CARNEGIE
ENDOWMENT FOR
INTERNATIONAL PEACE

COMPARING DEMOCRATIC DISTRESS IN THE UNITED STATES AND EUROPE

Saskia Brechenmacher

CARNEGIE
ENDOWMENT FOR
INTERNATIONAL PEACE

COMPARING DEMOCRATIC DISTRESS IN THE UNITED STATES AND EUROPE

Saskia Brechenmacher

Contents

About the Author

Saskia Brechenmacher is an associate fellow in Carnegie's Democracy, Conflict, and Governance Program, where her research focuses on gender, democracy, and governance, as well as trends in civic activism and civil society repression. Prior to joining Carnegie, Brechenmacher gained experience at the World Peace Foundation and the Institute for Human Security at Tufts University. She is a graduate of Carnegie's James C. Gaither Junior Fellows Program and a 2017 Atlantik-Brücke Young Leader, and also previously worked at Carnegie Europe in Brussels, the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung in London, and the EUROPEUM Institute for European Policy in Prague.

<p style="text-align:center">***</p>

Summary

Liberal democracy is in crisis where it was long thought most securely established. In both Western Europe and the United States, polls suggest voters are losing faith in democratic institutions; polarization and illiberalism appear to be on the rise. A striking feature of this crisis moment is the perception that many of the most pressing political issues are shared conditions of the United States and Europe—a significant change from earlier decades. This perceived convergence raises critical questions: To what extent are current democratic weaknesses in Europe in fact similar to or different from those facing the United States? And what are the most fertile areas for mutual learning and cooperation?

Shared Challenges

Following recent governance crises, **popular confidence in political institutions has plummeted** to historically low levels on both sides of the Atlantic—particularly among the less educated and less well-off.

Many **U.S. and European voters are disenchanted with mainstream political parties**, which they see as ineffective and out of touch. This groundswell of antiestablishment sentiment has benefited more extremist outsider movements and candidates, triggering greater political polarization and fragmentation.

Citizens are finding it harder to determine which news sources are trustworthy and which are not. Deliberate efforts to spread disinformation create new challenges for democratic discourse.

Government responses to terrorist threats have triggered **new concerns over creeping extensions of executive power**. Finding the right balance between security and individual liberty has become increasingly complex, partly due to unsettled questions about citizens' right to privacy.

U.S.-Specific Challenges

High levels of partisan polarization in the United States—heightened by its winner-take-all electoral system—have eroded democratic norms and produced gridlock, thereby undermining democratic performance.

Skyrocketing socioeconomic inequality and weak institutional safeguards allow wealthy U.S. elites to exert disproportionate political influence. Partisan polarization thus coexists with heightened vertical polarization between a small group at the top and the rest of society.

A deeply contested electoral process that is characterized by atypical levels of decentralization and partisanship exacerbates these dynamics in the United States: issues like voting restrictions pose much larger hurdles to representation than in most European democracies.

Europe-Specific Challenges

European electoral systems provide **more room for extremist and antipluralist political forces** to gain political representation. In Hungary and Poland, democratically elected governments have already taken major steps to weaken independent civil society and the rule of law.

A European democracy deficit persists: as decisionmaking has moved from the national to the European level, efforts to boost citizen participation have not kept pace. The disconnect between Brussels and many European voters has fueled Euroskepticism, which in turn thwarts efforts at institutional reform.

Introduction

Liberal democracy is in crisis in places where it was long thought most securely established. In both Western Europe and the United States, polls suggest voters are losing faith in democratic institutions; polarization and illiberalism appear to be on the rise. According to the Economist Intelligence Unit's Democracy Index, the average quality of democracy has declined on both sides of the Atlantic since 2006.[1]

A striking feature of this crisis moment is the perception that many of the most pressing political issues—such as the rise of antipluralist populism, fragmentation in existing political spaces and debates, and fears of malign external actors interfering in domestic politics—are shared conditions of the United States and Europe.[2] This sense of being in the same boat politically represents a significant change from earlier decades, when most American observers viewed European political dynamics as fundamentally different from U.S. politics, and European counterparts saw U.S. democracy as defined by uniquely American political syndromes.

Indeed, some crucial challenges are clearly shared now. In Europe as well as in the United States, popular trust in political institutions has declined in recent years. Many voters are disenchanted with mainstream political parties, which they see as ineffective and out of touch. This groundswell of antiestablishment sentiment has benefited outsider movements and candidates. U.S. and European democracies are also grappling with a more fragmented public information space and foreign efforts to sow disinformation and mistrust—as well as threats to civil liberties emanating from expanding executives and illiberal government action. These trends, while not entirely new, have been brought to a head by economic crisis, hardening contestation over migration and diversity, and changing geopolitical currents.

Despite areas of convergence, the United States still struggles with problems of political representation that are less pressing in Europe.

Yet despite these areas of transatlantic convergence, the United States still struggles with problems of political representation that are less pressing in Europe. Exceptionally high levels of partisan polarization—heightened by specific features of the U.S. political system—have eroded democratic norms and produced gridlock, exacerbating

popular discontent. In addition, while socioeconomic divides have intensified across many Western democracies, the trend is most pronounced in the United States, where weak institutional safeguards enable wealthy elites to exert disproportionate political influence. Partisan polarization thus coexists with heightened vertical polarization between a small group at the top and the rest of society, feeding into and being fed by other democratic weaknesses. The U.S. electoral process—characterized by atypical levels of decentralization and partisanship—exacerbates these dynamics, with issues like partisan gerrymandering and voting restrictions posing much larger hurdles.

At the same time, European democracies face challenges that are not present in the United States, or exist to a much lesser degree. European multiparty parliamentary systems provide more room for extremist and antipluralist political forces to gain political representation. In several Central European countries with short democratic histories and weak democratic institutions, democratically elected illiberal governments have already taken major steps to undermine independent civil society and the rule of law. Other European governments have to grapple with extremist forces increasing their share of parliamentary seats, thereby deepening political cleavages and often complicating coalition formation. In addition, European democracies continue to struggle with the consequences of supranational integration: as decisionmaking has moved from the national to the European level, efforts to boost citizen participation have not kept pace. The disconnect between Brussels and many European voters has fueled Euroskepticism—which in turn thwarts efforts at European reform.

> **As decisionmaking has moved from the national to the European level, efforts to boost citizen participation have not kept pace.**

In both the United States and Europe, broader geopolitical changes add to internal democratic weaknesses. Authoritarian powers like Russia and China are exerting rising political influence across borders, using tools that range from think tank engagement and new global media platforms to concerted disinformation campaigns.[3] These efforts not only challenge Western democracies' global geopolitical dominance, but also seek to discredit the viability of the liberal democratic model itself—for example, by manipulating existing divisions within democratic societies. In addition, transnational policy challenges related to migration and globalization are placing democratic institutions under heightened stress, testing their legitimacy and effectiveness. This wider context makes domestic democratic reforms more difficult, but also more pressing.

The long-standing perception of basic political difference between the United States and Europe has led to a relative scarcity of well-established structures for U.S.-European learning and cooperation on democratic deepening and reform. Yet as political actors and analysts on both sides of the Atlantic are looking for answers to the democratic crisis, the sense of a shared malaise could open the door to more productive lesson-sharing and partnerships.

Shared Challenges

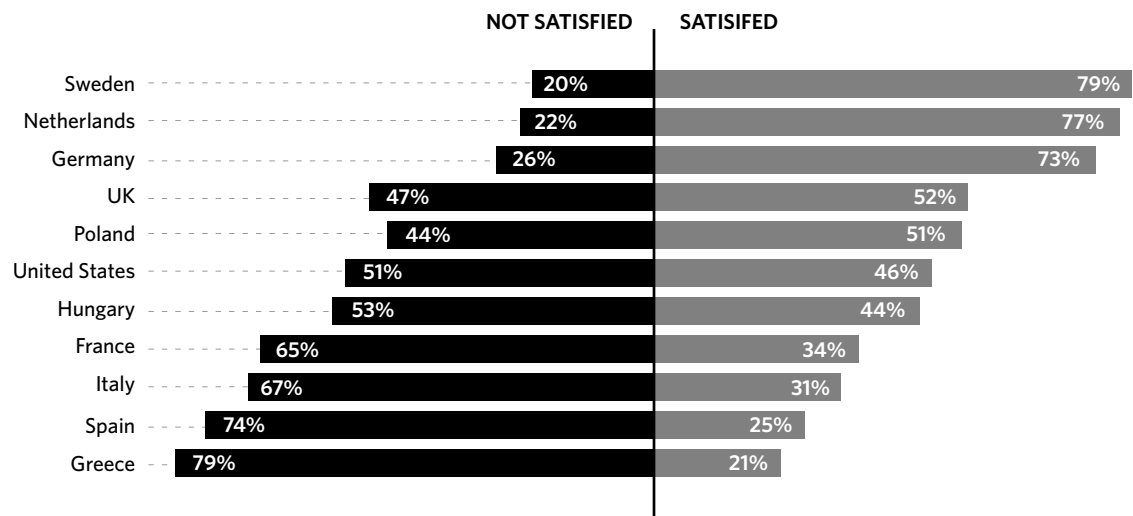### Rising Distrust in Democratic Institutions

Political scientists like Russell J. Dalton and Pippa Norris already in the 1990s had observed decreasing levels of trust in political institutions across many established democracies.[4] This long-standing trend exploded into the public consciousness with the unexpected electoral successes of populist outsiders in 2016 and 2017, which highlighted widespread public disenchantment with the political status quo. Roberto Stefan Foa and Yascha Mounk even warned that the West was witnessing early signs of "democratic deconsolidation," arguing that younger people in established democracies appear not only more distrustful of political leaders but also less supportive of democracy as a political system than previous generations.[5] The fear is that Western democracies may slowly be rotting from the inside, with citizens no longer committed to defending core democratic values and institutions.

The past few years have indeed been characterized by low levels of trust in political institutions and leaders on both sides of the Atlantic. In the United States, the percentage of Americans who expressed a "great deal" or a "fair amount of trust" in political leaders declined from 63 percent in 2004 to 42 percent in 2016, a new low in more than four decades.[6] In 2017, only 12 percent of Americans expressed a "great deal" or "quite a lot" of trust in Congress, down from an already relatively low 30 percent in 2004.[7] An index measuring "system support"—the degree to which Americans view their political system as fundamentally legitimate—shows a decline by 18 points between 2006 and 2014.[8]

In Europe, confidence in political institutions dropped sharply after the onset of the euro crisis. According to Eurobarometer, trust in national parliaments across the European Union fell from 38 percent in 2004 to 28 percent in 2016, while trust in national governments declined from 34 percent to 27 percent.[9] However, these averages conceal significant variation between and within countries: the decline in trust was much starker among poorer Europeans and residents of Southern Europe.[10] A 2017 Pew Global Attitudes Survey showed alarmingly low levels of satisfaction with the functioning of democracy in France, Greece, Italy, and Spain (see figure 1). It also revealed a large gap in satisfaction with democracy between those Europeans who think the economy is doing well and those who do not—a difference of more than 40 percentage points in France, Hungary, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, and Sweden.[11]

How do these patterns fit into longer-term trends? Survey data collected since the 1970s suggest a general decline in institutional trust among Americans and many Europeans over the past several decades.[12] These patterns have been linked to processes of social modernization: citizens now have access to more

Figure 1: Satisfaction With Democracy in Europe and the United States (1994–2016)

NOT SATISFIED   SATISIFED

| Country	Not Satisfied	Satisfied
Sweden	20%	79%
Netherlands	22%	77%
Germany	26%	73%
UK	47%	52%
Poland	44%	51%
United States	51%	46%
Hungary	53%	44%
France	65%	34%
Italy	67%	31%
Spain	74%	25%
Greece	79%	21%

Source: Pew Research Center, "Globally, Broad Support for Representative and Direct Democracy," October 2017.

information and may have less deference to authority and higher expectations of public institutions.[13] But the trends are not linear. In the United States, trust in government has fluctuated over the course of the past decades, with an increase in public confidence in the early 1980s and a renewed drop since former president George W. Bush's second term.[14] Some institutions—like the military—have been less affected (see figure 2).[15] In Europe, longer-term trends have varied from country to country. For example, while the UK and Poland witnessed a rising tide of public mistrust in government institutions during the 2000s, Belgium and Finland experienced the reverse.[16]

In an overall context of declining trust, citizens view some democratic institutions—political parties, national legislatures, and governments—in a particularly negative light. A key driver seems to be the perception that these institutions are failing to do their jobs. For example, heightened polarization and legislative gridlock in the United States has fueled rising disenchantment with Congress.[17] In Europe, skyrocketing unemployment following the financial crisis undermined trust in both national and European political institutions, particularly among those countries and voters most directly affected by socioeconomic upheaval.[18]

Decreasing levels of trust in political institutions do not necessarily indicate that voters in Western democracies are turning away from democratic values en masse. While there is some evidence that younger voters may be more open to nondemocratic forms of governance than older generations, the significance of these findings remains contested: several scholars have noted that this trend

Figure 2: U.S. Trust in Political Institutions (2017)
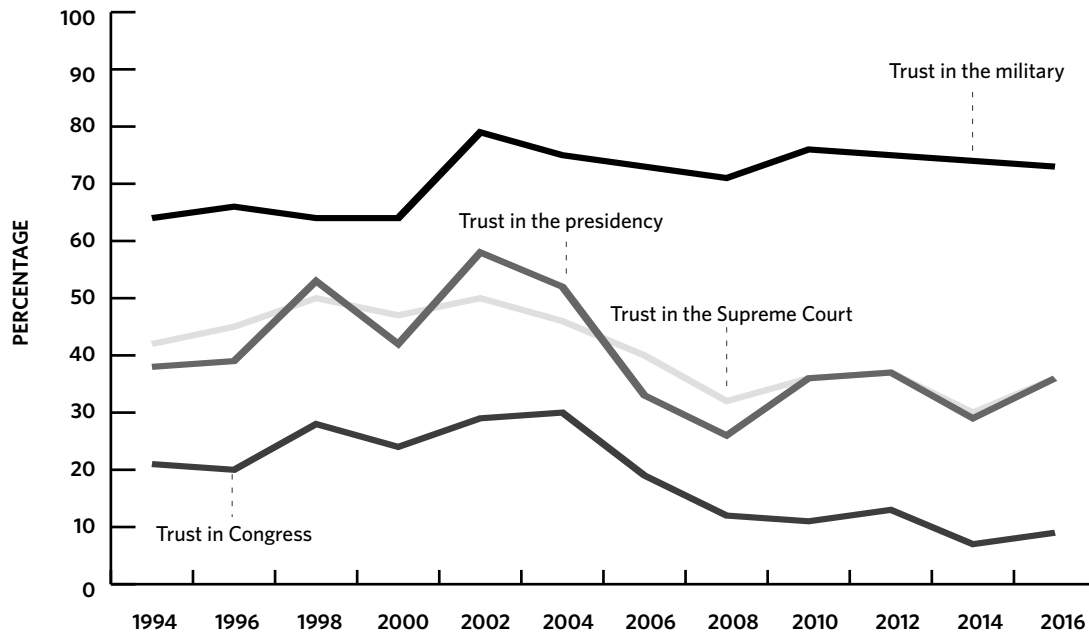
Source: Gallup, "Confidence in Institutions," accessed May 8, 2018.

may constitute an age, rather than a cohort, effect that it is largely confined to certain Western democracies, and that confidence in specific institutions actually appears to be lower among older voters.[19] Across Europe and the United States, support for representative democracy remains comparatively high.[20]
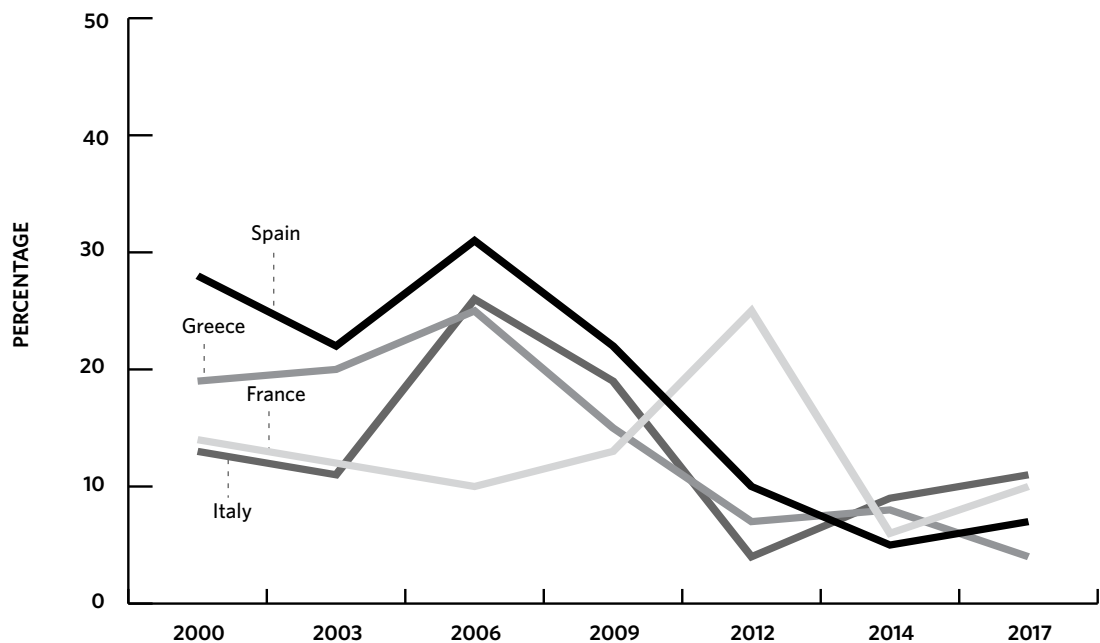
Yet many citizens are clearly frustrated with democratic performance. In countries like France, Italy, Poland, Spain, the UK, and the United States, a sizable share of the population expresses support for the idea of rule by experts or, to a lesser degree, rule by a strong leader or the military. This trend is particularly striking in Hungary, a country that has experienced significant backsliding over the past several years: 68 percent support rule by experts as a good way to govern the country.[21] In the United States, recent Gallup data indicates only around one-third say they are satisfied with the way they are being governed.[22] These numbers are concerning: modern democracies tend to backslide through executive aggrandizement—elected leaders gradually weakening institutional constraints on their power. An electorate frustrated with ineffective and unrepresentative governance may be more likely to welcome this type of overreach, or vote for candidates that mobilize against institutional constraints with the promise of renewal.

Disconnect Between Mainstream Political Parties and Citizens

One institution has borne the brunt of popular discontent: mainstream political parties are struggling to engage ordinary citizens. In Europe, the result has been a rise in support for far-right (and, in some countries, far-left) parties and populist movements. In the United States, it is expressed in growing voter discontent with both major parties. In both places, new civic and protest movements have emerged that circumvent traditional forms of party engagement.

Political parties are consistently ranked the most disliked political institution in most Western democracies.[23] This is not a new phenomenon: in Europe, popular confidence in political elites as well as party activism and membership began declining in the 1980s.[24] The euro crisis and tensions over austerity and migration have exacerbated these trends. In the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis, centrist European parties that had embraced globalization, immigration, and various degrees of neoliberalism struggled to provide clear policy solutions. Trust in political parties declined precipitously, particularly in some parts of Western and Southern Europe. In France, Greece, Italy, and Spain, fewer than ten percent of people expressed trust in their country's political parties in 2014 (see figure 3). Large numbers began turning their back to establishment parties: between 2004 and 2015, European challenger parties increased their vote share from around 10 to 23 percent.[25] Whereas many voters in Southern

Figure 3: Trust in Political Parties in Southern Europe (2000–2017)

Europe gravitated further left, centrist parties in Northern and Central Europe have faced stronger challengers from the far-right—particularly as immigration and terrorism have risen on the European agenda.

A greater diversity of parties and political voices can, of course, be seen positively, leading to better representation. In Spain, for example, the formation of the left-wing Podemos—which emerged from anticorruption and antiausterity protests—brought new wind into the Spanish political arena. Yet the weakening of centrist parties also poses real challenges. First, while not all populist challengers are necessarily antidemocratic, antiestablishment sentiments have benefited far-right parties with deeply illiberal and xenophobic strands.[26] France is a case in point: the Front National's vote share nearly doubled from 17.8 percent in 2002 to 33.9 percent in 2017.[27] In Germany that same

Between 2004 and 2015, European challenger parties increased their vote share from around 10 to 23 percent.

year, a far-right party won the third-largest share of seats and entered parliament for the first time since the Second World War.[28] Where such parties prevail, minorities often see threats to their safety and livelihoods. In Hungary and Poland, the election of nationalist parties that ran on antiestablishment platforms has led to attacks on the separation of powers as well as on independent civil society and media.

Second, greater political fragmentation makes it more difficult for political parties to form stable governing coalitions and pass difficult policy reforms.[29] In several countries, the emergence of new parties has gone hand-in-hand with political deadlock, unstable minority governments, and more dysfunctional governance. In Austria, Germany, and the Netherlands, greater political fragmentation has led to years of grand coalitions between left- and right-wing parties that have fueled voter discontent with undifferentiated centrism.[30] It remains to be seen whether these trends represent the beginning of a new normal in European electoral politics. Much will depend on whether mainstream parties successfully reinvigorate their political platforms—and the extent to which challenger parties can retain their outsider appeal.

In the United States, the majoritarian electoral system creates a fundamentally different party landscape, with limited opportunities for new party formation. Yet voter identification and satisfaction with political parties has also declined. Ahead of the 2016 election, six in ten Americans said that neither major party represented their views—a thirteen percent increase since 1990 (see figure 4).[31] A July 2017 Gallup poll showed 45 percent of Americans identifying as independent, indicating a dislike for both parties.[32] At the same time, most Americans now live in uncompetitive congressional districts, meaning that they have little meaningful choice to begin with.[33]

In 2016, both the Democratic Party and Republican Party establishments were rattled by outsider challengers. The progressive base of the Democrats is increasingly pushing back against a centrist party leadership that is viewed as

Figure 4: Dissatisfaction With U.S. Political Parties (1990 and 2016)

"Neither political party represents my views anymore."

DISAGREE | AGREE

	DISAGREE	AGREE
1990	45%	48%
2016	38%	61%

Source: PRRI, "America's Future: 1950 or 2050?" October 25, 2016.

out of touch with popular grievances, lacking moral and political integrity, and too cautious in its reform proposals. On the Republican side, support for President Donald Trump's antiestablishment, nativist, and protectionist message suggests that many voters have felt unrepresented by the party's pro-trade, pro-immigration, and status-quo-oriented policies. In fact, recent social science research shows that self-identified U.S. conservatives often take relatively liberal positions on key issues like the size of the government—which made them susceptible to a more heterodox candidate like Trump.[34]

Social scientists have advanced structural explanations to explain long-term trends of voter disengagement from political parties. As social classes have become more disaggregated and economies have transformed, parties' natural constituencies—such as churches and unions—have fractured.[35] Mainstream parties have struggled to formulate political platforms that speak to both the winners and losers of the status quo—and are often viewed as neglecting the latter in favor of the former.[36] At the same time, they have become more technocratic and professionalized, focused on governance rather than direct representation.[37] Many parties have not transformed their internal organizational cultures to appeal to younger voters or other underrepresented groups. In Europe for example, polling data suggests that most young people do not want to join political parties and generally hold them in low regard.[38]

Disengagement from parties has not necessarily gone hand-in-hand with political apathy. New social movements and citizen initiatives have emerged that push for representation and responsiveness outside of party channels.[39] Yet at the same time, a growing gap between parties and voters suggests that large parts of the electorate view the existing parties and party activism as poor mechanisms to shape democracy and advance their interests.

Problematic Public Information Space

On both sides of the Atlantic, governments and citizens are struggling to adjust to increasingly fragmented public information spaces and deliberate efforts to spread disinformation and stir mistrust. The speed, scale, and reach of digital

information flows have fundamentally reshaped the ways information is disseminated and consumed. As little as five years ago, this trend was still celebrated by many as fundamentally democratizing. Yet the sheer amount of information now available also means that readers carry much greater responsibility to assess the quality of news content. The role played by social media networks and increasing efforts by foreign governments to manipulate these platforms pose decidedly new threats to fact-based political discourse.

Several trends are worth highlighting. First, many Western democracies are characterized by relatively low levels of trust in traditional media outlets. A 2017 Eurobarometer survey found that only 34 percent of respondents across Europe claimed to trust the media (see figure 5), with particularly low levels of trust in France, the UK, and Greece (see figure 6). Those who placed themselves in the lower-middle or working class and were worse off economically were particularly likely to express distrust.[40] Throughout Europe, news consumers tend to have greater trust in radio and TV than in social networks and the written press.[41]

In the United States, trust in the mass media has decreased from 53 percent in 1997 to 32 percent in 2016, according to polling data.[42] Distrust in the media appears to be fueled by—or at least correlated with—heightened partisanship. A new study by Gallup and the Knight Foundation, for example, found that Republicans are considerably more likely to have unfavorable views of mainstream news organizations (see figure 7), a trend mirrored in Trump's repeated attacks on prominent news outlets. And while 60 percent of Republicans view Fox News as an objective media outlet, only 3 percent of Democrats agree.[43] Comparative analyses show that the American media environment is indeed much more ideologically polarized than that of other Western democracies—perhaps partly due to the absence of a centrist public broadcasting organization that captures both left- and right-wing voters.[44]

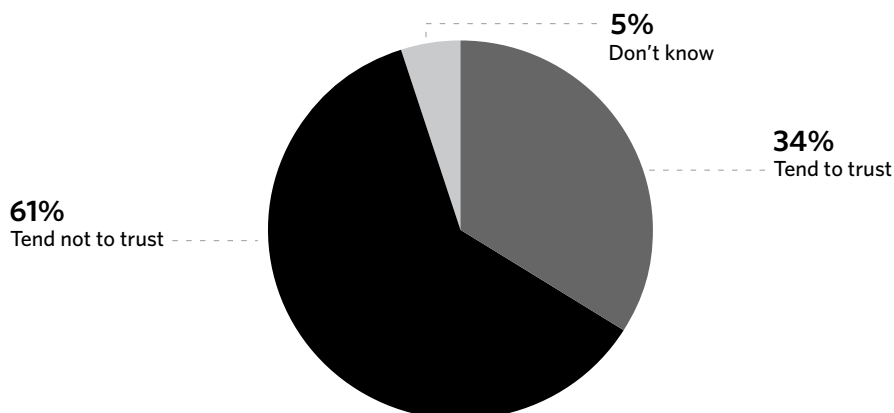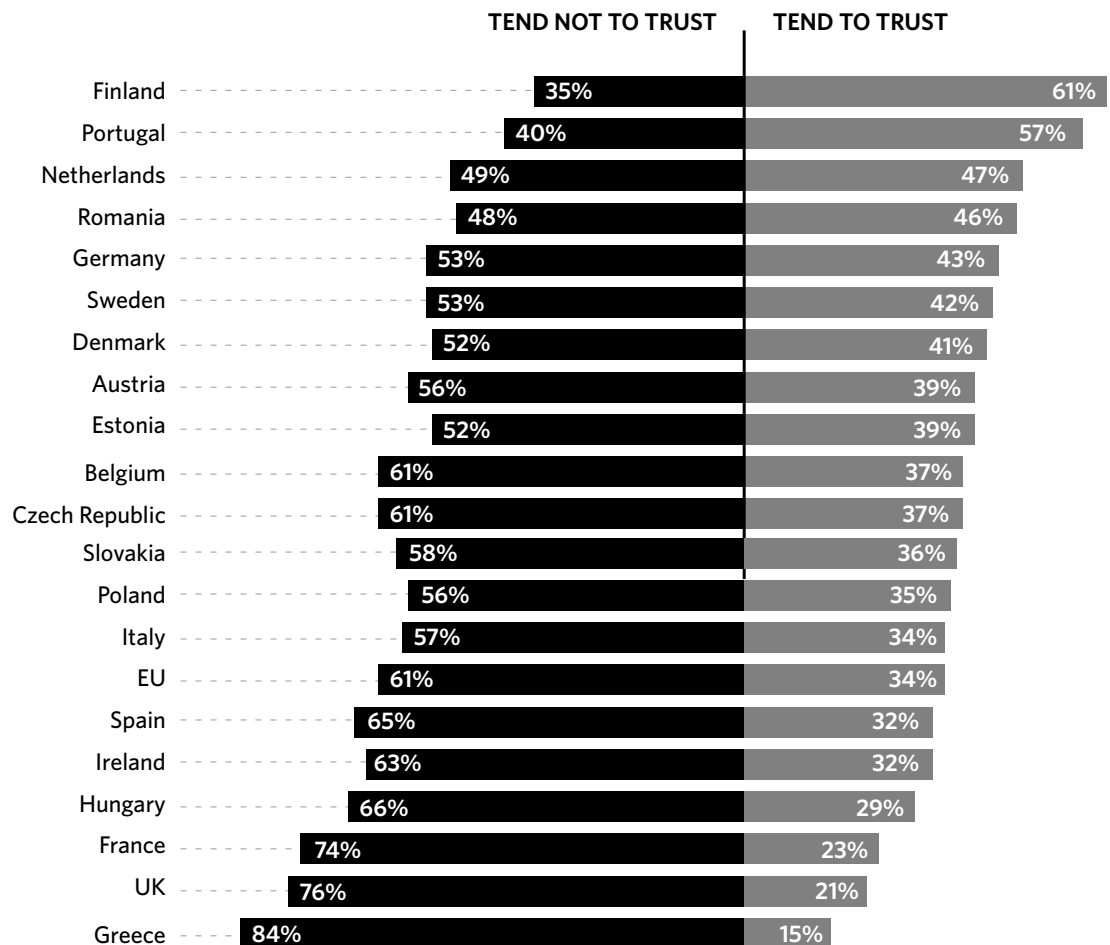**Figure 5: Trust in Media Across the European Union as an Average (April 2017)**

Source: European Commission, "Designing Europe's Future," Eurobarometer 461, April 2017.

Figure 6: Trust in Media Across the European Union by Country (April 2017)

|	TEND NOT TO TRUST	TEND TO TRUST
Finland	35%	61%
Portugal	40%	57%
Netherlands	49%	47%
Romania	48%	46%
Germany	53%	43%
Sweden	53%	42%
Denmark	52%	41%
Austria	56%	39%
Estonia	52%	39%
Belgium	61%	37%
Czech Republic	61%	37%
Slovakia	58%	36%
Poland	56%	35%
Italy	57%	34%
EU	61%	34%
Spain	65%	32%
Ireland	63%	32%
Hungary	66%	29%
France	74%	23%
UK	76%	21%
Greece	84%	15%

Source: European Commission, "Designing Europe's Future," Eurobarometer 461, April 2017.

Second, increasing numbers of citizens in the United States and Europe obtain at least some of their news from social media, even though traditional broadcasters and newspapers still play a dominant role.[45] This shift poses new challenges for democratic discourse. Research suggests that online news consumption makes it easier to seek out information that conforms to one's beliefs and ignore dissenting information.[46] Conspiracy theories appear to be more virulent, numerous, and persistent when circulated online rather than offline.[47] In addition, political discourse online is often shaped by those who use anonymity to engage in targeted harassment and inflammatory dialogue.[48] The effect of these phenomena on people's political views and political participation remains poorly understood.[49] However, it is clear that populist parties throughout the West use social media platforms very successfully to spread their political message—often tapping into popular distrust of establishment media outlets.[50]

Third, online political discourse has also enabled the deliberate diffusion of false information and rumors for political purposes, as evidenced by the professional online trolls and political ads used by the Russian government to influence the 2016 U.S. presidential election as well as a number of European elections.[51] Social media platforms, such as Twitter and Facebook—and the wealth of data they collect—offer new avenues for domestic and foreign actors to shape public opinion and sow distrust through coordinated disinformation campaigns.[52] As outlined in a Carnegie Endowment for International Peace paper by Erik Brattberg and Tim Maurer, several European governments have already begun taking measures to curb the risk of Russian information and cyber operations in elections, including new legal measures, awareness-raising campaigns, technical changes to election infrastructure, and operational and policy changes.[53] The United States so far has lagged behind in these efforts, though recent revelations about data harvesting by the voter profiling firm Cambridge Analytica have triggered stronger demands for regulation of social media platforms.[54]

All three trends are clearly interrelated. The common thread is that citizens are finding it harder to determine which news sources are trustworthy and accurate and which are not.[55] For example, while eight in ten U.S. adults believe that the news media are important to democracy, many also say that it

Figure 7: Americans' Opinion of the Media (2018)

Source: Knight Foundation, "American Views: Trust, Media and Democracy," 2018.
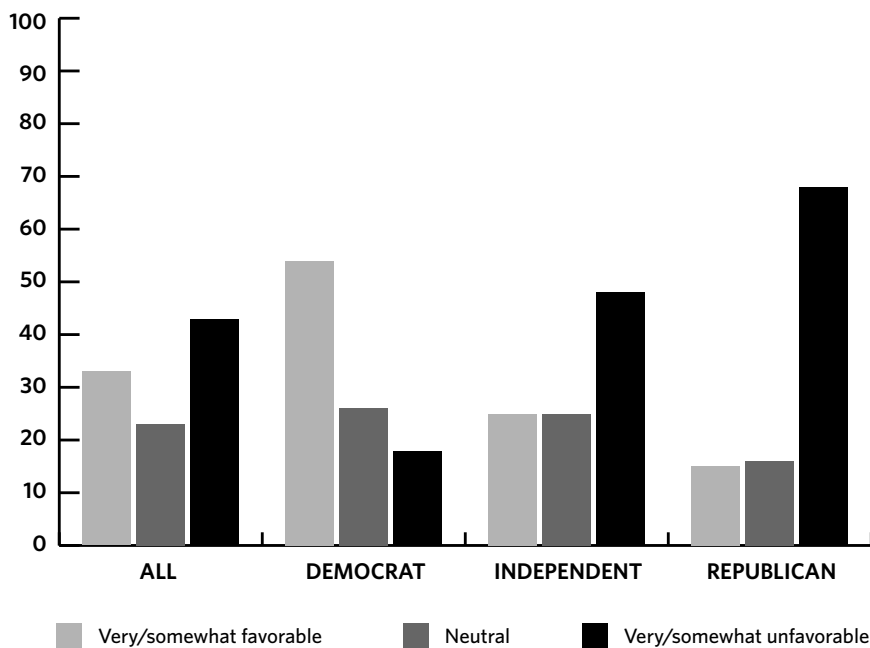
has become harder to remain well-informed and that news media are not fulfilling their role.[56] The implications for democracy are significant: political discourse becomes more polarized and less productive if voters no longer agree on a common set of facts. Low levels of trust in professional media outlets in turn make it harder to disprove false or inflammatory claims. The dissemination of inaccurate or misleading information can distort election campaigns, affect public opinion, and reinforce inter-group prejudices and animosity—all of which risk undermining the quality of democratic debate and representation.

Threats to Civil Liberties

Current threats to democracy emanate not only from changing citizen perceptions and preferences but also from illiberal government actions. In general, both the United States and Western European countries offer strong protections for core civil liberties such as freedom of association, assembly, and expression. This stands in contrast to Eastern and Central Europe, where independent civil society and the media have increasingly come under attack. Yet in all of these regions, government responses to heightened terrorist threats have triggered new concerns over creeping extensions of executive power. Finding the right balance between security and individual liberty has become increasingly complex, partly due to the pervasiveness of digital technology and unsettled questions about citizens' right to privacy.

In the United States, the passing of the Patriot Act after the September 11 terrorist attacks ushered in a trend of heightened surveillance and weak regulatory oversight and disclosure.[57] For example, in June 2013, records leaked by former National Security Agency contractor Edward J. Snowden revealed that the U.S. government had secretly used Section 215 of the Patriot Act to collect Americans' phone records in bulk. The U.S. Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act Amendments Act of 2008 also gave the National Security Agency significant powers to monitor Americans' international phone calls, text messages, and emails, as well as unknown numbers of domestic communications.[58]

> **Political discourse becomes more polarized and less productive if voters no longer agree on a common set of facts.**

Over time, some components of the Patriot Act have been weakened—for example, Congress has curtailed the domestic bulk collection of phone records.[59] Yet in January 2018, the Senate voted to extend the controversial Section 702 of the act for another six years, which civil liberties advocates say enables the continued surveillance of Americans' communications through various legal loopholes.[60]

In Europe, the recent spike in terrorist attacks has spurred a flurry of legislation: ten European countries have enacted significant new antiterror laws since 2015. Many of these laws define "terrorism" in very broad terms, which means that even people who have never been associated with any criminal acts can be subjected to surveillance, searches, detentions, and other restrictions.[61] Several

also enhance executive powers while weakening judicial controls, for example, by making it easier for governments to declare a state of emergency or grant special powers to security and intelligence services.[62] Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Hungary, the Netherlands, Poland, and the UK have all expanded mass surveillance powers. Poland's 2016 counterterrorism law, for example, allows for the temporary covert surveillance of foreign nationals without judicial oversight.[63] Other laws make "glorifying terrorism" or issuing an "apology of terrorism" a criminal offense without clearly defining these terms.[64]

France is a prominent example. The country was in a state of emergency for nearly two years before adopting a sweeping new counterterrorism law in October 2017. Between November 2015 and May 2017, French authorities used emergency powers to issue 155 decrees prohibiting public assemblies and imposed 639 measures banning specific individuals from participating in protests—at least 574 of which targeted individuals demonstrating against proposed labor market reforms.[65] French authorities have also imposed hundreds of house arrests and carried out thousands of warrantless raids primarily targeting Muslim communities—almost none of which led to further investigations.[66] The new law gives enforcement agencies greater power to continue conducting searches, closing religious facilities, and restricting the movements of terrorist suspects.[67] The inherent risk of these and similar measures is that ethnic and religious minorities will bear the brunt of new restrictions—even though they remain underrepresented in the surrounding policy debates.[68]

Priority U.S. Challenges

These trends—while not entirely new—have received much greater attention with the rising electoral success of populist parties and leaders. Yet despite this new sense of shared democratic distress, the United States still suffers from longer-standing institutional problems and democratic weaknesses that are somewhat or much less acute in Europe, and that feed into popular discontent with the media and U.S. political institutions.

First, unusually high levels of partisan polarization and gridlock have weakened democratic norms of civility and contributed to low public confidence in Congress. In addition, rising socioeconomic inequality—while not a democratic weakness per se—has fueled increasing vertical polarization between a small group at the top and the rest of society, with the former exerting disproportionate influence on the political process. These two patterns of polarization coexist with a highly contested electoral system that is both unusually decentralized and partisan: as a result, problems related to campaign spending, voter registration, and gerrymandering are much more pressing than in Europe. Together, these factors also help explain why the United States has one of the lowest turnout rates among Western democracies.

Partisan Polarization and Gridlock

Political scientists highlight partisan polarization as one of the most urgent threats to U.S. democracy.[69] This trend manifests itself in multiple ways. At the level of voters, polls show that both partisan sorting and partisan animosity have increased, particularly among those who are most politically active. The share of Americans with a highly negative view of the opposing party has more than doubled since 1994.[70] This pattern partly reflects profound changes in American society. The two major parties used to be fairly similar—both were overwhelmingly white, male, and Protestant. Today, partisan divides map onto religious, cultural, geographical, and racial divides to a much greater degree. As the writer Lee Drutman has noted, Americans' "collective sense of cultural, regional, and ethnic status [has] become more and more linked to the status of two political parties," which heightens the stake of elections and makes politics more emotional.[71] While the bulk of the electorate still retains relatively centrist policy views, these moderate voters tend to be more disengaged from the political process.

At the elite level, party polarization in today's Congress is higher than at any time since the late 1800s.[72] This presents a significant challenge. First, the U.S. political system is designed to maximize checks and balances: the two-house legislature and the strict separation of powers between the legislature and the executive make comprehensive policy change difficult. Even in the absence of divided government, filibuster rules and weak incentives for legislative party discipline can prevent the executive from advancing its agenda. Yet in a context of heightened polarization, this system has turned into a de facto "vetocracy"—blocking legislative action and incentivizing parties to subvert regular order to pass legislation.[73] Intense polarization—particularly in the Senate—thus results in legislative inaction, which undermines public confidence in Congress.[74]

But the problem goes deeper. Democracy depends on political parties being willing to set aside partisan differences to push back against extremists who threaten to subvert the democratic process. It also depends on a mutual respect for democratic norms and procedures. Yet as professors Steven Levitsky and Daniel Ziblatt showed in a recent book, polarization has weakened American parties' commitment to two central democratic norms: mutual toleration, which means accepting one's political rivals as legitimate political actors, and forbearance, which is the idea that parties should be restrained in their use of institutional prerogatives. Both parties have become more prone to playing "constitutional hardball"—exploiting their legal prerogatives in ways that undermine compromise, as exemplified by the Senate's refusal to take up the nomination of Merrick Garland to the Supreme Court in the last year of Barack Obama's presidency.[75] In the long run, high levels of polarization thus not only reduce congressional capacity to govern but also weaken the norms that undergird institutional checks and balances.

Political gridlock is generally less of a problem in European parliamentary systems in which the party or coalition that has the majority forms the government. Comparing levels of polarization is more difficult because multiparty parliamentary systems follow a fundamentally different political logic. For example, small parties allow fringe positions to be represented in the political spectrum, often resulting in a more ideologically differentiated political landscape than the current U.S. system allows. In other words, polarization tends to be more fragmented and multidimensional. Yet there is also evidence to suggest that the main (center-left and center-right) parties in many European countries have *depolarized* in recent decades.[76] Unlike in the United States, they no longer differ substantially from each other on the host of political and sociocultural issues that remain deeply divisive in the United States, such as gun ownership, climate change, or the appropriate role of government in basic service provision. Over the past several decades, they have also embodied an ideological consensus built around support for a single market, the euro, and EU integration.

The rise of more extremist challenger parties into the political life of many European countries has upset this pattern, creating a widening gap between the "depolarized center" and the political extremes. Even though most of these parties only command the support of a minority of voters, their success has revealed deeper societal cleavages over issues like immigration, European integration, and national identity.[77] In Poland, for example, the incumbent nationalist-conservative government has opened up deep ideological fissures in Polish politics and society.[78] Other countries have experienced a sharpening of historical divisions—such as in Spain, where intense contestation over Catalonian independence has split the country, weakening the political center. In general, however, European institutional structures and party systems do not necessarily work to amplify the political impact of underlying social and ideological differences to the same degree as the two-party system in the United States. Instead, the existence of multiple parties and the need to build governing coalitions tends to produce a more fragmented political landscape, in which centrist parties continue to find common ground on core policy issues while at the same time facing heightened pressure and hostility from the political extremes.

Democracy depends on political parties being willing to set aside partisan differences to push back against extremists who threaten to subvert the democratic process.

Spiraling Inequality and Increasing Money in Politics

In Europe and the United States, dissatisfaction with political institutions is not distributed equally across all social groups—instead, low-income earners and less educated and politically engaged citizens are much less likely to express trust in government institutions than college-educated, higher-income citizens.[79] Yet while socioeconomic divides have increased on both sides of the

Atlantic, the trend has been much more pronounced in the United States than in most European democracies. U.S. democracy is thus not only characterized by high levels of *horizontal* polarization between left and right, but also increasing *vertical* polarization rooted in socioeconomic divisions. These two forms of polarization interact in complex ways: for example, in the lead-up to the 2016 presidential elections, both Senator Bernie Sanders and Donald Trump tapped into the perception that the political system is "rigged" by special interests, while pointing to very different explanations and solutions.

In the United States, income inequality and wealth inequality have been increasing for several decades (see figure 8). In 1980, the top 1 percent of adults earned on average 27 times more than the bottom 50 percent of adults. Today, they earn 81 times more. As a result, the income share of the bottom half shrank from about 20 percent in 1980 to 12 percent in 2014.[80] In parallel, wealth held by the top 1 percent rose from just under 30 percent in 1989 to nearly 49 percent in 2016—while the share held by the bottom 90 percent decreased from just over 33 percent to less than 23 percent.[81] The financial crisis of 2008 fueled these trends by devastating many lower- and middle-income households.[82] Suddenly the idea of the United States as a society starkly divided between haves and have-nots (or have-littles) gained much greater currency.

On average, European countries today are considerably more egalitarian. This was not always the case: for much of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Western European societies concentrated land and wealth in the hands of a small upper-class. In 1910, the top 1 percent in Europe owned around 64 percent of all wealth, whereas in the United States the figure was 45 percent.[83] Over the course of the twentieth century, the situation has been reversed. The United States now has a higher Gini coefficient—the most commonly used measurement of inequality—than any European country. While levels of inequality have increased in countries like Germany, Sweden, and the UK over the past few decades, U.S. households are much more economically divided.[84]

In the United States, low-income earners and less educated and politically engaged citizens are much less likely to express trust in government institutions than college-educated, higher-income citizens.

The effects of inequality on democracy are complex. For example, several studies have debunked the popular narrative that rising support for illiberal populism and extremist movements in Europe and the United States can solely be explained by economic dislocation among working-class voters. Instead, economic status, social standing, racial attitudes, and spatial segmentation all appear to play a role. In the United States, for example, white identity and hostility to minority groups were strongly associated with support for Trump in the 2016 election, while standard indicators of economic hardship were not—although Trump also did better among white voters anxious about their economic future.[85] In a transnational study of twenty established democracies, Noam Gidron and Peter A. Hall similarly found lower

Figure 8: Income Shares of U.S. Households (1970–2015)
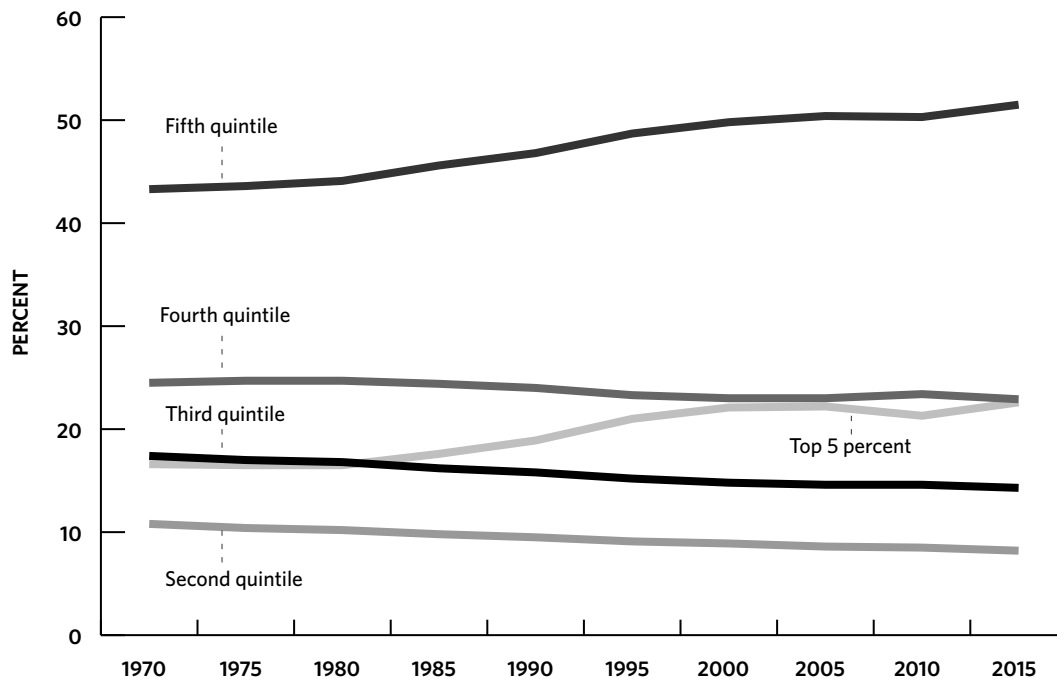
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, Annual Social and Economic Supplements.

levels of *subjective social status*—defined as the degree of social esteem people believe is accorded to them—to be a strong predictor of support for right-wing populist parties, especially among working-class men.[86]

Yet rising socioeconomic disparities do impact democratic politics in profound ways. The most immediate consequence is a growing inequality of political voice. In the United States, people with lower incomes and less education consistently vote at lower rates, are less politically engaged, and less likely to believe they can influence politics.[87] While this pattern also exists in other Western democracies, it is particularly pronounced in the United States. U.S. electoral turnout, for example, is highly socially skewed: those in the lowest income quintile and those with little schooling are much less likely to vote than comparable people in Western Europe, potentially because they are less incorporated into a social welfare state or because there are no left-wing competitor parties to mobilize them.[88] These disparities are even bigger when it comes to more costly political activities, such as making financial contributions, volunteering for campaigns, and contacting elected officials.[89] As a result, these activities tend to be dominated by wealthier and often more ideological voters, whose views do not necessarily reflect those of the general population.

As income and wealth have become more concentrated in the hands of a few, the highly privileged are also finding new ways to influence policy. Most

prominently, lax campaign finance rules post–*Citizens United* allow corporations, unions, and wealthy individuals to make unlimited contributions to super PACs (political action committees), and channel tax-exempt money to certain types of political nonprofits that are not required to disclose their donors. Not surprisingly, spending on elections has skyrocketed: between 2008 and 2016, spending on presidential elections increased from approximately $339.5 million to $1.3 billion (see figure 9).[90] In parallel, candidates and parties have become more dependent on a tiny group of mega-donors.[91] Some scholars suggest that this trend contributes to partisan polarization, as it further increases the influence of wealthy individuals with a strong ideological commitment or agenda.[92]

Spiraling political spending has other negative effects. At a basic level, it drives up the cost of elections, which reinforces the overrepresentation of the extremely wealthy among U.S. politicians. In the 2016 election cycle, an average winning U.S. Senate campaign spent $10.4 million, while an average winning House campaign spent $1.3 million.[93] Given these high costs, independently wealthy and well-connected candidates enjoy a clear advantage: they are more likely to attract the support of donors and party gatekeepers in the early stages of their campaigns. It is therefore hardly surprising that in 2016, the median minimum net worth of all senators and representatives was $511,000 (16 percent more than just two years ago), while 153 representatives and 50 senators were millionaires.[94] In contrast, people with working-class and low-income backgrounds are severely underrepresented both in Congress and in state legislatures.[95]

Campaign contributions—particularly in conjunction with lobbying—also allow donors to buy access, set the agenda, and influence policy on issues that are less visible to the public. While existing research suggests that legislators' voting behavior is unlikely to be swayed on highly salient policy issues, donor contributions do affect niche policy decisions, such as voting on trade policy, banking relations, and corporate take-over laws.[96] Contributions influence who legislators meet with, what issues they focus on, and how they allocate their time.[97] Corporations and the extremely wealthy are also funding unprecedented lobbying as well as using more creative means, such as funding think tanks and universities and controling private media networks, to further their policy views. Not surprisingly, a series of studies have shown that U.S. politicians on average are much more responsive to the concerns of rich constituents than the interests and demands of low-income Americans.[98]

European democracies wrestle with similar patterns of biased political responsiveness. Several Southern and Eastern European countries also still suffer from high levels of quid-pro-quo corruption that have eroded public trust in the political establishment. Yet no European democracy has seen a skyrocketing of private donations in any way comparable to the United States. Campaign finance regulations vary from country to country: half of EU member states

Figure 9: Outside Group Spending on U.S. Elections (2004–2016)
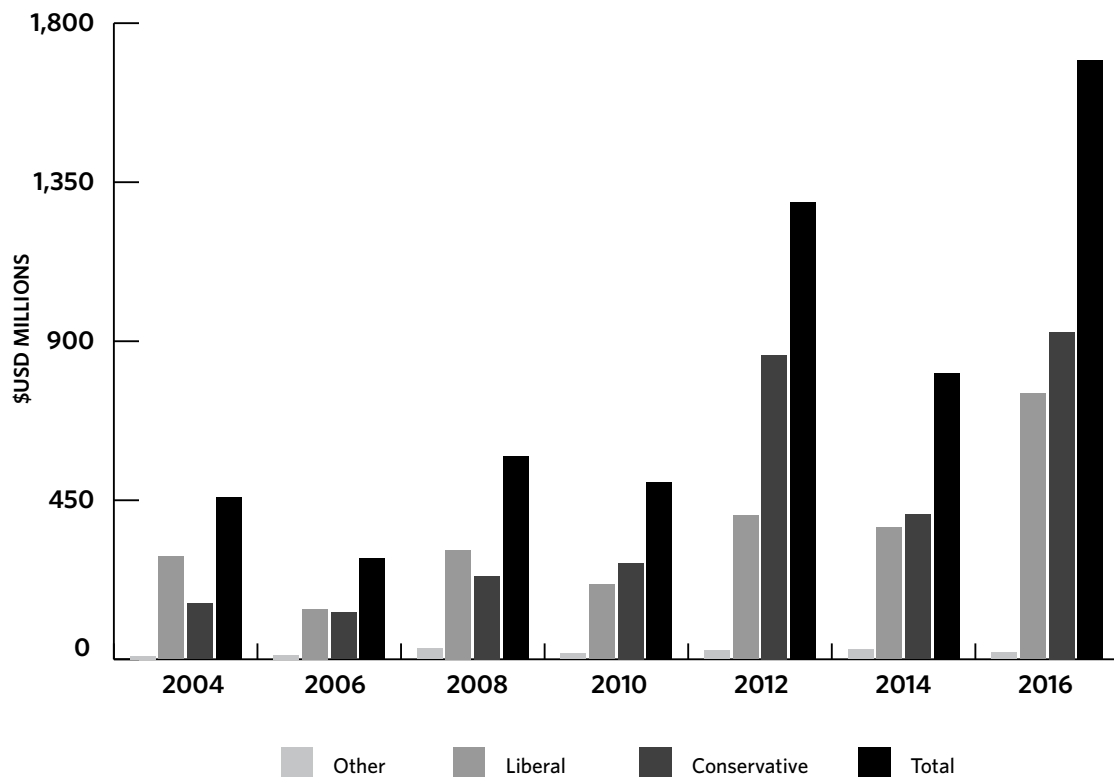
Source: OpenSecrets.org, "2018 Outside Spending, by Group," accessed May 9, 2018.

apply limits to party expenditures; others limit both contributions and spending. Many European countries have taken additional measures to keep spending down: they restrict the length of the official campaigning period, strictly regulate political advertising, or ban certain types of donors, such as anonymous and corporate donors.[99] In addition, most European parties rely heavily on public funding: on average, it accounts for almost three-quarters of total party income, thereby reducing the need for candidates and parties to solicit private donations. Stronger party discipline also means that wealthy donors have fewer incentives to try and influence individual candidates, who wield less political power than in the United States.

Money still plays a role in European politics. For example, in France, a country with strong campaign finance laws, a recent analysis showed that private donations confer a clear electoral advantage to center-right candidates at the municipal and legislative level—even though the amounts in question are minuscule by American standards.[100] Over the past several years, opaque donations to far-right and populist parties have also highlighted the limitations of current regulations. In Germany, for example, the Alternative für Deutschland has benefited extensively from spending by an independent campaign organization whose funding sources remain undisclosed.[101] In the UK, several

investigations into potential funding breaches by pro-Brexit campaigners are ongoing.[102] The EU is also revising its funding to European political parties after a number of cases of fraud and misuse have come to light—though critics argue these changes do not address current transparency shortcomings.[103]

Yet despite these shared challenges, the overall picture highlights pointed differences. In the United States, spiraling inequality combined with deregulated campaign spending, a candidate-centric electoral system, and long campaign periods have contributed to making money in politics a particularly vexing problem. The current system appears to feed partisan polarization by reinforcing the power of ideological donors, while contributing to the political disengagement and underrepresentation of lower-income Americans.

A Contested Voting System

Horizontal and vertical polarization in the United States fuel—and are fueled by—challenges with its electoral system, which is characterized by a high degree of decentralization and partisanship. According to the 2016 Perceptions of Electoral Integrity, the United States ranked 52 out of 153 countries when it comes to electoral integrity—behind all other Western democracies.[104] Problems range from long lines at the polls and outdated voting machines to burdensome registration procedures and partisan gerrymandering of district boundaries to favor incumbents. These challenges undercut democratic participation and representation, and make the electoral process more vulnerable to attacks from domestic and foreign actors seeking to sow distrust.

> **Independently wealthy and well-connected candidates enjoy a clear advantage: they are more likely to attract the support of donors and party gatekeepers in the early stages of their campaigns.**

The U.S. electoral system is uniquely decentralized, with each state setting its own electoral rules. As a result, standards are highly uneven. For example, the federal government does not take any responsibility for registering citizens to vote. The burden of registering is placed on individuals, with procedures varying from state to state. In contrast, most European countries task government agencies with getting citizens on voter rolls, or register them automatically once they become eligible to vote.[105]

As a result, most European democracies have much higher voter registration rates than the United States. In 2015, only about 64 percent of the U.S. voting-age population was registered to vote—compared to 91 percent in the UK and 96 percent in Sweden.[106]

Over the past several years, barriers to voting have further increased in many parts of the United States. Since 2010, twenty-three states have enacted new laws imposing more complex identification requirements, cutting back on early voting days, or making it harder for people with past criminal convictions to vote, among other measures.[107] Proponents have justified these efforts as necessary to reduce voter fraud and improve trust in the electoral system. Yet studies

show that deliberate voter fraud in the United States remains rare.[108] Instead, existing evidence indicates that strict voter identification laws disproportionately decrease turnout among ethnic and racial minorities, who are less likely to have photo IDs.[109] Such measures have also been most common in electorally competitive states, suggesting an underlying partisan rationale.[110]

New voting requirements are particularly troublesome given the United States' long history of preventing African Americans from voting. Until 2013, the 1965 Voting Rights Act barred nine U.S. states with a history of voter discrimination (and portions of six others) from passing new voting legislation without federal approval.[111] Yet in *Shelby County v. Holder*, the Supreme Court decided this preclearance requirement had become outdated. The ruling set in motion a new wave of legislation in states like North Carolina and Texas—many of which have either been struck down or continue to be contested in court. At the same time, other states are seeking to expand access: twelve states and the District of Columbia have already approved automatic voter registration, and twenty states have introduced automatic registration proposals in 2018.[112] These reforms, if passed, will likely help boost registration rates (and voter roll accuracy) by ensuring eligible citizens who interact with government agencies are automatically registered to vote unless they decline. The changes will also bring the United States more in line with current European voter registration systems.

Redistricting is another domain where partisanship and high levels of decentralization have weakened the U.S. electoral process. In contrast to most European democracies, the power to draw congressional district boundaries in most U.S. states rests in the hands of the party that holds the state legislative majority.[113] A small number of states use special commissions, though few are explicitly nonpartisan. As a result, the redistricting process is often used to benefit the incumbent political party—typically by grouping the opponents' supporters into a few districts while engineering a comfortable majority for the incumbent in all others.[114] This type of partisan gerrymandering can result in election outcomes that profoundly distort the distribution of votes in the population, thereby exacerbating the failures of representation already inherent in first-past-the-post voting systems. It also makes elections less competitive—even though factors like partisan sorting probably play an even bigger role.[115]

Yet partisan gerrymandering is not an easy problem to fix. It is in many ways a symptom of the United States' democratic challenges as well as a driver, a problem reinforced by geographic, racial, and partisan polarization. There is no "correct" way of drawing electoral districts: reformers have to balance different and often competing priorities, including competitiveness, minority representation, compactness, and proportionality.[116] The Supreme Court has in the past refused to get involved in partisan gerrymandering cases, arguing that it was too difficult to devise a workable criteria by which to evaluate the practice. However, the court is currently considering two cases from Maryland

and Wisconsin that could result in a new legal standard for judging excessive partisanship—with important implication for future U.S. elections.[117]

Redistricting generally is much less controversial in European democracies. In electoral systems that elect more than one representative per district, the principle of "one person, one vote" can often be achieved without redistricting, simply by adding or subtracting seats.[118] In addition, most European countries use national-level nonpartisan commissions—typically staffed by judges and/or administrative state functionaries—to redraw district boundaries. In some countries, like the UK and Germany, legislatures have to approve the proposed map changes. However, strict redistricting rules—such as the requirement that electoral districts respect local political boundaries—tend to limit the scope for political manipulation.

The partisan nature of the U.S. electoral process has created fertile grounds for politicians seeking to sow distrust in election outcomes.

A few European electoral systems more closely resemble the United States. France, for example, elects its deputies in single-member districts, which are drawn by the executive branch and reviewed by the Constitutional Council. While this system has fostered accusations of bias, existing evidence does not suggest strong partisan manipulation—though it does result in severe malapportionment.[119] In the UK, which also uses first-past-the-post voting, nonpartisan boundary commissions are charged with redrawing district boundaries. However, special protections for certain constituencies, the geographic distribution of voters, and other factors have led to disparities in district sizes and accusations of pro–Labour Party bias. An ongoing redistricting effort is seeking to address these problems.[120] While lower levels of polarization and institutional differences have not produced the levels of acrimony seen in the United States, both France and the UK share the disadvantages of winner-take-all systems, which leave more voters unrepresented.

The partisan nature of the U.S. electoral process has created fertile grounds for politicians seeking to sow distrust in election outcomes. According to a Gallup Poll ahead of the 2016 presidential elections, only 35 percent of Americans expressed confidence in the honesty of elections.[121] The implications are significant: if people believe that the electoral process is flawed or that their vote does not count, they are less likely to vote. Complex voter registration procedures also depress turnout—another key challenge facing U.S. democracy.

Low Voter Turnout

By international standards, U.S. voter turnout is unusually low. The 55.7 percent turnout in the 2016 election put the United States behind most of its peers—it now ranks twenty-eighth out of thirty-five OECD members.[122] In U.S. midterm elections, turnout is typically even lower: it was 36.7 percent in 2014, the lowest in seventy-two years.[123] However, this is not a new trend: U.S.

turnout rates have been consistently low over the past several decades, with some election-to-election variation.

Various factors explain this pattern. As noted above, complex registration procedures and restrictive voting laws in some states discourage participation, particularly among low-income voters. Geographic segregation and lower levels of unionization and welfare state integration likely further decrease turnout, resulting in more socially skewed participation.[124] Researchers cite low levels of competitiveness in many states and districts—both due to gerrymandering and partisan sorting—as another explanation.[125]

In Western and Northern Europe, average turnout rates remain higher than in the United States, despite country-to-country variation and nega-tive downward trends in many countries (see figure 10). In recent elections, Belgium—which has a mandatory voting law—had the highest rate of elec-toral participation, with 87.2 percent among all voting-age people turning out to vote. The country was followed closely by Sweden and Denmark; while Austria, Finland, Germany, Greece, Iceland, the Netherlands, and Norway all had turnout rates of over 68 percent in their recent elections.[126]

However, trends across the European Union are by no means uniformly positive. In the newer member states in Central and Eastern Europe, voter turnout has declined by roughly 20 percent since the first free elections were

Figure 10: Voter Turnout in the United States and Western Europe (1981–2017)
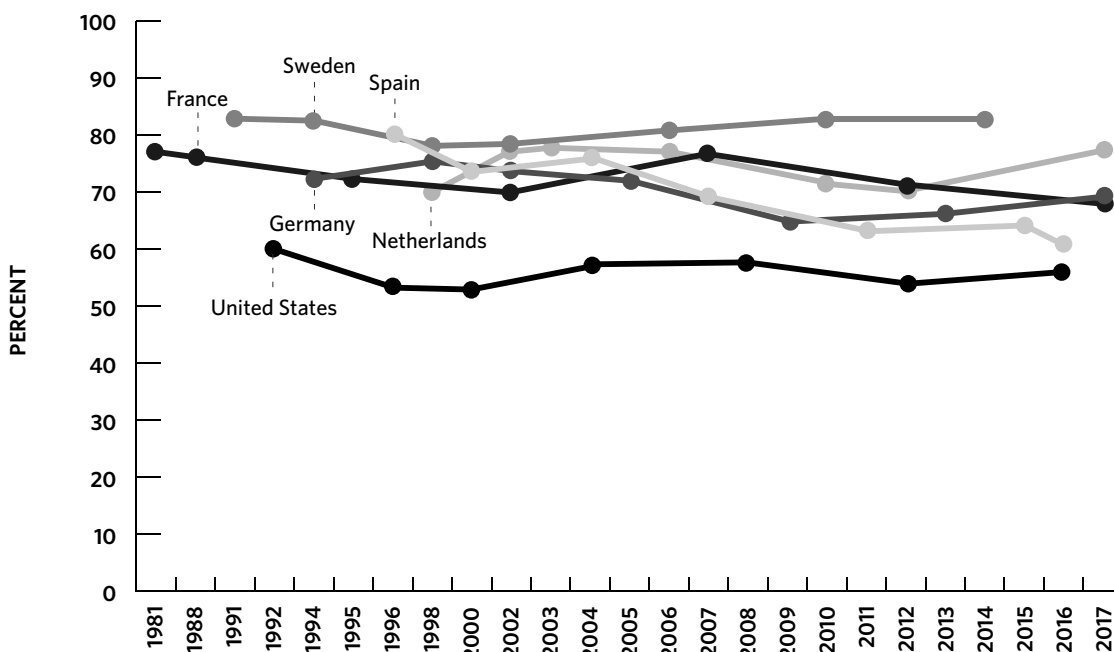
Source: International IDEA, Voter Turnout Database, accessed May 14, 2018.

held at the end of the 1980s, and turnout rates now are more similar to the United States.[127] Scholars have offered different explanations for this trend, including a growing disenchantment with democracy, deteriorating economic and political conditions, low electoral stakes, supranational integration, and a lack of strong political party identification. Yet further evidence is needed to fully unpack this trend—and its relationship to democratic backsliding in the region.[128]

Over the past three decades, there has also been a decline in turnout of about 10 percent in many established European democracies—albeit from a higher base.[129] Turnout rates in European Parliament elections have also decreased.[130] Moreover, European democracies are not immune from increasing inequalities in electoral participation. In Germany, for example, "the more precarious the living conditions in a location, the lower the voter turnout. Without exception, voter participation in socially disadvantage[d] areas is much lower than in more affluent urban districts."[131] A similar pattern has been observed in the UK.[132] While cross-national data is sparse, these examples suggest that despite higher average turnout levels, European democracies may also be becoming more divided, with social stratification making its impact felt.

Priority European Challenges

Rise of Illiberal Movements and Parties

In Europe, the most severe current challenges relate to the outcomes of democratic politics. Whereas the majority of the preceding analysis has focused on Western Europe, the clearest threat to democracy on the continent stems from continued democratic backsliding in Central Europe, particularly in Poland and Hungary. In both countries, elections have brought to power antipluralistic and openly intolerant majoritarian regimes that are systematically dismantling democratic checks and balances. What unites leaders in both countries is their shared belief that large popular mandates entitle them to scapegoat minorities and change the institutional make-up of their countries.

In Hungary, Prime Minister Viktor Orbán's Fidesz government—in power since 2010—has used its two-thirds parliamentary majority to enact a series of institutional and legislative changes that have weakened independent oversight and political competition. Since coming to power in 2010, the government has passed a new constitution and over a thousand new laws, turning the country into an increasingly illiberal democracy that combines far-right rhetoric, crony capitalism, and one-party rule.[133] Various laws have curtailed media pluralism, weakened judicial independence, and expanded government control over the state administration.[134] Orbán has also engaged in a relentless smear campaign against critical civil society voices, framing himself as a protector against various internal and external threats. He undeniably remains popular, helped by a

fragmented opposition and supportive media—and recent changes to the election system have further consolidated the party's hold on power.[135]

In Poland, the ruling Law and Justice Party has spearheaded efforts to assert political control over the judiciary. Over the past year, the government has passed several amendments that increased the ruling majority's authority over the Supreme Court, triggering mass protests and the start of EU disciplinary proceedings. New legislation also allows the justice minister to appoint and dismiss the presidents of ordinary courts and brings the National Council of the Judiciary under the control of the parliament.[136] In contrast to Hungary, the government has not prioritized controlling the economy—yet it has propagated revisionist historical narratives, and gradually transformed the country's public broadcaster into a propaganda outlet for the ruling party.[137]

The clearest threat to democracy on the continent stems from continued democratic backsliding in Central Europe, particularly in Poland and Hungary.

Democratic troubles are not confined to Hungary and Poland. Many other Eastern and Central European democracies suffer from the symptoms of hollowing democracy: declining turnout rates, waning citizen identification with political parties, and an atrophy of parties' relationships with civil society.[138] Both the Czech Republic and Slovakia have recently elected populist leaders. The nature and ideology of these governments vary from country to country, as do the specific drivers of their success. The financial crisis and resulting economic dislocation has certainly played a role. In Hungary, for example, the economy had shrunk by 6.6 percent the year prior to Orbán's election.[139] Yet the economy is not the whole story: in Poland and the Czech Republic, living standards have improved in recent years. The refugee crisis proved to be another central turning point, triggering what Ivan Krastev termed a "demographic panic" that brought to the fore preexisting illiberal political forces.[140] The return of geopolitical tensions spurred by Russia's increasing assertiveness—coupled with the EU's internal turmoil—have added fuel to the fire, providing both an autocratic model to emulate and a threat that justifies the reassertion of national sovereignty.

While illiberal populist parties have so far failed to win elections beyond Central Europe, they have nevertheless become a significant political force on the whole continent, especially due to their increased presence in parliaments.[141] For example, in Austria, the far-right Freedom Party has governed in a coalition with the conservative People's Party since December 2017, and pulled the latter further to the right on issues like immigration and social benefits for migrant workers. A similar trend has occurred in countries like Denmark, Finland, and Sweden, where far-right parties have made significant electoral gains, positioning themselves as champions of working-class voters. In Italy, it remains to be seen what policies the antiestablishment Five Star Movement and the far-right Northern League will pursue in their coalition government.

In the United States, President Donald Trump has displayed many of the illiberal instincts that characterize antidemocratic leaders in Central Europe, raising fears of democratic erosion. As Steven Levitsky and Daniel Ziblatt outlined in their book, Trump easily passes a basic "litmus test for autocrats": he has threatened unfriendly media outlets, questioned the democratic rules of the game, denied the legitimacy of his political opponents, and even tolerated or encouraged violence during his presidential campaign.[142] Yet at the same time, he has so far not been able to advance a broader illiberal political project. For one, despite his significant support among Republican voters, Trump lacks broader backing in his own party. In contrast to leaders like Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, he does not command control over an organized political movement, but relies on an uneasy alliance with a party that remains internally divided over key aspects of his political agenda and governing style. The presidential system and Trump's own policy inconsistencies reinforce this disconnect. In addition, U.S. democratic institutions—including a powerful independent judiciary and a strong civil society and media sector—exert a strong countervailing force.

> **While illiberal populist parties have so far failed to win elections beyond Central Europe, they have nevertheless become a significant political force on the whole continent.**

Some scholars suggest that democratic erosion in Eastern and Central Europe should be seen as a failure of democratic consolidation. A more worrisome interpretation is that the region is experiencing many of the same trends also visible in Western Europe and the United States—a failure to deliver economic prosperity and justice, a backlash against globalization and aspects of liberal cosmopolitanism, and a shifting geopolitical context—and has simply proven more vulnerable to them due to weaker institutions and a shorter democratic history.

Democracy Deficit in the European Union

In addition to democratic backsliding driven by unchecked majoritarianism, European democracies also face a set of unique challenges derived from the delegation of policymaking from the national to the European level. While the EU on the surface has a democratic structure, the complexity of the current institutional setup obscures lines of accountability. As a result, many European citizens view EU decisionmaking processes to be opaque and far removed.[143]

The EU currently has two main sources of democratic legitimacy: the European Parliament, which is elected directly by EU citizens, and the Council of the European Union (national ministers), which together with the European Council (heads of state) represents individual member states. Yet decisionmaking in the Council often lacks transparency, despite its agenda-setting role.[144] While the powers of the European Parliament have increased over the past decades, voter turnout in European Parliament elections is extremely low and

has fallen over the past several elections. In 2014, almost 60 percent of eligible voters stayed away from the polls (see figure 11).[145] European members of parliament have limited connections to national political systems: once in Brussels, they form transnational factions that often remain unfamiliar to voters. The parliament as a whole has failed to convince many Europeans that it represents their interests.

Part of the problem is the European Union's current state of partial integration, in which national governments work together to make decisions in some domains, while EU institutions take precedence in others. The euro crisis revealed the limits of this complex institutional mix, highlighting the need to either further advance political and economic integration or revert some economic decisionmaking back to EU member states. Instead, EU member states chose to muddle through, relying primarily on ad-hoc crisis management procedures.[146] The European Central Bank emerged as a key crisis actor, which meant that an unelected institution was making highly consequential political decisions.[147] In the realm of financial and economic policy, many European voters felt that they no longer had meaningful policy choices. Perceptions of unresponsiveness deepened mistrust in European institutions: many people felt democratic accountability should be brought closer to them.

Various proposals have been put forward to bridge the gap between the EU institutions and voters, such as directly electing the European Commission president, or further strengthening the European Parliament and the European Court of Justice.[148] Yet in the aftermath of the crisis, little action has been taken to advance these ideas. While French President Emmanuel Macron has called

Figure 11: Voter Turnout in European Elections (1979–2014)
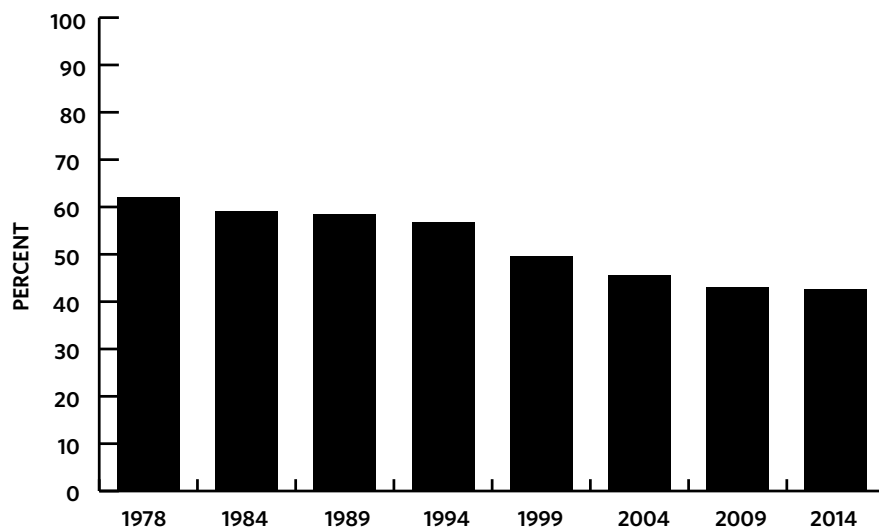
for further political integration, many other EU member states appear reluctant to engage in a fundamental rethinking of current European decisionmaking structures, fearing continued Euroskepticism among voters. The European Parliament recently rejected a proposal to consider transnational voting lists for the 2019 European elections.[149] While recent polls show an uptick in optimism about the future of the EU and support for EU political priorities, the question of how to better integrate European citizens into EU decisionmaking remains unsolved.[150]

Grounds for Common Approaches

Established democracies on both sides of the Atlantic are beset by a sense of crisis. At a time when the liberal democratic model has become more contested at the international level, Western democracies are also struggling with internal discontent. Longer-term problems of political representation and participation have become more visible and urgent. This perception of democratic ill-health is driving a powerful new sense of political convergence. For example, Europe and the United States are grappling with high levels of citizen distrust in democratic institutions, alienation from establishment political actors, and unease about an increasingly fragmented and incoherent public information space that is vulnerable to polarization. Yet not all challenges to democracy are clearly shared across the Atlantic: both the U.S. and European democracies are also contending with somewhat specific patterns of political dysfunction.

Identifying these areas of political convergence as well as divergence opens the door to a bigger question: can U.S. and European actors striving for democratic reform learn from each other, or even find ways to work directly together to counter domestic democratic problems? And if so, what would the most fertile areas for such learning and cooperation be? To date, linkages between U.S. and European communities of activists, reformers, and experts are still relatively underdeveloped; there are few networks to distill and share insights and lessons about effective responses to current democratic challenges.

The analysis highlights a number of areas that have significant potential for transatlantic learning. Democracies on both sides of the Atlantic suffer from the unresponsiveness of political power. Citizens have become especially ambivalent about the key arms of representative democracy: parliaments and political parties. This trend is particularly evident among those most dissatisfied with the political and economic status quo, resulting in significant rural-urban divides in elections and a growing socioeconomic gap between those who are confident in democratic institutions and those voicing distrust. These cleavages are breaking down parties' traditional constituencies, and provoking new realignments that mirror current anxieties over demographic diversity, economic dislocation, and sweeping cultural change. While European proportional electoral systems have proven more adaptable to this challenge than the

U.S. and British majoritarian systems, they now have to grapple with increasing party fragmentation and the rise of illiberal challenger parties.

At the same time, citizens' frustration with traditional party and parliamentary channels has triggered new waves of civic mobilization and protest.[151] Establishment parties and parliaments so far have mostly failed to tap into these political energies. Solutions in this realm will inevitably vary depending on the political system and party. Yet these trends highlight an opportunity for shared learning on initiatives and reforms that seek to improve citizen engagement in democratic politics beyond elections, for example through participatory policymaking at the local or regional level, efforts by parties to integrate younger and more diverse voters, and innovative forms of civic organizing and civic education. While such efforts at democratic innovation are hardly new, any forums to share lessons remain underdeveloped, especially involving European and U.S. actors. In addition, while U.S. partisan polarization and gridlock has no direct equivalent in Europe, many European countries are also grappling with a rise in political extremism among some parts of the electorate and a hardening of political discourse. These experiences may open the door to shared learning on bridging societal differences, grappling with diversity, and restoring norms of political civility, whether in the realm of civic education, media regulation, or across political parties.

Can U.S. and European actors striving for democratic reform learn from each other, or even find ways to work directly together to counter domestic democratic problems?

The fragmentation of media landscapes and the threat of disinformation represent fertile areas for U.S.-European collaboration. A number of European countries have already taken steps to counter Russian cyber and disinformation tactics in election campaigns. Yet these efforts have not been systematically shared across countries to inform the development of more robust long-term strategies—despite continued threats looming over upcoming elections on both sides of the Atlantic. In addition, in Europe and the United States, several innovative research and policy initiatives are exploring new mechanisms to improve public trust in media institutions. Many of these initiatives—which range from fact-checking and greater transparency measures to programs centered on media and civic literacy and investments in local newspapers and reporting—could be scaled through transatlantic partnerships.

In other areas, the problems facing Europe and the United States are more distinct, but domestic reform efforts could nevertheless benefit from greater exchange. For example, on issues such as election administration reform, partisan gerrymandering, and campaign finance regulation—all core priorities of the U.S. democratic reform movement—European democracies provide useful alternative models. Not all of these are suitable for the U.S. political context; in many areas, reformers face institutional and legal hurdles that require U.S.-centric solutions. Yet on specific policy questions, such as automatic voter

registration, efforts to reduce the influence of money in politics beyond contribution and spending limits, fighting online harassment, and support to public broadcasting and civic education, exchanges with European policymakers and civil society activists may offer lessons learned and new ideas for action. At the same time, European reformers may also learn from innovative strategies and tactics used by U.S. grassroots movements and social activists, and vice versa.

The fragmentation of media landscapes and the threat of disinformation represent fertile areas for U.S.-European collaboration.

Other challenges are rooted in institutional differences between the United States and Europe, with limited opportunities for shared learning. For example, while there certainly is polarization in European societies, these cultural divides are not as amplified by the political system in Europe as they are in the United States. Instead, elite coalitions are commonly struck that leave little room for outsiders, resulting in popular frustration with political consensus deals. A key question is thus how to revitalize the political center while ensuring greater political responsiveness. Another important area of difference with the United States is the EU dimension: democracy problems in Europe are not only the result of national-level problems, but also the way in which EU decisions increasingly override national democratic accountability. Indeed, some national-level democratic processes are relatively healthy, yet the democratic malaise still exists because of the delegation of power to the European level and citizens' increasing dissatisfaction with the current institutional set-up.

In both the United States and in Europe, the current moment of crisis has given rise to new local experiments in democratic innovation and new forms of mobilization. Failures of representation and delivery are galvanizing citizen action, at times putting governments on the offensive. Illiberal and anti-democratic measures by governments continue to spark significant public mobilization. The trends are thus not uniformly negative: citizens' search for more effective accountability mechanisms represents a promising source of democratic renewal. The sense of shared democratic malaise across Western democracies thus also offers the opportunity for a new reform agenda, rooted in greater transatlantic exchange and cooperation.

Notes

1   Economist Intelligence Unit, "Democracy Index 2016: Revenge of the Deplorables,"
    Economist, January 2017, http://felipesahagun.es/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/
    Democracy-Index-2016.pdf.
2   The term "Europe" in this paper is used to refer primarily to West and East-Central
    Europe (Poland, Czech Republic, Hungary, and Slovakia). Some statistics use aver-
    ages across all EU member states, and are referenced accordingly.
3   National Endowment for Democracy, *Sharp Power: Rising Authoritarian Influence,*
    December 2017.
4   Russell J. Dalton, "Political Support in Advanced Industrial Countries" in *Critical
    Citizens: Global Support for Democratic Government*, edited by Pippa Norris (Oxford:
    Oxford University Press, 1999); Pippa Norris, ed., *Critical Citizens: Global Support
    for Democratic Government* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999); and Joseph
    S. Nye, Philip D. Zelikow, and David C. King, eds., *Why Americans Mistrust
    Government* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997).
5   Roberto Stefan Foa and Yascha Mounk, "The Democratic Disconnect," *Journal of
    Democracy* 27 (2016): 7–8.
6   Jeffrey M. Jones, "Americans' Trust in Political Leaders, Public at New Lows,"
    Gallup, September 21, 2016, http://www.gallup.com/poll/195716/americans-trust-
    political-leaders-public-new-lows.aspx.
7   "Confidence in Institutions," Gallup News, http://news.gallup.com/poll/1597/
    confidence-institutions.aspx.
8   On a scale of 0 to 100. Amy Erica Smith, "Do Americans Still Believe in
    Democracy?," *Monkey Cage* (blog), *Washington Post,* April 6, 2016, https://www
    .washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2016/04/09/do-americans-still-believe-
    in-democracy/?utm_term=.4ecc968b4f44.
9   "Standard Eurobarometer 85, Spring 2016," European Commission, Directorate-
    General for Communication, July 2016, 14.
10 Chase Foster and Jeffry Frieden, "Crisis of Trust: Socio-Economic Determinants of
    European's Confidence in Government," February 17, 2017, https://papers.ssrn.com/
    sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2953951; and Veronica Fagerland Kroknes, Tor Georg
    Jakobsen, and Lisa-Marie Gronning, "Economic Performance and Political Trust:
    The Impact of the Financial Crisis on European Citizens," *European Societies* 17, no.
    5 (2015).
11 Richard Wike, Katie Simmons, Bruce Stokes, and Janell Fetterolf, "Globally, Broad
    Support for Representative and Direct Democracy," Pew Research Center, October
    2017, http://assets.pewresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2017/10/17102729/
    Pew-Research-Center_Democracy-Report_2017.10.16.pdf.
12 Russell J. Dalton, "The Social Transformation of Trust in Government,"
    International Review of Sociology 15, no. 1 (2005): 133–54.

13 Ibid.

14 American National Election Studies, "Trust in Federal Government 1958–2012," accessed August 22, 2016, http://electionstudies.org/nesguide/toptable/tab5a_1 .htm.

15 Pippa Norris, "Trends in System Support in the U.S. and Western Europe," in *Democratic Deficits: Critical Citizens Revisited* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

16 Ibid.; and Pippa Norris, "Is Western Democracy Backsliding? Diagnosing the Risks," *Journal of Democracy,* Web Exchange, April 2017, https://www .journalofdemocracy.org/sites/default/files/media/Journal%20of%20Democracy%20 Web%20Exchange%20-%20Norris_0.pdf.

17 Lydia Saad, "Gridlock Is Top Reason Americans Are Critical of Congress," Gallup News, June 12, 2013, http://news.gallup.com/poll/163031/gridlock-top-reason-americans-critical-congress.aspx.

18 Yann Algan, Sergei Guriev, Elias Papaioannou, and Evgenia Passari, "The European Trust Crisis and the Rise of Populism," Brookings Papers on Economic Activity, BPEA Conference Drafts, September 7–8, 2017, https://www.brookings.edu/ wp-content/uploads/2017/09/4_alganetal.pdf.

19 Foa and Mounk, "The Democratic Disconnect"; Erik Voeten, "Are People Really Turning Away From Democracy?," *Journal of Democracy* Web Exchange, https:// www.journalofdemocracy.org/sites/default/files/media/Journal%20of%20 Democracy%20Web%20Exchange%20-%20Voeten_0.pdf; and Norris, "Is Western Democracy Backsliding? Diagnosing the Risks."

20 Voeten, "Are People Really Turning Away From Democracy?," 3; and Wike, Simmons, Stokes, and Fetterolf, "Globally, Broad Support for Representative and Direct Democracy."

21 Wike, Simmons, Stokes, and Fetterolf, "Globally, Broad Support for Representative and Direct Democracy."

22 Frank Newport, "Seven in 10 Dissatisfied With Way U.S. Is Being Governed," Gallup, September 18, 2017, http://news.gallup.com/poll/219320/seven-dissatisfied-governed.aspx?g_source=Politics&g_medium=newsfeed&g_campaign=tiles.

23 Alina Mungiu-Pippidi et al., "Public Integrity and Trust in Europe," European Research Centre for Anti-Corruption and State-Building, Hertie School of Governance, 2015.

24 Peter Mair, *Ruling the Void: The Hollowing of Western Democracy* (New York: Verso Books, 2013).

25 Sara B. Hobolt and James Tilley, "Feeling the Centre: The Rise of Challenger Parties in the Aftermath of the Euro-crisis," *West European Politics* 39, no. 5 (2016): 971–91.

26 Manuel Funke, Moritz Schularick, and Christoph Trebesch, "Going to Extremes: Politics After Financial Crises, 1870–2014," CESinfo Working Paper No. 5553 (2015), accessible at: https://bfi.uchicago.edu/sites/default/files/research/Going_to_ Extremespercent2C_Politics_After_Financial_Crises.pdf.

27 Gina Doggett and Clare Byrne, "Marine Le Pen: Far-Right Firebrand Who Shook Up France," *Business Insider*, May 7, 2017, http://www.businessinsider.com/afp-marine-le-pen-far-right-firebrand-who-shook-up-france-2017-5.

28 Jefferson Chase, "AfD: What You Need to Know About Germany's Far-Right Party," Deutsche Welle, September 24, 2017, http://www.dw.com/en/afd-what-you-need-to-know-about-germanys-far-right-party/a-37208199.

29 Jon Henley, "Why Is Support for Europe's Mainstream Political Parties on the Wane?," *Guardian,* March 28, 2016, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/ mar/29/support-europes-mainstream-political-parties-parliaments.

30 "Europeans Are Splitting Their Votes Among Ever More Parties," *Economist*, January 12, 2017, https://www.economist.com/europe/2017/01/12/europeans-are-splitting-their-votes-among-ever-more-parties

31 David Smith, "Most Americans Do Not Feel Represented by Democrats or Republicans—Survey," *Guardian*, October 25, 2016, https://www.theguardian .com/us-news/2016/oct/25/american-political-parties-democrats-republicans-representation-survey.

32 Martin P. Wattenberg, *The Decline of American Political Parties, 1952-1996* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), 47–48. Wattenberg notes that the "independent" label to some degree is misleading: it includes people who do not purposefully identify as independents but simply do not view political parties as particularly relevant and therefore do not have a clear party reference.

33 Rachel Kleinfeld with Richard Youngs and Jonah Belser, "Renewing U.S. Political Representation: Lessons From Europe and U.S. History," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, March 2018, https://carnegieendowment.org/files/CP_326_ Kleinfeld_Political_Parties_Interior_FINAL.pdf.

34 John Sides and Michael Tesler, "How Political Science Helps Explain the Rise of Trump: Most Voters Aren't Ideologues," *Washington Post,* March 2, 2016, https:// www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2016/03/02/how-political-science-helps-explain-the-rise-of-trump-most-voters-arent-ideologues/?utm_ term=.233980aabb6f.

35 Russell J. Dalton, "Political Trust in North America," in *Handbook on Political Trust,* eds. Sonja Zmerli and Tom W. G. van der Meer (Edward Elgar Publishing, 2017), 384.

36 Doug Saunders, "Why Did All the West's Big Centrist Parties Go Down the Drain?," *Globe and Mail,* March 20, 2011, https://www.theglobeandmail.com/ news/politics/why-did-all-the-wests-big-centrist-parties-go-down-the-drain/ article625360/.

37 Peter Mair, *Ruling the Void,* and Paul. F. Whiteley, "Is the Party Over? The Decline of Party Activism and Membership Across the Democratic World," *Party Politics* 17, no. 1 (June 2010).

38 International IDEA, *The Global State of Democracy 2017: Exploring Democracy's Resilience* (Stockholm: International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, 2017), 103.

39 Richard Youngs and Sarah Manney, "Recession and Renewal in European Democracy," Carnegie Europe, February 26, 2018, http://carnegieeurope .eu/2018/02/26/recession-and-renewal-in-european-democracy-pub-75601.

40 European Commission, "Special Eurobarometer 461: Designing Europe's Future: Trust in Institutions, Globalisation, Support for the Euro, Opinions About Free Trade and Solidarity," European Commission, Directorate-General for Communication, April 2017, 16.

41 European Broadcasting Union, "Trust in Media 2016," March 2016, http://www .rcmediafreedom.eu/Publications/Reports/Trust-in-Media-2016.

42 Derek Thompson, "Why Do Americans Distrust the Media" *Atlantic*, September 16, 2016, https://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2016/09/why-do-americans-distrust-the-media/500252/.

43 Gallup and Knight Foundation, "American Views: Trust, Media and Democracy," January 2017, https://kf-site-production.s3.amazonaws.com/publications/ pdfs/000/000/242/original/KnightFoundation_AmericansViews_Client_ Report_010917_Final_Updated.pdf.

44 Nic Newman et al., "Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2017," Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, June 22, 2017, https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac .uk/sites/default/files/Digital%20News%20Report%202017%20web_0.pdf?utm_ source=digitalnewsreport.org&utm_medium=referral.

45   Jeffrey Gottfried and Elisa Shearer, "News Use Across Social Media Platforms 2016," Pew Research Center, May 26, 2016, http://www.journalism .org/2016/05/26/news-use-across-social-media-platforms-2016/; Nic Newman et al., "Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2016," Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, May 2016, https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/ Digital-News-Report-2016.pdf; Darrell M. West, "How to Combat Fake News and Disinformation," Brookings Institution, December 18, 2017, https://www .brookings.edu/research/how-to-combat-fake-news-and-disinformation/.

46   Walter Quattrochiocchi, Antonio Scala, and Cass R. Sunstein, "Echo Chambers on Facebook," June 13, 2016, available at SSRN: https://ssrn.com/abstract=2795110.

47   Michela Del Vicario et al., "The Spreading of Misinformation Online," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 113, no. 3 (2016), http://eprints .imtlucca.it/3020/; and Fabiana Zollo et al., "Emotional Dynamics in the Age of Misinformation," *PLOS One* 10, no. 9 (2015), http://journals.plos.org/plosone/ article/file?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0138740&type=printable.

48   Thomas B. Edsall, "Democracy, Disrupted," *New York Times,* March 2, 2017, https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/02/opinion/how-the-internet-threatens-democracy.html?rref=collection%2Fcolumn%2Fthomas-b-edsall&action= click&contentCollection=opinion&region=stream&module=stream_unit& version=latest&contentPlacement=1&pgtype=collection&_r=0.

49   Farahd Manjoo, "Facebook Use Polarizing Site Begs to Differ," *New York Times,* May 7, 2015, https://www.nytimes.com/2015/05/08/technology/facebook-study-disputes-theory-of-political-polarization-among-users.html.

50   Clara Hendrickson and William A. Glaston, "Why Are Populists Winning Online Social Media Reinforces Their Anti-Establishment Message," Brookings Institution, April 28, 2017, https://www.brookings.edu/blog/techtank/2017/04/28/why-are-populists-winning-online-social-media-reinforces-their-anti-establishment-message/.

51   "Background to 'Assessing Russian Activities and Intentions in Recent U.S. Elections': The Analytic Process and Cyber Incident Attribution," Office of National Intelligence and Director of National Intelligence, January 6, 2017, https://www .dni.gov/files/documents/ICA_2017_01.pdf; and Keir Giles, *Handbook of Russian Information Warfare,* NATO Defense College, November 2016.

52   Alessandro Best and Emilio Ferrara, "Social Bots Distort the 2016 U.S. Presidential Election Online Discussion," *First Monday* 21, no. 11 (2016), http://firstmonday.org/ ojs/index.php/fm/article/view/7090/5653.

53   Erik Brattberg and Tim Maurer, "Russian Election Interference: Europe's Counter to Fake News and Cyber Attacks," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, May 23, 2018, http://carnegieendowment.org/2018/05/23/russian-election-interference-europe-s-counter-to-fake-news-and-cyber-attacks-pub-76435.

54   David Dayen, "The U.S. Government Is Finally Scrambling to Regulate Facebook," *Intercept*, March 29, 2018, https://theintercept.com/2018/03/29/the-u-s-government-is-finally-scrambling-to-regulate-facebook/.

55   Gallup and Knight Foundation, "American Views."

56   Ibid.

57   For further, see Rachel Kleinfeld, "We Are Already in a State of Emergency," Just Security, July 28, 2017, http://carnegieendowment.org/2017/07/28/we-are-already-in-state-of-emergency-pub-72678.

58   "Documents Confirm How the NSA's Surveillance Procedures Threaten Americans' Privacy," American Civil Liberties Union, accessed May 15, 2018, https://www .aclu.org/fact-sheet/documents-confirm-how-nsas-surveillance-procedures-threaten-americans-privacy?redirect=national-security-technology-and-liberty/how-nsas-surveillance-procedures-threaten-americans-privacy.

59 Sabrina Siddiqui, "Congress Passes NSA Surveillance Reform in Vindication for Snowden," *Guardian*, June 3, 2015, https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2015/jun/02/congress-surveillance-reform-edward-snowden.

60 Alex Emmons, "NSA Surveillance Bill Would Legalize Loophole That Lets FBI Spy on Americans Without a Warrant," *Intercept*, January 9, 2018, https://theintercept .com/2018/01/09/nsa-surveillance-fisa-section-702-reauthorization-fbi/.

61 "Dangerously Disproportionate: The Ever-Expanding National Security State in Europe," Amnesty International, 2017, 23.

62 Austria, Bulgaria, Hungary, Luxembourg, Poland, and the UK have all passed measures make it easier to invoke or prolong a "state of emergency" in response to a threat of violence or crisis.

63 "EU: Orwellian Counter-Terrorism Laws Stripping Rights Under Guise of Defending Them," Amnesty International, January 17, 2017, https://www.amnesty .org/en/latest/news/2017/01/eu-orwellian-counter-terrorism-laws-stripping-rights-under-guise-of-defending-them/.

64 "Dangerously Disproportionate," Amnesty International, 37.

65 "France: Unchecked Clampdown on Protest Under Guise of Fighting Terrorism," Amnesty International, May 21, 2017, https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2017/05/france-unchecked-clampdown-on-protests-under-guise-of-fighting-terrorism/.

66 "France: Abuses Under State of Emergency," Human Rights Watch, February 3, 2016, https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/02/03/france-abuses-under-state-emergency.

67 Samuel Osborne, "France Declares End to State of Emergency Almost Two Years After Paris Terror Attacks," *Independent*, October 31, 2017, https://www .independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/france-state-of-emergency-end-terror-attacks-paris-isis-terrorism-alerts-warning-risk-reduced-a8029311.html.

68 Tufyal Choudhury and Helen Fenwick, "The Impact of Counter-Terrorism Measures on Muslim Communities," Equality and Human Rights Commission, Research Report no. 72, 2011, https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/sites/default/files/research-report-72-the-impact-of-counter-terrorism-measures-on-muslim-communities.pdf; Guradeau A. Spann, "Terror and Race," Georgetown Public Law and Legal Theory Research Paper no. 12-180, 2005, http://scholarship.law .georgetown.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1554&context=facpub; Vikram Dodd, "Asian People 42 Times More Likely to Be Held Under Terror Law," *Guardian*, May 23, 2011, https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2011/may/23/counter-terror-stop-search-minorities.http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/09627250802274238?journalCode=rcjm20.

69 Steven Levitsky and Daniel Ziblatt, *How Democracies Die* (New York: Penguin Randomhouse, 2018).

70 "Political Polarization in the American Public," Pew Research Center, June 12, 2014, http://www.people-press.org/2014/06/12/political-polarization-in-the-american-public/.

71 Lee Drutman, "We Need Political Parties. But Their Rabid Partisanship Could Desotry American Democracy," Vox, September 5, 2017, https://www.vox.com/the-big-idea/2017/9/5/16227700/hyperpartisanship-identity-american-democracy-problems-solutions-doom-loop.

72 Ezra Klein, "Congressional Dysfunction," Vox, May 15, 2015, https://www.vox.com/cards/congressional-dysfunction/what-is-political-polarization.

73 Francis Fukuyama, "Why Are We Still Fighting Over Obamacare? Because Our System Was Designed That Way," *Washington Post*, October 4, 2013, https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/why-are-we-still-fighting-over-obamacare-because-our-system-was-designed-that-way/2013/10/04/0ad4aaf6-2b79-11e3-b139-029811dbb57f_story.html?utm_term=.f0de287241e9; and Jeff Davis, "The

Rule That Broke the Senate," *Politico Magazine*, October 15, 2017, https://www .politico.com/magazine/story/2017/10/15/how-budget-reconciliation-broke- congress-215706.

74 See, for example: Eric M. Uslaner, "Congressional Polarization and Political Trust," *The Forum* 13, no. 3 (2015): 361–73. The problem also affects state legislatures: Kevin K. Banda and Justin H. Kirkland, "Legislative Party Polarization and Trust in State Legislatures," *American Politics Research* (2017).

75 Levitsky and Ziblatt, *How Democracies Die*.

76 Morris P. Fiorina, "Is the US Experience Exceptional?," Hoover Institution, Stanford University, https://www.hoover.org/sites/default/files/research/docs/fiorina_is_the_ us_experience_excep_8pdf.pdf; and Philipp Rehm and Timothy Reilly, "United We Stand: Constituency Homogeneity and Comparative Party Polarization," *Electoral Studies* 29, no. 1 (2010): 40–53.

77 Christopher Groskopf, "European Politics Is More Polarized Than Ever, and These Numbers Prove It," Quartz, March 30, 2016, https://qz.com/645649/european- politics-is-more-polarized-than-ever-and-these-numbers-prove-it/.

78 Judy Dempsey, "Poland's Polarizing Politics," Carnegie Europe, May 9, 2016, http://carnegieeurope.eu/strategiceurope/63529.

79 2016 Edelman Trust Barometer: Global Report," Edelman, January 17, 2016, http://www.edelman.com/insights/intellectual-property/2016-edelman-trust- barometer/global-results/.

80 Thomas Piketty, Emmanuel Saez, and Gabriel Zucman, "Distributional National Accounts: Methods and Estimates for the United States," NBER Working Paper 22945, National Bureau of Economics Research, December 2016, 3.

81 Chad Stone, Danilo Trisi, Arloc Sherman, and Emily Horton, "A Guide to Statistics on Historical Trends in Income Inequality," Center on Budget and Policy Priorities Report, Updated November 7, 2016, https://www.cbpp.org/research/poverty-and- inequality/a-guide-to-statistics-on-historical-trends-in-income-inequality.

82 Annie Lowrey, "The Great Recession Is Still With Us," *Atlantic*, December 1, 2017, https://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2017/12/great-recession-still-with- us/547268/.

83 John Cassidy, "Piketty's Inequality Story in Six Charts," *New Yorker,* March 26, 2014, http://www.newyorker.com/news/john-cassidy/pikettys-inequality-story-in- six-charts.

84 Rakesh Kochhar, "2 Key Findings on the State of the Middle Class in Western Europe," Pew Research Center, April 24, 2017, http://www.pewresearch.org/ fact-tank/2017/04/24/7-key-findings-on-the-state-of-the-middle-class-in-western- europe/. See OECD.Stat, http://stats.oecd.org/Index.aspx?DataSetCode=IDD. OECD, "An Overview of Growing Income Inequalities in OECD Countries: Main Findings," Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2011, https://www.oecd.org/els/soc/49499779.pdf.

85 Interestingly, perceptions of the economy may also be driven by racial attitudes. See Michael Tesler and John Sides, "How Political Science Helps Explain the Rise of Trump: The Role of White Identity and Grievances," *Washington Post*, March 3, 2016; John Sides and Michael Tesler, "How Political Science Helps Explain the Rise of Trump (part 3): It's the Economy, Stupid," *Washington Post,* March 4, 2016; Michael Tesler, "Economic Anxiety Isn't Driving Racial Resentment. Racial Resentment Is Driving Economic Anxiety," *Washington Post*, August 22, 2016; and Ben Casselman, "Stop Saying Trump's Win Had Nothing to Do With Economics," FiveThirtyEight, January 9, 2017, https://fivethirtyeight.com/features/stop-saying- trumps-win-had-nothing-to-do-with-economics/.

86 Noam Gildron and Peter A. Hall, "The Politics of Social Status: Economic and Cultural Roots of the Populist Right," *British Journal of Sociology* no. 51 (November 2017): 57–84.

87 Daniel Laurison, "Social Class and Political Engagement in the United States," *Sociology Compass* 10, no. 8 (2016): 684–97.

88 Christopher J. Anderson and Pablo Beramendi, "Left Parties, Poor Voters, and Electoral Participation in Advanced Industrial Societies," *Comparative Political Studies* 45, no. 6 (2012): 714–46; and Jens Albert and Ulrich Kohler, "The Inequality of Electoral Participation in Europe and America and the Politically Integrative Functions of the Welfare State," in *United in Diversity? Comparing Social Models in Europe and America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

89 Task Force on Inequality and American Democracy, "American Democracy in an Age of Rising Inequality," American Political Science Association, 2004.

90 "Total Outside Spending by Election, Cycle, Excluding Party Committees," Open Secrets, https://www.opensecrets.org/outsidespending/cycle_tots.php.

91 Russ Choma, "More Top-Heavy, More Republican: The One Percent of the One Percent Over Time," Sunlight Foundation, May 13, 2015, https://sunlightfoundation.com/2015/05/13/more-top-heavy-more-republican-the-one-percent-of-the-one-percent-over-time/.

92 Raymond J. La Raja and Brian F. Schaffner, "Campaign Finance Laws May Be Making Political Polarization Worse by Encouraging 'Purist' Donors," London School of Economics US Centre, December 3, 2015, http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/usappblog/2015/12/03/campaign-finance-laws-may-be-making-political-polarization-worse-by-encouraging-purist-donors/.

93 "The Price of Winning Just Got Higher, Especially in the Senate," Center for Responsive Politics, November 9, 2016, https://www.opensecrets.org/news/2016/11/the-price-of-winning-just-got-higher-especially-in-the-senate/.

94 David Hawkings, "Wealth of Congress: Richer Than Ever, But Mostly at the Very Top," RollCall, February 27, 2018, https://www.rollcall.com/news/hawkings/congress-richer-ever-mostly-top.

95 Nicholas Carnes, "Does the Numerical Underrepresentation of the Working Class in Congress Matter?," *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 37, no. 1 (2012): 5–34.

96 Ibid.

97 Lynda W. Powell, "The Influence of Campaign Contributions in State Legislatures: The Effects of Institutions and Politics, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2012; Christopher Witko, "PACs, Issue Context, and Congressional Decisionmaking," *Political Research Quarterly* 59, no. 2 (2006): 283–95; and Frank R. Baumgartner, Jeffrey M. Berry, Marie Hojnacki, David C. Kimball, and Beth L. Leech, *Lobbying and Policy Change: Who Wins, Who Loses, and Why* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009).

98 Martin Gilens and Benjamin I. Page, "Testing Theories of American Politics: Elites, Interest Groups, and Average Citizens," *Perspectives on Politics* 12, no. 3 (September 2014); and Jan Rosset, Nathalie Giger, and Julian Bernauer, "More Money, Fewer Problems? Cross-Level Effects of Economic Deprivation on Political Representation," *West European Politics* 36, no. 4 (2013): 817–35; and Larry Bartels, "Economic Inequality and Political Representation," in *The Unsustainable American State* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

99 Exceptions to this rule are Austria, Denmark, Estonia, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Malta, and the Netherlands. Directorate General for Internal Policies, "Party Financing and Referendum Campaigns in EU Member States," European Parliament, 2015.

100 Julia Cage, "Even in France, Money Rules Politics," Institute for New Economic Thinking, February 15, 2018, https://www.ineteconomics.org/perspectives/blog/even-in-france-money-rules-politics.

101 Ben Knight, "Anger at German AfD's Hidden Campaign Donors," Deutsche Welle, May 7, 2017, http://www.dw.com/en/anger-at-german-afds-hidden-campaign-donors/a-38742956.

102 Kate Holton and Guy Faulconbridge, "UK Investigates Brexit Campaign Funding Amid Speculation of Russian Meddling," Reuters, November 1, 2017, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-britain-eu-investigation/uk-investigates-brexit-campaign-funding-amid-speculation-of-russian-meddling-idUSKBN1D157I; and Carole Cadwalladr, "Leave.EU, Arron Banks and New Questions About Referendum Funding," *Guardian*, April 14, 2018, https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2018/apr/14/leave-eu-arron-banks-new-question-referendum-funded-brexit-cambridge-analytica.

103 Raphael Kergueno, "Fraud and Boats: Funding European Political Parties," Transparency International EU, November 9, 2017, https://transparency.eu/boatfraud/.

104 Pippa Norris, Holly Ann Garnett, and Max Grömping, "Electoral Integrity in All 50 US States, Ranked by Experts," Vox, December 27, 2016, https://www.vox.com/the-big-idea/2016/12/24/14074762/electoral-integrity-states-gerrymandering-voter-id.

105 Jennifer S. Rosenberg with Margaret Chen, "Expanding Democracy: Voter Registration Around the World," Brennan Center for Justice, New York University School of Law, 2009, https://www.brennancenter.org/sites/default/files/legacy/publications/Expanding.Democracy.pdf, 9.

106 "U.S. Voter Turnout Trails Most Developed Countries," Pew Research Center, May 15, 2017, http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/05/15/u-s-voter-turnout-trails-most-developed-countries/.

107 "New Voting Restrictions in America," Brennan Center for Justice, accessed on April 25, 2017, http://www.brennancenter.org/new-voting-restrictions-america.

108 See, for example: Lorraine C. Minnite, *The Myth of Voter Fraud* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2011).

109 Matt A. Barreto, Stephen A. Nuno, and Gabriel R. Sanchez, "The Disproportionate Impact of Voter-ID Requirements on the Electorate—New Evidence From Indiana," *PS: Political Science & Politics* 42, no. 1 (2009): 111–16, and Zoltan Hajnal, Nazita Lajevardi, and Lindsay Nielson, "Voter Identification Laws and the Suppression of Minority Votes," *Journal of Politics* 79, no. 2 (April 2017).

110 Keith G. Bentele and Erin E. O'Brien, "Jim Crow 2.0? Why States Consider and Adopt Restrictive Voter Access Policies," *Perspectives on Politics* 11, no. 4 (December 2013): 1088–116.

111 Pema Levy, "The Voting Rights Act May Be Coming Back From the Dead," *Mother Jones*, May 8, 2017, https://www.motherjones.com/politics/2017/05/supreme-court-voting-rights-texas/.

112 "Automatic Voter Registration," Brennan Center for Justice, updated April 17, 2018, https://www.brennancenter.org/analysis/automatic-voter-registration.

113 Six states use bipartisan commissions to draw new maps without the approval of state legislatures or governors (Arizona, California, Hawaii, Idaho, New Jersey, and Washington). However, these commissions have seats specifically reserved for Democratic and Republican appointees, and some have seats reserved for nonpartisan figures. Andrew Prokop, "Gerrymandering, Explained," Vox, May 15, 2015, https://www.vox.com/cards/gerrymandering-explained/who-is-responsible-for-gerrymandering.

114 Ibid.

115 Harry Enten, "Ending Gerrymandering Won't Fix What Ails America," FiveThirtyEight, January 26, 2018, https://fivethirtyeight.com/features/ending-gerrymandering-wont-fix-what-ails-america/.

116 David Wasserman, "Hating Gerrymandering Is Easy. Fixing It Is Harder," FiveThirtyEight, January 25, 2018, https://fivethirtyeight.com/features/hating-gerrymandering-is-easy-fixing-it-is-harder/.

117 Such a standard could, for example, be based on the difference between the parties' respective wasted votes in an election, the so-called "efficiency gap." Russell Wheeler, "The Supreme Court and Partisan Gerrymandering Cases," Brookings Institution, February 28, 2018, https://www.brookings.edu/blog/unpacked/2018/02/28/the-supreme-court-and-partisan-gerrymandering-cases/.

118 Bernard Grofman and German Feierherd, "The U.S. Could Be Free of Gerrymandering. Here's How Other Countries Do Redistricting," *Washington Post,* August 7, 2017, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2017/08/07/the-supreme-court-will-soon-consider-gerrymandering-heres-how-changes-in-redistricting-could-reduce-it/?utm_term=.60ab71f12ffa.

119 Nicolas Sauger and Bernard Grofman, "Partisan Bias and Redistricting in France," *Electoral Studies* 44 (October 2016).

120 "New Constituency Boundaries for Britain 2018," Electoral Calculus, updated February 21, 2018, http://www.electoralcalculus.co.uk/boundaries2018.html.

121 Pippa Norris, Holly Ann Garnett, and Max Grömping, "Why Don't More Americans Vote? Maybe Because They Don't Trust U.S. Elections," *Washington Post*, December 26, 2016, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2016/12/26/why-dont-more-americans-vote-maybe-because-they-dont-trust-u-s-elections/?utm_term=.f08d5b5d2574.

122 Drew Desilver, "U.S. Trails Most Developed Countries in Voter Turnout," Pew Research Center, May 15, 2017, http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/05/15/u-s-voter-turnout-trails-most-developed-countries/.

123 Adam Taylor, "American Voter Turnout Is Still Lower Than Most Other Wealthy Nations," *Washington Post,* November 10, 2016, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2016/11/10/even-in-a-historic-election-americans-dont-vote-as-much-as-those-from-other-nations/?utm_term=.4e95563e87fe.

124 Ibid.; Sean McElwee, "The Income Gap at the Polls," Politico, January 7, 2015, https://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2015/01/income-gap-at-the-polls-113997.

125 Michael D. Regan, "Why Is Voter Turnout So Low in the U.S.?," *PBS,* November 6, 2016, https://www.pbs.org/newshour/politics/voter-turnout-united-states.

126 "Voter Turnout Database," International IDEA, accessed May 15, 2017, https://www.idea.int/data-tools/data/voter-turnout.

127 Abdurashid Solijonov, "Voter Turnout Trends Around the World," International IDEA, 2016, https://www.agora-parl.org/sites/default/files/voter-turnout-trends-around-the-world_0.pdf, 27.

128 Ibid.

129 Ibid.

130 Nadia Fiorino, Nicola Pontarollo, and Roberto Ricciuti, "Voter Turnout in European Parliament Elections: A Spatial Analysis," Editorial Express, 2016, https://editorialexpress.com/cgi-bin/conference/download.cgi?db_name=SIEP2016&paper_id=29; and "Turnout in European Elections," European Parliamentary Research Service, March 7, 2014, http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/bibliotheque/briefing/2014/140739/LDM_BRI(2014)140739_REV1_EN.pdf.

131 Bertelsmann Stiftung, "The Social Divide in Voter Turnout," https://www.bertelsmann-stiftung.de/en/our-projects/demokratiemonitor/project-topics/divided-democracy-the-social-divide-in-voter-turnout/.

132 Ruth Patrick, "How Poverty Makes People Less Likely to Vote," *Guardian*, May 16, 2017, https://www.theguardian.com/society/2017/may/16/poverty-election-vote-apathy; and Matthew Flinders, "Low Voter Turnout Is Clearly a Problem, but a Much Greater Worry Is the Growing Inequality of That Turnout," *British Politics and Policy* (blog), London School of Economics and Political Science, March 13, 2014, http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/politicsandpolicy/look-beneath-the-vote/.

133 Patrick Kingsley, "As West Fears the Rise of Autocrats, Hungary Shows What's Possible," *New York Times*, February 10, 2018, https://www.nytimes.com/2018/02/10/world/europe/hungary-orban-democracy-far-right.html.

134 "Hungary: Democracy Under Threat: Six Years of Attacks Against the Rule of Law," FIDH, November 2016, https://www.fidh.org/IMG/pdf/hungary_democracy_under_threat.pdf.

135 "Hungary Approves Crackdown on Foreign NGOs," Deutsche Welle, June 13, 2016, https://euobserver.com/political/125128; and Kingsley, "As West Fears Rise of Autocrats."

136 Dalibor Rohac, "Hungary and Poland Aren't Democratic. They're Authoritarian," *Foreign Policy*, February 5, 2018, http://foreignpolicy.com/2018/02/05/hungary-and-poland-arent-democratic-theyre-authoritarian/.

137 "Poland," in "Nations in Transit 2017," Freedom House, 2017, https://freedomhouse.org/report/nations-transit/2017/poland.

138 Bela Greskovits, "The Hollowing and Backsliding of Democracy in East Central Europe," *Global Policy* 6, S1 (June 2015): 28–37.

139 Ivan Krastev, "Eastern Europe's Illiberal Revolution: The Long Road to Democratic Decline," *Foreign Affairs* (May-June 2018), https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/hungary/2018-04-16/eastern-europes-illiberal-revolution.

140 Ibid.

141 Justin Salhani, "Europe's Extreme Right Is Losing Elections but Still Reshaping Politics," ThinkProgress, March 16, 2017, https://thinkprogress.org/europes-extreme-right-is-losing-elections-but-still-reshaping-politics-88b6e577fe2a/, and Simon Shuster, "European Politics Are Swinging to the Right," *Time,* September 22, 2016, http://time.com/4504010/europe-politics-swing-right/.

142 Levitsky and Ziblatt, 61.

143 "Record 60% of Europeans 'Tend Not to Trust' EU," Euractiv, July 25, 2013, https://www.euractiv.com/section/elections/news/record-60-of-europeans-tend-not-to-trust-eu/.

144 Eszter Zalan, "EU Council Is 'Black Hole' in Public Trust," EU Observer, September 29, 2016, https://euobserver.com/institutional/135300.

145 Franziska Fislage, "EU Elections—Where Are the Voters?," Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, March 2015, http://www.kas.de/wf/doc/kas_40621-544-2-30.pdf?150304143237, 2.

146 Richard Youngs, "The EU Beyond the Crisis: The Unavoidable Challenge of Legitimacy," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, October 2013, http://carnegieendowment.org/files/eu_beyond_crisis_2.pdf.

147 Kathleen R. McNamara, "The ECB Is Hampered by a Lack of Democratic Legitimacy, Despite Being Responsible for Policies Hugely Consequential for the Lives of European Citizens," European Politics and Policy (*blog*), London School of Economics and Political Science, August 3, 2012, http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/europpblog/2012/08/03/ecb-democratic-reform/.

148 Youngs, "The EU Beyond the Crisis."

149 Cécile Barbière, "European Parliament Votes Against Transnational Lists," Euractiv, February 7, 2018, https://www.euractiv.com/section/elections/news/ep-votes-against-transnational-lists/.

150 European Commission," Three Points to Take Away From the Latest 2017 Eurobarometer," Medium, December 20, 2017, https://medium.com/the-latest-eurobarometer/european-views-eu-citizens-feel-the-eu-economy-has-improved-f75300a47bbd.

151 Youngs and Manney, "Recession and Renewal in European Democracy."

Carnegie Endowment for International Peace

The **Carnegie Endowment for International Peace** is a unique global network of policy research centers in Russia, China, Europe, the Middle East, India, and the United States. Our mission, dating back more than a century, is to advance peace through analysis and development of fresh policy ideas and direct engagement and collaboration with decisionmakers in government, business, and civil society. Working together, our centers bring the inestimable benefit of multiple national viewpoints to bilateral, regional, and global issues.

The **Carnegie Democracy, Conflict, and Governance Program** rigorously examines the global state of democracy and the rule of law and international efforts to support their advance.

BEIJING   BEIRUT   BRUSSELS   MOSCOW   NEW DELHI   WASHINGTON

THE
GLOBAL
THINK TANK

CARNEGIE
ENDOWMENT FOR
INTERNATIONAL PEACE

CarnegieEndowment.org