Brösel-Politiken: Is Democracy Working in the UK and across Europe?

Stephen Balogh

DANUBE INSTITUTE

All rights reserved. Printed in Hungary. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording, or any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher.

Author: Stephen Balogh

Danube Institute Leadership

President: John O'Sullivan
Executive Director: István Kiss
Director of Research: Calum T.M. Nicholson

Designed by: Hubert Kucharski

© 2026 by the Danube Institute

March 2026

Cover: Designed by Hubert Kucharski

Image: A serene landscape painting depicts a historical site with ruins and greenery (Shutterstock)

DANUBE
INSTITUTE

Contents

About the Danube Institute iv

Acknowledgements iv

About the Author v

Abstract vi

I. Introduction 1

II. Democracy as a technical procedure 2

III. Dissatisfaction with Democracy 4

IV. Focus on the British political scene 10

V. The demos question and how it is measured 17

VI. Movement parties in contemporary politics across Europe 25

VII. Beyond democracy or differently conceived democracy? 32

VIII. Conclusions 34

IX. Policy recommendations and further research 35

Endnotes 36

DANUBE
INSTITUTE

About the Danube Institute

The Danube Institute, established in 2013 by the Batthyány Lajos Foundation in Budapest, serves as a hub for the exchange of ideas and individuals within Central Europe and between Central Europe, other parts of Europe, and the English-speaking world. Rooted in a commitment to respectful conservatism in cultural, religious, and social life, the Institute also upholds the broad classical liberal tradition in economics and a realistic Atlanticism in national security policy. These guiding principles are complemented by a dedication to exploring the interplay between democracy and patriotism, emphasising the nation-state as the cornerstone of democratic governance and international cooperation.

Through research, analysis, publication, debate, and scholarly exchanges, the Danube Institute engages with centre-right intellectuals, political leaders, and public-spirited citizens, while also fostering dialogue with counterparts on the democratic centre-left. Its activities include establishing and supporting research groups, facilitating international conferences and fellowships, and encouraging youth participation in scholarly and political discourse. By drawing upon the expertise of leading minds across national boundaries, the Institute aims to contribute to the development of democratic societies grounded in national identity and civic engagement.

Acknowledgements

First, I would like to thank the Mathias Corvinus Collegium (MCC) for the opportunity to conduct original research in this field in association with a short Visiting Fellowship in late 2025, including the opportunities to speak on the theme of Democracy in Europe to audiences in Budapest, Cluj-Napoca and, in the form of a public lecture, in Győr. In particular, I would like to thank Zsófia Csurgai, Olívia Akaró, Csilla Nagy & Roland Tardi (Budapest), Adél Prédl (Győr), Balázs Kató & Borbála Hatházy (Cluj-Napoca), Mónika Éva Mittag (Békéscsaba), fellow visiting academics Dr Radu Albu-Comanescu & Dr Iraj Azarfaza with whom I shared most enjoyable panel discussions, and of course László Krisztián and Péter Lánczi who oversaw the lot. Amongst the highlights of my visit were the many opportunities over meals to meet and talk to MCC students, all of whom are a great credit to their institution. I thank the MCC once more for its permission that an expanded version of my research work is now published under the auspices of the Danube Institute.

For the Danube Institute, I would like to thank in particular Calum Nicholson & Juan Soto for their support and expert guidance in the final shaping and presentation of this paper and to the Institute as a whole for publishing my paper. Without reservation, however, any errors remain my responsibility alone.

Stephen Balogh
London, March 2026

About the Author

Stephen Balogh is London-based Chairman of the UK's Social Democratic Party. He is an active advocate of ideas and policies promoting national solidarity in the face of encroaching sectarianism, including through his association with the New Culture Forum think-tank as freelance publications editor and previously as National Organiser of its country-wide NCF Locals movement. He also takes an active interest in sociopolitical trends that threaten the notion and health of the family, part of which as a Trustee of research organisation Family Education Trust. Aside from these, Stephen brings his extensive business experience to community-based non-profits and voluntary associations. In autumn 2025 Stephen was a Visiting Fellow at the Matthias Corvinus Collegium, which provided the opportunity for research that has formed the basis of the Danube Institute publication he has recently authored. Whilst regrettably not fully bilingual, Stephen's Hungarian parentage often draws him to Budapest and beyond.

Brösel-Politiken: Is Democracy Working in the UK and across Europe?

Stephen Balogh

Abstract

Adopting Germany's 'Brösel-Brücken' (crumbling bridges) crisis as a metaphor for 'Brösel-Politiken' (broken politics), this paper examines whether democracy is functioning effectively in the UK and across Europe. The thesis posits that, while democratic machinery operates technically well according to indices like those of the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) and V-Dem, widespread citizen dissatisfaction reveals analytical shortfalls in conventional frameworks, particularly in recognizing collective national interests. The core argument critiques the EIU's five 'deficits' (equality, party, choice, ideas, citizenship) as asymmetrically focused on atomized individuals, neglecting a nationality-based demos (or '*demos of the nation*') emphasising high-trust cohesion and demographic sustainability. Drawing on academic sources (e.g., Ford & Jennings on cleavages; Koenig-Archibugi on demos conceptions) and UK/European surveys, it proposes a new 'National Interest deficit' category to remedy this normative bias, promoting balanced analysis that would improve explanatory value especially in respect of the rising populist movements on TAN and GAL axes. In conclusion, introducing this category enhances explanatory power, elites are advised to embrace national solidarity and challenger parties urged to prepare for competent governance. Policy recommendations include EIU adoption of the new democratic deficit category, with further research on how it might be made operational in practice.

I. Introduction

In 2024, a section of the Carola Bridge in Dresden, Germany, suddenly collapsed into the River Elbe. Fortunately, no-one was killed or injured because it happened at night. Early the following year, a major Berlin ring-road bridge had to be closed suddenly for similar reasons.

These and many similar failures spotlighted Germany's 'Brösel-Brücken' (crumbling bridges)[1] crisis and they duly became election flashpoints, legacy parties blaming each other for under-investment; Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) dubbed it 'creeping state failure'.[2]

Politics is often characterized as 'building bridges'. Thus, it seems suitable to adopt *Brösel-Brücken* as a metaphor for '*Brösel-Politiken*', or 'broken politics' in an examination of whether democratic politics is in good health or broken. Is there 'creeping state failure' or are there other reasons for disquiet? How is contemporary debate being framed, and whose voices are being heard? What remedies might be considered for such crumbling politics? (In passing, the crumbling infrastructure motif is of course not confined to Germany, but it did happen to be in that country that it became an inflammatory political topic.)

An unexpected but central proposition emerges: that citizens (voters), on the one hand, are considered in conventional macro-analytical terms to be atomized individuals and, on the other hand, are increasingly underserved in established political representation as traditional party politics narrows; many now feel dispossessed politically. Further investigation gives rise to the proposal of a new analytical category dubbed 'National Interest deficit' that recognizes a *demos of the nation*, and further discussion about the reciprocal nature of the government and the governed. Various country surveys across Europe provide practical illustrations.

A hybrid methodological framework has been developed, reflecting the variety of sources used. The basic analytical framework, which draws on both peer-reviewed papers and well established and respected journalistic publications, is supplemented with other sources for elaboration, exploration and probing[3].

The author's political stance as Party Chairman of the UK's Social Democratic Party is also employed selectively and transparently, particularly in the discussion about the role of an effective and competent government and its relationship with the people.

While the paper is intended to be pertinent for European countries in general, its heaviest emphasis is on the United Kingdom. This in part reflects the practical bounding of scope within a vast field of study but also the shaping of the original research remit and target audiences[4]. At the end of the paper, opportunities for follow-on research are outlined.

II. Democracy as a technical procedure

First, then, how might the machinery of democracy be measured? Typical indicators are delivery of accountable governance, broad participation and protection of political rights. In its most recent annual report[5], the UK-based Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) ranks every country using a combined category score of between 0 and 10: 8 and above for 'full democracy', 6 to 8 'flawed democracy', 4 to 6 'hybrid regime', below that, 'authoritarian'.

Almost all countries in Europe score in the top categories and are judged to be in good or reasonably good health, with only Bosnia & Herzegovina, Georgia and Turkey marked as 'hybrid' and Russia and Ukraine 'authoritarian'. In 2024 Romania was demoted to 'hybrid' on account of the abrupt cancellation of its presidential election.

The Sweden-based Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) institute has a similar scale and broadly comparable results. Its 2024 report[6] places Russia, Serbia, Turkey and Ukraine in the category of 'Electoral Autocracies' (akin to the EIU's 'hybrid regime') and 'Belarus' a 'Closed Autocracy'. A 'grey area' group includes certain Balkan nations. According to V-Dem, Hungary is also an Electoral Autocracy, which is touched on briefly later in the paper.[7] Overall, then, with exceptions noted, democracy is demonstrably working in Europe on a *technical* level. According to V-Dem, all is explained: certain black-marked countries must become slightly less authoritarian, but otherwise all is in order.

This, however, poses a rather large question: if democratic political machinery is largely in good health, why are the peoples of Europe plainly dissatisfied?

Night view of the illuminated building of the hungarian parliament in Budapest (Shutterstock)

III. Dissatisfaction with Democracy

The study of increasing general citizen dissatisfaction is not new. In the same EIU publication, its 'What's wrong with representative democracy?'[8] analysis plots growing citizen dissatisfaction for 50 years or more but with acceleration from the 1990s and again after around 2005.

Ironically, despite 2024's record election activity comprising four billion voters in 70 countries, dissatisfaction surged from 49% to 64% in 12 high-income nations, for which the biggest change among European countries was in the UK.[9]

To quote the EIU report: 'Citizens have a low opinion of their country's leaders, political parties and the overall state of democracy, providing "a relatively grim picture of the political mood in many nations"'.[10] Why do they think this is the case? The EIU's list provides a starting point for deeper analysis:

- Declining trust in government, exacerbated by concerns over corruption even in mature democracies
- Bias against ordinary people in favour of elites
- Widening economic gap, for instance from inflation
- Increased social and political inequalities, with special interest
- Poorer prospects for future generations
- Failure of politicians and political parties to address voters' concerns

The EIU breaks down its diagnosis further into five categories of what it refers to as 'deficits':

Equality deficit: The main axis measuring economic discontent, driven by actual and perceived wealth disparities and/or income insecurity, for instance from price inflation or asset price bubbles. Increased capital concentration can empower sectional lobby groups, potentially destabilizing democratic transmission.

Party deficit: Disconnection from old voter bases, including class connections, owing to social and cultural change, professionalization of parties and politicians, and oriented solely towards the state and its governing institutions.

Choice deficit: Gradual erasure of traditional political dividing lines and a convergence to the political centre. Factors include: collapse of communism, discrediting of alternative models such as of the left, growing influence of theories of global governance, expansion of the EU project, and an enhanced role in national policymaking of international organisations such as the World Bank and the IMF.

Ideas deficit: Old certainties dissolved and the West's Cold War victory; strife-ridden, partisan politics of the 1960s to 1980s replaced by 'third way' technocratic and managerial government lacking bold ideas and with policy making sub-contracted away from the direct control of politicians either upwards to the EU or downwards to other agencies. In short, depoliticization of the political arena and atrophying of political narrative.

Citizenship deficit: To quote the EIU directly: '… the quality of democracy is also defined by the character of its citizens … [and] its legitimacy and effectiveness ultimately depends on how representative of the nation's citizens it really is.'

Each of these categories is explored further below, but they are later supplemented by a proposed new category intended to remedy an analytical shortfall in the EIU explanatory scheme, one whose absence reveals a tendency amongst EIU, V-Dem and other 'democracy watchers' to veer into the normative.

Before beginning a deeper exploration, it is worth drawing a little on the work of Italian philosopher Norberto Bobbio, especially in *Liberalism and Democracy* (1990). Bobbio shines a light on some of the ground to be covered in this paper by examining the essential tension between, on the one hand, liberalism's emphasis on limiting power and protection of individual rights and freedoms and, on the other hand, democracy's central concern with popular sovereignty – the majority or 'the people' – and its demand for equality.[11] As this paper's analysis progresses, echoes of this juxtaposition will become apparent.

To pursue the exploration, there follow some remarks on the ideas deficit which, by extension, includes a deficit in articulation of a compelling narrative.

Without attempting to be too comprehensive, over the past few decades three secular, West-originating grand narratives have been competing for attention and credibility.

First, American philosopher Professor Francis Fukuyama suggested in his 1992 essay *The End of History?*[12] that, following the fall of Soviet communism, the universal appeal and global triumph of liberal democracy and free-market capitalism signalled the 'end of history': no alternative system could mount a viable challenge.

A stable, if uninspiring, era of democratic consensus would ensue. Fukuyama has along the way recognized setbacks in his claim as quite different circumstances have come to pass and modified his ideas.

In response to Fukuyama, Professor Samuel Huntington in an article entitled *The Clash of Civilizations?*[13] proposed that, far from a universal peace, global conflicts would continue, mainly along cultural and civilizational fault lines rather than ideological or national ones, leading to a multipolar world of civilizational blocs. Attempts by the West to champion universalist notions such as promotion of democracy, human rights, individualism and free markets would lead to antagonism, tension and resistance on the part of Islam and other particularist blocs. Arguably, this is exactly what did happen post-9/11 in various Western Neocon misadventures.

Marxism is the third grand narrative, in which human history advances by means of class struggle driven by economic contradictions, culminating in capitalism's inevitable collapse and, through revolutionary praxis, overthrow by the proletariat in favour of a classless, stateless communist society.

The so-called post-modern age post-1960s has, however, brought with it the attempted debunking of all grand narratives, together with any constituent explanatory force.[14] This sceptical turn has made it harder for many to trust politicians who attempt to deploy such big, sweeping narratives; harder indeed to address the central importance of *legitimization* and thus consent, which all political authority must seek if not to rule as authoritarian despot. One traditional path to legitimacy is via a compelling narrative.

To illustrate this, the European Union in its search for popular legitimization has attempted to create its own grand narrative. François Foret in his book *The European Union in Search of Narratives*[15] has catalogued the EU's search for meaning and legitimacy through connective story-telling. Invoking the book's subtitle of ' Disenchanted Europe', Foret relates the EU's attempts at narratives of a 'Europe of *rights*', 'Europe of *values*' and 'European *way of life*'. All such attempts have foundered because, in his words:

> "As an elite-driven political process relying largely on technocracy and with limited symbolic resources, the EU is not really expected to be prone to the production of narratives and even less to explicit dynamics of sacralization to gain support from the masses."[16]

By 'sacralization', Foret means imbuing with religious or quasi-religious meaning, which would also apply to quasi-metaphysical notions such as a 'people' or the act of 'nation-building'. Attempting to decode Foret's careful words, it would seem that by its nature the EU will always have trouble closing the narrative deficit and legitimization via that route. Instead, the EU takes comfort where it can, for instance with a recent Eurobarometer survey[17] indicating that trust by the populations within its perimeter had finally reached 50%. While a worthy milestone, it does mean almost half do not wish to express that they trust the EU.[18]

Retaining in the background Foret's observation about elites, technocracy, limited symbolic resources and sacralization, the changing nature of the relationship between national elites and the citizens of their own countries forms the next area of examination. This involves a turn to academic research and three sample sources looking into 'cleavage politics' or, put simply, political affiliation.

In the first, Ford and Jennings question how shifts in party systems reflect underlying socio-economic changes.[19] They argue that traditional cleavages, e.g., class or religion, are declining while new ones have been emerging, driven by four main structural transformations: (1) expansion of higher education giving rise to education-based cleavages and pro-globalization attitudes; (2) population ageing and generational divides, with value priorities shifting over time; (3) geographical segregation between globalized cities and declining rural areas, exacerbating urban-rural polarization; (4) mass migration and ethnic diversity, polarizing electorates along so-called inclusion/exclusion lines.

Rome, Italy. Ancient statue in the gardens of Farnese on the Palatine hill (Shutterstock)

8

As Ford and Jennings argue, declining traditional alignments increase volatility and fragmentation, challenge mainstream parties and heighten the likelihood of populist sentiment. The overall result could be to undermine overall democratic stability. They also cover a 'second dimension' of ideological shifts, for which a further two sources are introduced.

In the second, Guth & Nelsen[20] look at the rise of populist parties in Europe. While traditional left-right divides – based on class and religion – endure to some extent, a new 'transnational cleavage' has emerged, with left- and right-wing populists aligned against centrist establishment parties.

Both challenge liberal post-materialism – right populists on cultural grounds, e.g. opposing multiculturalism, left on economic ones, e.g. anti-capitalism. Underlying influences are the effects of globalization, economic insecurity and cultural transformations; together they foster anti-elite, anti-pluralist sentiments.

Right-wing variants, e.g., France's National Rally, Austria's Freedom Party, appeal to young, working-class, less-educated, male voters who are religiously detached, economically pessimistic, distrustful of governments and the EU, and anti-immigrant.

Left-wing counterparts, e.g. Greece's Syriza, Spain's Podemos, attract even younger, lower-status demographics, sharing economic woes and elite hostility but favouring redistribution and exhibiting milder anti-immigration views.

In the third source, Gethin, Clara Martínez-Toledano and Piketty[21] concentrate on Western democracies, including four in the non-European Anglosphere and using data series going back to 1948. The main change has seen a shift from *class-based* systems – where left parties drew low-income/low-education support and right parties high-income/high-education – to a '*multi-elite*' model.

Here, the so-called 'Brahmin Left' (comprising high-education voters favouring sociocultural liberalism and echoing Foret's technocratic elite, the word 'Brahmin' denoting the highest and most privileged of the traditional caste structure in India) dominates left-wing coalitions, while the 'merchant right' (high-income voters prioritizing market deregulation) bolsters conservatives, exacerbating inequality by sidelining working-class demands.

Socio-cultural polarisation has thus been amplified, fuelled by green and anti-immigration parties.

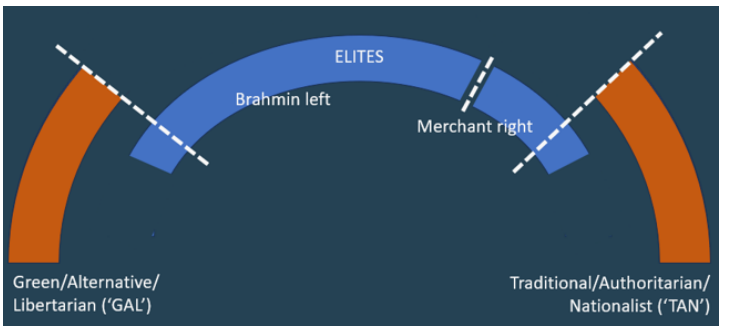
Their conclusions warn that this education-income disconnect hinders redistribution even amidst rising inequality. They also note the general leftward shift amongst women[22].

While these sources are between three and six years old and much has happened with populist parties since, the thrust of their conclusions remains both valid and fundamentally complementary to each other: traditional right and left parties have become the domain of different elites, freezing out the less well-off and/or the less educated, the latter a rough analogue of the old working class.

Particularly in respect of younger generations, their disenfranchisement from the traditional centrist parties attracts them to populist parties on the left and right albeit, pace Ford and Jennings, higher educated voters are increasingly attracted to the populist left (sometimes known as Green/Alternative/Libertarian, or GAL, from a scheme first proposed in 2002 by Hooghe and Marks[23]), which is also consistent with the general leftward shift noted by Gethin et al.

How, then, do political and governmental elites map onto the distribution of citizens? Adopting shorthand labelling, the Merchant Right, Brahmin Left and Green/Alternative/Libertarian segments are well represented amongst the elites, but the populist right (sometimes known as Traditional/Authoritarian/Nationalist, or TAN) is typically grossly under-represented.[24] This is illustrated in a simple conceptual model shown in *Figure 1*.

Figure 1: GAL-TAN model



Mainstream right-of-centre parties might shift towards the TAN group in an attempt to attract their vote, but they do this at the risk of loss of party cohesion from the centre, as per a 2021 paper by Michael Bayerlein.[25] Indeed, many traditional 'broad church' parties across Europe can be observed as close to ideological breaking point in their attempts to stretch.

Summarizing this section on citizen disaffection: with the loss of grand narratives, politicians have resorted to technocratic appeals to efficiency or to abstract values, which is also part of a broader trend towards convergence amongst mainstream parties; meanwhile, old party affiliations and elite preferences have shifted owing to major socioeconomic and ideological changes, leaving large numbers of citizens politically stranded and potentially attracted to rising populist parties, as a result loosening ties with traditional structures and leading to greater democratic volatility and electoral instability.

Recalling the EIU categories of *Equality* deficit, *Party* deficit, *Choice* deficit, *Ideas* deficit and *Citizenship* deficit, in this part of the paper certain academically derived explanatory factors have been mapped onto the middle three (*Party, Choice, Ideas*); observations on the *Equality* deficit and *Citizenship* deficit are made in the next section.

Big Ben at blue hour in London, UK (Shutterstock)

IV. Focus on the British political scene

To set the context for subsequent analysis, a brief description of the British political scene follows[26].

For the Westminster parliament, a general election must be called at least every five years, with the timing decided in normal times by the Prime Minister with the (constitutionally uncontested) agreement of the King.[27] The electoral system is known as *First Past The Post*: every parliamentary constituency is fought separately and won by whoever gains the most votes. There are no party lists: each Member of Parliament represents a specific geographical area. To reach a majority, a party requires at least 326 out of the 650. Of the last hundred years, some 69 have seen majority governments, 12 minority governments and 19 coalitions.[28]

This system essentially encourages two-party hegemony at national level,[29] with most coalition building taking place *within* a party rather than *across* parties. Regional parties exist in Scotland and Wales (both embodying secessionist sentiment) and the centrist Liberal Democrat Party has a strong presence in south-west England, all eating into the totals of the two hitherto principal (Conservative and Labour) parties and making achievement of a single-party majority more challenging than under a pure binary.

Especially considering the 360 or so registered political parties[30], achieving the scale and heft necessary to replace one of the top two parties is immensely difficult. The most recent such case occurred in the 1920s, when the Labour Party pushed out the Liberal Party. In the 1980s, Labour was nearly displaced by the Social Democratic Party but despite 50%+ opinion polls it failed to reach the tipping point in the 1983 general election, momentum – and Margaret Thatcher's Falklands victory – then moving against it.

A recently rising challenger party, led by veteran political campaigner Nigel Farage, is Reform UK. Its polling of between 28 and 32% translates into projections of a strong parliamentary force crushing both the Conservative and Labour parliamentary numbers. Yet there are signs of 'anything but Farage' electoral alliances and likely tactical voting designed to deaden the impact when the next general election comes in 2029, and indeed sooner in by-elections and local council elections.[31]

The analytical framework and conceptual model outlined in Part III can be deployed to explore further the British political scene.

There is a very significant 'Brahmin Left' elite that dominates Labour's centre of power but is also influential in the Conservative, Liberal Democrat parties and Scottish and Welsh nationalist parties, and indeed in governmental institutions generally.[32]

The result is a very large number of citizens now disconnected from the traditional parties, both in a broad Traditional/Authoritarian/Nationalist grouping and in a Green/Alternative/Libertarian grouping (in this paper generally preferring TAN-GAL terminology to right-left labelling). The established parties are in danger of losing these vast groupings entirely; previous loyalties and trust have been damaged almost beyond repair by broken electoral hopes over the last 10 to 15 years, including but not limited to elite attempts to overturn the 2016 Brexit referendum result.

As well as ideological concentration within the Brahmin Left, new structural divides have been emerging across society replacing class- and to some extent religion-based identities. These structural movements have affected Britain deeply:

- Higher education, especially for those who have attended university in the past 15 years or so, is a very strong identifier of attitude differences.
- Age and generation are correlated, even if affected by the other structural considerations.
- Urban-rural polarization is extreme, particularly between the main metropolitan areas and university towns on the one hand, and rural areas and smaller towns on the other hand.
- Mass migration and ethnic diversity are major factors.

These developments strongly reinforce each other and cannot be kept completely separate. Together, they have contributed to major societal changes[33] and, with them, political polarisation.

Those factors relating to mass immigration and demographic change[34] have undoubtedly contributed in recent years to the vastly expanded Traditional/ Authoritarian/Nationalist – TAN – grouping that has rejected established political parties in favour of populists, or indeed disengaged from democratic politics entirely. However, the spin-out to the edges of conventional political parties and beyond is not confined to the TAN wing. At the other end of the political spectrum, the Green/Alternative/Libertarian – GAL – axis is also becoming observably more attractive.

Taking the two together, a brief summary might be ventured on the two 'democratic deficits' of the EIU scheme not so far commented on:

Citizenship deficit

For a long time, formal membership of the main political parties and general civic involvement had been reducing, but the new populist parties on both TAN and GAL wings are enjoying a sharp increase in membership, as well as many new mass political movements looking to wield influence. There is also increasing use of online-based engagement methods such as issue-based campaign participation and petitions.

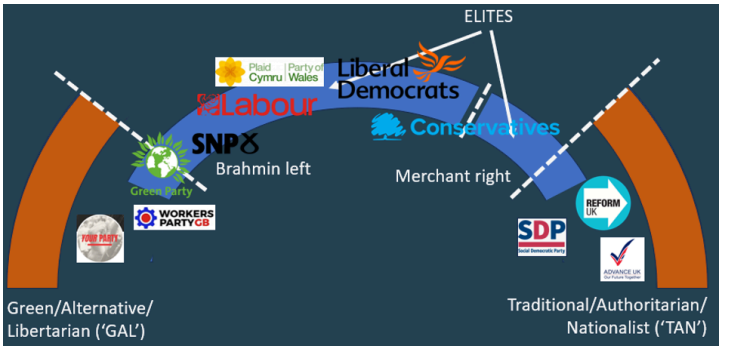
Equality deficit

The various structural changes in society have resulted in both groupings being marginalized financially and further alienated from the ruling Brahmin Left. For an increasing number (principally on the GAL wing), the Marxist grand narrative mentioned earlier carries a fresh attraction to those looking for total economic and social rupture. For others (the TAN wing), the equality deficit might be expressed in terms of a view of societal rupture arising from demographic and cultural changes enforced in unequal terms.

British politics in the GAL-TAN model

While this then brings to completion a brief running commentary on the five EIU thematic groups of deficit, it does not necessarily provide a complete explanatory framework; in particular, as will be argued, its overall explanatory value might be considered *asymmetric* between GAL (relatively complete) and TAN (radically incomplete) groupings. This asymmetry will be explored further in *Figure 2.*

Figure 2: GAL-TAN Model with UK political parties



As a result of the citizenship and equality deficits – of course differently conceived by the two wings – the breaking of old norms within the contemporary political scene in Britain can be observed occurring in real time: broad coalition building within the old large parties is being replaced by contestation from outside by challenger parties such as: Reform UK; Advance UK, effectively a splinter party from Reform UK; the now populist Green Party; the Workers' Party of Great Britain; a new radical left party known as 'Your Party' with nascent characteristics fusing radical leftism with political Islam; a growing number of Muslim-identified Independent MPs; the Social Democratic Party that after its 1980s heyday and a long period of quiet is growing again. All of them can be said to fit broadly into TAN-GAL groupings.[35]

This flourishing of political parties has by no means come from nowhere. It forms part of an upsurge in grass roots movements over the past two decades across European countries. Academic studies generally refer to these as 'movement parties', following Herbert Kitschelt.[36] Many but by no means all are explicitly connected with a registered political party.

In his original 2006 paper, Kitschelt used the following definition: 'Movement parties are coalitions of political activists who emanate from social movements and try to mobilize the energy and resources of social movements in electoral competition, while simultaneously maintaining the mobilizing capacity and radical discourse of a social movement.'[37] In brief, they are seen to have three main attributes:

- Low Investment in formal organizational structures: unbureaucratic, grass-roots, high autonomy for leaders over members
- Narrow programmatic focus: limited set of salient, often 'neglected' issues or pertaining to minority groupings or to trans-national concerns.
- High involvement in contentious action: protests, high profile social media campaigns, often emerging in contexts of rapid socio-structural change or neglected issues

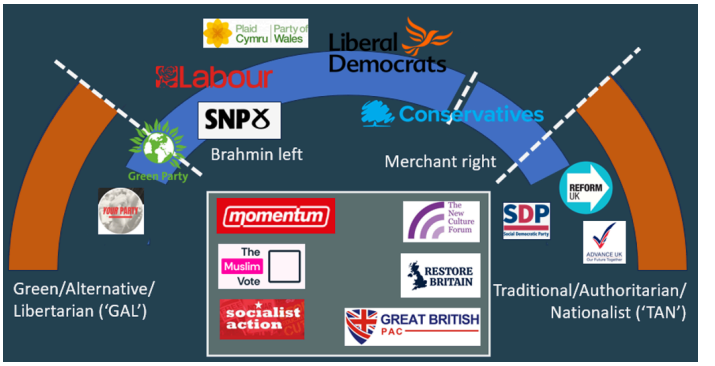
Three principal traits derived from Kitschelt can form a simple evaluation framework, those being *issue focus*, *participatory structure* and whether an organization *acts as a 'bridge'* to a political party structure.

Further, they can be used in combination with the conceptual model (see *Figure 3*) to extend analysis of the contemporary British political scene to include selected non-political party movement parties. The selection comprises:

- Momentum: a grassroots socialist pressure group founded in 2015 to support Jeremy Corbyn's leadership and push the Labour Party leftward.
- The Muslim Vote: a non-partisan pressure group launched in December 2023 recommending general election candidates based on scoring against an 18-point 'contract' on Gaza, Islamophobia and public services.
- Socialist Action: a secretive Trotskyist micro-group that practises deep entryism inside the Labour Party.
- New Culture Forum: a small-c conservative think-tank founded in 2006 to defend the merits of western civilisation and challenge 'woke' orthodoxies in media, academia, and the arts.
- Restore Britain: a member-led movement founded in summer 2025 by independent (ex-Reform) MP Rupert Lowe and aiming through policy research to influence the so-called patriotic vote[38].
- Great British PAC: launched in 2024 to draft ready-to-pass constitution repeal laws, fund legal challenges and unite Tories and Reform behind a single 'British-first' agenda.

This non-exhaustive set illustrates something of how busy and arguably rich is the emerging ecosystem on the fringes of the democratic sphere.

Figure 3: Conceptural Elites/GAL-TAN model with the addition of selected non-political party ' movement parties'



With limited space here, brief observations follow on different approaches being taken between them in relation to the Kitschelt-derived traits[39].

The Greens, Momentum and Your Party

The Green Party[40] has over time capitalized on its grass-roots activism to gain a parliamentary presence. In the UK this has been through a two-pronged approach of traditional middle class eco-concerns and radical eco-activism in progressive urban strongholds.

They have taken full advantage of the movement party zeitgeist, but this has been hugely turbocharged in recent months following the appointment of a new leader, Zack Polanski. In doing so, to coin one commentator's observation,[41] they have supplemented Gaia with another three Gs: Gaza, Greta and gender politics, supplemented by hard-left economic demands such as for a wealth tax.

Momentum is a movement devoted almost entirely to the promotion of hard-left policies *within* the Labour party[42]. In that respect, and especially with Labour experiencing electoral adversity, the Greens are a major challenge, as is the 'Your Party'.

Both Greens and Momentum could be described as 'full service' movement parties, the main difference being that the Greens are vertically integrated whereas Momentum is a 'feeder' movement.

Meanwhile, the recently launched 'Your Party'[43] has entered a now quite crowded radical, progressive field that is also broadly friendly to voiced concerns of Muslim citizens.

Nigel Farage, Leader of the Reform Party, London, UK (Shutterstock)

While both they and the Greens will obviously look to produce a full policy slate, there will be an interesting dynamic about the extent to which they dial down their mass movement emphasis. They may well also end up in local electoral pacts to see off Reform, and indeed Labour, perhaps in conjunction with others.

Constrast with Reform UK and the SDP

Evaluated against exclusively movement party traits, both Reform UK[44] and the SDP[45] fall short. Neither is an edgy movement prone to street demonstrations. Nigel Farage has always worked through registered political parties and high-profile social media. The SDP's main focus is on serious policy development.

Reform UK, Advance UK and Restore Britain

Reform UK has grown rapidly without a movement party to feed it (albeit with a political legacy from, respectively, the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) and direct forerunner the Brexit Party) and has now established a local branch structure. Advance UK[46], launched in late 2025 by ex-Reform Deputy Leader Ben Habib, arises most recently out of experience gained from the GB-PAC movement Habib also founded.

An interesting contrast is the extent to which he is also attempting to appeal explicitly to loose groupings who self-declare their political homelessness but whom the establishment – and indeed Reform UK – would consider *outré*.[47] Restore Britain, the political party newly launched out of the movement party of the same name at the time or finalizing this paper (mid-February 2026), will now be similarly vying with Advance UK for reach and influence.

The extent to which these two remain distinct political entities or choose some fashion of collaboration or merger is a matter of intense conjecture, further illustrating the dynamic creativity observable within contemporary British politics.

Focusing radical action through the Palestine Solidarity Committee

Participatory structures can involve indirect as well as direct means. The Palestine Solidarity Committee, which has been masterminding large-scale demonstrations as well as much other campaigning on behalf of Palestine and Gaza, (a) is heavily influenced by the tiny Socialist Action group including through appointees to its controlling group[48], (b) is supported through Momentum-influenced Labour channels[51], (c) has the Green Party[50] as an affiliate, (d) shares common aims with The Muslim Vote through inclusion in its the latter's high level pledges[51] that feed through into its 18-point candidate 'contract', and (e) has a long-time association with Jeremy Corbyn[52] and other proto-leaders of the new Your Party. Particularly for Socialist Action, this represents enormous leverage.

The Muslim Vote

The Muslim Vote[53] credibly claimed at the 2024 general election the mobilization of four million voters with an information and voting campaign, recommending for each constituency the candidate most sympathetic to Muslim interests alongside other broader concerns. It is effectively inviting a bidding war amongst Labour, Your Party, Green and sometimes Independent candidates for the highest compliance with its 18-point contract.[54]

Democratic resilence

Other such movement parties will likely appear and develop over time, forming new and often effective channels for engagement of citizens and especially for specific issues. While the examples used in this part are all fundamentally oriented towards existing institutional democracy, mention will be made in Part VII of one that is not.

By all accounts, this thriving and creative political ecosystem should indicate that democracy is in rude health in Britain: fresh and dynamic democratic party affinities are increasingly available, collectively vying amongst each other and the established parties to address the democratic deficit. Concern is, however, often voiced about the extent to which they enrich – as opposed to threaten – democracy.

One recent representative study is by Borbáth and Paxton, looking at 95 movement parties on the right since 2000.[55] Their conclusion appears to be that, while not easily categorized, all are to be seen as incipient threats requiring the bolstering of democratic resilience. V-Dem reported an 85% successful 'bounce back' from political crises between 2010 and 2023, seen to embody such threats, using institutional stress-absorption such as the judiciary.[56]

Academic study into the notion of democratic resilience has given rise to a number of contributions to the field in recent years. One such is 'Democratic resilience in Europe – and its limits,[57] in which Youngs and Panchilidze assess threats and resilience counter-measures against what is generally termed ' autocratization', defined more or less as exclusively coming from the right. To quote from their conclusion:

> "In the most recent period, negative assessments have revolved mainly around the far-right. In this, Europe shows some distinctiveness: while rightist-populist leaders have led illiberal political trends elsewhere too, other challenges and factors have been more prominent in driving democracy's troubles in other regions of the world. The unresolved question is whether the far-right is a body punch that European democracy has largely absorbed – bloodied and swaying but still standing – or is still potentially a knock-out blow. The resilience framework helps shed light on this much-debated topic, suggesting that it would appear *both* overly alarmist to suggest the far-right is on the cusp of autocratizing Europe *and* unwise to discount entirely the possibility of such dramatic assault at some point."[58]

The increasingly trans-national nature of movement parties, particularly on the leftist GAL wing, is also the subject of academic study, for instance as catalogued by Fominaya[59] and echoing earlier work by della Porta et al.[60] Together, they examine how left-leaning movements have in general been in the vanguard of the use of online presence and digital tools.

While recognizing the ever-present possibility of a rise in autocratic tendencies (not excluding from the right) along with the importance of mitigation in response, an observation might be made relating to the frequently strident tenor of this genre when considering subjects associated with the 'far right', leaving it open to the suggestion of an underlying normative tendency on the part of academics in this field.[61]

Such asymmetric concern may be another symptom of the same underlying challenge: why are the people so dissatisfied in the face of healthy democratic machinery? This poses the question of who are 'the people', a question raised in the next part.

Oliver Cromwell statue outside Westminster Hall, Houses of Parliament, London, UK (Shutterstock)

V. The demos question and how it is measured

So far, no attempt has been made to define what and who in fact comprises 'the people'. Before examining this in more detail below, a return is made to one of the cleavage disruptors previosuly touched on, that of mass immigration.

In the United Kingdom, the category of 'White British' is by now a minority in the major cities of London, Leicester and Birmingham, while the overall figure for England and Wales is 75%, down from 80% in 10 years.[62] In London it is 41% and, in parts of west London, less than a quarter.[63] Of the 61 million officially registered living in England and Wales in June 2023, 19% were born in a different country, of which 6% were from EU countries and 13% from non-EU countries.[64]

According to updated modelling from mid-2025[65], demographic trends suggest that the category of White British will become a minority of the UK population by the mid-2060s. Even if this projection is overstated, it amounts to large-scale changes in the composition of the UK's population at unprecedented speed. The notion of 'the people' in or of the UK is transforming year by year.

This brings to the fore a matter that so far has been at best tacit: that of *demos*, its definition[66] and its practical composition. It also raises consideration of whether there is an inherent gap in conventional analytical schemes – let alone in the nature of the relationship between the *demos* and government plus democratic institutions – that might limit the completeness and coherence of their explanatory power.

In simple terms, the default premise for categorization of a *demos* is 'anyone who has – or, by whatever criteria, should have – the vote'. Two studies assist with further exploration, between them exploring different sets of dimensions.

First, in his 2020 paper entitled 'Who are the People?'[67], Koenig-Archibugi addresses this question by outlining five approaches in principle to defining the *demos* ('conceptions') at a nation-state level: agnostic, nationality, legal subjection, coercion and all-affected[68]. Koenig-Archibugi's entry for the nationality principle, including an embedded quotation from Miller, reads as follows[69]:

> ''While several versions of nationalist theory exist, they share the contention that the boundaries of demos should coincide with the boundaries of nations, understood as collectives of individuals sharing a national identity. In identifying national identities, some nationalists privilege 'objective' factors, such as language, whereas other nationalists stress their 'subjective' nature, maintaining that 'a nationality exists when its members believe that it does'.[70] But even subjectivist nationalists such as David Miller maintain that
>
> '[n]ational divisions must be natural ones; they must correspond to real differences between peoples. This need not, fortunately, imply racism or the idea that the group is constituted by biological descent. The common traits can be cultural in character: they can consist in shared values, shared tastes or sensibilities.'[71]
>
> ''This argument implies that each 'national community' can establish its own membership criteria – ethnic, civic and so on – provided that all members identify with a 'public culture' that is external to each person taken individually. For a nationalist, then, a country possesses a properly constituted demos when its citizens or residents share a national identity, whichever specific criteria for identity are applied in the country in question. A country where this is not the case would not qualify as fully democratic, insofar as it fails to foster national self-determination through measures such as assimilation, secession or autonomy for territorially concentrated minorities, or in other ways."

This passage has been quoted in full because – whilst other definitions of a nationality-based *demos* undoubtedly abound – it elaborates several prospective demarcations while rehearsing arguments between them succinctly. It also recognizes the inherently subjective (normative) nature of defining such a *demos* and some of its more contentious considerations[72].Of the other four conceptions of *demos*, the agnostic principle is of particular interest here: as Koenig-Archibugi describes it and with original attribution to Joseph Schumpeter, 'the demos simply consists of those who have voting rights and who, de facto, rule'.[73]

This obviously appears in sharp contrast to the nature of a nationality-based *demos*, even if in practice with a high overlap in actual membership. The agnostic-based *demos* is of interest because, as per Koenig-Archibugi, it is the default in analytical terms: the franchise is quite literally the only criterion for inclusion in the *demos*.

Of additional interest is that the main purpose of Koenig-Archibugi's paper is to examine the attempt by democracy watcher V-Dem (which we encountered in Part II) to accommodate different measures of demos in its analytical framework: according to Koenig-Archibugi, 'the V-Dem project seems to privilege an agnostic position of a Schumpeterian kind'[74]. In concluding his paper following an examination of V-Dem's praiseworthy attempts at least to recognize different flavours of demos and to propose improvements to its methodology, Koenig-Archibugi highlights his laudable overarching objective, which is 'to increase awareness among political researchers that *making assumptions about the demos is inevitable*, and that it is better to address such assumptions explicitly and systematically than to leave them implicit' (italics in the original).[75]

That simple statement by Koenig-Archibugi bears repeating: *making assumptions about the demos is inevitable*. In other words, the universal default of 'those with the right to vote' is a normative supposition that is fundamentally important to expose – and, in certain situations, to challenge. Such a challenge, as discussed later, must also apply to the nature of the relationship between the government and governed. Having established a dichotomy between an agnostic-based and nationality-based conception of the *demos*, an entirely different dimension is now considered through the work of van Asseldonk.

In his paper, 'Democracy without Demos',[76] van Asseldonk uses his work on the notion of 'peoplehood' as a category of 'prefigurative politics'[77] to arrive at a characterisation of the *demos* that is entirely fluid inasmuch as it has no requirement at all for *a priori* form or definition, whether metaphysically or ontologically fixed:

> "In terms of a conceptual approach to the demos in the absence of possible metaphysical foundations, then, *being* the *demos* means *doing* the *demos*, and *doing* the *demos* means acting *as if* one is the *demos*, which effectively amounts to *taking* the entitlement to act as the *demos*."

In other words, any set of individuals who consciously wish to act together in some fashion (with a certain intention about how society might be lived in the future) becomes a *demos* by dint simply of acting in that way.

Without wishing to mischaracterize or belittle the notion, what amounts to *demotic collective self-ID* might be recognized in the ready, prolific and multifarious formation of 'movement parties' described in Part IV, perhaps most pertinently in their embryonic state before the later onset of greater formality.

Such a *demos* grouping that is consciously unanchored ontologically would seem to be the apotheosis of a nationality-based *demos* whose primary motivation is to remain ontologically anchored to a particular place and history (and indeed people). Thus, further light is shed on a certain asymmetry which, while still difficult to articulate precisely, may nonetheless be important in identifying a shortfall in the measurement and diagnosis of democratic deficit

On the one hand, the categories in the EIU democratic deficit measurement, which inherently address the *demos* on an agnostic basis, may be sufficient to capture the responses of a citizen whose orientation is essentially post-modern in nature. On the other hand, the responses of a citizen whose principal discontentment with democracy arises from dismay at the perceived loss of a nationality-based *demos* whose long-standing history, culture and relative homogeneity is being eroded, is much less likely to fit within these categories. The effect, to echo Koenig-Archibugi's central point, is that this impairs the measurement and explanatory value of the EIU scheme. Further, it can be argued, it does this in an asymmetric way that excludes due measurement and explanation of those who consider their *demos* to be a nationality-based one rather than an agnostic-based one.

It is noted once more that Koenig-Archibugi's applied praise to V-Dem for recognizing – at least in principle – that there the plural conceptions of *demos* for categorical measurement of democratic participation, albeit that V-Dem's intention relates to the technical operation of democracy rather than satisfaction with its outcomes. In the same spirit, this paper wishes to propose to the Economist Intelligence Unit that it augments its democratic deficit measurement categories as follows: that a distinct additional category is introduced, one that measures legitimate democratic interest as *a collective group based on the nation*.

Ursula von der Leyen, first female President of the European Commission (Shutterstock)

A preliminary characterisation for such a new category might be as follows:

New democratic shortfall category reflecting democratic participation as a collective group based on the nation. Extent of shortfall of the collective sense of *demos* of the nation within the population; extent of policy priority for that *demos*, reflecting the value of high-trust, cohesive solidarity as a nation and its long-term sustainability in demographic and cultural terms, underpinned by economic security.

Now, recalling Norberto Bobbio's distinction between liberalism and democracy as noted earlier, another way to characterize such a measurement shortfall is this: while agnostic-based *demos* conceptions are consistent with a focus on individualistic rights that characterize liberalism, a nationality-based *demos*, by contrast, resonates with democracy's emphasis on collective sovereignty and equality.[78] This proposed new deficit category provides a remedy by measuring collective national solidarity – exemplified by high-trust cohesion and demographic sustainability – as a democratic counterweight to the atomization of liberalism, thus ensuring the scheme captures both dimensions without normative bias towards either one.

While such a concept might be seen as disruptive to the existing scheme – perhaps even revolutionary inasmuch as it recognises a specific dimension of *collective* as opposed to *individual* interest – the risks of not doing so arguably outweigh the challenge of introducing it into the scheme. Such risks relate not only to the immediate analytical shortfall but to a mismatch in the fundamental relationship between the government and the governed.

In support of this statement, a return is made to the contemporary political situation in Britain – viewed from the perspective both of a prospective party of power and from those who would wish to see their collective interest recognized. It also yields a proposed name for this new analytical category.

This section thus goes deeper into the nature of the relationship between those who would hold power and 'the people' over whom that power would be exercised. It is presented as a self-contained interlude which is not structurally necessary for the main flow of argumentation in this paper. It is styled somewhat in the author's own voice and, inevitably, political outlook.

It does, however, contain the claim that the main elements of the argument can be abstracted into a generally applicable case for political engagement.

The reason for including such a section in this mode is three-fold. First, the field of study is self-evidently vast in itself[79] and could not possibly be boiled down to a few paragraphs. Second, and conversely, there would appear to be a dearth of scholarly research pertinent to the contemporary UK situation that does not appear intrinsically tied to an agnostic-based definition of *demos*; it therefore requires a greater degree of 'off piste' searching for sources. Third, in focusing purely on a notion of the *demos of the nation* in this section, accusations of one-sidedness might be levied. The intention is that such criticism would be applied to this 'cutaway' section alone and not the paper as a whole.

To set the scene, there are indications that a significant part of the electorate is beginning to view the next general election as the last chance they give to political change through democratic means. To illustrate this, a report[80] by UK think-tank *Onward* based on polling in summer 2025 may be cited:

> "[This] new polling finds that there is significant support for extreme and undemocratic forms of government and political ideologies among younger British people. There is significant variation by age, with support for non-democratic forms of government and extreme ideologies declining markedly with age. Overall, younger Brits emerge as much more likely than those in older age groups to hold a positive view of military strongman government, absolute monarchy, communism and fascism."

To back the words up with figures: some 38% of respondents aged between 18 and 34 have a very positive or fairly positive view of 'a military strongman with no government or elections'. And over 34% of respondents aged between 18 and 44 had a positive view of 'a king with no government'.

This obviously reinforces the secular decline in voter satisfaction highlighted early in Part II. The relationship (or democratic 'contract', perhaps) between governors and governed is coming under ever increasing strain, with no discernible sign of self-healing.

The political space beyond the conventional democratic boundary has already been part-covered in the section on UK 'movement parties' (and later in Part VI in respect of other European countries) and other scenarios will be considered in Part VII. Staying here with the machinery of institutional democracy, whichever party is in power following the next general election, whether an established or challenger party or even coalition of parties, must translate *incipient* political capability and capacity into *effective* and *competent* use of executive political power once realised. These two essential features are now explored briefly.

The first condition is that any challenger party must be ready and equipped to use governmental power *effectively* and not to remain in the mode of an inchoate protest party in the spirit of Kitschelt's attributes described in Part IV. This is posited as a self-evident statement and not explored further.

The second strong condition for closing the democratic deficit must be a *competent*, confident state committed to governing truly, honestly and primarily in the interests of its citizens viewed as a nation and not merely as franchise holders. Drawing transparently on the author's political stance in respect of the natural responsibilities of a competent state, there follow some brief examples of what this might entail.

Long-term planning. Restoration of honesty to political debate and rebalancing towards investment over entitlement. Widespread infrastructure investment including a massive house-building programme to improve inter-generational fairness

Cheap, abundant energy. A combination of new nuclear baseload generation with boosted fossil fuel use in the interim to transform national economics and permanently boost growth.

National solidarity. Restoration of a coherent, high-trust society through a strong programme of national solidarity; elimination of policies for preference for exceptionalist sub-communities to stem the growth of sectarianism; a permanent end to mass immigration and the ending of incentives for illegal entry, that is to say, restoration of the physical and socio-political national border; strong conditions of residency, expectations of assimilation and compliance with reasserted – perhaps reformulated – norms.

Economic solidarity. Redistributive policies to counter the trend towards extreme income inequalities and social re-stratification.

While drawn from social democratic principles and notwithstanding specific policy detail, the argument may be made that each of the categories listed can be abstracted into a set of essential, non-negotiable and long-term pre-conditions for any and *all* serious political parties: conditions for the survival of the nation in recognizable form, culturally and economically – and, above all, in terms of recognizable solidarity. Anything less must ultimately lead to social strife and economic bankruptcy, both of which could be credibly argued by an increasing number to be rather close in the UK just now.

This, inevitably, prompts a fundamental question: *solidarity between whom*? The loop is thus closed, for it marks a return to the matter of 'the people'.

Earlier in Part V, reference was made to the rapid demographic change being experienced in the UK and projections for the future. There is increasing public debate about the accompanying loss of social cohesion, rapid cultural dilution, conflicting evidence about differential rates of crime – including serious crime – committed by foreign nationals, questions about even-handed legal treatment, stress on housing stock, health and other services and officially acknowledged net financial burdens of a sizeable proportion of arrivals).[81] While immigration per se is obviously not an unmitigated bad, the manifest lack of a democratic mandate (no government has been elected on a mass immigration platform) is the point of focus here. In such a situation, do concerned citizens have a right to disappointment, let alone some sort of recourse? How would such disappointment even be measured in an analytical framework beyond the registration of discontent as atomized voters?

As noted earlier, compared to the plethora of scholarly research essentially focusing on incomers and their needs, there appear to be few looking at it the other way around except in wholly negative terms. Albeit none of them recent, one such example follows, supplemented by two illustrative think-tank references.

The first, by Professor Samuel Issacharoff[82], is particularly pertinent to the present study, as is clear from this extract from his abstract:

Remains of Roman Agora in the old town of Athens (Shutterstock)

> "The current democratic malaise is rooted not so much in the outcome of any particular election but in four central institutional challenges …: first, the accelerated decline of political parties and other institutional forms of popular engagement; second, the paralysis of the legislative branches; third, the loss of a sense of social cohesion; and fourth, the decline in state competence. While there are no doubt other candidates for inducing anxiety over the state of democracy, these four have a particular salience in theories of democratic superiority that make their decline or loss a matter of grave concern."[83]

Of the four challenges listed by Issacharoff, three are directly pertinent (the fourth, legislative paralysis, is also relevant but not attempted here). Here he is, for instance, on social cohesion: 'Among the contemporary challenges in advanced democratic societies are *significant erosions in the sense of collective solidarity that provided the historic glue for the common project of democratic governance*. For immediate purposes, I focus on two: the challenge of immigration and the challenge of declining living standards of the broad mass of the population – the toilers and voters of democratic states.'[84] (Italics added)

Before moving to the next example, an observation from Issacharoff's chapter on the importance of a competent state may be used to reinforce earlier comments about the urgency of its restoration in the UK. Issacharoff, citing Fukuyama, notices a major malaise of our time that increasingly impedes the exercise of competence: 'Mature democracies include mechanisms of transparency, due process, and participation that provide an entry point for private interests to block undesired governmental action. Under such circumstances, it is easier to block than to build and the result is to raise the costs of public endeavours dramatically. Fukuyama terms this the rise of "vetocracy", defined as "a situation in which special interests can veto measures harmful to themselves, while collective action for the common good becomes exceedingly difficult to achieve".'[85] This provides much food for thought for any incoming government to contemplate.[86],[87]

At this point, too, there might be an echo of the 'creeping state failure' claim by AfD about the crumbling bridges, with which this paper opened[88].

The second is a 2002 report from think tank Civitas entitled 'Do We Need Mass Immigration?'[89] This has been selected for reference because, despite being almost a quarter of a century old, even on a cursory examination it remains entirely pertinent to today's situation, if not more so. The following sentence is selected for quotation: 'Like all policies that have profound social, economic and cultural consequences, it is important that immigration achieves public support and acceptance, otherwise there are dangers that an increasingly large proportion of the public will not only refuse to accept the pattern of immigration but also refuse to accept the immigrants themselves—they will widely be seen as illegitimate'[90] and reinforces this elsewhere by highlighting the 'huge democratic legitimacy problem'.[91]

The third is a 2013 report from the University of Oxford's Migration Observatory addressing, as its subtitle says, complexities of the democratic mandate in relation to immigration.[92] This report is of interest in that it precedes the 2015 Europe-wide migration influx and the 2016 Brexit vote aftermath and reads as a balanced guide for policy makers in interpreting and navigating public opinion. Of the many conflicting considerations, supra-national obligations – mainly EU-related – meant that, even were policy makers willing, they might in practice be prevented from doing so.

In this section, then, an outline case is presented for greater awareness and attentiveness by the government (and, by tacit extension, related institutions and perhaps the elite in general) of the gravity of the contemporary political situation in the United Kingdom, and to show it practically in three ways: by its effectiveness, by its competence, and by its recognition of the importance of national solidarity experienced by the *demos of the nation*.

The term 'national interest', while normally applied solely in the sphere of international relations, can be cast more broadly so that it is seen to represent the totality of expectations of the *demos of a nation*, both internationally and domestically. It is therefore proposed as the name of the new democratic deficit category: 'National Interest deficit'.

Two closing observations are offered in this section.

The first is that nothing in this proposed orientation towards inclusion of the *demos of the nation* obviates the need for democratic checks and balances to avoid, for instance, any tendency towards nationalistic autocracy. Concern expressed in scholarly work about such risks, albeit noteworthy as highlighted in Part IV for seeming one-sidedness[93], is by no means entirely unfounded. While core democratic principles such as rule of law and pluralism are also susceptible to normative interpretations from every angle, institutional integrity must prevail.[94]

The second is a clarification about the target for measurement. While this section has looked at the two-way relationship between government and governed, the proposed analytical democratic deficit category would, like the existing categories, measure citizen (dis-) satisfaction and not as such act as a scorecard for government performance.

In rounding up this part on the demos question, the label National Interest deficit is now applied to the proposed new EIU democratic deficit category:

National Interest deficit. Extent of shortfall of the collective sense of *demos of the nation* within the aggregate electoral population; extent of policy priority for that *demos*, reflecting the value of high-trust, cohesive solidarity as a nation and its long-term sustainability in demographic and cultural terms, underpinned by economic security.

Without attempting a full description of instrumental and operational considerations here (see Part IX for research opportunities in future research), this category should be placed alongside the others in the EIU scheme, taking due care, on the one hand, to ensure appropriate demarcation alongside the existing categories so that it is both analytically sound and given due weight and, on the other hand, to avoid a normative straight-jacket on how the *demos* might be characterised.

A brief remark at the close of this section: the increased explanatory value from the proposed new category – and indeed the broader benefits in informing government policy in respect of the *demos of the nation* – should repay the challenges of its introduction. One might even characterize its successful implementation as satisfying the ‘Bobbio test’.

VI. Movement parties in contemporary politics across Europe

Although this mini survey of movement parties and challenger political parties has so far been limited to Britain, the phenomenon is widespread across Europe as a whole: whether AfD in Germany, Vlaams Belang in Belgium, Rassemblement National in France or the Tisza party in Hungary.

To illustrate this trend further, brief examinations follow of contemporary politics in ten selected European countries: Belgium, Czechia, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, Romania and Slovakia. Each contains an overview of the current government and power balance, followed by discussion of notable movement parties and challenger parties, drawing on recent academic and journalistic sources where pertinent. They together highlight the diversification of political expression beyond traditional elites, often as populist alternatives on both TAN and GAL axes, and underscore the broader proposition of citizen disaffection displayed in their support for new parties and movements.

Belgium

Belgium's federal government, formed in February 2025 under Prime Minister Bart De Wever of the Flemish nationalist New Flemish Alliance (N-VA), comprises a coalition of N-VA, the socialist Vooruit, and the Christian Democratic CD&V on the Flemish side, with the liberal Reformist Movement (MR) and centrist Les Engagés dominating the Francophone contingent. This arrangement reflects Belgium’s divide by language and culture, with a precarious power balance that must take into account regional tensions. The 2024 elections highlighted fragmentation in a different direction, as parties farther to the left and to the right gained ground but were excluded from coalitions.[95]

Movement parties in Belgium often align with regional identities, amplifying elite disconnect. The far-right Vlaams Belang (VB), a TAN populist force in Flanders, fits Kitschelt’s framework with its narrow anti-immigration focus, grass-roots protests and social media mobilization. Tapping into its separatist roots, VB’s contentious actions, including anti-Islam campaigns, took it to towards 15% in 2024 European Parliament (EP) elections, which now serves it as a challenger to traditional centrist dominance on cultural issues.[96]

Conversely, the left-populist Workers' Party of Belgium (PTB-PVDA), operating nationally but stronger in Wallonia and Brussels, emphasises economic inequalities through participatory structures like petitions and strikes. With a GAL orientation, it achieved around 11% in 2024 EP polls, bridging to electoral gains and pressurizing policies on redistribution. Together, pace Ford and Jennings, these strengthening TAN-GAL cleavages are bringing about greater volatility and thereby challenging federal cohesion.[97]

Czechia

As of late 2025, Czechia is governed by Prime Minister Andrej Babiš's populist ANO party, which won the October 2025 parliamentary elections with 34.5% and entered into coalition talks with the right-ist SPD and Motorists for Themselves. The power balance is tense, with economic stagnation and anti-establishment sentiment opposition alliances holding significant numbers of seats, signifying increasing polarization post-2024 EP elections.[98]

Movement parties have grown through the channelling of discontent with corruption and EU policies. On the TAN side, ANO embodies Kitschelt's traits with anti-elite focus, low bureaucracy and contentious campaigns on economic security. Winning 26.1% in 2024 EP for 7 seats, it is forming a bridge towards governing power despite mainstream resistance.[99]

Challenger parties like SPD, with its anti-immigration stance and use of protests, represents the radical TAN wing, securing 5.7% in 2024 EP for 1 seat. GAL-oriented groups like Pirates are meanwhile using petitions and other means to pursue anti-corruption and green agendas. As Ford and Jennings note and Gethin et al.’s multi-elite analysis reinforces, these cleavages are contributing to heightened volatility.[100]

France

France’s political landscape in early 2026 remained mired in instability following the 2024 snap legislative elections and the ensuing instability of a hung parliament divided among the left-wing New Popular Front (NPF), President Emmanuel Macron’s centrist Ensemble alliance, and the far-right National Rally (RN).

The Brussels-based European Parliament photographed at night (Shutterstock)

After various short-lived minority governments, the current administration is relying on ad hoc support from centrists and conservatives, excluding RN and the far-left France Unbowed (LFI). This tripartite split has largely paralysed policymaking, exacerbating economic and social tensions.[101]

Movement parties have thrived amid this deadlock, particularly on the fringes. The RN, a TAN-oriented populist force, embodies Kitschelt's model with its anti-immigration focus, high-profile protests and low organizational bureaucracy under Jordan Bardella. Evolving from Marine Le Pen's leadership, it has deployed effective social media campaigns and street action, securing 31% in the 2024 EP elections. As a bridge to formal politics, RN is increasingly challenging the previously strong elite consensus on multiculturalism and influencing debates on border controls despite exclusion from government.[102]

On the GAL side, LFI within the NPF alliance represents left-populist activism, with economic redistribution and anti-elite narratives driving contentious actions like Gaza solidarity protests. Jean-Luc Mélenchon's movement, with its feeder structures and programmatic emphasis on social inequality, took around 10% in 2024 EP polls. Taken together, this polarization, as noted by Guth and Nelsen, is fostering anti-pluralist sentiments with the longer-term potential destabilizing EU-aligned policies on trade and migration.[103]

Germany

As of early 2026, Germany was governed by a 'black-red' coalition of the centre-right Christian Democratic Union/Christian Social Union (CDU/CSU) and the centre-left Social Democratic Party (SPD), led by Chancellor Friedrich Merz. This minority government emerged after the collapse of Olaf Scholz's 'traffic light' coalition (SPD, Greens, FDP) in late 2024, amid economic stagnation and migration pressures.

The power balance remains fragile, with the far-right Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) holding significant opposition influence, particularly in eastern states, and smaller parties like the left-populist Sahra Wagenknecht Alliance (BSW) fragmenting the left.[104]

Movement parties in Germany have flourished, as elsewhere often channelling discontent with elite-driven policies on immigration and energy. On the TAN side, the AfD has evolved from a Eurosceptic grouping into a fully-fledged populist radical-right force, emphasising anti-immigration and cultural nationalism. Emerging from protests against EU bailouts, it now incorporates grass-roots activism, including online campaigns and local demonstrations, fitting Kitschelt's traits of narrow programmatic focus (eg, border security) and contentious action. The AfD's success in the 2024 European Parliament elections, securing around 16% of the vote, underscores its role as a bridge to electoral politics, though mainstream parties have until now maintained a 'firewall' against cooperation.[105]

Challenger parties like the BSW, a left-populist splinter from Die Linke founded in 2023, represent the GAL spectrum with anti-capitalist and pro-redistribution rhetoric blended with cultural conservatism, as per Gethin et al.'s analysis of multi-elite shifts.[106] Drawing on economic insecurity and anti-elite sentiment, BSW's participatory structures, including issue-focused petitions, have attracted disaffected voters, achieving 6% nationally in 2024 EP elections. This diversification is putting pressure on the centrist consensus, with increasing discussion on wealth inequality and EU integration.

Hungary

Hungary remains under the long-standing rule of Prime Minister Viktor Orbán's Fidesz party, which secured another term in 2022 and has maintained a supermajority in parliament. The 2024 EP elections saw Fidesz retain dominance, but emerging challengers like the Tisza Party are highlighting gradually shifting balances in the face of increasing economic strains.[107]

Movement parties in Hungary often contest Orbán's narrative of national sovereignty. The right-populist Our Homeland Movement (Mi Hazánk), with its TAN focus on anti-globalism and cultural preservation, employs deliberately provocative actions such as protests against EU policies.

Gaining 7% in 2024 EP elections, it is bridging grass-roots activism and parliamentary influence, challenging Fidesz's monopoly on nationalism.[108]

The centrist Tisza Party, led by Péter Magyar, is drawing on GAL-leaning anti-elite sentiment, riding on corruption scandals through participatory campaigns and petitions. Achieving 30% in 2024 EP polls, Tisza's rapid rise, as analysed by Borbáth and Paxton, is diversifying electoral choice and looking to put pressure on Orbán on rule-of-law reforms and ongoing EU funding disputes.[109]

Italy

Italy's government, led by Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni of the Brothers of Italy (FdI) since 2022, is a right-wing coalition with the League (Lega) and Forza Italia (FI). This stable majority has pursued conservative reforms assisted by economic recovery, but faces opposition from fragmented centre-left forces like the Democratic Party (PD). The 2024 EP elections reinforced FdI's lead, reflecting sustained right-wing dominance.[110]

Movement parties dominate Italy's populist spectrum. FdI, a TAN force, embodies Kitschelt's traits with its anti-immigration focus and high-involvement protests, evolving from post-fascist roots to secure 29% in 2024 EP elections. As a realistic challenger for governance, it is wielding influence on policies relating to migration and cultural values.[111] The League, under Matteo Salvini, maintains radical-right populism through social media and demonstrations, achieving 9% in 2024. On the GAL side, the Five Star Movement (M5S) blends anti-elite rhetoric with environmentalism using participatory platforms, achieving 10%. As per Gethin et al., volatility is increasing.[112]

Netherlands

The government of the Netherlands, formed in July 2024 under technocratic Prime Minister Dick Schoof, included the far-right Party for Freedom (PVV), centre-right VVD, and others, but collapsed in spring 2025 as a result of a fracturing of the coalition. Snap elections in October 2025 saw the centre-left Democrats 66 (D66) come out just ahead of PVV, leading to ongoing coalition formation talks excluding the populists. This instability is emblematic of polarization in a traditionally consensual system.[113]

Movement parties have grown rapidly, particularly on the right. The PVV, a TAN populist party led by Geert Wilders, fits Kitschelt's model with its anti-Islam focus, securing 18% in 2024 EP elections before its 2025 decline.

As a former coalition partner, it continues to challenge elites on the highly salient issue of immigration.[114] The agrarian-populist Farmer-Citizen Movement (BBB) emphasises rural issues through grass-roots actions, gaining 3% in 2024. Left-populist challengers like the Socialist Party (SP) add GAL dynamics. As Ford and Jennings note, urban-rural cleavages are having a major impact on fragmentation and increasing contention around EU policies on agriculture and migration.[115]

Poland

Poland's government as at early 2026 is led by Prime Minister Donald Tusk's centrist Civic Coalition (KO) in coalition with Third Way and The Left, following the 2023 parliamentary elections that ended eight years of Law and Justice (PiS) rule. This pro-EU administration has prioritized EU integration and what it considers to be rule-of-law restoration, though tensions have persisted with the opposition and the presidency (held by PiS-aligned figures until mid-2025). The power balance remains in play after the 2024 European Parliament elections, where KO narrowly won, but PiS held strong opposition influence.[116]

Movement parties in Poland are exploiting deep societal divides. On the TAN side, PiS, a right-wing populist force, fits Kitschelt's model with anti-EU rhetoric, a focus on national sovereignty, family values and judicial reforms, driven by media campaigns. Securing 36% in the 2024 EP elections for 20 seats, PiS is successfully bridging grass-roots nationalism to parliamentary opposition, challenging centrist elites in particular on migration and judicial independence.[117]

Challenger parties like the far-right Confederation emphasise anti-immigration and libertarian economics through protests and social media. Achieving 12% in 2024 EP for 6 seats, it is attracting disaffected voters and fragmenting the right. This rise has amplified anti-pluralist sentiments, pressuring policies on redistribution and EU integration in reaction to elite shifts per Gethin et al.[118]

Romania

Romania's government in early 2026 features a pro-EU grand coalition of PSD, PNL, and UDMR, formed after the 2024 parliamentary elections and post-annulment presidential re-run.

Leader of the Polish Law and Justice (PiS) Partty, Jarosław Kaczyński (Shutterstock)

Led initially by Marcel Ciolacu but later by Bolojan, the coalition holds a slim majority amid far-right gains and ongoing instability from the 2024 presidential annulment and 2025 re-election.[119]

Movement parties have tapped into populist sentiment. On the TAN side, AUR embodies Kitschelt's traits with an anti-EU focus, grass-roots protests and social media on the subject of national identity. Winning 15% in 2024 EP for strong parliamentary gains, its main aim is to challenge elites on migration and sovereignty.[120]

Challenger parties like SOS RO are pursuing radical-right populism and demonstrations. GAL-leaning USR is using anti-corruption petitions, winning 9% of the EP election vote. The general situation, as per Gethin et al. and Ford and Jennings, is of heightened volatility.[121]

Slovakia

Slovakia remains under Prime Minister Robert Fico's populist Smer-SD coalition with Hlas-SD and nationalist SNS, in power since 2023. This government has acted to centralize authority, giving rise to media control and rule-of-law concerns. The 2024 EP elections showed opposition gains, but Smer retained dominance despite increasing economic strains and ongoing debates about policy on Ukraine.[122]

Movement parties are growing up. On the TAN side, Smer fits Kitschelt's framework with its anti-elite rhetoric and a narrow focus on social welfare and sovereignty. Securing 25% in the 2024 EP elections, it had bridged mobilization to government influence despite tensions with the EU.[123]

Challenger parties like far-right Republic, which emphasises cultural nationalism through protests, gained 12% in the 2024 EP elections. GAL-oriented Progressive Slovakia (PS), with anti-corruption campaigns, won 28%. This diversification has in the round acted as an anti-pluralist influence, potentially destabilizing established redistribution policies in the light of changed cleavages as per Ford and Jennings.[124]

Summary

In summary, these country cases reveal a pan-European pattern: movement and challenger parties, often populist in nature, are capitalizing on socioeconomic cleavages and elite disconnects to diversify political expression into both TAN and GAL wings. While technical democracy evidently persists (albeit with some CEE countries registering ' amber' on democracy watchers' charts), the general pattern underscores the need for the flexing of analytical frameworks to capture citizen dissatisfaction more fully.

Anticipating somewhat the paper's conclusions, the extent to which this part illustrates the vibrant health of democracy in the European countries surveyed depends on, first, the toleration of elites in keeping such developments within the democratic perimeter and, second, that the recently established parties are serious about readiness for the wielding of political power, once achieved.

Protest against compuslory military army service in Trier, Germany (Shutterstock)

VII. Beyond democracy or differently conceived democracy?

Sprinkled throughout the paper so far have been references to 'beyond the democratic boundary'. In some respects, with the discussion about 'movement parties', a number of which are not connected to or directly oriented towards formal political parties, some of this territory has already been covered. By and large, though, all of the examples so far are fundamentally oriented whether directly or indirectly to political influence via existing democratic machinery.

This final substantive part of the paper contains a necessarily brief, perhaps somewhat fragmentary exploration of extra-democratic – or, more correctly for most of what follows – differently conceived democratic scenarios.

The term 'extra-democratic' of course carries value-judgement overtones, as the Occupy movement party would be sure to point out. Occupy is one of the movement party groupings covered by van Asseldonk in his study previously cited, but reference to it was deferred to this part. This is because, as reported by van Asseldonk, Occupy as the most famous exponent of the new-style 'anarchist and autonomist movements … famously rejected representative democracy as an oxymoron, explicitly pitting democracy as an alternative to representation, not in potential harmony *with* it. In seeking to enact what they claimed to be "real democracy," Occupy adopted a wide repertoire of different methods and activities, all of which effaced representation, at least in the sense it is ordinarily understood, in favour of more direct participation.'[125] (italics in the original)

Having with this example thrown at least a little doubt on where the democratic perimeter does actually lie, this need for discerning judgment will also be applied to others (in short: the elites) in the concluding part.

One scenario requiring very little judgement about what is democratic and what is not is that of the brutal politics of streets and barricades. To arrive at this, we do so via a lightning return to the international scene. While this paper is not concerned with geopolitics *per se*, it is inescapable that global matters have salience in a country, such as the United Kingdom, that has exercised both mass immigration and a policy of multiculturalism without a strong assimilationist aspect.

Earlier, the grand narratives of Fukuyama and Huntington were cited for a contrast between their different outlooks. Fukuyama is illustrative of a normative presumption of an idealized western liberal universalism, while Huntington's connection with the present study is perhaps less obvious, seeing as he splits the world into increasingly homogeneous civilizational zones based broadly on religion or culture, with persistent inter-zonal conflict in what he calls 'torn' countries such as Mexico and Turkey that find themselves on a fault line or with historically mixed cultures.

Henry Kissinger, in his 2015 book *World Order*[126], writes: 'An ominous new trend: the disintegration of statehood into tribal and sectarian units, some of them cutting across existing borders, in violent conflict with each other or manipulated by competing outside factions, observing no common rules other than the law of superior force – what [Thomas] Hobbes might have called the state of nature … portions of the state may drift into anarchy or permanent rebellion.'[127]

Kissinger was talking about Syria but, in Huntington's terms, he could be describing *any* torn country. By this measure, the number of so-called torn countries is rising and now arguably includes 'newly torn' western European countries such as the UK that have practised mass immigration alongside at best loose assimilationist policies. Thus, they risk creating *within themselves* a newly torn country comprising one or more mixed-culture fault lines.

In such a context and absent the imposition of non-negotiable assimilation, the entry of sectarianism into both everyday life and institutional politics becomes a near inevitability. At the risk of oversimplification, three possible scenarios might be envisaged[128]: first, broad accommodation of sectarianism into institutional politics through the establishment and acceptance of sectional-interest parties; second, devolved governance for a situation in which physically contiguous zones comprising predominantly or exclusively designated ethnic or confessional groups arises whether through 'natural' concentration and displacement or as a result of official policy; third, a Hobbesian cataclysm.

Starting with the third of these, a prominent voice of alarm is David Betz of King's College London, who believes in the inevitability of civil war within a western country within five years, most likely the UK or France, with a further claim that in effect it has already begun sporadically. He characterizes it as a savage, intimate ethnic factional conflict, not as grand conventional battles or systematically linked actions and attacks, but neighbour-on-neighbour savagery along identity lines, fuelled by economic stagnation, elite complacency and the manifest failure of multiculturalism.[129]

Moving to the second scenario, in which zonal government of varying degrees of autonomy becomes the norm (on account of the entrenchment of sectarianism arising from Balkanized ethnic or confessional groupings), aside from the obvious examples of the devolved parliament in Scotland and devolved assembly in Wales there is another model of democracy known as 'consociationalism'. This can be defined in brief as 'a stable democratic system in deeply divided societies that is based on power sharing between elites from different social groups'[130]. Long-standing examples often cited include Belgium, Switzerland and the Netherlands. An example of the application of a variant of model has been North Macedonia[131], with studies also into Bosnia-Herzegovina, Northern Ireland, and potential extensions to Catalonia (Spain) or Ukraine[132].

Mention of this model here does not infer advocacy or assertion of applicability so much as a desire for completeness in this brief survey. It is important to note critics of consociationalism when they report that, while facilitating stability in divided societies, it risks entrenching ethnic or confessional divisions without effective conflict resolution, prioritizing elite bargains over broad democratic participation, and potentially fostering inefficiency or corruption in segmented governance, all of which threaten sustainability in the long term. In some ways akin to critiques of authoritarian tendencies,[133] vigilance over safeguards is vital to prevent democratic erosion in the long term.[134]

Last, turning to the first of the three scenarios listed above, that of the integration of sectarianism into existing democratic structures. Aside from traditionally Balkanized politics in parts of Scotland and Northern Ireland, this scenario in embryonic state has been touched on tangentially in Part IV, as sectarian influences begin to make their mark increasingly within the British political scene, largely within the GAL wing of new-style politics.

VIII. Conclusions

In concluding, we return to the titular theme of *Brösel-Politiken*: whether politics is in good health or whether it is indeed crumbling.

To quote Ernest Hemingway on the subject of bankruptcy: it happened gradually, and then suddenly.[135] The same for the infrastructure in Germany (as elsewhere): it crumbled gradually and then suddenly. And the same perhaps for the crumbling of politics, social peace and sense of collective identity.

Despite everything, however, the peoples of Europe still respond broadly positively to the World Values Survey (WVS) question 'How important is it for you to live in a country that is governed democratically?' A King's College London report[136] using WVS survey results listed the weighted response to this question of the people of Germany as 95%, of Italy 87%, Spain 85%, Poland 85%, the UK 81%, France 79%. Unsurprisingly, perhaps, the people of Russia were way down at 50%.

Looked at through one lens, with the exception of the Betzian civil war scenario and arguably the anarchistic leanings of Occupy and similar organizations, almost all of the subjects of this survey of contemporary politics are directly or indirectly related to conventional democratic means. Thus, the myriad organizations catalogued here form a glorious flourishing of democratic endeavour, new political vehicles connecting back into political possibilities those many who are disenfranchised from old-style parties, whether they fall, *pace* Hooghe & Marks, into the so-called Green-Alternative-Left (GAL) nexus or that of the equally so-called Traditional-Authoritarian-Nationalist (TAN) range.

Looked at through a second lens, as described early on in this paper, the technical machinery of democracy is declared to be functioning well, with a few well documented exceptions according to the democracy watchers. The technocrats of democratic machinery approve.

However, all is not well when viewed through third and fourth lenses.

The third concerns the empirical findings of the latest Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) democracy report, with seemingly inexorable increases in dissatisfaction year on year.

Each of the five existing categories of (dis-)satisfaction have been explored in this paper for underlying causes.

The fourth consists of the broadly overlapping array of dismayed leaders of conventional, incumbent political parties, the institutional elites (Gethin et al's 'Brahmin Left' and 'Merchant Right') and the many in academia whose professional composure is barely maintained in the face of the exhausting game of 'far right' whack-a-mole that must seem to them never-ending.

However, a central claim of this paper is that there is a further distinct lens needed for a proper survey of the scene, through which one might view those citizens who identify themselves collectively as part of a *demos of the nation* and whose discontent is that they are not recognized as such, whether by the dismayed ruling elites or by democracy watchers. In fact, those same people are recognized, but only in negative terms for their association with unmodish ideas such as that of the nation and outré groupings that propound traditionally-leaning views.

To the democracy watchers: Introduction of new democratic deficit category under the EIU scheme dubbed 'National Interest deficit' oriented towards a *demos of the nation* would play a major part in closing this conceptual and analytical gap.

To the political elites: beyond urging them to recognize the merit in a rediscovered *demos of the nation*, which is to temper an instinct to draw tighter the democratic perimeter to displace movement parties associated with that *demos*. Instead, they should renew their acquaintance with them as fellow citizens of the nation, understand and work with them with the aim of achieving true national solidarity. The alternative may be not some much a crumbling of politics but a collapse.

To those challenger parties and movements that would vie for political office: work hard now to turn yourselves from a mode of protest into an *effective* and *competent* government-in-waiting.

The *demos of the nation* in every country of Europe deserves it.

IX. Policy recommendations and further research

Drawing together policy points, this paper contains one substantive policy recommendation and two other strong observations as follows.

Policy recommendation

Serious consideration should be given to creation of a new democratic deficit category under the EIU democratic deficit scheme, dubbed 'National Interest deficit'. Necessarily different in nature to the existing five in that it would aim to reflect a sense of democratic *collective* identity as the demos of the nation rather than purely in terms of atomized individuals, its measurement would increase the explanatory value of the EIU scheme. For completeness, the full revised list would be:

- Equality Deficit
- Party Deficit
- Choice Deficit
- Ideas Deficit
- Citizenship Deficit
- National Interest Deficit

Towards the political elites: beyond urging them to recognize the merit in a rediscovered *demos of the nation*, temper an instinct to draw tighter the democratic perimeter to displace movement parties associated with that *demos*. Instead, they should renew their acquaintance with them as fellow citizens of the nation, understand and work with them towards true national solidarity.

To those challenger parties and movements that would vie for political office: work hard now to turn yourselves from a mode of protest into an *effective* and *competent* government-in-waiting.

Further research

A paper of this sort can only ever scratch the surface of what is a vast field of study. Suggested opportunities for future study include the following:

- Detailed work on implementation of the proposed additional 'National Interest deficit' category for the EIU scheme, including how it might be made operational in practice.
- Deeper surveys and comparative assessments against the Kitschelt characteristics of 'movement parties' in other European countries.
- Detailed study into both the philosophical and practical challenges of a public re-orientation by governments towards a demos of the people, while ensuring due safeguards.

Endnotes

[1]Bild<https://www.bild.de/politik/inland/die-10-schlimmsten-sanierungsfaelle-deutschlands-broesel-bruecken-66e2a428fd0c4e5b0992986d>[accessed 14th October 2025]

[2]The Guardian <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/jun/03/why-are-germany-bridges-schools-falling-apart-far-right> [accessed 14th October 2025]

[3]These sources are: firstly, popular literature, studies and surveys that are considered authoritative and informative, in the main authored by established academics albeit not necessarily subjected to rigorous academic peer review; secondly, references (mainly later in the paper) to sources deliberately selected as reflective and deliberately provocative admixtures to the discussion; thirdly, newspaper and other media sources selectively cited for the purposes of narrative and illustration.

[4]For references to scope shaping and limitation, see Footnotes 1, 2, 27 and, in reference to Hungary, 24.

[5]Economist Intelligence Unit, *Democracy Index 2024: What's wrong with representative democracy* (London: Economist Intelligence, 2025)

[6]V-Dem Institute, *Democracy Report 2025: 25 Years of Autocratization – Democracy Trumped?*, (Gothenburg: University of Gothenburg, 2025) <https://www.v-dem.net/documents/61/v-dem-dr__2025_lowres_v2.pdf> [accessed 14th October 2025]

[7]Whilst noting here Professor Günter Roth's 2021 comment that V-Dem appears to exercise double standards when it comes to Hungary, cf. Günter Roth, 'Sondierungen zur Erosion ‚real existierender' Demokratien' ['Explorations into the erosion of 'real existing' democracies'], *Einfachcompliziert*, (7th Nov 2021), <https://einfachkompliziert.de/sondierungen-zur-erosion-real-existierender-demokratien/> [accessed 10th Oct 2025]

[8]Economist Intelligence Unit (2025) pp. 29-37, drawing strongly on research by Pew Research

[9]Ibid. p. 30, quoting a blog post by Richard Wike and Janell Fetterolf 'Satisfaction with democracy has declined in recent years in high-income nations', *Pew Research* <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2024/06/18/satisfaction-with-democracy-has-declined-in-recent-years-in-high-income-nations/> [accessed 2nd November 2025]

[10]Ibid. p. 30, quoting *Pew Research*

[11]Bobbio, Norberto, *Liberalism and Democracy* (trans. by Martin Ryle & Kate Soper) (London: Verso, 1990) [Original version: Liberalismo e democrazia, 1985]

[12]Francis Fukuyama, 'The End of History?', *The National Interest* 16 (Summer 1989) pp. 3-18

[13]Samuel P. Huntington, 'The Clash of Civilizations?', *Foreign Affairs* (Summer 1993) 72.3 pp. 22-49 <https://doi.org/10.2307/20045621> [accessed 4th February 2026]

[14]e.g. Jean-François Lyotard, 'La condition postmoderne : rapport sur le savoir' ['The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge'], trans. by Bennington, Geoff and Massumi, Brian, *Theory and History of Literature Vol. 10* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984) e.g. <https://monoskop.org/images/e/e0/Lyotard_Jean-Francois_The_Postmodern_Condition_A_Report_on_Knowledge.pdf> [accessed 14th October 2025]

[15]François Foret, *The European Union in Search of Narratives: Disenchanted Europe* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2025)

[16]Ibid. p. 5

[17]EU Standard Eurobarometer 103 (Spring 2025)

[18]Referring to the 'health of democracy' surveys, it might be considered noteworthy that the EU is largely absent from EIU, V-Dem and other similar frameworks and scrutiny. One might speculate whether, were it to be included, it might empirically be placed in a democratic or sub-democratic category. Further, one might remark on the fact that the EU is almost entirely absent from such reports even as outside agent, despite manifest influence on national democratic mandates, such as in Greece, Ireland, France, the Netherlands, Italy, Poland and, obviously, Hungary too. Yanis Varoufakis is instructive on this subject in respect of events concerning Greece in around 2015, cf. *Adults in the Room* (London: Bodley Head, 2017).

[19]Robert Ford and Will Jennings, 'The Changing Cleavage Politics of Western Europe', *Annual Review of Political Science (23) (2020)* pp. 295-314 e.g. < https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-polisci-052217-104957> [accessed 4th February 2026]

[20]James L. Guth and Brent F. Nelsen, 'Party choice in Europe: Social cleavages and the rise of populist parties', *Party Politics Party Politics* (27.3) (2021) pp. 453-464 <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354068819853965> [accessed 4th February 2026]

[21]Gethin, Amory, Martínez-Toledano, Clara and Piketty, Thomas, 'Brahmin Left versus Merchant Right: Changing Political Cleavages in 21 Western Democracies 1948-2020', *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 137.1 (2022) pp. 1-48 <https://doi.org/10.1093/qje/qjab036> [accessed 4th February 2026]

[22]Which, for reasons of limited scope, is not pursued in this paper.
[23]Liesbet Hooghe and Gary Marks, 'Does Left/Right Structure Party Positions on European Integration?', *Comparative Political Studies*, 35.8 (2002) pp. 965-989 <https://doi.org/10.1177/001041402236310> [accessed 4th February 2026]. The counterpart on the right is Traditional/Authoritarian/Nationalist, or TAN. Whilst the scheme was devised to analyse the matter of attitudes to European integration and its nomenclature somewhat reflects this narrow objectives, it can have broader application notwithstanding.
[24] It is acknowledged that these sources about political cleavage are based almost entirely on Western European countries and may apply less to those in Central and Eastern Europe. Research, such as by Dr Clara Volintiru et al citing 2022 European Social Survey data does indicate for instance that TAN-aligned thinking is significantly better represented amongst academics in Hungary, at 25%, than in the UK, at 15% (Clara Volintirua, Neculai-Cristian Surubaru, Rachel A. Epstein and Adam Fagand, 'Re-evaluating the East-West divide in the European Union' in *Journal of European Public Policy*, 31.3 (2024) 782 - 800 <https://doi.org/10.1080/13501763.2024.2313694> [accessed 2nd November 2025]).
[25]Bayerlein, Michael, 'Verfolgung des anderen populistischen „Zeitgeists"? Europäische Mainstreamparteien und der Aufstieg des Rechtspopulismus' ['Chasing the Other "Populist Zeitgeist"? Mainstream Parties and the Rise of Right-Wing Populism'], *Polit Vierteljahresschr* 62 (2021) pp. 411–433 <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11615-021-00299-x> [accessed 14th October 2025]
[26]For reasons of scope limitation, this section covers the political scene of Great Britain rather than that of the United Kingdom as a whole because the politics of Northern Ireland are quite different from the rest of the UK. Use of the term 'Britain' or 'British' thus in this context means the nations making up Great Britain, which comprise, in order of size, England, Scotland and Wales. As a second limitation of scope, only national level politics concerning the Westminster parliament is covered.
[27]Or, in truly exceptional – unprecedented – times, by *order* of the King.
[28]This split is quoted to give a general impression, with slightly different numbers possible depending on interpretation of the more complex political situations during that time.
[29]One might invoke the words of W.S. Gilbert, librettist in the Victorian-era Gilbert & Sullivan duo responsible for the 'Savoy' comic operettas: '*I often think it's comical – Fal, lal, la! / How Nature always does contrive – Fal, lal, la! / That every boy and every gal / That's born into the world alive / Is either a little Liberal / Or else a little Conservative! / Fal, lal, la!'* ('The Sentry's Song', Iolanthe (1882)).
[30]As at October 2025
[31]At the time of finalizing this paper (early February 2026), the Gorton & Denton by-election campaign was in progress, with hard-left coalescence around a single party, the Greens.
[32]This gives rise to a well-worn, if contentious, joke: Labour is no longer the party of the labouring classes, the Conservatives now destroy rather than conserve, and the Liberal Democrats are neither liberal nor democratic.
[33]Excluded from the scope of this paper is discussion over what is often referred to as 'progressive ideology', which does overlap with matters concerned here but are left tacit for the sake of simplicity.
[34]Discussed in previous chapters
[35]That said, the TAN-GAL binary fits less well for the SDP, which combines being culturally traditional with a balanced centre-left economic policy including a competent and strong state, as does, to an extent, the Workers' Party.
[36]The notion of 'movement parties' was originally devised by Herbert Kitschelt in 'Movement Parties', *Handbook of Party Politics* edited by Richard S. Katz and William Crotty, (London: Sage, 2006) pp. 278–290
[37]Ibid. p. 278
[38]At the time of finalising this paper (mid February 2026), Reform Britain was relaunched as a full political party.
[39]Based on objective information, but the author's own commentary.
[40]Green Party <https://greenparty.org.uk/> [accessed 22nd November 2025]
[41]A handy alliterative phrase used by Obadiah Mbatang in 'Zack Polanski and the crankish turn of the Greens', *Spiked Online* <https://www.spiked-online.com/2025/06/10/zack-polanski-and-the-crankish-turn-of-the-greens/> [accessed 22nd November 2025] which, whilst used there in a pejorative register, is arguably appropriate in characterising the Green Party's recent political turn.
[42]Momentum <https://peoplesmomentum.com/> [accessed 22nd November 2025]

[43]Your Party <https://www.yourparty.uk/> [accessed 22nd November 2025]
[44]Reform UK <https://www.reformparty.uk/> [accessed 22nd November 2025]
[45]Social Democratic Party <https://sdp.org.uk/> [accessed 22nd November 2025]
[46]Advance UK <https://www.advanceuk.org.uk/> [accessed 22nd November 2025]
[47]Including, explicitly, association with the well-known journalist and populist figurehead, Tommy Robinson.
[48]Weekly Worker <https://weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/803/socialist-action-and-the-psc/> [accessed 22nd November 2025]
[49]People's Momentum <https://peoplesmomentum.com/newsletters/the-organiser/the-organiser-oct-2025/> [accessed 22nd November 2025]
[50]Palestine Solidarity Campaign <https://palestinecampaign.org/the-green-party/> [Accessed 22nd November 2025]
[51]The Muslim Vote <https://themuslimvote.co.uk/pledges/> [accessed 22nd November 2025]
[52]Palestine Solidarity Campaign <https://palestinecampaign.org/jeremy-corbyn-a-champion-of-palestinian-rights-leads-the-labour-party/> [accessed 22nd November 2025]
[53]The Muslim Vote <https://themuslimvote.co.uk/> [accessed 15th October 2025]
[54]At the time of finalization of this paper (early Feb 2026), The Muslim Vote was exercising significant influence on the Gorton & Denton by-election. Having publicly endorsed the Green Party, the Workers' Party of Great Britain announced in response that it would not be standing in the contest (BBC News <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c5y2lj3md8po> [accessed 2nd February 2026].
[55]Endre Borbáth and Fred Paxton, 'Movement parties in Europe: a comparative assessment', *Acta Politica* (2025) (60) pp. 1–16 <HYPERLINK "https://doi.org/10.1057/s41269-024-00381-3> [accessed 4th February 2026]
[56]Aurel Croissant and Lars Lott, *Democratic Resilience in the Twenty-First Century: Search for an analytical framework and explorative analysis*, V-Dem Institute (Gothenburg: University of Gothenburg, 2024) <https://ssrn.com/abstract=4932497> [accessed 4th February 2026]
[57]Youngs, Richard & Panchulidze, Elene, 'Democratic resilience in Europe – and its limits." *Democratization* (2025) https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2025.2581838 [accessed 2nd February 2026]
[58]Ibid. pp.14-15
[59]Cristina Flesher Fominaya, *Social Movements in a Globalized World* (2nd Edition) (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020)
[60]Della Porta, Donatella, Kriesi, Hanspeter & Rucht, Dieter (Eds.), *Social Movements in a Globalizing World* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1999, updated 2006) <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-349-27319-5> [accessed 4th November 2025]
[61]Venturing an aside, to the extent that preparation of this paper has included a literature search on the subjects of movement parties and democratic resilience, relatively little attempt is made in such papers to present findings and conclusions in strictly positive terms. The extract from Foimaya is considered by the present author to be broadly representative of the genre (see Footnote 72).
[62]Office for National Statistics <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/culturalidentity/ethnicity/bulletins/ethnicgroupenglandandwales/census2021> [accessed 15th October 2025]. Data relate to the 2021 Census.
[63]Office for National Statistics <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates/bulletins/annualmidyearpopulationestimates/mid2023> [accessed 15th October 2025]
[64]Commons Library, UK Parliament <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/sn06077/> [accessed 15th October 2025]
[65]Matthew Goodwin, *Demographic Change and the Future of the United Kingdom: 2022 to 2122*, University of Buckingham <https://www.heterodoxcentre.com/wp-content/uploads/3-CHSS-Goodwin.pdf> [accessed 15th October 2025]
[66]The word demos is a common synonym for 'the people', originating from demes. According to Oxford Reference: The Greek word [demes] means originally 'district, land', hence esp. (in Attica and elsewhere) the villages or demes (demoi, pl. of demos) which were the main units of country settlement. From 'the place where the people live' the word comes to mean 'the people', as in compounds like dḿmo-kratia, 'people-power' or 'democracy'; demos sometimes means 'the sovereign people', sometimes 'the common people'. <https://www.oxfordreference.com/display/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803095709914> [accessed 2nd February 2026]

[67]Mathias Koenig-Archibugi, 'Who Are the People? Defining the Demos in the Measurement of Democracy', *Political Studies* 69(4) (November 2020) 1030-1050 <https://doi.org/10.1177/0032321720966481> [accessed 1st February 2026]
[68]Ibid. 1032-1034
[69]Ibid. 1033
[70]David Miller, 'In Defence of Nationality', *Journal of Applied Philosophy* (10.1) (1993) 3–16, p.6 quoted in Koenig-Archibugi (2020)
[71]Ibid. p.7 quoted in Koenig-Archibugi (2020)
[72]The present paper does not concern itself with determining a 'best' way of defining a Nationality-based *demos* (in particular highly complex and contested matters often described in terms of 'blood and soil'), rather limiting itself to the broader matter of highlighting its distinction compared to a definition of demos based on the Agnostic principle.
[73]Koenig-Archibugi (2020) 1032-33
[74]Ibid. 1038
[75]Ibid. 1047s
[76]van Asseldonk, Maxim 'Democracy without Demos: A Prefigurative Approach to Democratic Peoplehood', Krisis: Journal for Contemporary Philosophy (44.2) (December 2024) <https://doi.org/10.21827/krisis.44.2.41119> [accessed 1st February 2026]
[77]In simple terms, actively living out and practising now the kind of society (or relationships) that people want to create in the future—instead of simply fighting against the current system or waiting for big changes later.
[78]Bobbio, Norberto, *Liberalism and Democracy*, 20–40
[79]Covering authorities such as Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, J.S. Mill and Isaiah Berlin as a bare minimum
[80]Nicholas Stephenson and Phoebe Arsnalagic-Little, *Generation Extreme*, Onward (20th July 2025), <https://ukonward.com/reports/generation-extreme/> [accessed 15th October 2025]
[81]Official projections show sizeable net fiscal costs both on arrival and over their lifetimes for many categories of immigrant. For instance, modelling by the Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR) suggests that a 25-year-old arrival on low income and average life expectancy will be expected to incur a lifetime cost to the state of the equivalent of 465,000 Euros (Office for Budget Responsibility, *Fiscal risks and sustainability – September 2024* <https://obr.uk/frs/fiscal-risks-and-sustainability-september-2024/> [accessed 7th November 2025])
[82]Samuel Issacharoff, 'Democracy's Deficits', The University of Chicago Law Review, (85.2) (March 2018), pp. 485-520 <https://lawreview.uchicago.edu/sites/default/files/09%20Issacharoff_SYMP_Online.pdf> [accessed 3rd February 2026]
[83]Ibid. p.485
[84]Ibid. p.509
[85]Ibid. pp.513-514, citing Francis Fukuyama, 'The Failed State', *Prospect* (Jan 2017) <https://www.prospectmagazine.co.uk/essays/43715/america-the-failed-state> [accessed 3rd February 2026]
[86]Further food for thought might be provided in a provocative comment by English political philosopher John Gray when he says the following: 'In the twentieth century the state was the chief enemy of freedom. Today, it is the weakness of the state that most threatens freedom.' (John Gray, 'Back To Hobbes' in *Heresies: Against Progress and Other Illusions* (London: Granta Books, 2004) p. 109)
[87]Political commentator Joel Kotkin turns the screw further on special interests: 'Increasingly, wealth and power are concentrated in a small number of families and institutions that control the commanding heights of the economy… We are witnessing the rise of a new hereditary elite whose position is protected by control of information, capital, and regulatory power.' (Joel Kotkin, *The Coming of Neo-Feudalism: A Warning to the Global Middle Classes*, (New York: Encounter Books, 2020), p. 156)
[88]See Footnote 4
[89]Anthony Browne, *Do We Need Mass Immigration?*, Civitas (2002) <https://www.civitas.org.uk/content/files/cs23.pdf> [accessed 3rd February 2026]
[90]Ibid. p.139
[91]Ibid. p.117

[92]Scott Blinder, *Public Opinion and Public Policy: Complexities of the Democratic Mandate*, Migration Observatory, University of Oxford (2013) <https://migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/resources/primers/public-opinion-and-public-policy-complexities-of-the-democratic-mandate> [accessed 3rd February 2026]
[93]See Footnote 70
[94]Illustrative critiques focusing on concerns about 'illiberal' tendencies amongst right-of-centre parties can be found in Svolik et al. ('In Europe, Democracy Erodes from the Right', *Journal of Democracy* (34.1) (Jan 2023) pp. 5-20 <https://www.journalofdemocracy.org/articles/in-europe-democracy-erodes-from-the-right/> [accessed 4th February 2026]) and Polyakova et al. ('The Anatomy of Illiberal States: Assessing and Responding to Democratic Decline in Turkey and Central Europe', *Brookings Institution* (February 2019) <https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/illiberal-states-web.pdf> [accessed 4th February 2026]. One hopes for equivalent critical treatment of similar tendencies in left-of-centre ruling parties such as in the United Kingdom and Spain.
[95]Politico, 'Belgium gets new government with Flemish separatist Bart De Wever as PM' (31 January 2025) <https://www.politico.eu/article/belgium-bart-de-wever-government-coalition-flemish-nationalist-n-va/> [accessed 4th February 2026]; Le Monde, 'Flemish nationalist Bart De Wever sworn in as Belgium's new prime minister' (3 February 2025) <https://www.lemonde.fr/en/international/article/2025/02/03/flemish-nationalist-bart-de-wever-sworn-in-as-belgium-s-new-prime-minister_6737718_4.html> [accessed 4 February 2026]
[96]European Parliament elections 2024, <https://results.elections.europa.eu/en/belgium/index.html#country-results> [accessed 4th February 2026]
[97]Ford & Jennings, 'The Changing Cleavage Politics of Western Europe' (2020).
[98]OSW Centre for Eastern Studies, 'Babiš's new government: Czechia first' (18 December 2025) <https://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/analyses/2025-12-18/babiss-new-government-czechia-first> [accessed 4 February 2026]; Reuters, 'Czech populist billionaire Babis returns as prime minister' (9 December 2025) <https://www.reuters.com/world/czech-president-appoints-andrej-babis-new-prime-minister-2025-12-09> [accessed 4 February 2026]
[99]European Parliament, <https://results.elections.europa.eu/en/national-results/czechia/2024-2029> [accessed February 2026]
[100]Ford & Jennings, 'The Changing Cleavage Politics of Western Europe' (2020)
[101]Euronews, 'French government avoids collapse after surviving two no-confidence votes' (23 January 2026) <https://www.euronews.com/my-europe/2026/01/23/french-government-avoids-collapse-after-surviving-two-no-confidence-votes> [accessed 4th February 2026]; The Guardian, 'France passes budget after months of wrangling and no-confidence motions' (2 February 2026) <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2026/feb/02/france-passes-budget-after-wrangling-no-confidence-motions-sebastien-lecornu> [accessed 4 February 2026]
[102]European Parliament, https://results.elections.europa.eu/en/national-results/france/2024-2029 [accessed 4 February 2026].
[103]Guth & Nelsen, 'Party choice in Europe' (2021).
[104]The Guardian, 'German parliament elects Merz as chancellor in second round of voting' (6 May 2025) <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/may/06/friedrich-merz-suffers-shock-defeat-in-german-parliament-vote-for-chancellor> [accessed 4 February 2026]; BBC, 'Germany's Merz becomes chancellor after surviving historic vote failure' (6 May 2025) <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c3gg8v2n8jno> [accessed 4 February 2026]; ifo Institute, '100 Days of Germany's Black/Red government: Economists Give Initial Interim Assessment' (13 August 2025) <https://www.ifo.de/en/facts/2025-08-13/100-days-germanys-blackred-government-economists-give-initial-interim-assessment> [accessed 4 February 2026].
[105]European Parliament, <https://results.elections.europa.eu/en/national-results/germany/2024-2029> [(accessed 4th February 2026].
[106]Gethin et al., 'Brahmin Left versus Merchant Right' (2022).
[107]European Parliament, <https://results.elections.europa.eu/en/national-results/hungary/2024-2029> [accessed 4 February 2026].
[108]Ibid.

[109]Borbáth & Paxton, 'Movement parties in Europe' (2025)
[110]European Parliament, <https://results.elections.europa.eu/en/national-results/italy/2024-2029> [accessed February 2026]
[111]Ibid.; FdI results.
[112]Gethin et al. (2022)
[113]ECRE, 'OP-ED: The fall of the Dutch government – that took longer than expected' (19 June 2025) <https://ecre.org/op-ed-the-fall-of-the-dutch-government-that-took-longer-than-expected> [accessed 4th February 2026]; The Conversation, 'The Netherlands is trying to draw a line under a year of chaos with fresh elections – will it work?' (21 October 2025) <https://theconversation.com/the-netherlands-is-trying-to-draw-a-line-under-a-year-of-chaos-with-fresh-elections-will-it-work-267076> [accessed 4 February 2026] (reports on Dutch snap election October 2025 after Schoof collapse)
[114]PVV at ~24% in 2024 EP
[115]Ford & Jennings (2020).
[116]Notes from Poland 'Official results confirm victory for Tusk's KO in Poland's European elections with far right third' (10 June 2024) <https://notesfrompoland.com/2024/06/10/official-results-confirm-victory-for-tusks-ko-in-polands-european-elections-with-far-right-third> [accessed 4 February 2026]; House of Commons Library, 'Poland: The Tusk government and the 2025 presidential election' (3 July 2025) <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-10300> [accessed 4 February 2026].
[117]European Parliament, <https://results.elections.europa.eu/en/national-results/poland/2024-2029> [accessed February 2026].
[118]Gethin et al., 'Brahmin Left versus Merchant Right' (2022)
[119]BBC, 'Romanian PM resigns and pulls out of coalition after nationalist vote win' (5 May 2025) <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cj3xk8prxy8o> [accessed 4 February 2026]; House of Commons Library, 'Romania: the 2025 Presidential election' (9 October 2025) <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-10355> [accessed 4 February 2026]
[120]European Parliament, <https://results.elections.europa.eu/en/national-results/romania/2024-2029> [accessed February 2026].
[121]Gethin et al. (2022)
[122]Freedom House, 'Slovakia: Freedom in the World 2025' <https://freedomhouse.org/country/slovakia/freedom-world/2025> [accessed 4 February 2026]; Balkan Insight, 'Slovakia in 2025: Continuing Down a Dark Road' (8 January 2025) <https://balkaninsight.com/2025/01/08/slovakia-in-2025-continuing-down-a-dark-road> [accessed 4 February 2026]
[123]European Parliament, <https://results.elections.europa.eu/en/national-results/slovakia/2024-2029> [accessed 4th February 2026]
[124]Ford & Jennings (2020)
[125]van Asseldonk (2024), pp. 8-9, citing Mathijs van de Sande, 'They Don't Represent Us? Synecdochal Representation and the Politics of Occupy Movements' *Constellations* (27.3) (2020) 397-411 and Isabell Lorey, 'The 2011 Occupy Movements: Rancière and the Crisis of Democracy' *Theory, Culture & Society* (31.7/8) (2014) 43-65
[126]Henry Kissinger, *World Order* (London: Penguin Books, 2014)
[127]Ibid. p. 142
[128]Not covered here are the various other non-democratic courses of action listed as survey options in the Outward report noted in Part V and Footnote 89, viz. military strongman government, absolute monarchy, communism and fascism.
[129]David Betz, 'Civil War Comes to the West', *Military Strategy Magazine* (9.1) (Summer 2023) pp. 20-26 <https://doi.org/10.64148/msm.v9i1.3> [accessed 14th October 2025]
[130]cf. Britannica, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/consociationalism> [accessed 3rd February 2026]
[131]Pyke Haans, *Experiences from Twenty Years of Consociationalism in Multi-Ethnic North Macedonia* (Master's thesis), Radboud University <https://theses.ubn.ru.nl/bitstreams/f2718a09-9bdc-4d44-8cef-2304cafb9ec4/download> [accessed 3rd February 2026]
[132]e.g. Michaelina Jakala, Durukan Kuzu & Matt Qvortrup (Eds.), *Consociationalism and Power-Sharing in Europe: Arend Lijphart's Theory of Political Accommodation*. (Palgrave Macmillan, Cham: 2018) <http://ndl.ethernet.edu.et/bitstream/123456789/59247/1/87.pdf.pdf> [accessed 3rd February 2026]
[133]See Footnote 102

[134]Examples described in the previous two references include elite capture and corruption (Haans) and inefficiency and frozen conflicts (Jakala et al). Comprehensive critical assessments include those by Brian Barry ('The Consociational Model and Its Dangers', *European Journal of Political Research* (3.4) (1975) pp. 393-412 <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-6765.1975.tb01253.x> [accessed 4th February 2026] and Matthew Wilson ('A Closer Look at the Limits of Consociationalism', *Comparative Political Studies* (53.5) (2020) pp. 571-602 <https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414019858956> [accessed 4th February 2026])

[135]In Ernest Hemingway's novel *The Sun Always Rises*, one of the characters is asked how he had gone bankrupt. 'Gradually,' he replied, 'and then suddenly.'

[136]*Democracy in theory and practice: how UK attitudes compare internationally*, King's College London (2023) <https://www.kcl.ac.uk/policy-institute/assets/democracy-in-theory-and-practice.pdf> [accessed 15th October 2025]. World Values Survey data is supplemented by additional data for the UK. Not all countries are included in the WVS data set.?

DANUBE

INSTITUTE