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Hoffmann-Lange, Ursula

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5 European citizens and elites in times of economic crisis and citizen unrest

Ursula Hoffmann-Lange and Mindaugas Kuklys

Introduction

Since the mid-1960s, established democracies have experienced a considerable decline in institutionalized forms of political participation such as voting, party identification, and party membership; this has been accompanied by a parallel surge of citizen protest against the decisions of governmental institutions of all levels: local, regional, national, and transnational. In his theory of value change, Ronald Inglehart (1997, pp. 168–171, p. 311) has characterized this ongoing process as a change from elite-directed to elite-challenging political participation, which he considers to be the result of a cognitive mobilization that has enabled citizens to act as political subjects, rather than as objects of elite decision-making. This rationale implies that today's citizens are more critical of elites and demand more opportunities for direct democratic involvement. Another concurrent trend has been changes in the political party systems of the established democracies. Since around 1970, the traditional socio-economic cleavage began to lose its grip on the electorate. Identification with the established parties has declined, voter volatility has increased, and party systems have become more fluid (Drummond 2006).

The last decade has seen some of the most turbulent political developments in European democracies. The global economic recession forced governments to respond to the economic downturn and its associated fiscal problems, frequently by imposing austerity policies and economic hardships on their citizens by increasing taxes and reducing welfare payments. At the same time, the ongoing globalization has contributed to moving industrial production to low-cost countries, while post-industrial economies have specialized in the development of ever more sophisticated products, information technologies, and global distribution logistics. Finally, international political tensions have increased. Moreover, persistent poverty and civil wars in other parts of the world have contributed to an unprecedented mass migration of people seeking both physical security and economic opportunity in European countries.

Inglehart has argued that value change also depends on the persistence of relatively secure socio-economic conditions. Even though most of the European democracies show signs of recovery, the economic recession, the rapid changes

in living conditions, and the massive influx of migrants all contribute to feelings of insecurity among citizens, and have facilitated the rise of right-wing populist movements and parties whose political demands are very different from the *New Politics* envisioned by Ronald Inglehart. Instead of post-materialist concerns, these movements (e.g., the Front National in France, the Partij voor de Vrijheid in the Netherlands, the Sweden Democrats, and the Alternative für Deutschland) all articulate traditional materialist demands, such as higher government expenditures for infrastructure and welfare, the creation of new jobs, and security. These movements are also preoccupied with cultural identity and traditional values, e.g., by mobilizing against issues such as gay marriage and mass immigration of people from different cultural backgrounds. One would be hard pressed to label the latter as materialist demands (Papadopoulos 2013, p. 28). These new right-wing populist movements and political parties frequently use the same action repertoires as the post-materialist protesters.

This raises two different questions: The first is whether the return of traditional economic and cultural issues to the political agenda will reinvigorate old political loyalties, or whether it will rather precipitate the ongoing erosion of traditional political ties and provide opportunities for new political entrepreneurs. The second is more fundamental and asks if the advent of *monitory democracy* implies that elites have come under unprecedented public pressure by the media and vocal protest groups. Will established representative democracies thereby come closer to realizing the ideal of a democracy not only for, but by the citizens? Or will it contribute to an erosion of representative democratic institutions, impair the ability of elites to aggregate an increasingly heterogeneous spectrum of political demands, and give rise to erratic political decisions and anarchy?

Empirical political sociology, elite theory, and theories of pluralist society have all pointed out the less benign implications of more direct involvement of citizens in policy decision-making. Empirical political sociology has shown that regular political involvement of citizens is normally limited to a relatively small stratum of active citizens. Elite theory has argued that a considerable degree of elite autonomy is necessary for pursuing coherent and sustainable policies. Theories of pluralist society, finally, have claimed that intermediary associations provide indispensable linkages between citizens and elites. Therefore, a rising degree of direct citizen involvement in political affairs implies more public pressure especially on elected political elites. Their power basis will become less stable and their careers more vulnerable to electoral defeat. This will force them to pursue short-term strategies in order to secure their mandate. At the same time, it will make democratic politics more volatile and erratic in the future.

The rise of non-institutionalized political participation in Western democracies

The last decades have seen a considerable increase of protest against decisions taken by national governments, public agencies, and private enterprises. Global

protest movements have mushroomed especially over the past decade, with the Occupy movement confirming that political action groups that first emerge in one country may easily spread to other countries, quickly developing into a loosely knit global protest network. However, not all of these organizations belong to what is usually labeled *New Social Movements*, as established organizations—especially labor unions and economic pressure groups—have also intensified their mobilization efforts.

The politically quiet post-war period came to an end already in the late 1960s with the sudden and unexpected outburst of political protest among students in the affluent Western democracies. The Political Action Study, a five-nation survey conducted in 1974, confirmed the emergence of new modes of political activism and a mobilization of citizens outside of the traditional intermediary associations. A majority of the respondents in four of these five countries considered lawful direct political actions such as demonstrations and petitions as a legitimate way to articulate their disapproval with government policies. At that time, however, only a relatively small number of about 10 percent indicated that they had actually participated in such activities (Barnes and Kaase 1979, pp. 548–549). The potential for engaging in direct political action showed a negative association with age and was positively associated with higher education. Although the authors had only cross-sectional data, they saw their results as indicating a fundamental shift in patterns of political participation that would change the politics of established democracies in the future. At the same time, the data also showed that the protest potential they had found was not directed against the democratic institutions per se, but rather signified an expansion of the repertoire of citizen participation in politics (Barnes and Kaase 1979, p. 27). Moreover, protest activities and traditional means of political participation such as voting and membership in traditional intermediary associations were closely interrelated at the individual level, rather than being alternative acts of political participation.

In their conclusions, the authors discussed the likely political impact of these new patterns of participation:

Undoubtedly, elite positions in the future will become less and less permanent, hierarchical, and encompassing; contrary to C. W. Mills' expectation, the existing elite structure will become increasingly diverse and pluralistic. We hold this to be desirable for a democratic society. Furthermore, we are not frightened by the claim that decision-making will become more and more difficult because of broadened participation by citizens. This may well be true, but the old efficiency argument does not suffice in democratic politics; it has to be qualified and balanced by bringing in the consensus or legitimacy dimension as well. In fact, it appears entirely conceivable that citizens will be willing to engage in prolonged decision-making and to accept political outcomes not to their liking if their own involvement satisfied their self-realization needs and persuades them of the legitimacy of that outcome.

(Barnes and Kaase 1979, p. 531)

In the more than 40 years that have passed since the Political Action survey, the share of citizens in post-industrial democracies who participate in direct political action has increased at a breathtaking pace (Dalton 2006, p. 68). This was first confirmed by a longitudinal comparative analysis of survey data on citizen attitudes toward the state and changes in patterns of political participation from the mid-1970s until the mid-1990s. “The observed increase in non-institutionalized participation in practically all countries is the most unambiguous finding in this volume” (Fuchs and Klingemann 1995b, p. 431). A 2015 representative youth survey in Germany confirmed that non-institutionalized forms of political participation have continued to rise with the spread of the digital media. The percentage of young Germans aged 14 to 29 claiming that they had already participated in demonstrations has since risen to 43 percent, with 35 percent participating in online protest initiatives and 75 percent signing petitions (Gille et al. 2017).

Ample empirical evidence confirms that institutionalized and non-institutionalized forms of citizen participation are complementary, and that active citizens tend to use the entire range of available options to feed their political preferences into the political system by voting, working within political parties, but also by trying to influence policy decisions through all kinds of direct action. Increased readiness to engage in political protest against government policies does not imply, however, that citizens “withdraw their support from the democratic system state as a whole, or, at least, from core structural elements” (Fuchs and Klingemann 1995b, p. 434). Support for democracy and democratic procedures has even increased over the last decades.

As many observers have rightfully pointed out, this increase in political activism can be attributed primarily to educational expansion. However, while Inglehart and others have claimed that rising educational levels, in conjunction with the spread of mass media (especially the internet), have promoted a massive process of cognitive mobilization and an increase in political sophistication (Inglehart and Welzel 2005, p. 28; Dalton 2006, p. 25), politics remains a sphere to which most people devote little time. A deeper understanding of the complexities of politics and regular political involvement continue to be the preserve of a relatively small segment of the population. Moreover, political interest has not risen as much as could be expected given this increase in educational levels. Nie et al.’s (1996) study of the relationship between education and democratic citizenship tries to unravel this seeming paradox. The authors distinguish two analytically distinct aspects of democratic citizenship: democratic enlightenment and political engagement. Democratic enlightenment relates to knowledge of the principles of democracy, and to a commitment to democratic values and tolerance. “Political engagement, on the other hand, signifies the capability of citizens to pursue their preferences in politics and is characterized by attributes such as participation in difficult political activities and knowledge of leaders” (Nie et al. 1996, p. 37).

Both aspects of democratic citizenship are related to formal education, but they follow a different logic. Political engagement depends not only on

education, but also on one's perceived ability to influence political processes. Unlike education, regular political activity and influence are scarce status goods. Political engagement therefore follows what the authors call the *relative education model*. Rising educational levels increase the competition for political influence among those with higher education, causing the political clout associated with higher education to decrease. As a result, the percentage of respondents who report engaging in time-consuming political activities such as campaign work and who regularly follow politics has been more or less stable between 1972 and 1992 (Nie et al. 1996, p. 127). Democratic enlightenment, in contrast, is a personal attribute that follows the *absolute education model*. Support for democratic values has, accordingly, increased with the rise in average educational levels (Nie et al. 1996, p. 122).

Nie et al.'s study provides a pertinent explanation for some of the paradoxes in the development of citizen value orientations and political participation patterns in modern democracies. The absolute education model explains why rising educational levels have contributed to a spread of pro-democratic values, declining trust in politicians, and an increased readiness to contribute money and to take to the streets for "good" political causes. Most of these activities, however, are intermittent and limited to influencing specific issues. The relative education model instead explains why the number of activists who are prepared to devote a fair amount of time to politics has not risen comparably. This conclusion is supported by the fact that both established and new organizations increasingly have problems both recruiting and retaining members: While demonstrations may draw large crowds, the organizational work is left to a relatively stable core of activists.

The declining reliance on traditional mass organizations has, in turn, led to a decline in membership, which has especially affected political parties and labor unions (Putnam 2000), although this decline has been more than compensated for by the proliferation of advocacy groups and initiatives promoting social and political causes, ranging from loosely structured local groups to national and even global ones. An increasing non-profit sector, the rise of watchdog groups, but also new political party types can serve as examples (Huntington 1974, p. 176; Fuchs and Klingemann 1995a and 1995b; Keane 2011). The sheer number of these organizations does not support Putnam's concerns that the decline of traditional mass organizations has eroded social capital in post-industrial democracies. At the same time, however, these new groups and initiatives are organizationally less institutionalized and ephemeral:

From the citizen's perspective, they allow efficient interest representation under time constraints; from the perspective of the political system, they are a collective political actor which is capable of adapting more quickly than formal organizations to the changing constellation of problems.

(Fuchs and Klingemann 1995a, p. 19)

Elections in 31 European democracies since 2009: acceleration of a long-term increase in electoral volatility during the economic recession

The combined impact of these ongoing political developments and the recent economic recession on electoral behavior in the European democracies can be gauged by looking at the basic economic indicators and the elections of the last decade. For this purpose, we have collected data for the 28 EU member countries and three other long-standing European democracies (Iceland, Norway, and Switzerland). Although the data cover only a relatively short period and use relatively simple measures, they illustrate the degree to which traditional political parties and governments are being confronted by unstable electorates.

We can distinguish three groups of countries based on per capita gross domestic product (GDP): With the exception of the Czech Republic and Slovenia, the post-communist democracies have a per capita national income below \$20,000; the per capita GDP of the Southern European countries ranges between \$22,000 (Greece and Portugal) and \$34,000 (Italy), while the established democracies in Northern and Western Europe all enjoy per capita GDPs above \$40,000. A look at changes in GDP growth for 2009 shows that only 1 of the 31 countries, Poland, had a small positive economic growth in 2009, while the other 30 countries suffered considerable economic setback, with an average dip in their growth rate of -5.5 percent. The three Baltic countries Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania were hardest hit by the recession in 2009, but they quickly recovered, while the recovery took much longer in four of the six Southern European countries. By 2015, the average GDP growth in the 31 countries had improved to $+2.9$ percent. Even Greece—which suffered an exceptionally deep and prolonged crisis—showed a modest economic growth of 0.4 percent. However, GDP in a number of these countries has not fully recovered from the crisis, some of which continue to report double-digit unemployment, and some suffer from a sovereign debt rate of more than 100 percent. Greece is worst off with a GDP standing at 89 percent of its 2007 level, a 23.9 percent unemployment rate, and a sovereign debt of 181.7 percent. Based on these economic indicators, the economic crisis appears far from over yet, and especially the poorer countries have been suffering from a decline in standards of living.

The decision to distinguish three country groups was based on the GDP data as well as on their different historical trajectories. This is especially obvious for the post-communist countries that democratized only in 1989/90.¹ The Southern European countries are set apart by their somewhat peripheral location on the Mediterranean.² Moreover, five of these six countries (excluding Malta) have been deeply affected by the economic crisis. The decision to treat them as a separate group is also supported by the fact that the crisis played an important role in most of the elections held in these countries since 2009 (again, with the exception of Malta).

The decline in party identification and increasing voter volatility have both made contemporary democratic party systems less stable. In addition, increasing

public pressure for lowering electoral thresholds, increasing the proportionality of electoral systems, and the introduction of public funding in ever more European democracies, has resulted in lower entrance barriers for new parties, and has facilitated an increasing fragmentation of their party systems. This process has not proceeded in a uniform and linear fashion, and has been particularly pronounced for younger and smaller parties (Drummond 2006; Dassoneville and Hooghe 2011).

Table 5.1 shows a fairly high level of electoral instability in recent years. From 2009 to 2016, a total of 68 legislative elections were held in the 31 countries. Excluding the 2 countries with fixed legislative terms (Norway and Switzerland), one-third of these elections (23 out of 64) were held ahead of schedule after a break-up of the government. Looking at the incidence of early elections, it can be seen that they were less frequent in the 11 post-communist democracies than in the other 2 country groups. Only eight of these countries (30.8 percent) have held early elections since 2009. Since the party systems of these still relatively young democracies are less entrenched, party splits, electoral coalitions among parties, and the formation of new parties are all more common. This allows that new elections can be avoided by a regrouping of the parties in parliament.

Early elections, which used to be considered indicators of political instability, were instead much more frequent in the Southern European democracies, where 9 out of 15 elections (60 percent) were called before the regular end of the legislative term. But they also have been quite common in the established democracies, especially in those with highly proportional electoral systems. It seems that early elections are no longer considered by politicians to be dangerous, but rather as a way out of a political impasse. Increasingly, parties justify their wish to hold early elections by arguing that the political situation calls for a new electoral mandate.

At first glance, it seems surprising that the economic crisis and the governments' economic and fiscal policies were a central issue only in about half of the electoral campaigns. This is probably due to the fact that, especially in the elections held since 2013, many of the countries had already recovered economically, with other issues arising as more central.³ The data indicate, however, that the economic crisis continued to play an important role, especially in the electoral campaigns of the Southern European democracies, which have been strongly affected by high sovereign debt and the Euro crisis.

High electoral volatility was assumed if at least one party in an election suffered a loss or scored a gain of at least 10 percent. The figures show a linear increase from 44.4 percent in the group of Western and Northern European countries, to 53.3 percent in the Southern European group, to 73.1 percent in the post-communist group.

Data compiled by Emanuele (2015, with an update for 2016 and the first half of 2017) on the long-term development of voter volatility in 19 Western and Southern European democracies (excluding Cyprus) are provided in Table 5.2. They confirm an overall increase of electoral volatility by 5.5 percent from the

Table 5.1 Elections, electoral volatility, and changes in government in 31 European democracies 2009–2016¹

Country group	14 Western and Northern European democracies	6 Southern European democracies	11 post-Communist EU member countries	All 31 democracies
Number of elections held	27	15	26	68
% early elections ²	25.9	60.0	30.8	35.3
% economic policy/recession central issue of the electoral campaign ³	33.3	93.3	30.8	45.6
% elections with high electoral volatility ⁴	44.4	53.3	73.1	57.4
Mean combined gains/losses for the parties in government (%)	-7.7	-11.0	-12.4	-10.0
% elections with combined losses for parties in government of more than 10%	37.0	33.3	50.0	41.2
Number of new parties gaining first-time parliamentary representation ⁵	8	14	37	59
% of new parties gaining first-time parliamentary representation in an election	29.6	93.3	142.3	86.8
Number of changes in government ⁶	29	22	44	95
% changes in government	107.4	146.7	169.2	139.7

Sources: www.parties-and-elections.eu; Wikipedia; articles on individual elections in *Electoral Studies*.

Notes

- 1 Includes all elections and changes in government from January 2009 to December 2016.
- 2 Norway and Switzerland excluded from calculation because of constitutionally fixed legislative terms.
- 3 Elections in which the national government's handling of the economic crisis/Euro crisis/sovereign debt was a central focus of the electoral campaign.
- 4 Any gain or loss of more 10% for at least one party in the election was counted as high volatility.
- 5 Because some countries have no or very low electoral thresholds, a first-time representation with at least five parliamentary seats was considered sufficient. In parliaments with less than 100 seats (Cyprus, Iceland, Luxembourg, and Malta), a first-time representation with at least three seats was counted. These parties are not necessarily new in the sense that they were founded only recently. It was only required that they ran *successfully* for the first time, e.g. the Sweden Democrats in 2010. New parties that resulted from a regrouping of older parties were included unless they had simply changed their name, merged or formed electoral coalitions.
- 6 Any change in party composition, majority/minority status of a government or change in head of government (President or Prime Minister), Caretaker governments that did not involve a change in coalition partners, majority status or PM were disregarded.

Table 5.2 Electoral volatility in 19 Western European democracies 1990 to July 2016¹

Country	Mean 1990–2008	Mean 2009–July 2017	% change
Austria	12.6	15.7	3.1
Belgium	11.7	12.8	1.1
Denmark	10.6	15.2	4.6
Finland	10.6	11.5	0.9
France	19.8	32.2	12.4
Germany	8.2	15.2	7.1
Greece	6.2	21.2	15.0
Iceland	10.6	26.3	15.7
Ireland	9.5	27.2	17.6
Italy	17.9	36.7	18.8
Luxembourg	7.8	7.2	-0.6
Malta	2.8	3.8	1.0
Netherlands	21.4	20.9	-0.5
Norway	17.1	10.7	-6.4
Portugal	11.2	12.2	1.0
Spain	8.4	19.3	10.8
Sweden	14.6	9.8	-4.9
Switzerland	7.6	6.4	-1.3
UK	7.3	15.8	8.5
Mean	11.4	16.8	5.5

Source: Emanuele (2015), updated on August 3, 2017.

Note

1 Cyprus not included in dataset.

period before (1990–2008) and after the onset of the economic recession (2009 to mid-2017). However, they also indicate that the bulk of this increase stems from a subset of five countries in which volatility went up by more than 10 percent after 2008: Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, and Spain. These were also the countries that suffered the most from the economic recession, if we take into account unemployment rate and sovereign debt rather than limiting the analysis to GDP growth.⁴ A study by Drummond (2006) complements these data by going even further back. He compared two successive periods (1945–1970 and 1970–1995). While the first period was characterized by a fairly high electoral stability, electoral volatility increased during the second period. This increase was mainly due to the ascendancy of parties that formed during the interwar period and *New Politics* parties formed since the 1970s. Lane and Ersson (2007), finally, who included post-communist countries in their study, also found increasing volatility in the older democracies and at the same time considerable higher levels of volatility in the post-communist countries.

A comparable development can be seen in the magnitude of electoral losses for the parties in government (Table 5.1). The average loss during the period 2009 to 2016 amounts to -10.0 percent for all 31 countries, ranging from -7.7 percent to -12.4 percent for the three groups. Parties in government lost more than 10 percent in two fifth of all elections (41.2 percent). The percentage is not much lower (37.0 percent) in the Northern and Western European democracies.

This finding confirms that voters have become more mobile, and do not hesitate to change their voting decision from one election to the next. Losses of more than 25 percent for the parties in government occurred in Bulgaria 2009 (−28.8 percent), in the Greek election of June 2012 (−48.1 percent), Iceland 2013 (−27.7 percent), Ireland 2011 (−29.7 percent), Italy 2013 (−27.5 percent), Lithuania 2016 (−27.6 percent), and Slovenia in both 2011 and 2014 (−34.3 percent and −34.6 percent). While slightly below that threshold, it should be noted that in France the three leftist coalition parties under leadership of the Socialist Party experienced a combined loss of 24.4 percent in 2017. Conversely, the electoral returns for governmental parties increased in only 10 of the 68 elections. This shows that voters have become more prone to punishing governments for poor performance rather than rewarding them for good performance.

The electoral success of new parties is another indicator of an increasingly mobile electorate. In the 68 elections under study, 59 new parties were able to gain first-time parliamentary representation. Some of them even managed to achieve a substantial share of the total vote, e.g., 2009 the *Citizens for European Development* (GERB) in Bulgaria which immediately became the strongest party with 39.7 percent of the total vote, just as 2013 the Cinque Stelle movement in Italy with 25.5 percent. Emmanuel Macron's new party *La République en Marche* was even able to get 28.2 percent of the total vote in the first round of the 2017 elections for the French National Assembly, and 43.1 percent in the second round, which was enough for winning a majority of seats (308 of 577, i.e., 53.4 percent).⁵

As was mentioned before, new parties have been particularly successful in the post-communist democracies, on average more than one per election. In the Southern European democracies, new parties were successful in 14 of 15 elections. The party systems of the established democracies have been more stable in this respect, but even here eight new parties appeared on the scene from 2009 to 2016, including the PVV (Wilders), the True Finns, and the Sweden Democrats. In Germany, the Alternative für Deutschland (AfD), founded in 2013, has already successfully competed in 14 of the 16 German state elections held since, and received 12.6 percent of the total vote in the 2017 Bundestag election. *La République en Marche's* appearance in the 2017 French election was certainly the most spectacular in this group of countries. The overall volatility in this election was 40.7 percent, which has been the second-highest in one of the established European democracies, only surpassed by the Greek election of May 2012 with 48.5 percent.

Studies of electoral volatility have emphasized the necessity of distinguishing between volatility deriving from an exchange among established parties (*alteration volatility*) and volatility stemming from the entrance of new parties (*regeneration volatility*). Chiamonte and Emanuele (2015) tried to untangle these two types of volatility, finding that both have increased in Western Europe, with the rate of increase accelerating during the economic recession. As high-volatility elections with successful new parties are on the rise, the authors conclude “that symptoms of an ongoing process of de-institutionalization are spreading across

many countries in Western Europe” (2015, p. 9). Likewise, Powell and Tucker (2013) have shown that electoral volatility in the post-communist countries is primarily due to the participation of new parties in elections, rather than to voters switching between existing parties.

Changes in government were noted in Table 5.1 if one of the following conditions applied: A change in the majority or minority status of a government, a change in the governing party coalition, or a change in the head of government. Since 2009, a total of 95 changes in government have taken place in the 31 countries under study. Only Switzerland with its customary four-party coalition has not experienced any change in the 8 years from 2009 to 2016. Six countries have experienced 1, another 6 experienced 2, 7 countries 3, while the remaining 11 countries saw between 4 and 7 changes, with Greece and Romania at the top. Changes in government have been more frequent in the post-communist countries, where—with the exception of Lithuania and Poland—nine countries have gone through at least three changes in government. These countries collectively account for 46.3 percent of the total of 95 changes, while they make up less than one-third of the 31 countries. Changes in government between elections have also been rather frequent in the Southern European democracies.

Many studies indicate that the increasing electoral volatility has been accompanied by a parallel decline in both political trust and satisfaction with democracy (e.g., Dalton 2006). Evaluations of politics have been negatively affected by the current economic crisis, too. Based on data from the European Social Survey for the years 2004 and 2010, a study by Polavieja (2012) revealed that both political trust and satisfaction with democracy have significantly declined after 2004, especially in the countries hardest hit by the crisis, primarily Greece, Spain, Slovenia, and Ireland (2012, pp. 18–19, p. 35). Likewise, a report by the Pew Research Center (May 2013) showed a sharp drop in respondents’ evaluation of the state of the national economy and of the ability of political leaders to deal with the economic crisis, especially in the three Southern European countries of Greece, Spain, and Italy, but also in France and Great Britain (2013, pp. 3–5).

Do these indicators of political dissatisfaction with government performance also threaten the viability of democratic institutions? The post-communist democracies are particularly interesting in this respect, since they constitute the poorest group of countries in Europe, and all but one were severely affected by the economic recession. One would therefore expect democracy in these countries to be more vulnerable. But despite their high level of governmental instability, electoral or parliamentary defeats of governments have not resulted in constitutional crises so far. The present danger is not so much that governing parties are not willing to accept electoral defeat—they have always done this—although the governments of Hungary and Poland have made attempts to curb opposition rights. Compared to the instability of many Central and Southern European democracies that had formed after World War I, democracy in the post-communist democracies has remained remarkably resilient.

While the economic and fiscal problems of the Southern European democracies are certainly grave, with very high unemployment rates, high sovereign

debt and electoral gains of an openly fascist party in Greece, democracy in these countries does not seem to be in danger either. Governmental instability in Italy, for example, was much higher during the first 40 years after World War II, when the life expectancy of Italian governments was counted in days rather than months (Cotta and Verzichelli 2007a, pp. 110–118). Trust in politicians has always been rather low in Italy as well. While it is obvious that governmental instability impairs the ability of governments to govern effectively, it is doubtful that it indicates a severe crisis of democracy. On the contrary: If necessary, the major established parties have eventually acted responsibly and have joined broad-based coalition governments even with their main political adversaries, most notably in Greece and Italy.

Today's European democracies seem to be more stable and at the same time more flexible in absorbing relatively high levels of electoral and governmental instability. The increase in voter volatility has resulted in major party system changes, even in long-standing democracies such as Denmark, the Netherlands, Belgium, Switzerland, and France, without producing much concern about the overall stability of democracy among citizens and elites. Even in the UK with its first-past-the-post electoral system, the combined share of Conservatives and Labour has been decreasing since the 1970s and single-party parliamentary majorities may become less customary in the future. This was the case in 2010 as well as in 2017. The party systems in the post-communist democracies are even more fluid. This raises the questions as to whether these developments will have an impact on the effectiveness of governments and on the quality of these democracies.

Participatory democracy and monitory democracy as new models of democracy?

The spread of protest activities was long considered to be a typical phenomenon of affluent Western democracies. However, popular uprising against political oppression in the Soviet satellite states in Central and Eastern Europe at the end of the 1980s, the Arab Spring of 2011, as well as more recent mass protests in Venezuela, Turkey, Thailand, and Russia all confirm that political protest has become a global phenomenon. The most popular explanation for this development is Ronald Inglehart's theory of value change. Even those who doubt the validity of this theory do not dispute the correctness of Inglehart's observation that a secular shift from *elite-directed* to *elite-challenging* modes of political participation has taken place (1997, p. 169; see also Inglehart 2005), a shift which has been corroborated by a wealth of empirical data.

More recently, Inglehart and Welzel (2005) have developed the theory of value change into a full-blown theory of the relationship between modernization, human development, and democracy, with a decidedly bottom-up perspective of democracy. This perspective not only denies the relevance of elites for processes of democratization and for the consolidation of democracy (*ibid.*, p. 2), but also neglects some problematic consequences of the decreasing willingness of

citizens to accept government decisions for interest aggregation. It also confounds *elite-challenging* and *elite-directing* behavior, and does not adequately conceptualize the crucial distinction between the two. Political protest challenges elites and is primarily directed against policy proposals of public authorities, rather than aimed at developing alternative solutions. While democracy grants citizens the right to articulate political demands, effective governance also depends on the ability of democratically elected governments to take and implement binding policy decisions that citizens accept as legitimate. Such decision-making involves the balancing of contradictory demands, and requires compromises that will necessarily disappoint those whose preferences have not prevailed.

Many social scientists, and especially political activists, claim that the increase in cognitive mobilization has opened up opportunities for improving the quality of existing democracies by developing representative liberal democracy into a *participatory democracy*. This would involve the introduction of direct democratic instruments such as referenda, advisory citizen committees, and direct elections for important political offices (i.e., presidents and heads of government). The Swiss model is frequently invoked in this argument, albeit without acknowledging the central role of elites, political parties, and interest groups in the Swiss direct democratic process (Kriesi 2005).

Keane's (2009, 2011) model of *monitory democracy* shares many features with the model of participatory democracy, although he emphasizes a different aspect of political life. He expects that the advent of the digital age will promote the spread of watchdog groups monitoring the actions of governments and other public agencies (2011, p. 212). At the same time, he argues that elections, political parties, and legislatures will neither disappear nor necessarily decline in importance, but that they will lose their pivotal position in policy-making. "The new power-scrutinising innovations tend to enfranchise many more citizens' voices, sometimes by means of *unelected representatives* skilled at using what Americans sometimes call 'bully pulpits.'" These new mechanisms will "break the grip of the majority rule principle—the worship of numbers—associated with representative democracy" (Keane 2011, p. 214).

Maloney (2015) criticized Keane's overly optimistic view of advocacy groups claiming to represent grass-root interests. He argued that advocacy groups frequently represent supply-side rather than demand-side interests, and increase the inequality of political resources by providing additional influence channels for already resource-rich groups. The term *astroturf participation* denotes such attempts by paid lobbyists to conduct public relations campaigns on behalf of paying clients.

While the advocates of participatory democracy assume that increased citizen involvement in politics will improve the quality of democracy, they tend to neglect fundamental insights of elite theory, political sociology, and theories of interest intermediation. These cast doubt on the validity of the expectation that the increase of political activism will also increase the political influence of ordinary citizens.

Already in the 1970s and 1980s, after the post-war period of rapid economic growth had come to a halt, and a period of economic turbulences set in, with high inflation, soaring budget deficits, a dramatic increase in sovereign debt levels, and rising unemployment, a series of publications invoked the specter of government overload and the ungovernability of modern democracies (e.g., Huntington 1974; Crozier et al. 1975; King 1975). Most of these authors diagnosed the problems of governability as stemming from increased citizens demands that confronted governments with increasingly untractable problems. Already then, Huntington (1974) asked how benign post-industrialism would be, and predicted that changing citizen attitudes toward politics would make it more difficult for governments to carry through their policy priorities and to solve pressing political problems.

Theoretical and empirical insights of various strands of sociology and political science may be helpful in assessing a number of implications of high levels of direct citizen involvement in politics, in particular with respect to five different aspects:

- the role of citizens in elite theory;
- the rationality of elections;
- the inequality of political participation;
- problems of interest aggregation and political deadlocks;
- leadership selection and the security of elite positions.

The role of citizens in elite theory

The classics of elite theory, Vilfredo Pareto, Gaetano Mosca, and Robert Michels, were preoccupied with claiming the universality of (political) power and elites. Despite their reputation of being fervent opponents of democracy, their major objective was to demonstrate that a conception of democracy as direct rule by the people was fundamentally flawed. Therefore, they analyzed elite motivations, the strategies used by elites to preserve their power (basis), and the rise and decline of historical elites. Non-elites, in their view, were objects rather than subjects of history. While they acknowledged that elites had to take into account mass preferences, they expected that they did so by manipulating them to their own advantage. They also assumed that studying the characteristics of ruling classes and elites was sufficient for understanding politics. This implied the assumption that the failure of politics to solving political problems and to cope with social change was primarily due “to the incompetence and inadequacy of the ruling classes” (Mosca 1939, p. 430).

Pareto and Mosca were not interested in non-elites, whom they considered to be more or less politically irrelevant. Even in a parliamentary democracy, Mosca claimed that the parliamentary deputy is not chosen by the voters, but “*has himself elected* by the voters” (Mosca 1939, p. 154, italics by the author). He went on to state that the theoretical freedom of choice of the voters “necessarily becomes null, not to say ludicrous” (Mosca 1939). He tones down his argument

on the next page, though, by acknowledging that voters have a “limited right to exercise an option among a number of candidates.” This obliged candidates to make “every effort to flatter, wheedle and obtain the good will of the voters” and “to take account of mass sentiments” (Mosca 1939, pp. 155–156).

Michels (1970, first published in 1911) and Schumpeter (1994, first published in 1943), analyzed the division of labor between politicians and ordinary citizens in representative democracies. Based on his analysis of the pre-World War I German Social Democratic Party (SPD), Michels identified three causes for the emergence of a stable political leadership in political parties: The necessity of creating and upholding an effective party organization, the diverging motivations of the party leadership and the rank-and-file members as well as the knowledge gap between the two. Since this was true even for a political party whose main objective was to fight for democracy, Michels claimed the existence of a *iron law of oligarchy* that is universally valid for large organizations.

In a similar vein, Schumpeter argued that most voters lack sufficient knowledge about political affairs, and that the political interests of the voters remain latent until they are articulated by political leaders:

Such volitions do not as a rule assert themselves directly. Even if strong and definite, they remain latent, often for decades, until they are called to life by some political leader who turns them into political factors. This he does, or else his agents do it for him, by organizing these volitions, by working them up and by including eventually appropriate items in his competitive offering.

(Schumpeter 1994, pp. 270–271)

Schumpeter developed a *new theory of democracy* that relies entirely on competitive elections and institutional constraints for enforcing the political accountability of elected leaders. It implies a top-down model of interest representation: In contrast to the mandate theory, which is based on the expectation that representatives act as agents, who are supposed to implement the demands of the citizens (i.e., principals), Schumpeter claimed that political leaders play an active role in developing alternative programs and presenting them to the voters. In this model, the role of the citizens is limited to electing and ousting governments.

Although Giovanni Sartori (1987) agrees with the assumption that policies are seldom initiated by the voters, he has taken a more differentiated position and claimed that the assumption that new policies are always initiated by elites too simplistic. He argued that the process of policy formation can work in both ways (1987, p. 94). Bottom-up initiatives developed and promoted by groups of active citizens can and do regularly occur. However, they need to be fed into the regular channels of policy formation, and will only be implemented if they are taken up and converted into formal legislation by the political leadership.

The limited rationality of elections as instruments for producing elite accountability, and the inequality of political participation

Public opinion research has regularly confirmed that the majority of citizens are only marginally involved in public affairs, while only a relatively small segment of the citizenry has in-depth knowledge about politics. In his classic study on “The Nature of Belief Systems in Mass Publics,” Converse (1964) claimed that the political beliefs of most citizens showed only low levels of ideological constraint and were not stable over time. Even though Converse’s study was criticized on methodological grounds, as well as for not adequately acknowledging the usefulness of political heuristics for citizens with low levels of political sophistication, the existence of a hierarchy of political involvement remains undisputed.

In their book *Democracy for Realists: Why Elections Do Not Produce Responsive Government* (2016), Achen and Bartels made the most systematic attempt to date to disprove traditional assumptions about the function of elections as instruments for informing governments about the policy preferences of citizens. They claim that elections are not a suitable instrument for producing responsive governments. Their analysis cast doubts on the rationality of voter decisions, as well as on the impact of elections on the actions of legislators and governments. They found that the policy preferences of citizens were only modestly predictive of election outcomes, and even less so of policy decisions taken by legislatures (Achen and Bartels 2016, p. 46). This finding confirms Converse’s analysis and is not really surprising given the myriads of policies that legislatures routinely have to deal with.

The authors further claim that not even the less demanding assumption that retrospective voting is a suitable instrument for ensuring government accountability is true, since even such retrospective judgments are mostly myopic and based on the state of affairs at election time rather than reflecting an assessment of the entire electoral term (Achen and Bartels 2016, p. 211). While the examples used by Achen and Bartels are selective and one-sided, they confirm the inadequacy of conceptualizing elections as instruments of informing elites about the policy preferences of the voters, as well as the central role of elites in policy formation and decision-making. Other authors have found more elite-mass congruence in political issue attitudes (e.g., Burstein 2003 and Shapiro 2011). The differentiated analyses of Putnam (1976) and Zaller (1992) have shown, however, that public opinion formation is more complex than both one-directional theories assume.

Rather than wrongly assuming that the rise of citizen initiatives and political action groups promoting *New Politics* issues will increase the political power of ordinary citizens, one has to keep in mind that the iron law of oligarchy also applies to these groups. Like traditional associations and political parties, their supporters tend to follow the policies chosen by their leadership. Most of these leaders are political entrepreneurs intent on making a living, sometimes even a

profit, from the money generated by donations to their organization. Moreover, many of these organizations (e.g., Greenpeace) do not even practice democratic procedures in selecting their leadership. The fact that they prefer to call themselves *public interest groups* and pretend that they are different from particularistic interest associations must not fool us into believing that they are substantially different from their traditional counterparts.

Increasing the opportunities for direct citizen involvement in policy decision-making, rather than making democracies more democratic, increases political inequality. Based on empirical studies of political participation, Nie et al. (1996) have shown the validity of the *standard model of political participation*, which holds that the inequality of political participation increases with the difficulty of the participatory act. Citizens with higher socio-economic status are therefore more likely to engage in forms of political participation that require higher levels of political sophistication and that are more time-consuming. Non-institutionalized forms of direct political action (e.g., demonstrations) as well as direct democratic forms of political participation (e.g., referenda) are disproportionately used by citizens with better political resources (Kaase 1981). The problem of political inequality further increases with even more demanding forms of political participation, such as initiating petitions, e-democracy, or involvement in citizen initiatives. The institutionalization of more direct democratic participation rights might therefore contribute to increasing rather than reducing political inequality, as the following statement by Schäfer and Schoen shows: “Broadening democratic participation rights is not a wholesale cure, but rather a medicine with grave side-effects” (2013, p. 115, translation by the authors; see also Merkel 2011).

Problems of interest intermediation and aggregation

Around the time when elite theory started to emphasize the inevitability of elite rule, cultural critics started to raise concerns about the impact of modernization on societal integration and politics. They warned that it would lead to an erosion of traditional social bonds of family, kinship, and religion, would uproot individuals and result in an atomization of society. This was not only considered as detrimental for citizens’ sense of identity, but also expected to pose problems for the social order. The concomitant loss of social control on the side of traditional elites would open up chances for mass mobilization by extremist movements. The dangers associated with the advent of *mass society* became a topic analyzed by many writers, among them Ferdinand Tönnies (1887), Gustave Le Bon (2002, first published 1895), and José Ortega di Gasset (1964, first published 1930) come to mind.⁴

Later, theories of pluralism, communitarianism, and civil society (*inter alia* Aron 1950, Stammer 1951, Lipset et al. 1956, Lipset 1960, Dahl 1971, Putnam 1993 and 2000) took up these ideas. While they accord citizens a more active political role than the classic elitists, they assume that political influence needs to be mediated by voluntary associations. The idea of the crucial function of

intermediary associations for democracy can be traced all the way back to Tocqueville. Kornhauser's book on *The Politics of Mass Society* (1960) is a good example of this type of theorizing, and explicitly dealt with elite–mass relations. These relations involve bilateral channels of communication. The bottom-up channel secures the accessibility of elites for mass demands, the top-down channel the availability of non-elites for elite guidance. Combining the two yields a table with four societal types (Table 5.3).

Kornhauser argued that pluralist society is characterized by a high degree of elite responsiveness to citizen demands, as well as by a high degree of elite autonomy from public pressures. Citizen demands are transmitted into the political decision-making arena through a dense web of intermediary associations via institutionalized channels of interest articulation. Elites have the task of aggregating these group demands. Mass society, in contrast, is characterized by a lack of intermediary associations. Elites are confronted with direct political pressures to accede to mass demands, and in turn use mass manipulation to placate the citizenry while they pursue their own agenda. This implies that mass society is vulnerable to fall prey to totalitarian movements that promise to establish direct links between elites and citizens, but that in reality try to establish a tight control over society.

The fundamental flaw of the model of participatory democracy based on direct interaction between citizens and political elites is its complete disregard for problems of interest aggregation. Protest movements as well as organized pressure groups do not have to take into account the externalities that an implementation of their political demands will produce. Therefore, Dahl (1982) identified the problem of interest aggregation as a fundamental dilemma of pluralist democracy. He argued that pressure groups stabilize social and political inequalities. By publicly advocating particularistic interests, they contribute to deforming civic consciousness. They distort the public agenda because they convert their superior resources into influencing the political agenda. And finally they use their veto power to alienate final control (Dahl 1982, p. 47).

While traditional voluntary mass organizations used to have a heterogeneous membership that requires them to aggregate the interests of their members before feeding their policy demands into the policy formation process, small groups targeting more specific interests do not have to do this. The proliferation of specialized pressure groups then decreases the transparency of the policy-making

Table 5.3 Kornhauser's model of mass society

<i>Accessibility of elites</i>	<i>Availability of non-elites</i>	
	<i>Low</i>	<i>High</i>
Low	Communal society	Totalitarian society
High	Pluralist society	Mass society

Source: adapted from Kornhauser 1960, p. 40.

process, as the demands of small groups usually receive little media attention. In their study of interest group networks in the US, Heinz et al. (1993, ch. 12) argued that the increasing fragmentation of the associational landscape has increased the uncertainty of political outcomes and increasingly forces private organizations as well as public office holders to focus on realizing their short-term interests and to disregard any negative externalities that their deals may produce (Heinz et al. 1993, p. 412).

Pierre Rosanvallon (2008) pointed out that the same logic applies to mass mobilization against specific government projects. He argues that it is relatively easy to mobilize against specific policies, because this does not require a consensus to be forged on alternative courses of action. Moreover, since small advocacy groups are better able to mobilize support for their causes, the spread of such groups makes working for political parties as the main vehicles of interest aggregation less attractive.

These considerations cast doubt on the claim made by Fuchs and Klingemann (1995b, p. 437) that more direct citizen participation will increase the political influence of ordinary voters and the responsiveness of elites. The final decision-making power will continue to rest with the political parties and their leaders, who have to decide on political priorities. It is also questionable if an excessive fragmentation of the demands on political decision-makers will increase public control. Finally, it should also be noted that not all of these new organizations pursue democratic objectives. The use of the web for propagating all kinds of fundamentalist and extremist agendas shows that freedom of organization is open to everyone and can be used for all kinds of causes, not only for beneficial and democratic ones.

Already in 1974, Huntington argued that the continued expansion of citizen participation could make post-industrial society extraordinarily difficult to govern (1974, p. 177). He cited a study that showed that American cities whose populations had above-average levels of higher education were characterized by lower levels of innovation. “One reason suggested for this seemingly anomalous situation is that widespread education tends to produce too much interest and participation which leads in turn to political stalemate” (Huntington 1974). In a similar vein, Sartori argued that less power for the political leadership does not necessarily imply more power for the governed (1987, p. 122).

In *The End of Power* (2013), Moisés Naím, once himself minister of development of Venezuela, comes to similar conclusions regarding what he calls “the decay of power” (ibid., Ch. 1): “In the twenty-first century, power is easier to get, harder to use—and easier to lose. From boardrooms and combat zones to cyberspaces, battles for power are as intense as ever, but they are yielding diminishing returns” (Naím 2013, p. 2). He mentions increasing constraints “in the form of citizen activism, global markets, and media scrutiny.” The author explains this development as being the result of three revolutions: “The More, Mobility and Mentality Revolution” (Naím 2013, ch. 4). The “more revolution” involves the proliferation of *micropowers*, the increase in the number of political actors across the globe due to the larger number of independent states. The

“mobility revolution” has made people more difficult to control, and immigration has changed the economy and culture of nations. The “mentality revolution,” finally, was facilitated by the spread of a global middle class in the developing and its shrinking in the richer countries. “And both growing and shrinking middle classes fuel political turmoil. The embattled middle classes take to the streets and fight to protect their living standards while the expanding middle classes protest to get more and better services” (Naím 2013, p. 64). While the author sees undeniable positive consequences of the decay of power (e.g., an increase in civil liberties and more options for voters), he also emphasizes the downsides of these developments, such as an increase in crime, the rise of extremist politics, and a proliferation of improvised groups as well as reduced transparency of the policy formation process which may lead to political paralysis or *vetocracy* (Naím 2013, p. 223).

Leadership selection and the security of elite positions

From the previous considerations it is obvious that the increase in voter volatility and the sometimes dramatic changes in the national party systems could not have happened without having an impact on the careers and outlook of elites, in particular political elites. First, they have reduced the stability of elite careers. Naím concluded “today’s power players often pay a steeper and more immediate price for their mistakes than did their predecessors” (2013, p. 2).

Political parties have lost much of their former ability to promise would-be candidates and office-holders (re-)nomination or re-election in exchange for their dedicated party work. The insecurity associated with this development not only affects the parliamentarians themselves, but also their staff: After the 2013 Bundestag election in which the Liberals (FDP) failed to surmount the 5 percent threshold, about 500 staff members lost their jobs along with the 93 ousted FDP deputies (Kempkens and Weiland 2013). More than one-third of the members of the Bundestag elected in 2013 (34.2 percent) were newcomers. Based on their analysis of the re-election rates of state parliamentarians in Germany, Best and Jahr (2006) concluded that politics should be considered precarious employment since the hazard rate for losing the mandate after the first term is rather high: 26 percent in the west German and even 62 percent in the east German state parliaments (Best and Jahr 2006, p. 74). The authors characterized the political profession as insecure, episodic, and underspecified in regard to the definition of the professional field, the required qualifications and the career prospects (Best and Jahr 2006, p. 79). They also expect that political incumbents will do anything in order to increase their income and to decrease the risks of losing office. Such prevalence of short-term considerations is exactly the opposite of what is expected from parliamentarians, who are supposed to be responsible for the well-being of their country.

The data of the EURELITE project provide some insights into the long-term development of parliamentary turnover in the European countries since the mid-nineteenth century. They show a considerable effect of the two World Wars as

well as of regime change on parliamentary turnover. It should not come as a surprise that the first elections after democratic transitions usually produced a very high turnover rate compared to the previous election or the last democratic election before the authoritarian or totalitarian regime took power (Cotta and Verzichelli 2007b, pp. 467–469; Best 2007, pp. 101, 109).

More interesting in the present context is the increase in parliamentary turnover since the 1980s. The average tenure of parliamentarians decreased from 2.7 terms in the 1980s to 2.3 in the 1990s, but then slightly rebounded to 2.4 in the first half of the 2000s (Best 2007, p. 109; Cotta and Verzichelli 2007b, p. 473; Verzichelli 2014). The data indicate that this trend is neither pronounced nor uniform. A study by Matland and Studlar (2004) comparing parliamentary turnover for 25 advanced industrial democracies during the period from 1979 to 1994 reveals notable differences across countries: The United States had the lowest average turnover rate (15.2 percent),⁷ followed by Australia (20.0 percent) and West Germany (22.3 percent), while France (43.3 percent), Spain (44.0 percent), Portugal (45.2 percent), and Canada (46.9 percent) were located at the other end of the spectrum (2004, p. 93).

The very low turnover in the US House of Representatives is probably due to its short terms of 2 years, the American two-party system, and the electoral system of plurality voting in small electoral districts. The post-communist democracies show an opposite pattern. They started out with very high turnover rates of nearly 70 percent, which have meanwhile somewhat receded (Edinger 2010, p. 145). Turnover rates in these post-communist democracies can be expected to remain high, however, so long as their party systems continue to be highly volatile. Turnover in the established parliamentary democracies falls between these extremes, and has gone up in recent years: In Canada, turnover started to increase after 1980, and hit a peak of 66.1 percent in 1993 (Docherty 1997, p. 52). In Germany, an increase in turnover is visible, but not very pronounced: Excluding the first two Bundestag elections, the average turnover for the elections from 1961 to 1987 was 25.1 percent, and from 1990 to 2013 it rose to 29.5 percent (Table 5.4).⁸

Table 5.4 Newcomers in the German Bundestag (percent)

<i>Election year</i>	<i>% newcomers</i>	<i>Election year</i>	<i>% newcomers</i>
1949	100.0	1983	17.7
1953	48.1	1987	21.2
1957	30.6	1990	35.5
1961	25.1	1994	30.2
1964	25.5	1998	24.8
1969	30.1	2002	28.7
1972	28.0	2005	23.0
1976	22.6	2009	32.9
1980	24.9	2013	34.2

Source: www.bundestag.de, own calculations.

Careers in other elite sectors have become less predictable as well. Candidates for senior positions are generally expected to be flexible. Frequent rotation in positions at all hierarchical levels is considered desirable. In the business sector, board positions and especially the positions of CEOs in major industrial corporations have also become less secure in recent years. A study of the top managers in the 50 largest German corporations showed that while the average age at which the CEOs reached their position has remained rather stable and decreased only slightly from 53 to 51 years since 1960, average tenure has decreased from 11 to 8 years (Freye 2009, pp. 63–65). Naím (2013, p. 163) cites a number of studies that confirm a global trend toward higher turnover rates in the United States, Europe, and Japan. In the US, the tenure of the average CEO has halved from about 10 years in the 1990s to about 5.5 years in recent years. The same trend also applies to corporations. “Sojourns at the top of corporate league tables have noticeably shortened” (Naím 2013, p. 164). These changes confirm a general trend that is likely to continue into the future.

Unfortunately, studies trying to determine the consequences of the increasing insecurities of elite careers are lacking. It can be expected that elites will adapt to the new situation as they always have done. They will certainly try to minimize negative consequences for their personal life. This may for instance be one of the reasons for the enormous increase in salaries and bonuses for top managers. It will probably also reduce the loyalty of elite position-holders to their organization and their dedication to the obligations of their office. These will be important questions for future elite research.

Conclusion

The first part of our analysis has shown a clear trend toward increasing voter volatility and fragmentation of the European party systems, which has been aggravated by the recent economic recession. Rather than stabilizing or even reinvigorating loyalties to traditional parties that historically represented the two sides of the class conflict, the economic crisis has further accelerated the erosion of traditional cleavages. These developments, in combination with the rising protest potential, have made politics more erratic and less predictable. While some social scientists have interpreted these developments as a higher stage of democratization, we have noted some less sanguine implications associated with the destabilization of electorates and the proliferation of a vast and heterogeneous sector of civil society organizations, ranging from large traditional associations, to small and highly effective small pressure groups all the way to loosely structured Nongovernmental Organizations (NGOs) and ad-hoc initiatives. Without strengthening the institutions for interest aggregation, in particular the legislative arena, this trend will continue to impair opportunities for a fair aggregation of interests and will work to the benefit of those who are best able to use their political clout for pursuing their particularistic interests.

Notes

- 1 Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia.
- 2 Greece, Italy, Malta, Portugal, Spain, Cyprus.
- 3 It should be noted that this indicator is based on the subjective assessments of experts, and is therefore less valid than actual election results. Moreover, in electoral campaigns in which the crisis was overshadowed by fundamental domestic political controversies such as constitutional issues, corruption of government officials, ethnic conflicts, or simply dissatisfaction with the political performance of the sitting government, observers may have underestimated the degree to which the crisis was actually looming large in these elections.
- 4 This seems especially appropriate since GDP growth has picked up faster than the other two indicators whose impact on the household budgets of citizens is more immediate while a rising economic growth does not immediate effects on the living conditions of ordinary citizens.
- 5 This was primarily due to the French electoral system of majority representation with its two rounds of voting, and an exceptionally low voter turnout of 48.7 percent and 42.6 percent.
- 6 For a detailed analysis of the arguments of these cultural critics see Hirschman (1991) and Femia (2001).
- 7 The re-election rate in the US House of Representatives has been very high for most of the post-World War II period, ranging between 80 percent and over 90 percent, with the exception of 1993 when it sank to 74 percent (Manning and Petersen 2016).
- 8 Because the authors analyzed the institutional determinants of turnover, they have not provided information on the development over time, on the impact of electoral volatility or on the consequences of high turnover rates for the legislative process.

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