).

Many Green parties across Northwestern Europe have their origins in the 1970s and early 1980s when the changing electoral demands of voters triggered the formation of left-libertarian, so-called new social movements. Above all, these formations were concerned with "new" issues like the protection of the environment, nuclear disarmament, and a pacifistic outlook on international politics – all of which continue to represent the culturally liberal pole of party competition along the 'new' cleavage in contemporary European politics. Advancing a vision of "new politics" and an unconventional political

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style, which emphasizes participatory elements in policy-making, after a period of organizational institutionalization, these Green formation mostly aligned to the left-libertarian political side of conflict (Poguntke, 1987), favoring a strong social welfare state and redistribution (see also the discussion in Kitschelt (2019, p.81f.) that draws attention to the initial heterogeneous activists among some of the Green formations, e.g. the German Greens). Green formations have been less successful in the Southern European countries with a strong "old" left and, in absence of strong post-materialistic values (Jordan, 1991; Deegan-Krause, 2007), they were mostly also less influential in the CEE countries with the exception of a short period of legislative representation after the end of the Communist regime (Frankland, 2016). Recently, environmental concerns and environmental activism has received renewed public attention when new climate movements (e.g. the youth-led group "Fridays for Future") have mobilized several millions of young activists across different parts of Europe. This revival of environmental activism might further increase the salience of policy issues advanced by Green parties, thereby possibly fueling their electoral success across Europe in the future.

Several authors argue that the expansion of progressive values and ideas and their institutional and legislative representation through Green and left-libertarian parties, has nurtured its own backlash and provoked a cultural counter-reaction among parts of the electorate (Ignazi, 1992; Bornschier, 2010; Norris and Inglehart, 2019). This counter-reaction is directed against the growing cultural diversity in modern European societies, rising numbers of immigrants and asylum seekers, an erosion of national identities, and oftentimes also against membership in the European Union. Such culturally conservative sentiments resonate among individuals who feel threatened and alienated by the rapid progression of cultural change and demand the return to a less diverse, ethnically and ideationally more homogeneous and traditionalist society (Rydgren, 2008). In recent scholarly accounts, the rise of the radical right across Europe has also been attributed to the unevenly distributed economic benefits and risks resulting from globalization and automation. Studying variation in support for support for the withdrawal from the EU during the "Brexit" referendum in the UK, Colantone and Stanig (2018) finds that support for "Leave", indicative of support for the prevalence of populist right sentiments across the British population, is a function of import shocks from China experienced by certain regions. The experience of local economic deprivation, thus, appears also critical to understand voters' populist right sentiments (see also Jackman and Volpert, 1996 for a comparative account studying cross-country variation in radical right support and economic conditions at the macro-level). The picture seems to be somewhat more mixed in settings of multi-party competition and electoral choice in proportionally representative (PR) systems, where recent analyses suggest that support for populist right parties is not only a function of exposure to economic aspects of globalization (import shocks and disruption of the local economy), but also of exposure to the cultural aspects of globalization (immigration inflows) (Caselli et al., 2020).

Crisis of representation and challenger parties in government

The rise of challenger parties across Europe is clearly an expression of the changing socio-structural cleavages in society. Yet, in addition to these socio-structural transformations, voters' *political grievances* also contribute decisively to the electoral success of challenger parties. These political grievances are inherently linked to the declining representative capacity of party systems in Western Europe (Mudde, 2004; Kriesi, 2014). Mainstream parties have mostly neglected the substantive "new" demands of voters or started to integrate these demands into their policy profiles belatedly in response to an

evident electoral success of a challenger party or a non-negligible, pressingly high public salience of related issues (Abou-Chadi and Krause, 2018).

The unresponsiveness of mainstream parties has nurtured anti-elitist sentiments and political disaffection among voters that decisively contribute to the success of populist challenger parties (Lubbers et al., 2002; Akkerman et al., 2014; Caramani, 2017). These sentiments lie at the heart of a "crisis of representation" across Europe that has increasingly been subject to scholarly attention, focusing on the success of populist parties and the implications for party choice and party competition across Europe (see chapter xx).

Recent research studies the conditions under which parties from the radical left and the radical right can benefit from such populist sentiments (Kriesi and Schulte-Cloos, 2020). For example, Hanspeter Kriesi and I looked at the relationship between political disaffection and voting for a radical left or radical right party in 15 European countries, located mostly in the northwest. We find that political distrust only drives a vote for these parties when they are excluded from government. When the parties are represented in cabinet, in contrast, their supporters are no less distrustful than supporters of mainstream parties. Thus, voters' political disaffection appears to partly originate in the failure of mainstream parties to integrate their substantive demands into policy-making.

Thus, the representation of new challenger parties in government might contribute to mitigate voters' political disaffection. Figure 4 shows the representation of Green, populist left, populist right and populist centrist parties in government from 1980 to 2020 across countries. The graph highlights two important points. First, it shows that government participation of these challenger parties still remains the exception. Yet, Figure 4 also suggests that challenger parties have been represented in political office more frequently in recent decades. In addition, their relative size in the cabinet has increased, which can be seen by the strength of the shading in Figure 4. Scholars still have to understand the long-term effects that the government participation of challenger parties have for the political satisfaction of their voters and their populist and anti-elitist sentiments.

But even when government participation is still an unlikely outcome, voters might be motivated to electorally participate when a challenger party that claims to represent their substantive demands runs in an election. Schulte-Cloos and Leininger (2022) and Schulte-Cloos (2022) show that the German populist radical right AfD significantly benefits from the electoral mobilization of those parts of the electorate who display high levels of political disaffection at a time prior to the existence of the party.

Conclusion

How did European party systems transform over the past decades, what has been driving these changes and what are the resulting consequences of these transformations for patterns of electoral competition and the representation of citizens' interests? This chapter has started from the notion that in the representative model of democracy, parties are central to articulate and represent voters' political demands. Mainstream parties who previously used to represent the interests of a majority of citizens across Europe have lost much of their electoral appeal in response to both ongoing processes of socio-structural transformation of societies and to the integration of member states into the European multi-level structure. These two developments have been coupled with the sequential experience of the European sovereign debt crisis, the migration crisis and the COVID-19 crisis. During these various crises, voters in some European crises have perceived of governing mainstream parties as

Figure 2.4.: Challenger parties' government participation

Data: Parlgov/Wikipedia
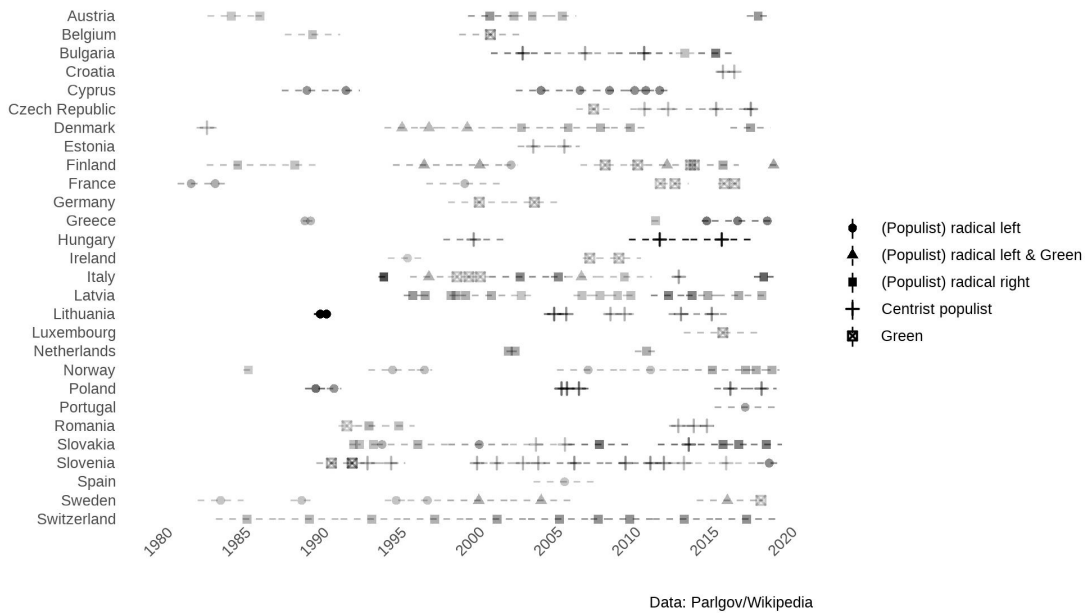
Government participation and minority government support by challenger parties. The strength of the shading
indicates the relative size of the challenger parties in the respective cabinets.

Figure 4: Government participation and minority government support by challenger parties, 1980-
2020.

unresponsive to their demands, putting the representative model of democracy further under pressure
and increasing the salience of issues related to the "new" cultural dimension of political conflict. These
new electoral demands have been articulated most successfully by challenger parties, resulting in
legislative and executive representation of these parties in all parts of Europe. Many challenger parties
adopt a populist and anti-system discourse to appeal to voters. In doing so, they are capitalizing on
the political dissatisfaction of parts of the electorate and the political grievances that some citizens
harbor while feeling unrepresented by the established political mainstream parties. Future trends of
party competition and political representation across Europe, thus, depend also on challenger parties'
capacities to sustain lasting electoral ties to the electorate.

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