

Quality of Parties and Candidates

Sustainable Governance Indicators 2024



Indicator

Socially Rooted Party System

Question

To what extent do parties articulate and aggregate all societal interests?

30 OECD and EU countries are sorted according to their performance on a scale from 10 (best) to 1 (lowest). This scale is tied to four qualitative evaluation levels.

- 10-9 = There are no barriers, by law or in practice, to achieving effective societal integration.
- 8-6 = Existing obstacles in the party system, by law and in practice, pose no significant barriers to achieving effective societal integration.
- 5-3 = Existing obstacles in the party system, by law and in practice, pose some significant barriers to achieving effective societal integration.
- 2-1 = Existing obstacles in the party system, by law and in practice, pose various significant barriers to achieving effective societal integration.

Finland

Score 10

Electoral provisions stipulate universal suffrage for all adult Finnish citizens, including prisoners and mentally disabled people, with a secret-ballot voting method. The minimum voting age is 18, and voting is noncompulsory. Expatriated Finnish citizens are entitled to vote, while non-Finnish nationals residing in Finland are excluded from national elections. However, non-Finnish permanent residents may vote in municipal elections. The population registration center maintains a register of people eligible to vote and sends a notification to those included in the register. Citizens do not need to register separately to vote. A system of advance voting has been in place for several decades, and the proportion of ballots cast in advance has risen significantly.

It is fair to say that the legal aspects of the political system, such as electoral system features, do not hinder the representation of relevant societal interests through political parties.

Electronic voting was tested in three municipalities during the 2008 municipal elections but has not been adopted in subsequent elections. In its final report from 2017, a working group on the issue appointed by the Ministry of Justice stated that while technically feasible, an online voting system is not yet ready to be implemented, as the technology has not reached a sufficiently high level to meet all relevant requirements.

The major political parties have local branches to represent distinct local interests. However, local party branches have lost members, and the parties' local

representation has become weaker. It is still fair to say that the existing parties in the legislature fairly well represent significant societal interests in a programmatic manner, as opposed to relying on clientelism.

Party manifestos differ from one another and are publicly accessible.

Citation:

Dag Anckar and Carsten Anckar. "Finland." In Dieter Nohlen and Philip Stöver, eds. *Elections in Europe. Data Handbook*. 2010. Nomos.
<https://vaalit.fi/en/electronic-voting1>

Norway

Score 10

The electoral system at the national level consists of 19 election districts, each sending a fixed number of delegates to parliament under a proportional representation system. The distribution of the 169 delegates among parties and districts slightly favors large parties and rural districts. To address this imbalance, 19 of the 169 members of parliament are allocated based on national voting results. To secure any of these 19 "equalization mandates," a party must receive at least 4.0% of the total national votes.

In elections to local authorities, each municipality functions as a single election district. Representatives are distributed among parties in proportion to their share of the votes. All major parties are organized as national organizations; no party exists with only regional presence. In local elections, ad hoc parties and interest groups may also participate.

The party system is typically described as a tripolar system: On the left, there are three parties (Labour, the Socialist Left, and the Red Party); on the right, there are two parties (the Conservative Party and the Progress Party); and clustered in the middle are the Agrarian Center Party, the Christian Democrats, the Liberal Party, and the Green Party. In sum, it is fair to say that all major social and economic interests are represented in the party system. Party manifestos are fairly similar in their commitment to a democratic polity. All parties have comprehensive homepages on the internet, and party programs and other relevant policy documents are easily accessible.

Austria

Score 9

There are no legal barriers in the electoral system or other rules that would hinder the representation of relevant societal interests through political parties. There is a 4% threshold that parties must overcome to gain mandates at the federal level. Several states also have a 4% threshold, including Burgenland, Lower Austria, and Upper Austria. The majority of other states have a slightly higher 5% threshold, while

Styria has no explicit minimum threshold for parliamentary state elections. However, by international standards, these rules cannot reasonably be considered to undermine the principle of democratic political competition and representation.

Austrian parties have a sophisticated organizational structure that reflects the federalist nature of the country as well as its lower regional units. The parties elected to parliament can be considered to represent a reasonably wide share of societal interests. The share of women members of parliament has risen more or less continuously and is currently at 40.1% in the Nationalrat, elected in 2019. However, migrants have remained strongly under-represented in parliament due to both a lack of voting rights and a tendency of most parties to place migrant candidates low on the party list.

All parties in parliament have detailed and reasonably distinct party manifestos, which are available to the public and enable voters to make an informed choice.

Citation:

<https://www.derstandard.at/story/2000110191221/mehr-bauern-als-migranten-und-wenige-frauen-im-neuen-nationalrat>

Belgium

Score 9

Belgium's proportional election system, combined with mandatory voting, ensures that many parties run in elections, representing a wide array of preferences. The consociational nature of Belgium, based on Catholic, Socialist, and Liberal pillars, includes nonprofit organizations, political parties, unions, and social security organizations. This system is associated with political parties representing the interests of a significant proportion of citizens in parliament and, although not always, in government (Delwi, 2022). However, the consociational nature can be questioned (Van Haute & Wauter, 2019) as eleven parties and two independent MPs have seats in the lower chamber of parliament. The presence of multiple parties, including far-right and far-left, allows a diversity of interests to be represented and to achieve societal integration in parliament, although it makes governing coalitions difficult (Pile, 2021).

Some parties with unique positions, such as the "Islam" party in 2012 or "DierAnimal" in 2019, ran for election but did not win seats. This reflects the main parties' incentive to incorporate such positions into their platforms as they become salient (Meguid 2005). One growing criticism from elected representatives is that the power of party leaders and technocrats can become overbearing, with party discipline resulting in a top-down chain of command that sometimes restricts individual representatives' freedom of expression.

V-Dem's Democracy report 2023 ranks Belgium in the top 10% of most democratic countries, above the Netherlands, Germany, and France but below Denmark, Sweden, and Norway..

Citation:

<https://www.lesoir.be/551084/article/2023-11-23/laicite-et-democratie-interne-pourquoi-julien-uyttendaele-quitte-le-ps>
<https://www.lesoir.be/556046/article/2023-12-17/rachid-madrane-un-clan-decide-autour-dun-repas-de-la-confection-des-listes-du-ps>

Delwit, P. 2022. *La vie politique en Belgique de 1830 à nos jours*. Bruxelles: UB Lire.

Meguid, B. M. 2005. "Competition between Unequals: The Role of Mainstream Party Strategy in Niche Party Success." *American Political Science Review* 99 (3): 347-359.

Pilet, J. B. 2021. "Hard Times for Governing Parties: The 2019 Federal Elections in Belgium." *West European Politics* 44 (2): 439-449.

Van Haute, E., and B. Wauters. 2019. "Do Characteristics of Consociational Democracies Still Apply to Belgian Parties." *Politics of the Low Countries* 1: 6.

Canada

Score 9

In Canada, political parties are free-forming and open to competition. There are no barriers to their creation, although creation does not imply success in electing candidates in future elections, where incumbents and party loyalties favor older, more well-established parties (Cross et al. 2022).

In the modern era in Canada, parties are not ethnically, religiously, or race-based, although some are regional. Currently, this is the case with the Bloc Québécois, a federal party that runs candidates only in the province of Quebec and supports its independence from the rest of Canada.

In general, political parties in Canada, both federal and provincial, make a determined effort to have a diverse candidate pool. This is due to the country's significant regional and ethno-racial diversity. Parties also pay attention to the gender diversity of candidates; however, federally and provincially, legislative assemblies are currently male-dominated. For instance, in the federal House of Commons, only about 30% of the MPs are women. However, since late 2015, gender parity has been enforced within the federal ministerial cabinet.

Federal political parties are known for their "brokerage" qualities, especially as they seek to reconcile perspectives from English and French Canada. Nevertheless, there are modest programmatic differences between these parties, which can be seen in their publicly accessible manifestos.

Citation:

HOUSE OF COMMONS PROCEDURE AND PRACTICE

Edited by Robert Marleau and Camille Montpetit

<https://www.ourcommons.ca/marleaumontpetit/DocumentViewer.aspx?Sec=Ch04&Seq=3&Language=E>

Cross, William P., Scott Pruyers, and Rob Currie-Wood. 2022. *The Political Party in Canada*. Vancouver: UBC Press.

Denmark

Score 9

Denmark employs a proportional electoral formula for elections at all levels of governance, ensuring that most societal interests can obtain representation. Consequently, it is rare for social movements unaffiliated with political parties to gain representation. Following the latest municipal election, Elklit and Kjær (2021) argued that some imbalances in the current electoral formula need to be addressed. These imbalances arise because political parties have the right to form electoral alliances, based on which seats are distributed. Without this right, the electoral system would be more proportional. According to Elklit and Kjær, the primary issue is that the ability to form pre-electoral coalitions distorts results, giving the biggest party in the coalition an advantage by awarding it more seats relative to the number of votes it has received.

Political parties are well represented across Denmark, with active local branches. Most parties also have youth organizations. There are some differences among parties regarding how independently local branches can nominate candidates without interference from national offices. Generally, the newer the party, the less autonomy local branches have in selecting candidates to run for office (Kosiara-Pedersen and Harre 2017).

A recent analysis of local party manifestos from the 2021 election shows that political parties offer policies adjusted to the local political environment without losing sight of their ideological outlook (Schrøder et al. 2021). Hence, political parties at the national and local levels are programmatic in their approach to policy. While parties have distinct political profiles, ideological distances between parties are relatively small in Denmark, with no evidence of strong positional polarization (Green-Pedersen and Kosiara-Pedersen 2020).

Party manifestos are publicly available at national, regional and municipal elections for most parties.

Citation:

Green-Pedersen, C. and K. Kosiara-Hansen. 2020. "The Party System: Open yet Stable." *Oxford Handbook of Danish Politics*, 554-579.

Elklit, J., and U. Kjær. 2021. "Er 1, 2, 3, 4 ... virkelig bedre end 1, 3, 5, 7 ...?" <https://www.ft.dk/samling/2022/almde/INU/bilag/39/2739523/index.htm>

Kosiara-Pedersen, K., and Harre, A. 2017. "Kandidatrekruttering i politiske partier." *Økonomi & Politik* 90 (3).

Schrøder, et al. 2021. "Er der forskel på partiernes lokale valgprogrammer?" In Elklit Jørgen and Ulrik Kjær, eds., *KV17: Analyser af kommunalvalget 2017*, pp. 223-239.

Estonia

Score 9

Estonia uses a party-list proportional electoral system, which, unlike the winner-take-all system, allows for a more balanced representation of societal interests in local councils and the Riigikogu (parliament). In parliamentary elections, the threshold for eligibility is 5% of the national vote. In 2023, three such parties exceeded this mark. Six parties are represented in the current (15th) Riigikogu (National Electoral Committee 2023).

All main political parties have local branches, and their rights and autonomy are regulated by statutes. Since Estonia is a small country with a two-tier administrative system, regional political interests are not particularly salient. By and large, the extent to which local entities are able to voice local problems at the national level depends on the particular person or branch.

Political parties in the legislature represent significant societal interests, the main cleavage being between liberalism/openness and conservatism/nationalism. Some specific interests, such as those of farmers, are not explicitly represented by any political party. Similarly, the Greens and parties representing national minorities, including Russian speakers, are not popular enough to enter the legislature. Nonetheless, these interests are represented to some extent by other parliamentary parties, notably the Social Democrats and the Center Party.

Party manifestos are publicly available on party websites and attract significant media attention. Because the political climate has become more tense in the last decade, party manifestos have become more distinct, especially in relation to “soft” values such as gender equality, sexual orientation, marriage, religious issues and freedom of speech.

National Electoral Committee. 2023. “Votes and Seats by Political Parties.” <https://rk2023.valimised.ee/et/election-result/index.html>

Germany

Score 9

Legal aspects of the German political system only moderately hinder the representation of legal aspects of the German political system only moderately hinder the representation of relevant societal interests. For example, political parties can be prevented from representing undemocratic interests. According to Article 21 of the Basic Law, parties must adhere to democratic principles and are deemed unconstitutional if they impair these principles. If the Federal Constitutional Court determines a party is unconstitutional, it can be dissolved and prohibited from being re-established.

However, prohibiting a party is not easily achieved. The rejection of democratic principles in a party’s manifesto is insufficient for a ban; the party must threaten

democracy through its concrete actions. This requirement poses a significant obstacle because it is difficult to differentiate between the actions of individual party members and the actions of the party as an entity. Additionally, any ruling must consider the jurisdiction of the European Court of Human Rights, which allows prohibition only if a party has realistic chances of being elected and implementing goals that threaten democracy.

Due to these strong barriers, only two parties have ever been banned in Germany: the SRP and the KPD. The NPD, which was determined to be unconstitutional, was not banned because the Federal Constitutional Court ruled it did not have the potential to enforce its anti-democratic goals (Bundesverfassungsgericht, 2017).

The German electoral system includes a five percent threshold for political parties to gain seats in parliament and thus represent specific societal interests. This threshold was implemented in 1949 to ensure the operability of the parliament and to form a stable government. In the 2021 federal elections, 8.7% of the votes were for parties that did not surpass the 5% threshold and, hence, did not receive seats in the German parliament (Statista, 2023). A similar trend can be found in various state elections in 2023. In Bavaria, 9.7% of the votes – including those for the FDP and The Left – did not exceed 5% (Süddeutsche Zeitung, 2023). In Hesse, 12.1% of the votes, including those for The Left, did not meet the threshold (Hessisches Statistisches Landesamt, 2023). In Berlin, the percentage was 13.7%, with the FDP included in this figure (Tagesschau, 2023a). Therefore, an increasing share of votes is not represented in the parliament.

In June 2023, German Federal President Steinmeier signed a new law for electoral reform (Wahlrechtsreform) to decrease the size of the Bundestag to 630 members. The Bundestag currently consists of 736 representatives (Tagesschau, 2023b). The reform abolishes the so-called “Grundmandatsklausel.” Previously, a party could be represented in the Bundestag if it won at least three constituencies (Direktmandat), even if the party itself did not exceed the five percent threshold. Under the new law, candidates with a Direktmandat will receive a seat in parliament only if their party exceeds the five percent threshold.

This change will likely lead to the elimination of The Left party from the Bundestag because its current presence in the chamber is a function of the three-constituency rule. Moreover, the parliamentary representation of the CSU is in jeopardy. This party runs only in one of the 16 states, Bavaria, where it wins almost all constituencies; nonetheless, its overall nationwide vote share was just 5.2% in 2021. A loss of 0.3 percentage points would eliminate this party from the Bundestag as well. Thus, the change in the electoral law clearly has the potential to hinder the representation of relevant societal interests.

In October 2023, the citizens’ association Mehr Demokratie filed a complaint against the reform with the Constitutional Court, worrying that millions of votes would be invalidated (Tagesschau, 2023c).

During the last federal election in 2021, almost all political parties published manifestos that are publicly accessible on their websites and are relatively distinct from one another (V-Dem, 2023). A majority of parties also published additional manifestos formulated in simple language. Moreover, since 2002, the Federal Agency for Civic Education has provided the “Wahl-O-Mat,” which allows voters to determine how closely their preferences on relevant topics align with the manifestos of various parties running for election (BpB, 2021).

Additionally, a majority of Germany’s major political parties have permanent local branches to support local interests (V-Dem, 2023). This practice stems from German federalism, where the responsibility for some tasks lies with the states rather than the federal government (§73ff. Basic Law). Some state-level responsibilities are delegated to municipalities, making local party branches relevant as well.

The Varieties of Democracy data shows a value of 3.76 for the party linkages indicator, suggesting that constituents mainly respond to a party’s program and its ideas for society. The value also indicates that, to a lesser extent, voters are rewarded with local collective goods. Clientelism, however, does not appear to be very present in political parties (V-Dem, 2023).

Regarding the different societal interests represented through the major political parties, left, center, and right positions are present in the parliament. According to the Manifesto Project (2023), which uses a right-left position scale derived from party manifestos, The Left, the SPD, the South Schleswig Voter’s Union, and the Greens are classified as left-wing parties. The FDP and CDU are positioned in the middle of the scale, making them center parties. The AfD is classified as a right-wing party.

Citation:

Bundesverfassungsgericht. 2017. “Kein Verbot der NPD wegen fehlender Anhaltspunkte für eine erfolgreiche Durchsetzung ihrer verfassungsfeindlichen Ziele.” Pressemitteilung Nr. 4/2017 vom 17. Januar 2017. <https://www.bundesverfassungsgericht.de/SharedDocs/Pressemitteilungen/DE/2017/bvg17-004.html>

Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung. 2021. “Wie funktioniert der Wahl-O-Mat?” <https://www.bpb.de/themen/wahl-o-mat/294576/wie-funktioniert-der-wahl-o-mat/>

Deutscher Bundestag. 2013. “Aktueller Begriff Sperrklausel im Wahlrecht, Nr. 48/13.” December 19.

Hessisches Statistisches Landesamt. 2023. “Landtagswahlen in Hessen: Vorläufige Ergebnisse.” <https://statistik.hessen.de/presse/landtagswahl-2023-in-hessen-vorlaeufige-ergebnisse>

Manifesto Project. 2023. “Manifesto Project Data Dashboard.” https://visuals.manifesto-project.wzb.eu/mpdb-shiny/cmp_dashboard_dataset/

Niedermayer, O. 2022. “Voraussetzungen, Rechte und Pflichten von Parteien in Deutschland.” <https://www.bpb.de/themen/parteien/parteien-in-deutschland/197278/voraussetzungen-rechte-und-pflichten-von-parteien-in-deutschland/#node-content-title-1>

Tagesschau. 2023a. “Abgeordnetenhauswahl 2023.” <https://www.tagesschau.de/wahl/archiv/2023-02-12-LT-DE-BE/index.shtml>

Tagesschau. 2023b. “Steinmeier unterschreibt Gesetz zur Wahlrechtsreform.” <https://www.tagesschau.de/eilmeldung/steinmeier-wahlrecht-100.html>

Tagesschau. 2023. “Bürgerverein klagt gegen Wahlrechtsreform der Ampel.” <https://www.tagesschau.de/inland/innenpolitik/wahlrechtsreform-sperrklausel-klage-100.html>

Statista. 2023. “Ergebnisse der Bundestagswahl am 26. September 2021.” <https://de.statista.com/themen/3999/bundestagswahlen-in-deutschland/#topicOverview>

Süddeutsche Zeitung. 2023. “Stimmkreise und Direktmandate: Alle Ergebnisse im Überblick.”

<https://www.sueddeutsche.de/bayern/landtagswahl-bayern-2023-ergebnisse-csu-afd-die-gruenen-stimmkreise-freie-waehler-1.6278958>

Varieties of Democracy. 2023. https://www.v-dem.net/data_analysis/CountryGraph/

Slovenia

Score 9

The electoral system is based on proportional representation with a 4% threshold for entry into the National Assembly of the RS (lower house of parliament). Slovenia is divided into eight constituencies, each subdivided into 11 sub-constituencies (districts). In practice, due to the seat distribution model, not every district always has its representative. Representatives of the Hungarian and Italian national minorities compete for a reserved seat, one for each group. The electoral system allows several parties to enter parliament – in practice, between 7 and 9. However, in 2022, only five parties passed the threshold, mainly due to tactical voting favoring the winning party. These parties represent important and diverse interests in society.

As the Manifesto Project shows, the manifestos of political parties differ in length, policy domains and policies addressed, importance, and solutions offered. The manifestos of the parties competing in the 2022 elections were publicly accessible, mainly via the parties' websites. Both libertarian-authoritarian (GAL-TAN) and left-right economic cleavages are evident in the party system. Some parties in this system have significant populist elements. There is also considerable polarization caused by certain political parties (e.g., SDS) that have contributed to the tactical voting of center-left voters to defeat the former ruling party and its government in the 2022 elections. Established parties have developed a territorial organizational structure, although there is an important difference between the established and institutionalized and the new political parties in this respect.

Citation:

Chapel Hill Expert Survey. 2024. "Chess Interactive." <https://chesdata.shinyapps.io/Shiny-CHES/>

Krašovec, A., and Lajh, D. 2024. "Ali je 'slon v prostoru'? Evropska unija in strankarsko tekmovanje." In M. Novak and E. Nacevska, eds., *Parlamentarne volitve 2022*. Ljubljana: Fakulteta za družbene vede (in print).

Manifesto Project. 2024. "Manifesto Project Database." <https://manifesto-project.wzb.eu>

The PopuList. 2024. "Country Reports." <https://popu-list.org/applications/>

Spain

Score 9

Each major political party in Spain has local branches that allowing them to represent local interests and maintain a presence in communities. Several nationalist parties, which have significant national impact, focus on specific local interests or are pro-independence, maintaining a permanent presence of party activists in particular communities. Left-wing parties are noticeable but primarily concentrated in urban areas. The organizational hierarchy varies significantly among major

political parties. For instance, the new Sumar party is a loose alliance of regional and local groups, whereas Vox is highly organized.

During the observation period, party leadership structures increased their control over major decisions, including the appointment of local and regional party leaders. However, the decline in party membership in recent years has weakened the connection between parties, new voters, and civil society actors.

Most parties and their candidates provide targeted goods and benefits to a minor extent. During the past legislative term, 19 parties were represented in the Spanish parliament, some with very specific programs and others with predominantly regional interests focused on particular goods and benefits.

According to the V-Dem project, party manifestos differ widely. For example, on immigration, some manifestos strongly oppose almost all forms of immigration, while others strongly support most forms (V-Dem Project, 2023). Similar variations exist in minority policies and the territorial organization of the state, among others. All party manifestos are publicly accessible.

Citation:

V-Dem Project, <https://www.v-dem.net/about/v-dem-project/>

Sweden

Score 9

Political parties are at the heart of modern representative democracy in Sweden. They are large, powerful organizations that recruit future political leaders and train current political activists. They have local chapters and, in theory, they are in tune with issues that are salient at both the local and national levels.

Erlingsson et al. (2016) identify three main developments in party organizations. First, Swedish party organizations have become professionalized and appear to be less connected with their grassroots base and civil society organizations. As a consequence, they risk providing less relevant solutions at the local level. Second, as party membership declines, parties are increasingly dependent on state subsidies. This may further disconnect them from the will of the citizens they are supposed to represent. Third, Erlingsson et al. (2016) find that although political parties are not a particularly trusted institution in Sweden, their reputation is improving, and there is little to suggest they are becoming internally less democratic.

Party manifestos are available online in an easy-to-read format. In the 2022 elections, there was significantly less focus on ideology in these documents compared to the 2018 elections. Parties either presented detailed policy proposals or conveyed a general message on safety – to address the issue of gang violence, which is currently a major concern on the political agenda (Demker, 2022).

Citation:

Demker, M. 2022. "Demokratiens grindvakter." In *Snabbtänkt: 2.022. Reflektioner från valet 2022 av ledande forskare*, eds. N. Bolin, K. Falasca, M. Grusell, and Lars Nord. https://www.miun.se/globalassets/forskning/center-och-institut/demicom/snabbtankt_2022_12okt.pdf

Erlingsson, G. Ó., A.-K. Kölln, and P. Öhberg. 2016. "The Party Organizations." In *The Oxford Handbook of Swedish Politics*, ed. J. Pierre, 169-187. Oxford: OUP.

Greece

Score 8

In Greece, a 3% electoral threshold must be surpassed by a political party to gain parliamentary representation. While this threshold acts as a barrier, it ensures that the vast majority of societal interests are represented without fragmenting parliamentary representation excessively. Parties failing to meet this threshold do not elect MPs. There are no minority parties representing ethnic, regional, or other specific constituencies. Over the past 30 years, the Muslim minority of Western Thrace (in northwest Greece) has been represented by MPs who have aligned with major parties such as New Democracy, Pasok, and Syriza.

The largest political parties, including New Democracy, Pasok, and Syriza, maintain local branches across cities and towns nationwide without promoting localism or distinctly regional interests. Party manifestos once differed significantly during periods of intense polarization in the Greek party system, such as in the 1980s (New Democracy vs. Pasok) and again during the recent economic crisis in the 2010s (New Democracy and Pasok vs. Syriza). Although ideological differences persist, particularly regarding state intervention in the economy and labor market, the major parties have converged on key policy areas such as foreign policy, EU-Greece relations, and macroeconomic and fiscal policies.

Moreover, all three major parties reject the revolutionary approach to state socialism advocated by the Communist Party of Greece (KKE). Despite this exception, the largest parties have reached consensus on significant policy issues.

Citation:

Links to party manifestos (2023):

New Democracy (ND): <https://nd.gr/ekloges-2023>

Panhellenic Socialist Party (Pasok): <https://digitalsociety.gr/programma.pdf>

Coalition of the Radical Left (Syriza): <https://www.syriza.gr/article/id/144470/To-kybernhitiko-programma-toy-SYRIZA-Proodeytikh-Symmachia.html#>

Communist Party of Greece (KKE): <https://www.kke.gr/arxes-stoxoi/programma/>

Ireland

Score 8

The institutional and policy context is characterized by the paradox of a strongly centralized state and weak local government, alongside a political culture dominated by strong localism that is reinforced by a proportional national electoral system

organized around 43 constituencies (in the next election). An unusual number of independent candidates (up to 20%) can group (usually *ex ante*) into political groups supporting coalition governments (potentially reinforcing local over societal interests). An ongoing innovation to ensure better representation of societal interests is the gender candidate quotas which have significantly changed candidate selection processes in general elections. The Electoral (Amendment) (Political Funding) Act 2012 encourages political parties to select at least 30% female candidates in national elections with the threshold rising to 40% by the next general election, and there is demand to extend this to local elections. While successfully implemented, gender disparity continues alongside poor representation of ethnic groups and migrants, including people of color and the Traveller Community (Cullen and Gough 2022). Major political parties organize through local branches (*cumann*) to represent distinct local interests albeit not all have full geographical coverage. Existing parties in the legislature comprehensively represent significant societal interests in a programmatic manner, but also serve local constituencies in a manner similar to clientelism (servants of the people). Party manifestos are distinctive from one another and are publicly accessible. The “Populist” database is out of date and erroneous for Ireland, but The Manifesto Project has 2016 data for all relevant parties and political scientists in Ireland have published work analyzing public political party manifestos.

Citation:

Carty, K. 2021. “The Electoral Framework and the Politics of Representation.” In D.M. Farrell and N. Hardiman, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Irish Politics*, 297-310. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Cullen, P. and Gough, S. 2022. *Different Paths, Shared Experiences, Ethnic Minority Women and Local Government in Ireland*. Maynooth: Maynooth University.

Lithuania

Score 8

Political parties, coalitions and independent candidates participating in national, municipal and European Parliament elections represent a wide range of ideologies. The vote threshold of 5% for political parties and 7% for party coalitions for entry to the Seimas might pose a barrier for smaller fringe parties. However, the mixed electoral system of the Seimas – with 71 members elected based on single-member constituencies and 70 members elected through proportional representation – increases the possibilities for representing distinct local interests.

The political parties elected to the Seimas represent a spectrum of ideologies ranging from left to right, as well as GAL (green, alternative, libertarian) and TAN (traditional, authoritarian, nationalist). Since the reestablishment of independence in the 1990s, no single party has been able to secure a majority of seats in the parliament. Ruling coalitions, typically comprising three or four parties, have generally been dominated by either centrist conservative or social-democratic parties, alternating with each election cycle. These parties also have the most developed organizational structures, with local branches. Almost every parliamentary election has featured the emergence of a newly established political party in the Seimas.

In practice, the political divide between the ruling coalition and the opposition often dictates voting patterns more than ideological cleavages. These ideological differences are further blurred by the presence of informal groups representing GAL and TAN attitudes in major political parties, including the conservative Homeland Union – Lithuanian Christian Democrats, Lithuanian Social Democrats and the Liberal Movement, with those representing TAN attitudes typically elected in single-member districts.

Citation:

The Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania. “Seimas 2020-2024.”
https://www.lrs.lt/sip/portal.show?p_r=35354&p_k=2

New Zealand

Score 8

Generally speaking, political parties in New Zealand perform their democratic functions of social interest aggregation and articulation in an adequate fashion.

Parties seek to mobilize voters through programmatic platforms rather than particularistic appeals, and they can be distinguished based on their policy priorities. The party system is structured not only along a left-right economic policy divide, but also along a post-material cleavage that separates socially liberal parties from socially authoritarian parties (Ford 2021).

The mixed member proportional (MMP) electoral system is designed to represent diverse social interests more proportionately compared to some other electoral systems. Under MMP, coalition governments are common in New Zealand, meaning parties representing diverse social interests often have to collaborate in Parliament. Meanwhile, the Māori electoral roll and dedicated Māori electorates are intended to ensure that the Indigenous Māori community has political representation that acknowledges and addresses its specific cultural, social and political interests within the parliamentary system.

However, there are several challenges related to the aggregation and articulation of social interests.

As in other industrialized democracies, the programmatic manifestos of the two major parties have lost much of their distinctiveness. In particular, on the left-right economic spectrum, Labour has moved very close to the National Party since the 1980s (Aimer 2015).

Moreover, in a manner similar to other democracies, political parties have seen a significant decline in grassroots membership. There is also an imbalance in organizational complexity: While the two major parties maintain a dense network of local branches, minor parties’ organizations are more limited. With the exception of

the Green Party, New Zealand's mainstream parliamentary parties tend to restrict participation by ordinary members in the selection of candidates for general elections (Miller 2015: 176-182).

Citation:

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Miller, R. 2015. *Democracy in New Zealand*. Auckland: Auckland University Press.

Portugal

Score 8

The expression of broader societal interests through political parties is somewhat hindered by certain features of the Portuguese electoral system, as previously discussed. In legislative elections, 226 seats are distributed proportionally to the number of voters in the 20 electoral districts of Portugal: 18 mainland districts and two districts for each Autonomous Region. In addition, there are two districts for Portuguese citizens residing abroad, one for those in Europe and another for those outside Europe, with two seats each. This generates a total of 230 seats in parliament.

It should be noted that this diaspora is substantial, with around 1.5 million registered electors in 2022 (Setenta e Quatro, 2022); however, the proportion of these who actually vote is very small. Turnout was only 11% in these two districts in the 2022 elections.

Previous elections reveal challenges in representing districts with much lower population density, primarily due to the limited number of seats they elect, which favors major political parties. For instance, in Portalegre, a district that elects only two members for parliament, the 2022 legislative elections showed that more than half of the valid votes cast in this district (51.82%) did not result in the election of any representatives (Expresso, 2022).

Despite these challenges, the traditionally stable Portuguese party system has recently undergone significant changes, moving away from the long-standing dominance of the same five parties that have controlled representation since 1999. However, it remains to be seen whether this shift has made the system more representative of broader social and political interests.

The January 2022 legislative elections saw 22 different lists competing, one more than in 2019, marking the highest total since democratization and reflecting increased inter-party differentiation and diverse societal representations (Serra-Silva & Santos, 2023). The upcoming snap election scheduled for March 2024 is likely to maintain this level of partisan diversity, potentially encompassing more societal

interests. Furthermore, the two mainstream parties – PS and PSD – which historically shared substantial programmatic agreement, have experienced increased ideological divergence in recent years (Serra-Silva & Santos, 2023).

Portugal’s main political parties have a formally decentralized structure at local and regional levels. However, these structures are predominantly mobilized for elections rather than articulating local interests and fostering grassroots engagement.

Citation:

Setenta e Quatro. 2022. “Todos os votos são iguais, mas alguns são mais iguais do que outros.” <https://setentaquatro.pt/ensaio/todos-os-votos-sao-iguais-mas-alguns-sao-mais-iguais-do-que-outros>

Expresso. 2022. “Mais de 671 mil votos foram ‘para o lixo’ nestas legislativas. Foi um em cada sete.” <https://expresso.pt/eleicoes/legislativas-2022/2022-01-31-Mais-de-671-mil-votos-foram-para-o-lixo-nestas-legislativas.-Foi-um-em-cada-sete-c2760589>

Serra-Silva, A., and M. Santos. 2023. “Continuity and Change in Portuguese Politics: Towards a More Polarized Party System?” In A. Costa Pinto eds., *Portugal Since the 2008 Economic Crisis: Resilience and Change*, 1st ed., 129-155. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781351046916>

Switzerland

Score 8

The major Swiss political parties offer clearly distinctive programmatic positions, with some considerable overlap in the case of the Social Democratic and Green parties. The Swiss party system is one of the programmatically most polarized systems in Western Europe (Zollinger 2022: 6; Zollinger and Traber 2023). These distinctive party manifestos are easily publicly accessible, in particular via the websites of the parties.

While party identification (respondents saying that they are close to a political party) has decreased from about 60% in 1971 to 30% in 2019 (Lutz 2022: 542; Vatter 2018: 146), party voters identify very strongly in terms of positive feelings with their chosen party. At the same time, their degree of dislike of other parties is at the lower end of the distribution of 20 established democracies (Häusermann and Bornschier 2023: 24).

Given the proportional electoral rule in elections to the House of Representatives (Nationalrat), the representation of relevant societal interests through political parties is not hindered. Furthermore, in the bicameral parliamentary system, the Council of States (Ständerat) ensures the representation of cantonal-level representatives at the national level, thus allowing for the integration of regional interests into the institutional political structure. There have been recent debates about whether this gives excessive weight to the more conservative voice of non-urban cantons, as opposed to the political preferences of the cities in which a large proportion of the population is clustered. At the level of the federal government, the historically instituted “formule magique” (since 1959) mandates stability in the party representation of the seven members of the Federal Council (Bundesrates) (Burgos et

al. 2009). Here again, there have been political discussions as to whether the Federal Council still reflects the composition of the parliament, as there has never been a representative of the Green Party in the Federal Council.

Historically, the Swiss party system has been very decentralized both programmatically and organizationally. Rather than one national party system, there have been 26 cantonal systems. In recent decades, some programmatic centralization has taken place; however, parties still have strong regional and local organizations (Ladner et al. 2022). The Swiss People's Party (SVP) has historically strong links to farmers and small traders, with its policymaking clearly offering benefits for this electorate. In that regard, there may be some clientelism; however, in general, parties comprehensively represent significant societal interests programmatically.

Citation:

Burgos, Elie, Oscar Mazzoleni, and Hervé Rayner. 2009. "Le gouvernement de tous faute de mieux. Institutionnalisation et transformation de la 'formule magique' en Suisse (1959-2003)." *Politix* 88 (4): 39-61.

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Ladner, Andreas, Daniel Schwarz, and Jan Fivaz. 2022. "Parteien und Parteiensystem." In *Handbuch der Schweizer Politik*, eds. Yannis Papadopoulos, Pascal Sciarini, Adrian Vatter, Silja Häusermann, Patrick Emmenegger, and Flavia Fossati. Zürich: NZZ Libro, 403-438.

Ladner, Andreas, Daniel Schwarz, and Jan Fivaz. 2023. "Parties and Party Systems." In *The Oxford Handbook of Swiss Politics*, eds. Patrick Emmenegger, Flavia Fossati, Silja Häusermann, Yannis Papadopoulos, Pascal Sciarini, and Adrian Vatter. Oxford: Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780192871787.013.16>. pp. 317-336

Lutz, Georg, and Anke Tresch. 2022. "Die nationalen Wahlen in der Schweiz." In *Handbuch der Schweizer Politik*. 7th ed., eds. Yannis Papadopoulos, Pascal Sciarini, Adrian Vatter, Silja Häusermann, Patrick Emmenegger, and Flavia Fossati, 519-557. Zürich: NZZ Libro.

Vatter, Adrian. 2018. *Das politische System der Schweiz*. 3rd edition. Baden-Baden: Nomos (UTB).

Zollinger, Delia. 2022. "Cleavage Identities in Voters' Own Words: Harnessing Open-Ended Survey Responses." *American Journal of Political Science*. <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/ajps.12743>

Zollinger, Delia, and Denise Traber. 2023. "The Ideological Space in Swiss Politics: Voters, Parties, and Realignment." In *The Oxford Handbook of Swiss Politics*, eds. Patrick Emmenegger, Flavia Fossati, Silja Häusermann, Yannis Papadopoulos, Pascal Sciarini, and Adrian Vatter. Oxford: Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780192871787.013.1>. pp. 116-136.

United Kingdom

Score 8

For the Westminster Parliament, the "first-past-the-post" system has been in place for several generations. This system almost always results in a majority for either the Conservative or Labour parties, which have been the dominant political forces over the past century. Although there was a coalition government between 2010 and 2015, and instances where the party with the largest number of Members of Parliament had to rely on less formal arrangements to remain in power, these are exceptions.

The Conservatives are right-of-center, encompassing a range from hard right to soft right, while the Labour Party is center-left, typically including some hard left members of Parliament. This internal diversity is a feature of the system. In 2015, the Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn was from the hard left, but a significant defeat in the 2019 election likely discourages the selection of another leader from that wing of the party. The current leader, Keir Starmer, emphasizes competence over ideology. Similarly, the Conservatives underwent a rebalancing in 2022 following Liz Truss's brief and problematic tenure as Prime Minister, during which she pursued right-wing economic reforms.

Political parties present manifestos, which are publicly available, and they are expected to broadly attempt to fulfill these commitments, although the realities of governance often lead to some promises being shelved. The differences between the main parties' manifestos can vary, depending on the internal dynamics within each party. In practice, smaller parties have minimal influence except in rare instances when the leading party has no majority or a very small one.

The situation is quite different for the devolved governments in Scotland and Wales. Both use the mixed-member proportional system, which reduces the likelihood of a single-party majority, allows smaller parties to secure more representation, and increases the likelihood of coalition governments. However, since 2007, the Scottish National Party has defied this expectation by forming single-party governments, either as a minority (2007-2011, 2016-present) or a majority (2011-2016). In Wales, since 1999, Welsh Labour has formed minority single-party governments or majority coalition governments, including the current minority single-party government since 2021.

In Northern Ireland, the 1998 Belfast Agreement mandates a power-sharing executive with representatives from both the Nationalist and Unionist communities. After the 2021 election, which resulted in a narrow Nationalist majority, Sinn Fein had the right to nominate the First Minister for the first time. However, a Unionist boycott, partly in protest of Brexit's impact, delayed the formation of the executive until 2024.

Overall, representation of different interests is achieved over time, provided there is a change in the governing party. Long periods of one party in power can favor certain interests, but shifts in governance help balance representation.

Australia

Score 7

The wide range of views presented by the parties in the Australian party system facilitates effective social integration, supported by preferential voting. However, the low and declining membership of parties indicates weakening societal penetration and relevance.

The Australian party system comprises two major parties/coalitions, Labor and the Liberal-National coalition, alongside several minor parties (with the Greens being the largest) and an increasing number of independent MPs and Senators. At the national level, the Liberal-National coalition, which had governed continuously since 2013, was defeated in the 2022 federal election, resulting in a Labor majority. Various competitive arrangements exist at the state level, such as in Victoria and Queensland, where Labor has been dominant for extended periods.

Labor is traditionally associated with left-wing politics, combining economic priorities with social and cultural policies. The Liberal-National coalition advocates conservative policies across economic, social, and cultural matters. Although the Liberals and Nationals are independent parties, they do not compete against each other in elections and generally operate as a cohesive coalition. The National party primarily draws support from regional and rural voters, making Australia unique internationally for having a significant agrarian party. Smaller parties and independents cater to niche electoral markets, including environmentalism, nativism, and integrity.

A wide range of ideological positions and manifestos are presented to voters at election time. For example, significant differences between the major parties were apparent in the 2022 federal election regarding aged care policy, corruption and the federal integrity commission, childcare policy, climate change policy, housing policy, the Voice and Indigenous recognition, and health policy (Guardian staff 2022).

The preferential voting system used in Australian elections allows voters to rank-order parties/candidates, enabling them to express complex preferences. Left-leaning supporters often give their first preference vote to Labor or the Greens and their second preference to the other left-leaning party. Right-leaning voters may distribute their preferences between the Liberal-National Coalition and right-leaning minor parties like One Nation. To capitalize on preferential voting, parties issue 'how to vote' cards to guide their supporters on allocating preferences.

While natural affinities exist between parties on the same side of the ideological spectrum, conflicts can arise among these 'ideological friends.' For example, relations between Labor and the Greens have been strained over their disagreement on addressing the housing affordability crisis (Speers 2023). Labor proposed a housing fund to build 30,000 social and affordable homes over three years, while the Greens called for more urgent action, including a rent freeze. Similar tensions have occurred on the right. During the 2022 federal election, the Liberal-National Coalition placed One Nation below Jacqui Lambie on its how-to-vote card for the Tasmanian senate elections. One Nation responded by directing its supporters to preference Labor ahead of the Liberal-National Coalition in five seats (Karp and Hinchliffe 2022).

Although parties present a wide range of positions, there has been some weakening of the connection between these positions and the demands and preferences of ordinary citizens. One reason may be the low and declining levels of party membership across the system (Oliver 2014), as party members traditionally played a key role in conveying grassroots views to party elites. The tenor of political discourse, in parliament and the media, may also have accelerated disillusionment and disengagement.

Citation:

Guardian staff. 2022. "Who should I vote for? Guide to seven key policies in the 2022 Australian federal election where Labor and Coalition differ." *The Guardian*, May 20. <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2022/may/20/australia-federal-election-2022-labor-liberal-coalition-australian-policy-guide-who-should-can-i-vote-for-aged-care-icac-childcare-climate-change>

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Czechia

Score 7

The party system in the Czech Republic allows for the aggregation of preferences from the grassroots level, and many small parties have emerged in the past. However, parties must cross a 5% threshold to gain entry into parliament. In the 2021 elections, which determine the current composition of parliament, many smaller parties failed to meet this threshold. For the first time since 1989, no left-wing party secured parliamentary seats. Consequently, more than one million votes, mostly from less well-off Czechs, are currently unrepresented in parliament (Guasti and Buřtková, CEPS, 2022).

Parties represent societal interests only to a limited degree. The connection between citizens and parties is weak and has become even more tenuous due to the rise of direct communication methods, flexible working arrangements that undermine union formation, and identity politics. Political parties generally lack extensive networks of local branches, though this varies among parties. The ODS, the party of Prime Minister Fiala, established in 1992, has eliminated local branches but maintains branches at the regional level.

The main opposition party, ANO, has no members and relies financially on its leader, Andrej Babiš, owner of the Agrofert conglomerate. Babiš has described ANO as both a catch-all party and a right-wing party with a social conscience, the latter description serving as a strategy to garner political support and undermine left-wing

parties. In the European Parliament, ANO belongs to the ALDE group. It won 27.2% of the votes in the 2021 parliamentary elections.

The far-right Freedom and Direct Democracy party (Svoboda a přímá demokracie, SPD), which received 9.6% of the votes in 2021, is highly personalized and lacks a network of local branches. The Pirate Party, a member of the coalition government, has a very open structure and a plebiscitary decision-making process. It does not have institutionalized local branches and is a member of the Greens/European Free Alliance in the European Parliament. Although it appears socially liberal, it leans more to the right on economic issues. The Pirate Party is allied with STAN (Starostové a Nezávislí, Mayors and Independents), which is a member of the European People's Party in the European Parliament. STAN is economically liberal and concerned with environmental issues. This alliance won 15.6% of the votes in 2021.

The main force in the government is a three-party coalition that received 27.8% of the votes in the 2021 parliamentary elections. Its largest member, the ODS, is socially conservative and economically liberal. It belongs to the European Conservatives and Reformists group in the European Parliament, along with Poland's PiS. The ODS retains a membership of 12,000, and the prime minister, Petr Fiala, is a member.

Citation:

Petra Guasti and Lenka Buštková. 2022. "Czech Government Wobbled by Mass Protests." CEPA. <https://cepa.org/article/czech-government-wobbled-by-mass-protests/>

Italy

Score 7

The Italian electoral system introduced by Law 165/2017 is a mixed system with two-thirds of representatives elected in multi-member districts (MMD) by a proportional formula (PR) and one-third in single-member districts (SMD) with plurality rule. Since the Italian bicameral system gives identical powers to both branches of parliament, the main elements that characterize the electoral rules have been harmonized between the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate to avoid different outcomes and ensure governability.

Legal thresholds of representation are essential for both individual parties and coalitions. For individual parties, the threshold is 3% of valid votes at the national level. This threshold does not apply to parties representing linguistic and ethnic minorities. Coalitions are eligible for proportional representation seats only if they obtain at least 10% of the votes nationwide and include a party with at least 3%. If these conditions are met, the coalition can count on the votes of all member parties that get at least 1% of the votes nationwide. However, only parties in the coalition with at least 3% of the votes can get a proportional share of the PR seats allocated to the coalition.

The presence of SMDs and legal thresholds of representation can potentially lead to disproportionate results, thus hindering an adequate representation of all social groups. The results of the September 2022 elections confirm a high level of disproportionality, as the center-right coalition won almost all SMDs (121 out of 146 in the chamber; 56 out of 67 in the Senate) (Chiaramonte et al. 2023).

The territorial distribution of the vote reveals important links between parties or coalitions and local interests. Italy's electoral map has changed dramatically from its traditional layout for the third election in a row. Fratelli d'Italia (FdI), which has acquired the same territorial profile as the League – from which it has drawn many voters – has become the most popular party in the Center-North. At the same time, the Five Star Movement (M5S) has remained by far the most popular party in southern Italy. More generally, center-right parties dominate Italy's small municipalities, where most voters live. The center-left coalition prevails in large cities in Central and Northern Italy. Finally, in the South, the M5S is the dominant party (Chiaramonte et al. 2023).

The vote distribution between North and South Italy, as well as between rural and urban areas, partly reveals the cultural divide between GAL (Green, Alternative, Libertarian) and TAN (Traditional, Authoritarian, Nationalist) parties. It also shows the connection of some parties or coalitions with specific local interests: taxation, deregulation, and protectionism for artisans and small and medium enterprises in Northern Italy, and income support policies for southern Italy. The rapid growth of M5S support in southern Italy after introducing citizenship income when it was in government – whose recipients are mainly located in southern regions – is emblematic.

The electoral law requires that party manifestos be published in a special section of the election website maintained by the Ministry of the Interior. This allows them to be consulted by all citizens. Extensive publicity is also given to the manifestos through the main parties' websites and social media. In the 2022 elections, the manifestos varied widely in length and detail, with those of the League and M5S among the longest. According to quantitative textual analyses (Trastulli and Mastroianni 2023), references to environmental and energy issues – two main topics of Italy's National Recovery and Resilience Plan (PNRR) – are present in almost all manifestos. Alongside these high-valence issues, parties have continued to emphasize those that traditionally define their ideological profiles in terms of credibility. Specifically, center-left parties focus on labor policies and social issues, while right-wing parties emphasize nationalism, defense, and security. Overall, the manifestos are rather generalist and cover a broad range of themes.

Citation:

Electoral results:<https://elezionistorico.interno.gov.it/>

Trastulli, F., and L. Mastroianni. 2023. "What's New Under the Sun? A Corpus Linguistic Analysis of the 2022 Italian Election Campaign Themes in Party Manifestos." *Modern Italy* 1–22. DOI:10.1017/mit.2023.45

Chiaromonte, A., Emanuele, V., Maggini, N., and Paparo, A. 2023. "Radical-Right Surge in a Deinstitutionalised Party System: The 2022 Italian General Election." *South European Society and Politics* 00(00): 1–29.

Japan

Score 7

There are few legal restrictions on establishing a political party, and the frequent formation and re-formation of parties on the national level indicates that the lack of organizational cohesion and stability, especially on the part of the opposition, is of greater concern for the functioning of representative democracy in Japan.

Apart from the LDP, the Japanese Communist Party (JCP) and the Komeito, most parties have only weak organizational structures on the local level. LDP politicians traditionally rely on personal support networks, called *kōenkai*, which organize campaigns and are loyal to individual politicians rather than party branches, while the Komeito relies on the *Sōka Gakkai* Buddhist sect to mobilize voters. Only the JCP features a nationwide party structure, which has allowed it to consistently field candidates in all electoral districts. The Constitutional Democratic Party of Japan (CDPJ), currently the main opposition party, maintains close ties with the moderate trade union umbrella organization *Rengō*. However, it is not a traditional labor party in the Western European sense. Opposition parties tend to rely more on urban voters than the LDP but are disadvantaged due to the malapportionment of electoral districts.

On the prefectural and local level, formally independent candidates who are supported by multiple parties are most common. In national elections, larger opposition parties often recruit and field candidates from outside the party. This has made them somewhat more inclusive of underrepresented societal groups. But even left and left-of-center parties field more male than female candidates. The LDP, on the other hand, is dominated by factional politics in which tenure and party membership play a large role. The LDP has few young and few female candidates. Also conspicuous is the absence of an avowedly environmental party, even though support for environmental policies is generally high.

Japan's postwar political system has long been described as clientelistic (Scheiner 2007) and deeply rooted in interest group politics. In the pre-1994 electoral system, LDP candidates were incentivized to "specialize" on specific interest groups so large parties could get two or more members elected in multi-member districts. This often involved pork-barrel spending and organizing a personal vote with relatively weak party ties. This is said to have contributed to massive public works spending. Although many institutions and laws have been reformed with the goal of reining in clientelism, it is noticeable that public works spending has increased again (Statistics Bureau 2023: 32).

All major parties publish manifestos before elections, which make programmatic choices fairly transparent.

Citation:

Hijino, Ken, and Victor Leonard. 2021. "What Drives Japanese Regional Elections? Multilevel Factors and Partisan Independents." *Regional and Federal Studies* 31 (3): 419-432.

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Scheiner, Ethan. 2007. "Clientelism in Japan: The Importance and Limits of Institutional Explanations." In *Patrons, Clients and Policies. Patterns of Democratic Accountability and Political Competition*, eds. Kitschelt, H., and S.I. Wilkinson. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 276-297.

Statistics Bureau of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications Japan. 2023. *The Statistical Handbook of Japan*. Tokyo: Statistics Bureau, Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications Japan.

Poland

Score 7

In general, most societal interests are reflected in the political spectrum present in the parliament. The Sejm, consisting of 460 members, is elected for a four-year term using proportional representation and the d'Hondt method, with a 5% threshold for entry (8% for coalitions, waived for national minorities). This rule has eliminated most minor parties from the Polish political scene; they have either disappeared or merged with larger parties, such as the Greens, who joined the Civic Platform in 2023 along with Nowoczesna and Inicjatywa Polska. Most major parties – aside from the newly constituted Polska 2050 – have well-organized local branches based mainly on state administrative divisions. Regional and local party branches report regional challenges to party leaders and are active during party conventions.

With 100 members, the Senate is elected for a four-year term via single-member constituencies and a first-past-the-post voting model. In the 2023 elections, only a few independent candidates not rooted in party politics entered the Senate, and most joined the liberal Senate Pact. The age requirements of 21 for the Sejm and 30 for the Senate do not infringe on the representation of various age groups in parliament. A rule introduced in 2011 requires all parties to allocate at least 35% of places on election lists to women, resulting in steady growth in the number of female parliamentarians, reaching a record 29.6% in the 2023 Sejm elections.

In 2023, all parties published political manifestos in anticipation of the forthcoming parliamentary elections. The PiS party called for new spending on social and military causes; Konfederacja advocated for tax cuts; the Civic Platform proposed changes in education and an increase in public sector salaries; the Third Way focused on green development and healthcare; and the New Left centered on restoring reproductive rights and women's rights. In general, all parties from the democratic opposition advocated reversing unconstitutional reforms of the judiciary system and restoring closer ties with the European Union (Łada-Konefał 2023).

Citation:

Łada-Konefał, A. 2023. "Poland's Pivotal Elections – High Stakes and an Uncertain Outcome." <https://globaleurope.eu/europes-future/polands-pivotal-elections-high-stakes-and-an-uncertain-outcome/>

United States

Score 7

The United States party system has undergone substantial internal transformation in recent decades, even though on the surface it appears much the same as it has since the mid-19th century. Since the 1850s, U.S. politics has been dominated by two main parties: the Democratic Party and the Republican Party. These parties have historically been large, varied coalitions. For example, in the early 20th century, the Democratic Party was a coalition of urban Catholic immigrants in the North and anti-immigrant rural Protestants in the South (Abramowitz 2018). Federalism and the decentralization of American politics allowed the parties to maintain electoral coalitions that contained voters with quite divergent perspectives.

From the 1930s, American politics began to “nationalize” as the federal government became more involved in policy areas that had once been largely left to the states (Hopkins 2018). This was especially true of social policy, which had largely been a state competence until the massive expansion of federal welfare provision in the 1930s and again in the 1960s. For the first time, the Democratic Party came to be seen at the national level as the party of the “left” and the Republican Party as the party of the “right” (Levendusky 2009).

However, voters were still able to distinguish between the national party and their state parties. Political scientist Nelson Polsby famously said that the United States is not a country of two parties but of 102 parties. Each state’s Democratic and Republican parties had their own set of policy priorities, which, in turn, differed from the national parties’ agendas.

Party loyalty was guided by a variety of factors, including clientelism and patronage. Often, voters supported a particular party because the local party was seen as aligned with the interests of a specific local group. These alignments were frequently based on historic reasons and only loosely connected to policy programs (Polsby 1983). Today, this is no longer the case. The American party system has nationalized. The policy priorities of Democrats in Massachusetts and Mississippi are more similar to each other than ever before. In turn, the parties’ ideological character has finally crystallized in the eyes of the electorate at all levels.

In this respect, American political parties “look” more like conventional political parties in the rest of the developed democratic world. They are ideologically coherent, programmatic parties. Voters support these parties, for the most part, on the basis of policy alignment rather than on non-policy reasons like religion, local history or geography.

By their very nature, U.S. political parties need to be “big tent” or “broad church” parties. They must still accommodate a wide set of interests, but these interests are

now more closely sorted according to ideology than they ever have been. Nonetheless, there is space for “moderates” and “extremists” of the left and right within both parties’ coalitions.

Citation:

Alan Abramowitz. 2018. *The Great Alignment*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Daniel Hopkins. 2018. *The Increasingly United States: How and Why American Politics Nationalized*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Matthew Levendusky. 2009. *The Partisan Sort: How Liberals Became Democrats and Conservatives Became Republicans*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Nelson Polsby. 1983. *Consequences of Party Reform*. Oxford: University Press.

France

Score 6

The Fifth Republic is constructed as a majoritarian political system, with a two-round majority-based system for both direct presidential and legislative elections. As such, this system tends to create a significant imbalance between the expression of preferences by citizens and the political representation in practice (Grossman and Sauger 2009). The minority is systematically underrepresented in institutions, starting with the presidential office – which is by definition held singly. This has led to France being characterized as one of the most disproportional countries in Europe in terms of political representation. In the first round of the vote, there are few constraints on citizens’ expression. Twelve candidates competed in the 2022 presidential race. But the mechanical effect of the runoff drastically reduces the political offerings.

This imbalance has been reinforced by various second-order elections that have been introduced in recent decades (Parodi 1997). These have tended to further open the competition to a variety of actors through, for instance, a proportional component for municipal, regional and European elections. But they also involve strict majority logic, especially with the bonus system for municipal and regional elections (Bedock and Sauger 2014).

The electoral system nevertheless also offers incentives for societal representation. Parity laws have either introduced strict rules for equal representation between men and women for all list systems or monetary penalties if parties do not field as many women as men in legislative elections. The first female president has yet to be elected. In the same way, the districting system for legislative elections fosters local representation. Senators, indirectly elected, even have an explicit mandate to represent “territories.” Decentralization and autonomy processes have pushed this local representation a step further, especially in Corsica and in overseas territories. There, local party systems have often been created to better represent local issues and specific aspirations to independence or resistance to such a move.

French parties, as organizations, remain weak compared to many of their European counterparts. The entire party system fell to pieces after the 2017 political

earthquake. While this destructive phase has permitted Macron to sweep away the old political forces to the advantage of his new movement, it has also contributed to the weakening of the traditional mediatory institutions. This is true even of the president's own movement, *La République en Marche* (since renamed *Renaissance*), which has been unable to transform itself into a truly developed party with a full-scale organization and capable of fulfilling a mediatory role. Its roots at the local level remain strictly limited, all the more so since the party has managed at most limited successes in local elections. Over the last few years, the situation has not improved; on the contrary, the Macron movement has lost appeal, and finds itself already in a structural crisis due to internal competition in the quest for a new presidential leader. The leftist parties are weaker and more divided than ever, while the extreme-right movements are flourishing. The hard-right National Rally, whose ambition was to appear more responsible and moderate, now has to compete with a newcomer, *Éric Zemmour*, whose radical rhetoric is based on the "French decline" and the invasion of migrants. The National Rally presently looks like the overall winner of this situation, embodying the only structured opposition to a weak governmental party (Rouban 2022).

The weakness of party organization and institutionalization does not prevent parties from innovating ideologically and attempting to respond to citizens' expectations. The range is broad, from the radical Trotskyist left to the far right, ranging as well from environmental to nationalist parties. The overall positioning of these parties is generally clear. This was somewhat blurred by Macron's move in 2017 to bridge the moderate left and moderate right traditions. More generally, precise party programs are scarce, and when they do exist, they are not intensively used in party communications. To some extent, all parties address the majority, broadly defined by the working or middle class. The "enemy" is what differs most between the parties. This is liberalism for the left, the extremes for the center, and immigrants for the radical right. Parties do not seem willing to build on group consultation or seek academic expertise, despite some isolated initiatives in this area. Most key decisions appear to be the result of leaders' initiatives or based on short-term opinion poll feedback.

The variety of choices between parties does not generally preclude a feeling of disconnect between the population and its political elite. Part of this feeling might be attributable to the observation of significant differences between what is promised and what is actually delivered once in government. Even if pledges are often respected, the general outcomes of governmental actions too often fall short of citizens' expectations.

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Latvia

Score 6

Latvia has a multiparty system. Although there are many ethnic groups in Latvia – such as Russians, Belarusians, Ukrainians, Poles, and Lithuanians – the legal framework does not give advantages to any particular group. All citizens and non-citizens can be members of political parties, but only citizens can vote and be elected. Legally, all relevant social interests are represented through political party programs and later in the election process. The legal framework provides a sufficient base for democratic elections.

Political parties in Latvia are often perceived as representing either Latvian or Russian speakers. This ethnic and linguistic divide also aligns with a left-right political spectrum, where parties representing Russians generally lean left (e.g., Stabilitātei). Another cleavage is observed along social values, such as perceptions of the traditional family and political positions on the Istanbul Convention. Overall, political parties elected to parliament or local councils can achieve communication for agreement, though it may occasionally necessitate compromise.

The governing coalition in parliament and the government is dominated by right-wing parties with a liberal approach to the economy and support for the EU. The current government, in power since September 2023, consists of the Jauna Vienotība (a liberal and right-wing party), ZZS – Union of Farmers and Green (a centrist party), and Progresīvie (Progressives) (social democrats). Programs and political manifestos are publicly available.

However, the membership size is small for all political parties. At the beginning of 2023, the most significant political parties had membership numbers above 1,000. For example, the Union of Farmers had 1,351 members, Saskaņa (Harmony) had 1,347 members, and Vienotība (Unity) had 2,166 members (Uzņēmumu reģistrs, 2024). The average membership size for regional parties participating in local elections ranges from 200 to 500 (Uzņēmumu reģistrs, 2024). This small membership size hinders political parties from effectively representing societal interests between elections. Consequently, they tend to focus on broad “umbrella type” issues to attract the electorate’s attention during pre-election campaigns.

The major political parties have local branches in the regions of Latvia. However, no distinct local interests shape the parties’ political manifestos. As Latvia is a small, unitary country with a proportional election system, coalitions form the government.

Citation:

The Law on Elections of Saeima. <https://likumi.lv/ta/en/en/id/35261-law-on-the-election-of-the-saeimai>

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Netherlands

Score 6

The Netherlands has a system of full proportional representation with no threshold requirements. A seat in parliament is guaranteed for any party which gains at least 0.67% of the national vote; this is between 69,000 and 88,000 votes, depending on the election turnout. In the 2023 national parliamentary elections, 26 political parties competed; during the 2021 – 2023 parliamentary sessions, 26 members of parliament changed their party affiliation, resulting in 21 political parties with serving legislators, the highest number ever. Only the major political parties have local branches, but there are hundreds of strictly local political parties both with and without formal affiliations with national political parties. Most strictly local political parties are protest parties. It is plausible to expect that many voters for local protest parties vote for national protest parties, like PVV, FvD, BBB and NSC, in national elections. Only one local political party, Lijst De Mos (The Hague), has been accused engaging in illegal clientelist practices. However, it was acquitted by court. National political party platforms are normally available months before the election date. Several well-used voter guides or electoral “compasses” help voters distinguish between the platforms of so many political parties.

Interestingly, parties have no status in the law. Legislation on political parties in the Netherlands is extremely weak and inconsistent (see Krouwel 2004, WRR 2004). In Dutch law, the existence of political parties is hardly recognized, and they have an almost “extra legem” status (Elzinga 1990). In the constitution, the existence of political parties is totally ignored. Parties have no separate status under Dutch law and are entirely subject to civil law. As a result, parliamentarians are formally considered citizens with an individual mandate, and formally vote “without burden” (Art. 67.3 Constitution). Dutch law does not require political parties to take a specific organizational form, and does not mandate internal democratic procedures. Registration based on Article 2 of the Commercial Register Act is sufficient (Elections Act Art. G1). Parties are recognized in the parliament’s Rules of Procedure (Art.11), which regulate the allocation of speaking time, while the Elections Act (Art. G and H) and the Media Act (Art. 39g) also recognize a number of party functions. However, parties here are called “political groupings,” and the requirements for recognition of that label remain unclear. The only direct legal recognition of political parties is found in the Law on Party Finance, where parties are defined as associations registered under Article G1 of the Elections Act. This legal denial of the existence of political parties also leads to problems in cases when a party violates the democratic rules of the game

There are numerous political parties with distinct social roots. In a 2023 research report, the Netherlands Institute for Social Research distinguishes between seven clearly differentiated “social classes” based on combined indicators of economic, social, cultural and political capital. Each is linked to a small set of preferred

political parties – except for the working middle class, which makes up a floating vote of a quarter of all voters. Four of these classes and their share as part of the population are as follows:

Working upper layer (>40, high-educated, high income, in good health, life satisfaction score 8.1 (out of 10). Conservative (VVD) and Social Liberals (D66) and Green Left (GL): 19%

Younger with promising but uncertain prospects (60, middle-to-lower income, unemployed or retired, limited network, less healthy, 7.7). CDA, Labor (PvdA): 8.6%

Insecure workers (flexible/temporary jobs, non-western 33% migration background, lower educated, less healthy, most ‘unhappy’: 6.6.). Party for Freedom (PVV), Socialist Party (SP): 10%

Precariat (>60, little political, economic, social and political capital, 45% primary education only, no social network, 70% mild/severe health problems, 6.8) PVV, PvdA, DENK: 6.3% (author’s summary derived from SCP, Rapport Eigentijdse ongelijkheid).

It is this 25% of highly volatile floating voters that have produced the wildly fluctuating election results of the last years – providing strong totals in 2019 for the ultra-right-wing Forum for Democracy (in provincial elections), next for Labor (in European elections), for the VVD in 2021 (in national parliamentary elections), for the BBB in March 2023 (in provincial elections), and in the most recent shocking surprise, for the extremist right-wing PVV in the November 2023 national elections. One highly respected political analyst termed this: “Voters as bargain hunters.”

The large number of parties that participate in elections and enter parliament due to the low threshold provide for a wide range of political orientations and policy proposals. Coalition governments often span a substantial proportion of the Dutch political landscape. For example, the two most recent coalitions included the economically centrist and culturally progressive D66, the orthodox religious Christian Union, the right-wing liberal VVD and the center-right Christian Democratic CDA.

In terms of representation, studies show that voters’ proximity to parties tends to be higher on issues that parties emphasize more strongly. As these are the issues where parties typically have the greatest policy impact, this implies that the quality of representation is highest where it matters most. Research also shows that the congruence between voter preferences and party policy offerings is better for the niche and extremist parties than for the mainstream parties in the Netherlands (Costello et al 2021).

Citation:

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Hungary

Score 5

The Hungarian electoral system produces distorting effects. The mixed system, with a strong first-past-the-post element, generally produces large majorities; two-thirds majorities are more the rule than the exception. This has opened the door for the ruling party – for many years Fidesz under Prime Minister Orbán – to establish tailor-made legal norms. As a result, the already-deep rift in society deepens, as parties outside the two organized camps have few opportunities to be represented in parliament. Moreover, the opposition bloc is ideologically and organizationally fragmented. However, the electoral system favors the existence of two blocs of similar size. As a result, opposition parties face significant coordination challenges in finding a strategy compatible with the electoral system and the ability to represent their voters. Few newcomers successfully pass the electoral threshold (5% of the popular vote). For example, the far-right Mi Hazánk (Our Homeland) secured some seats as a nonaligned party in the 2022 elections. Most parties feature local and regional bodies, though few establish a strong local presence due to low membership figures and insufficient state funding (Susánszky et al. 2020). Local party chapters are often organized alongside election constituencies. Some parties, especially among the opposition, have difficulties organizing themselves in rural areas, as their programs address urban centers more than those of Fidesz. This weakness is an essential factor in the inability of the opposition to score well outside Budapest. Still, in local and regional elections, this weakness appears to be smaller, as the distorting effects of the national electoral system are absent here, and the number of

independent mayors is traditionally relatively high. In the government camp, decision-making is highly centralized, and there is little room for regional interests due to the dominance of top-down political communication. The power of the mayors was diminished a long time ago by the Fidesz government by preventing individuals from simultaneously holding a mayoral position and a mandate in parliament. Most Hungarian parties perceive themselves as catchall parties. However, the discourse on policy is hardly visible. Instead, parties' rhetoric follows a perpetual clash between different worldviews, especially aligned around cosmopolitan versus national views. As a result, parties compete with each other less over political solutions and more with regard to a cultural clash between identity issues such as migration or sexuality (LGBTQ+). In this standoff of "hipsters" versus "rednecks," parties remain programmatically vague, and major interests are not explicitly represented in the political discourse. The government counters many opposition attempts to address particular issues and problems with an avalanche of populism and disinformation. The latest example is the "discourse" relating to Russia's war in Ukraine. Clientelism, in a classical sense, is not strong in Hungary, partly because economic interests are not only steered but also owned by the central core of Fidesz and party members' wider families. The pattern is not clientelism, in which economic interests steer the government, but rather the government steering economic interests, also referred to as "reverse state capture" (Bozóki and Hegedüs 2018). Societal interests beyond the government-economic complex are generally underrepresented. The publicly articulated anger of healthcare system or education-sector employees demonstrates that the government neglects such central interests. Not surprisingly, party manifestos, although publicly accessible, provide little enlightenment about the parties' policy preferences, and are instead used to consolidate political camps by stressing the issues that create rifts between the camps. Certain sizable minorities, such as the Roma community, do not have effective representation through political parties, and their associations are routinely co-opted by major political parties, most recently by Fidesz.

Citation:

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Israel

Score 5

The electoral system in Israel is proportional, allowing multiple parties representing various groups and interests to participate. In the last election, 49 parties and 40 lists appeared on the ballot. However, since 2014, the electoral threshold has been increased to 3.25%. As a result, parties now need to win at least five out of the 120 seats to enter the Knesset. This change limits the representation of many groups and forces parties to join lists to ensure their entry into the Knesset. It is well known that

the intention behind raising the threshold was to prevent smaller, Arab parties from entering the Knesset. Notably, one of these parties, Balad, failed to surpass the threshold in the last election.

Israel's traditional major parties have local branches, but their activities have been limited in recent years. Additionally, parties with primaries have reserved candidate slots for representatives of various minorities (women, immigrants, Arabs) and localities (Southern, Northern, Jerusalem and Kibutz districts). However, in most parties, representatives elected by a specific group or region compete in the general list. Therefore, their incentive to address the needs of their constituency is relatively low. The constituency link in the Israeli system is perceived to be relatively weak for the main parties, which lack an electoral incentive to promote their constituencies' interests (Itzkovitch-Malka, 2021). This is not true for sectoral parties, which by definition represent specific groups, such as ultraorthodox Jews, immigrants and settlers. Nowadays, more mainstream parties also tend to lack effective internal democratic mechanisms (Shapira and Fridman 2019).

Not all parties publish manifestos (Manifesto Project). Currently, the parties in opposition have detailed manifestos representing the diverse concerns of their electorates. However, Likud, the formateur party, has not published a manifesto since 2013. This omission makes it difficult to judge Likud's agenda and the extent to which it represents the interests of its voters. Ultraorthodox parties also do not publish manifestos, and their voters are guided by community leaders to vote for the party, regardless of the party's agenda or achievements in government.

While it is challenging for voters to evaluate a party based on its pledges, it is safe to say that the sectoral parties that entered the coalition represent their constituencies through coalition agreements. These agreements outline the issues the parties consider most significant (Moury 2011). According to data from the Israeli Agenda Project (Cavari et al. 2022), coalition agreements contain numerous clauses on key issues, including education for ultraorthodox students, state and religious issues, and settlements in the West Bank – all of which are typically crucial to the parties forming the coalition.

The problem remains for the formateur party, Likud, which lacks a party manifesto or a coalition agreement. Likud's 2022 election campaign focused on security and cost of living issues. However, the party subsequently made judicial reform the main issue on the government's agenda. For example, the coalition agreement stated that judicial reform would be the first issue the government would address during its tenure. Notably, this is in spite of the fact that Most Important Problem surveys conducted before the elections did not find the issue to be among the most important issues for the public or Likud voters (INES, 2022). Consequently, despite the representative system and the variety of parties, it is unclear to what extent the major parties represent their voters.

Citation:

Israel National Election Studies (INES) <https://socsci4.tau.ac.il/mu2/ines/>

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Shapira, Assaf, and Avital Fridman. 2019. *The Intra-Party Democracy Index 2019* (in Hebrew). The Israel Democracy Institute. <https://www.idi.org.il/articles/26503>

Slovakia

Score 4

Some legal aspects of Slovakia's political system hinder the representation of important societal interests. The proportional representation system, which operates with a single electoral district and a 5% threshold, leads to the underrepresentation of ethnic minorities and underdeveloped regions. This setup undermines fair representation and governance. For instance, most major foreign investments are located in western Slovakia, and since the 2020 elections, none of the Hungarian minority parties have been represented in parliament.

These legal provisions have influenced the organization of political parties. Many parties in Slovakia are highly centralized and effectively owned by their political leaders and founders, lacking local and regional structures. An extreme example is OĽaNO (recently renamed "Slovensko"), which Igor Matovič fully controls. Since its foundation in 2011, this party has had no registered members or regional and local structures. The absence of party structure led SNS leader Andrej Danko to change the law on political parties after the 2016 elections, increasing regulation on party organization and membership transparency. Due to these requirements, political entities elected to parliament in 2023 have some membership and minimal regional and local structures. However, Slovensko remains a "non-standard" entity in terms of party organization (see Malý and Nemeč, 2023).

All major political entities running for national elections publish their party manifestos. However, these texts do not comprehensively represent significant societal interests programmatically and do not rely much on clientelism. Instead, they are predominantly populist, aimed at attracting voters with often unrealistic promises (see Rossi, 2020).

Citation:

Michael Rossi. 2020. "Slovakia after Fico: Systemic Change or More of the Same?" *Czech Journal of Political Science* 27 (3): 235-258.

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Indicator

Effective Cross-Party Cooperation

Question

To what extent do political parties retain their ability to enable cross-party cooperation in policymaking and implementation?

30 OECD and EU countries are sorted according to their performance on a scale from 10 (best) to 1 (lowest). This scale is tied to four qualitative evaluation levels.

- 10-9 = There are no barriers, by law or in practice, to achieving effective cross-party cooperation.
- 8-6 = Existing obstacles in the party system, by law and in practice, pose no significant barriers to achieving effective cross-party cooperation.
- 5-3 = Existing obstacles in the party system, by law and in practice, pose some significant barriers to achieving effective cross-party cooperation.
- 2-1 = Existing obstacles in the party system, by law and in practice, pose various significant barriers to achieving effective cross-party cooperation.

Norway

Score 10

Rule of law, democracy, and human rights are the foundation of all political parties. On the extreme left, the Red Party – historically inspired by Mao’s China – abandoned its program of armed revolution two decades ago. On the extreme right, the populist Progress Party has significantly modified its anti-immigrant rhetoric and entered into a coalition government (2013 – 2020) with the Conservative and Liberal parties. This suggests that, in a comparative perspective and although parties are easily positioned on a left-to-right dimension, the degree of polarization is modest. Center-left and center-right coalitions are the norm at the national government level. In local authorities, all combinations of coalitions and alliances are found. The solid commitment to liberal democratic values by all parties also reflects the opinions found in the electorate. Anti-democratic and extreme populist sentiments are rare, and if voiced at all, are met with massive condemnation by all political parties.

Denmark

Score 9

Denmark’s democracy is very stable and enjoys strong legitimacy among all parties. Anti-democratic movements remain on the fringe in Denmark. Thus, all major parties support the constitution, and there have been no signs that political parties are willing to change the fundamentals of liberal democracy.

Polarization is on the rise in Denmark, as in most European countries. This does not affect the levels of cooperation in the Danish parliament, where legislation is still passed with overwhelming majorities, a trend observed since the introduction of the

1953 constitution. Denmark is typically governed by minority governments, which requires cross-party cooperation to reach compromises (Green-Pedersen and Sjøveland 2020, Hansen 2003). Surprisingly, the current majority government has passed most of its significant legislation using supermajorities, as has been the norm in the Danish parliament.

While the system is stable and there is a strong consensus tradition in Danish politics, members of parliament frequently shift parties, and new parties are often formed. In the recent general election in 2023, three new parties with roots in other parties were on the ballot: the Independent Greens (Frie Grønne), formed by legislators who had left the Alternative (Alternativet); The Moderates (Moderaterne), headed by the former prime minister Lars Løkke Rasmussen (then representing the Liberals (Venstre)); and the Danish Democrats (Danmarksdemokraterne), headed by Inger Støjberg, a former minister (then representing the Liberals (Venstre)).

Since anti-democratic forces are only a tiny fringe group, democracy has not come under threat.

Citation:

Green-Pedersen, C., and A. Skjøveland. 2020. "Blokpolitik og nye politiske emner. Hvordan går det med samarbejds mønstrene i Folketinget?" *Politica: Tidsskrift for Politisk Videnskab* 52 (3).

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Austria

Score 8

With the FPÖ, the Austrian Nationalrat includes a major party that many consider problematic concerning some liberal democratic values, particularly respect for minorities and migrants living in Austria. In the most recent parliamentary election in 2019, the FPÖ won 16.2% of the total vote and secured 31 seats. Since late 2021, the party has consistently been identified as the largest party in public surveys. In those surveys, the FPÖ's support has hovered around 30%, with many supporters reportedly coming from the pool of former Sebastian Kurz backers.

The political rhetoric in Austria reflects the strong position of a party with limited respect for different minorities. However, the polarization at the programmatic-ideological level has not hindered the effective execution of public policies. Both the two governing parties – ÖVP and Greens – and the majority of opposition parties in the current Nationalrat (i.e., SPÖ and NEOS) are clearly democratic parties. The FPÖ's support is rarely, if ever, needed, even for constitutional amendments, which require a two-thirds majority.

Arguably even more importantly, a detailed analysis of voting patterns in the Nationalrat suggests that the FPÖ is not structurally isolated. Rather, depending on the issue, it usually aligns with one or several of the other parties (see Kontrast

2023).

A particular issue that has emerged since the FPÖ became the largest party in popular opinion surveys concerns the possible role of the FPÖ and its leader, Herbert Kickl, in a future Austrian federal government. Kickl, through his rhetoric, is considered one of the most extreme right-wing leaders of the FPÖ since the war. The FPÖ and Kickl have repeatedly cited Hungary's FIDESZ as a leading example, including its illiberal course.

While the largest party in a governing coalition is conventionally considered to have the right to fill the position of chancellor, a scenario with Kickl as chancellor has long been ruled out by all other major players. However, more recently there have been signs that the ÖVP, which formed a governing coalition with the FPÖ from 2019 – 2021 (and between 2000 – 2005), has started to warm up to the idea of forging another coalition with a Kickl-led FPÖ. In this context, it is also worth noting that in 2023 two ÖVP-FPÖ coalition governments were formed at the state level in Salzburg and Lower Austria.

Citation:

<https://www.derstandard.at/story/2000143901321/kanzler-oder-pragmatisierter-oppositions-fuehrer-was-plant-herbert-kickl>

<https://www.derstandard.at/story/2000146452385/bereitschaft-zu-koalition-mit-der-kickl-fpoe-waechst-in-der>

<https://kontrast.at/abstimmungen-im-nationalrat/>

<https://www.derstandard.at/story/3000000203911/systemparteien-volksverrat-ketten-brechen-kickl-und-die-sprache-der-nazis>

Belgium

Score 8

Belgium is a textbook example of consociational parliamentary democracy, characterized by a grand coalition, proportionality, mutual veto rights, segmental autonomy, and cultural public passivity (Caluwaerts & Reuchamps, 2020). The proportional representation system implies that no party has held a majority since WWI. A de facto constraint is the decentralization trend since the 1960s, which delegates increasing powers to the country's regions, serving different communities: mainly the Flemish-speaking north and the French-speaking south, both represented in Brussels. It is de facto impossible for a French-speaking party to profitably run for election in the north, and vice versa. The increasing fractionalization of the electoral landscape has induced some parties to run together to reach a critical mass, notably the Flemish and French-speaking Greens, the far-left PTB-PVDA, and the Christian Democrats in Brussels.

A self-imposed constraint on cross-party cooperation is the “cordon sanitaire” meant to exclude extreme-right parties since the 1980s (Biard, 2020). This results in lower access to traditional media platforms and exclusion from potential coalitions.

Conversely, some right-wing parties want to impose the same “cordon sanitaire” around extreme-left parties, with less success. Over the last decade, the main extreme-right party in Belgium, the Flemish Vlaams Belang (previously Vlaams Blok), has worked to portray itself as less anti-Semitic and distanced from former WWII Nazi collaborators. This “mainstreaming” strategy (Hjorth et al. 2024) adapts challenger parties’ rhetoric and political style to the norms and policy positions of dominant parties to be considered credible coalition partners. This has led some “democratic” parties to be less openly reluctant to cooperate with the extreme right.

Like in almost all democracies, the last decades have seen some degree of polarization and personalization of politics. In Belgium, this mainly takes the form of individual politicians overcommunicating on social media and taking ostentatious positions on minor issues. This makes coalition governance harder and has induced many “old school” politicians to retire, claiming they can no longer “work for the population” as they did in the past.

Citation:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_elections_in_Belgium

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‘Bouchez moet stoppen met N-VA-ambassadeur te spelen binnen Vivaldi’ | De Standaard:

https://www.standaard.be/cnt/dmf20211210_97902349

Finland

Score 8

Finland is known for coalition governments. This means all parties aiming to enter the cabinet need to maintain their ability to enable cross-party cooperation in policymaking and implementation.

In comparative terms, the level of party polarization in Finland is low. Generally, Finnish governments are coalition governments, often comprising parties from both the left and right. The Sanna Marin government and the current Petteri Orpo government fit well into this tradition. The most extreme example of a broad coalition in recent decades occurred in 2011 when Jyrki Katainen formed a cabinet consisting of six parties, including the far-left Left Alliance, the Green Party and Katainen’s conservative National Coalition Party.

The Sipilä government (2015 – 2019), however, was an exception to this rule, as it was composed of only three center-right parties.

As with many other European countries, Finland has experienced polarization between political elites and nationalistic populist elements.

As of this writing, the ruling cabinet in Finland consists of a coalition of four major parties, which together command a majority in parliament. There are essentially four parties in the opposition.

Party polarization did not undermine the ability to engage in cross-party cooperation for crisis management during the pandemic in Finland or during the application for NATO membership.

There is widespread acceptance of liberal democratic values and institutions among major political parties. However, it is somewhat doubtful whether all parties – especially the populist True Finns party – are truly committed to advancing them. The most serious crisis erupted in the summer of 2023 when it was revealed that the True Finns party chair had expressed racist comments in a blog written in 2008. So far, the Orpo government has been able to work together within the coalition to control and neutralize the influence of anti-democratic actors.

Citation:

<https://www.politico.eu/article/finish-finance-minister-riikka-purra-racism-xenophobia-racist-comments-hallaaho-scripta-immigration/>

Germany

Score 8

The Liberal Democracy Index, based on the Varieties of Democracy Project, allocated Germany a score of 0.81 for 2022 on a scale from 0 to 1 (Our World in Data, 2023). Further, according to the Manifesto Project, which analyzes the manifestos of the major political parties in a country, all major parties in Germany make favorable statements about the necessity of democracy. The Greens (5.241) and the Left (5.084) receive the highest scores, suggesting the highest number of positive mentions of democracy in their manifestos. In contrast, the AfD (2.033) receives the lowest score, followed by the CDU with a score of 2.559. Additionally, while the AfD has a relatively low score of 0.064, it is the only major party for which statements against the idea of democracy can be observed, either in general or within its manifesto (Manifesto Project, 2023). Hence, liberal democratic values are widely accepted and supported within the major political parties apart from parts of the AfD. In Saxony, Thuringia, and Saxony-Anhalt, for instance, the AfD was classified as a secured right-wing extremist party by the states' domestic intelligence services based on the justification that the AfD pursues anti-constitutional goals in these states (Tagesschau, 2023).

The cooperation of two or three parties to form a majority and thereby govern is standard in Germany at all federal levels. This cooperation in developing and executing policies is a crucial aspect of German politics. Various coalition combinations exist, and there are no barriers to coalitions between democratic parties with one exception: The CDU currently excludes coalitions with the Left. However, this position is under discussion due to the need to form stable democratic governments amid the rising share of AfD votes, particularly in East Germany (Zeit Online, 2023b).

The major political parties regularly criticize and distance themselves from the AfD, and there are demands, for instance from the Greens in Berlin, to examine the possibility of prohibiting the AfD (Süddeutsche Zeitung, 2024). Additionally, the domestic intelligence service classified the AfD as a suspected right-wing extremist case in 2022, which allows it to observe the party as a whole (Tagesschau, 2022).

However, according to the “Politbarometer” by the news outlet ZDF, the AfD would receive 22% of the votes in a federal election as of January 12, 2024 (Politbarometer 2024). Therefore, it is not clear how effective efforts to neutralize the AfD are. While other parties distance themselves from cooperation at the state or federal level, the newspaper “Die Zeit” showed in July 2023 that cooperation on a communal level has already taken place in several instances. This includes collaborations in Saxony, Saxony-Anhalt, and Thuringia where the AfD is classified as a secured right-wing extremist organization (Zeit Online, 2023a).

Existing obstacles in the party system, both by law and in practice, pose no significant barriers to achieving effective cross-party cooperation among democratic parties. However, the strength of the AfD necessitates coalitions across the left and right camps, which find it very difficult to agree on and jointly defend reforms. This situation is likely to increase support for the AfD.

Citation:

Manifesto Project. 2023. “Manifesto Project Data Dashboard.” https://visuals.manifesto-project.wzb.eu/mpdb-shiny/cmp_dashboard_dataset/

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Politbarometer. 2024. “Politbarometer vom 12. Januar 2024.” <https://www.zdf.de/politik/politbarometer/240112-politbarometer-video-100.html>

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Tagesschau. 2023. “AfD in Sachsen ‘gesichert rechtsextremistisch.’” <https://www.tagesschau.de/inland/innenpolitik/verfassungsschutz-afd-sachsen-rechtsextremistisch-100.html>

Tagesschau. 2022. “Ein Urteil und seine möglichen Folgen.” <https://www.tagesschau.de/inland/innenpolitik/afd-beobachtung-verfassungsschutz-101.html>

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Zeit Online. 2023. “CDU-Vorstand Mike Mohring ist offen für Gespräche mit der Linken.” <https://www.zeit.de/politik/deutschland/2023-07/thueringen-afd-cdu-mike-mohring-linke-koalition-landtag>

Ireland

Score 8 Acceptance of liberal democratic values and institutions is widespread among major political parties in Ireland, which appear committed to advancing these principles. However, new small far-right parties are emerging, and are beginning to have electoral impact. These parties do not share the same values, signaling a breakdown in the relative absence of hard-right populism or significant overt anti-immigrant sentiment in party politics. The May 2024 local and European elections were targets for these newly established far-right parties, for which there is tacit demand from some Irish voters (Costello 2021). Adshead and Scully (2021) observe that long-established parties are now joined by an increasing number of smaller parties in the Dáil. This raises the potential to shift the balance of power away from the larger parties, with possible consequences for the style and capacity for policy analysis. The next general election, speculated to be in late 2024 or early 2025, is expected to further dissolve traditional politics, overlapping with political dynamics in Northern Ireland. Impacts on equality and sustainability may be mixed. Sinn Féin, the main contender for government, may question the legitimacy of Ireland's current Climate Action Plan 2020-2030 and carbon tax regime, which could be incompatible with the Green Party, a potential smaller coalition partner. While it is unclear who will form the next government, it is likely to be a coalition, and finding durable coalitions may become more challenging in the future. This realignment of Irish politics will be influenced by international factors, including the ongoing implications of Brexit, the housing crisis, inflation and the cost of living and the emergence of the far right.

Trust in government in Ireland was at 46% in 2022, a relatively high level compared to other European countries, although low in absolute terms, with trust in national government at 51% and local government at 45%. Mainstream actors have been relatively effective in working together to control or neutralize the influence of anti-democratic actors. However, the experiences of 2023, such as the Dublin riots on November 7th and numerous arson attacks on asylum seeker accommodations, suggest that anti-democratic actors have established a base and influence.

Citation:

Adshead, M., and Scully, D. 2021. *Political Parties and the Policy Process*. Bristol: Policy Press.

OECD. 2021. *Government at a Glance 2021*. Paris: OECD.

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HCC. 2023. *Hate not Fear*. Dublin: Hope and Courage Collective.

Japan

Score 8 None of the major parties question liberal democracy outright, and Japan stands out internationally for its lack of a major populist movement. In the past, Japan's democracy has been criticized for its sometimes opaque decision-making processes,

with many decisions taken informally by ministerial bureaucrats rather than elected politicians. A number of reforms in the 1990s and 2000s have led to administrative changes, centralized decision-making and strengthened the position of prime minister. However, the fact that constitutional reform is very difficult politically – as any change must be approved by popular vote – has given rise to concerns that governments may undermine the constitution by changing its official interpretation and application. Prime Minister Abe, for example, used a reinterpretation of Article 9 issued by the Cabinet Legislation Bureau to justify participation in collective self-defense pacts. This was considered to be a constitutional breach by most experts.

Prime Minister Abe Shinzô's (2012 – 2020) efforts to take greater control of the public broadcaster NHK – such as installing a government loyalist as governor – contributed to the Economist Democracy Index downgrading Japan's democracy to flawed democracy. Under his successors Suga Yoshihide (2020 – 2021) and Kishida Fumio (2021 – present), Japan has regained the status of full democracy, however.

Ideological polarization seems to have declined in recent years. For example, the issue of a close security partnership with the United States used to be highly controversial, contributing to a split in the Socialist Party. Today, most opposition parties do not question the alliance, with the exception of the JCP. Party cooperation in elections has increased in recent years.

However, the Japanese political scene is not fully coherent in its stance on actors who violate the rules of liberal democracy. In 2016, the Hate Speech Elimination Law was enacted against extreme right-wing groups, but it failed to criminalize discriminatory behavior based on race or ethnicity, despite an appeal from left-wing parties. In addition, some members of the LDP, other conservative parties as well as members of the rising Sansei party have repeatedly made xenophobic and in the latter case even antisemitic statements without significant public repercussion. Though such sentiment does not seem widespread, they appeal to Japan's small but well-funded and organized right-wing and nationalistic organizations (Gill 2018).

Citation:

Gill, Tom, ed. 2018. "Special Issue: Japan's New Wave Rightists: Addressing the Action Conservative Movement." *Social Science Japan Journal* 21 (2): 157-166.

Economist Intelligence. 2023. "Democracy Index 2022." <https://www.eiu.com/n/campaigns/democracy-index-2022/>

Kotani, Junko. 2018. "Proceed with Caution: Hate Speech Regulation in Japan." *Hastings Constitutional Law Quarterly* 45 (3): 603-622.

Lithuania

Score 8

Although political conflicts are common in the decision-making process, they often stem from the division between the ruling coalition and the opposition. Typically, these conflicts concern policy issues that do not affect the liberal democratic values and institutions established by the constitution. Moreover, cross-party agreements

have been reached on matters of strategic importance, such as the country's membership in the EU and NATO.

Most recently, a cross-party agreement among most parliamentary parties was signed in mid-2022. This was the fourth such agreement on defense policy since 2012, and aimed to further increase funding for the country's defense following Russia's large-scale war against Ukraine. In 2021, parliamentary parties signed a national agreement on education policy for 2021 – 2030. This agreement was initiated by the ruling center-right coalition of conservative and liberal parties and set out policy priorities and funding commitments for the period up to 2030. With new elections approaching in 2024, some opposition parties declared they were leaving some of these cross-party agreements.

New Zealand

Score 8

The acceptance of liberal democratic values is widespread among the political parties that regularly win representation in Parliament, including Labour, the National Party and minor parties. While there may be differences in policy priorities among these parties, they operate within the framework of liberal democracy and accept its core principles and institutions.

New Zealand does not have a significant presence of anti-democratic actors at the mainstream level; there have only been isolated instances of small extremist groups or individuals expressing anti-democratic ideologies. The most infamous example dates back to 2019, when a far-right extremist fatally shot 51 people in two mosques in Christchurch.

New Zealand has also been spared by the wave of populism that has swept across developed democracies in the last two decades (Curtin and Vowles 2020). Although there have been instances where politicians such as David Seymour and Winston Peters, or political movements like Groundswell, have used populist rhetoric or tactics, the impacts of populism have been felt much less than in other countries.

Generally speaking, the political spectrum in New Zealand is not as deeply divided as in some other democratic systems. Ideological differences do exist among the major political parties, but the level of polarization is relatively low (Ford 2021; Miller 2015: 166-177). New Zealand has a tradition of consensus-oriented politics that fosters cooperation across party lines, despite ideological differences. However, some political commentators have warned that the three-party coalition that assumed power after the 2023 election – formed by National, ACT and NZ First – will, due to its policy differences and lack of conflict-management arrangements, have an unpredictable internal dynamic (Shaw 2023).

Citation:

Curtin, J. and Vowles, J. 2020. "New Zealand Populism in the 2017 Election and Beyond." In J. Vowles and J. Curtin, eds., *A Populist Exception? The 2017 New Zealand General Election*. Canberra: ANU Press.

Ford, G. 2021. "Political Parties." In *Government and Politics in Aotearoa New Zealand*, 7th edition, J. Hayward et al. Oxford University Press.

Miller, R. 2015. *Democracy in New Zealand*. Auckland: Auckland University Press.

Shaw, R. 2023. "Three parties, two deals, one government: the stress points within New Zealand's 'coalition of many colours'." *The Conversation*. <https://theconversation.com/three-parties-two-deals-one-government-the-stress-points-within-new-zealands-coalition-of-many-colours-217673>

Portugal

Score 8

The Portuguese constitution guarantees political and civic liberties, as well as democratic values, through political parties that promote widely agreed-upon fundamental liberties, rights, and the development of democratic institutions.

Despite the stability of the Portuguese party system since democratization – mainly characterized by the alternating rule between the two major parties, PSD and PS, and the dominance of the same five parties in parliament from 1999 to 2015 (Jalali, 2019) – Portuguese politics has recently undergone substantial transformations.

First, the unexpected government solution known as *Geringonça* ("contraption") in 2015, which saw cross-party cooperation between the PS and left-wing parties for the first time, marked a significant shift in cross-party collaboration in Portuguese politics (Fernandes et al., 2018).

Second, the 2019 general elections witnessed the emergence of three new parties: *Iniciativa Liberal* (Liberal Initiative), focused on economic and social liberalization; the left-wing *LIVRE* (FREE); and *Chega* (Enough), the first Portuguese populist radical right party to win parliamentary representation.

Third, the 2022 general elections saw a significant increase in *Chega's* and *IL's* vote share in a short period, contributing to higher party polarization (Serra-Silva & Santos, 2023: 136).

The rise of these new parties has heightened conflicts in parliament, impacting cross-party cooperation and consensus-building on legislative approvals, as observed in recent research (e.g., Serra-Silva & Santos, 2023: 145). Scholars have concluded that there are clear signs of increased polarization, especially between 2015 and 2022 (Serra-Silva & Santos, 2023). While Portugal didn't have prominent anti-democratic forces until recently, the emergence of *Chega* has sparked discussions about whether this political force deviates from the values of liberal democracy. The legal existence of *Chega* has been questioned by several parties, and there have been formal requests, such as the one made by Ana Gomes, a former diplomat and Eurodeputy, to outlaw the *Chega* party, though without effect (Rádio Renascença, 2021).

Citation:

Serra-Silva, João, and Pedro Santos. 2023. "Continuity and Change in Portuguese Politics: Towards a More Polarized Party System?" In *Portugal Since the 2008 Economic Crisis: Resilience and Change*, eds. António Costa Pinto. 1st ed. 129-155. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781351046916>

Fernandes, J., Magalhães, P., and Santana-Pereira, J. 2018. "Portugal's Leftist Government: From Sick Man to Poster Boy?" *South European Society and Politics* 23 (4): 503-524. DOI: 10.1080/13608746.2018.1525914.

Jalali, C. 2019. "The Portuguese Party System: Evolution in Continuity?" In Costa Pinto, A. and Teixeira, C. P., eds. *Political Institutions and Democracy in Portugal*. London: Palgrave.

Rádio Renascença. 2021. "Ana Gomes avança com participação para ilegalização do Chega." <https://rr.sapo.pt/noticia/politica/2021/02/04/ana-gomes-avanca-com-participacao-para-ilegalizacao-do-chega/225347>

Czechia

Score 7

No current parliamentary party is formally opposed to parliamentary democracy. However, differences in style and policy make cooperation across all parties impossible. The SPD, with 9.6% of the vote in 2021, is often characterized as extreme right and allied with similar parties across Europe. The SPD campaigns against immigration, Islam, NATO, and the EU. Despite this, it cooperated with ANO in parliament from 2017 to 2021, and talks of further cooperation have continued. The biggest problem for ANO is the SPD's advocacy for referendums on leaving the EU and NATO.

The current coalition consists of five political entities that demonstrated their ability to cooperate by coming together in 2021 to oppose ANO. They successfully mobilized their supporters in coordinated efforts in the Senate and municipal elections in 2022. Although the current president, Petr Pavel, was an independent candidate, Andrej Babiš, the leader of ANO, tried to portray him as the leader of the governing parties and painted him as partisan. However, the ruling coalition is fragmented with disparate policy preferences, weakening it. Opinion polls show the ODS enjoying only one-third of the popular support of ANO.

Doubts over public support for the government as a whole could encourage smaller parties to oppose ODS policies in European Parliament elections and more clearly in parliamentary elections, as all parties will want to be confident of passing the 5% threshold. The five governing political entities have different views on European integration. Some support early affiliation with the eurozone, while the ODS has traditionally been opposed. Some are more concerned about environmental issues, while the ODS has traditionally been more skeptical.

On identity and cultural issues, the governing parties span both liberal and conservative views. Some support same-sex marriage and gender equality, while others oppose them. However, consensus and cooperation within the government around its adopted program appear possible on many issues, particularly since many policy initiatives are initiated and partially funded by the EU.

Estonia

Score 7

In the first decades of the 21st century, the political landscape in Estonia could be characterized as modestly polarized, with principles of liberal democracy and parliamentarism generally adhered to. This situation changed radically in 2019, when the populist far-right Conservative People's Party (EKRE) entered parliament and was included in the ruling coalition for almost two years. After performing worse than expected in the 2023 elections, EKRE adopted a completely obstructive position with regard to legislative work. EKRE's obstructions included taking frequent unnecessary breaks during sessions and submitting hundreds of irrelevant correction proposals to bills. These tactics, used persistently by EKRE and occasionally by other opposition parties, led the government to bind many votes with a vote of confidence. In such cases, the executive has considerable power over the legislature (Act on the Rules of Procedure of the Riigikogu).

In the fall of 2023, the speaker of the Riigikogu convened a special commission of experts to determine a way out of the parliamentary stalemate. The country's president additionally held consultations with political parties, but neither initiative led to a positive outcome.

Cross-party cooperation within the executive is much smoother. Disputes are resolved through informal negotiations among coalition partners, and policy development or implementation is not significantly hampered. However, some disagreements can drag on in public, such as the dispute between the minister of education (Estonia 200) and the minister of finance (Reform Party) over teacher salaries in 2023 during a nationwide teacher strike in early 2024.

Citation:

Riigikogu kodukorra seadus. 2003. <https://www.riigiteataja.ee/akt/833705>

Greece

Score 7

There is nothing in the institutional design of Greece's party system that prevents effective cross-party cooperation. However, in practice, the Greek party system has experienced significant political polarization. From 1974 to 2010, the two largest parties – the center-right New Democracy and the center-left Pasok – alternated in government and engaged in fierce electoral battles. Polarization continued during the Greek economic crisis in the 2010s, with New Democracy and the radical left Syriza competing for power (Andreadis and Stavrakakis 2020).

This polarization is not only a reflection of political party competition but also a legacy of the historical conflict between the Right and the Left, dating back to the Greek Civil War of the 1940s. The electoral system, which facilitates the formation of single-party majority governments, has also contributed to this polarization.

Particularly during pre-electoral periods, both major parties and the media, including nationally circulated newspapers, exacerbate polarization, further hindering cross-party cooperation (Exadactylos, 2020).

After 2015, as all parties converged on austerity measures and fiscal restraint, polarization became less pronounced. Recent research indicates that despite ongoing tensions, there was significant cross-party cooperation in parliament during 2019–2024 (VouliWatch, 2023). For instance, opposition parties such as Pasok and Syriza frequently voted alongside the ruling New Democracy party, with Pasok aligning on 69% of all parliamentary votes and Syriza on 45%.

Citation:

Andreadis, Ioannis, and Yannis Stavrakakis. 2020. "Dynamics of Polarization in the Greek Case." *ANNALS, AAPSS* 681 (January): 157-172.

Exadactylos, Theofanis. 2020. "Them and Us: The Politics of Exclusion in Greece in Times of Polarization." *The Emerald Handbook of Digital Media in Greece*, 275-288.

VouliWatch. 2023. "Voting together – the extent of consensus among political parties in parliament." <https://twitter.com/vouliwatch/status/1656634387599970310>

Latvia

Score 7

Political parties elected to parliament or local councils typically reach a consensus during the coalition formation process.

There is a noticeable tendency for political parties to strive for inclusion in the ruling coalition. To achieve this, some parties engage with ideologically different partners, leading to a rapid shift in their ideological positions. This strategy often confuses the electorate (Ikstens, 2023).

A strong division exists between the coalition and the opposition, particularly evident in budgetary processes where the coalition routinely rejects opposition proposals. This pattern was observed during the extended period when the political party Harmony was in opposition and continues with current opposition parties like For Stability! (elected to parliament in 2022) (LSM, 2023).

While cross-party polarization generally does not hinder policy implementation, ideological polarization has occasionally delayed certain policies, such as the use of the Latvian language in education and the ratification of the Istanbul Convention.

Latvian governing coalitions represent liberal, pro-European, and democratic values, enabling them to neutralize anti-democratic trends and influences.

Citation:

OSCE. 2023. *Latvia, Parliamentary Elections, 1 October 2022: Final Report*. ODIHR Election Assessment Mission Final Report. <https://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/latvia/541053>

Ikstens, J. 2023. "Politiskās partijas Latvijā." <https://enciklopedija.lv/skirklis/25856>
LSM. 2023. "Budžets 2024: Saeimas komisijā atbalstu gūst tikai retais opozīcijas priekšlikums." <https://www.lsm.lv/raksts/zinas/ekonomika/04.12.2023-budzets-2024-saeimas-komisija-atbalstu-gust-tikai-retais-opozicijas-priekslukums.a534130/>

Netherlands

Score 7

In 2015, Ombudsman Alex Brenninkmeijer issued what he called a "stress test" for the Netherlands' rule of law, in which he wrote that "...(i)n many areas, fundamental rights are violated in the formation and implementation of policies." Since that time, the number of lawyers in parliament has shrunk considerably. Their number has been steadily decreasing: from 26 in 2017 and 25 in 2021 to 22 today. They have had to cede space to parliamentarians trained as economists, public administration experts or political scientists – all disciplines that consider laws and legal rules as policy instruments, not as institutional devices for the rule of law and democratic government.

In November 2023, eight years later, a few days after election results in which the extreme-right-wing PVV party had made a formidable gain of 20 seats (to a total of 37 in a 150-seat parliament), four parties (PVV, NSC, BBB and VVD) started coalition formation talks. One topic addressed was the parties' preliminary positions on respecting and advancing the constitution and the rule of law. This was not surprising, because a panel of the professional association of legal scholars had previously found that 11 out of 18 political parties likely to win seats featured positions in their party platforms that clearly violated the constitution and rule of law practices.

For example, the PVV, which at the time of writing was leading the coalition formation talks, has advocated banning the Koran and Islamic schools. Such a ban would violate the freedom of religion and belief, and therefore also go against the constitution. An asylum freeze, as strongly advocated by the PVV, and which was arguably their winning political argument in the November 2023 elections, would not be allowed under either the UN Refugee Convention or the European Convention on Human Rights. And a position such as setting up a digital pillory for criminals is also difficult to reconcile with the law. Quite a few PVV legislators have criminals record of petty crimes and other integrity problems, and have thus been shown not to hold the law in high respect. The brand-new party New Social Contract, which otherwise strongly advocates "decent government" and respect for the rule of law, nevertheless received a low rating from the legal scholars for its proposal to introduce a migration quota of no more than 50,000 individuals, because of the proposal's conflict with international laws and regulations. The VVD, which at the time was still the largest party, was criticized for proposing minimum sentences for certain crimes and a ban on community service, while also seeking to reduce legal aid for underprivileged asylum-seekers.

At the time of writing, political tension between advocates of an open society (GL/PvdA, D66, Christina Union, Volt, SP, Party of the Animals) and right-wing political parties advocating a (more) closed society (PVV: “Dutch at #1 again!”) was reaching new heights. Rather than being due to ideological polarization by radicalized flank parties away from a political “middle,” this stemmed from the radicalization of voters tied to formerly mainstream parties (mainly CDA and VVD) around anti-migration issues and a closed society. Neutralizing radicalizing and/or anti-democratic tendencies through cooptation is a tried-and-tested strategy in Dutch politics. This makes cross-party cooperation almost a given, reinforced by the Dutch maximally proportional representative electoral system. The VVD’s exclusion of the PVV as coalition partner after the fall of the Rutte I government functioned as a de facto “cordon sanitaire.” However, this exclusion has now been lifted, and may actually have aided the PVV win. Yet, it is not beyond reasonable doubt that the PVV will be the leading party in a next majority coalition government. At the time of writing, the NSC was still raising the possibility of a minority coalition (as seen in Scandinavian countries), governing through shifting support by varying political parties depending on the content of government bills and policy proposals. As further historical precedent, Labor was excluded from governing in 1983 by a blocking coalition led by the CDA and VVD in spite of a huge electoral victory.

Citation:

Brennikmeijer, A. 2015. “Stresstest Rechtsstaat Nederland.” *Nederlands Juristenblad* 16: 1046-1055.

Mr. OnlineJuridisch. 2023. “Aantal juristen in Tweede Kamer neemt verder af: van 25 naar 22.” 27 November.

Mr. OnlineJuridisch. 2023. “Nieuws, 6 November NOvA: tien verkiezingsprogramma’s bevatten onrechtsstatelijke voorstellen.”

De Dijn, Annelien. 2023. “‘Polarisatie’ is een frame waar vooral de VVD van profiteert.” NRC-H, June 9.

Pieter Immerzaal. 2023. “Criminele en foute PVV-toppers (update).” *Welingelichte Kringen* November 27.

M. Lubbers et al. 2023. “Ook de ‘nieuwe’ PVV-stemmer stemde vooral tegen migratie en uit politiek protest.” *Stuk Rood Vlees*, December 21.

NOS Nieuws. 2023. “Omtzigt: nog niet onderhandelen over meerderheid- of minderheidskabinet.” November 29.

Slovenia

Score 7

Since the 1990s, the ideological profiling between parties and within society in Slovenia has been clear; this also applies to the period before World War II. However, this divergence has increased more recently, partly because certain cleavages continue to overlap. Although the libertarian-authoritarian cleavage was particularly evident in the 1990s, since the first decade of the 21st century, the economic cleavage has also become more significant. This change was mainly a consequence of the disintegration of the Liberal Democracy of Slovenia (LDS) party, which had long been in office and occupied the center. Under the leadership of Prime Minister Drnovšek, the LDS was able to form ideologically mixed coalitions aimed at maintaining political stability.

The Slovenian Democratic Party (SDS), initially founded at the end of the 1980s as a center-left social democratic party, transformed into a conservative party at the turn of the 21st century. Since 1993, the party has been led by Janez Janša, a particularly polarizing figure in Slovenian politics. This has been demonstrated several times over the last two decades, as center-left voters have focused on defeating Janez Janša. A considerable part of the electoral success of new center-left parties is based on this strategy to attract voters.

Despite ideological polarization, there have been instances in the past where decision-makers have managed to overcome these divides. Examples include the declaration of Slovenia's independence, the country's accession to the EU and NATO, and the tough decisions made during the financial and economic crisis, as well as early in the COVID-19 pandemic. However, in the later phases of the pandemic, cooperation became untenable, primarily due to the democratic backsliding under the Janša government (which several democratic watchdog organizations had warned about). More recently, effective cross-party cooperation in addressing the consequences of the catastrophic floods in August 2023 has demonstrated, at least temporarily, that collaboration on critical issues is still possible.

Citation:

Fink-Hafner, Danica. 2020. "Destabilizacija slovenskega strankarskega sistema po letu 2000." In Krašovec, A. & Deželan, T., eds., *Volilno leto*, 5-35. Ljubljana: Fakulteta za družbene vede.

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<https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2022/04/26/slovenia-jansa-golob-backsliding-democracy/>

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Sweden

Score 7

Party polarization has been increasing in Sweden, even though for a long time it was the exception. While radical right-wing populist parties were growing in countries such as Austria, Denmark and France, such a party did not enter the Swedish parliament until 2010. By the 2022 elections, the radical right-wing populist Sweden Democrats had become the second-largest party after the Social Democrats and ahead of the Moderate Party. The left-right divide, where redistributive policies were at the center of ideological differentiation, has given way to a cultural divide, with a focus on diversity (or lack thereof), identity, globalization and migration (Wikforss, 2022).

More specifically, the GAL-TAN divide (GAL: green, alternative, libertarian and TAN: traditional, authoritarian, nationalist), which refers to the political cleavages associated with values and lifestyles, has emerged as a new feature of the party

system. Parties that traditionally occupied different places on the left-right spectrum may adopt similar positions within the GAL-TAN scale. For example, on issues such as migration, the Social Democrats and Conservatives share a similar policy position, while left-wing, green, and center parties tend to share a different policy position (Lindvall, 2017). There has been a polarization trend since 2010 that could mark the start of a steep polarization era. At the same time, this cleavage is not ahistorical in the Swedish context (Oscarsson et al., 2021).

Cross-party collaboration has been difficult and short-lived. The Tidöavtalet, the compromise that allowed for the formation of the minority coalition government after the 2022 elections, illustrated this. Even though the Sweden Democrats and the Liberals promised to be tough on crime, they have different ideas on how to tackle it. While the former hold a punitive stance, the latter prefer measures that maintain the integrity of the individual (Blombäck, 2023). Although the Sweden Democrats are not represented in the governing coalition – they are a supporting party – they are clearly imprinting their programmatic stamp on government policy.

In summary, there are no legal barriers to collaboration; in fact, it is an integral part of Swedish politics. Recently, it has been more difficult for parties to find common ground due to the strategically favorable position of the Sweden Democrats as the pivotal party between the political blocs.

Citation:

Blombäck, S. 2023. "Statsvetaren: Här står Sverigedemokraterna och Liberalerna långt ifrån varandra." <https://www.svt.se/nyheter/inrikes/statsvetaren-har-star-sverigedemokraterna-och-liberalerna-langt-ifran-varandra>

Lindvall, J., Bäck, H., Dahlström, C., Naurin, E., and Teorell, J. 2017. "Samverkan och Strid i den Parlamentariska Demokratien." SNS Demokratirapport 2017. <https://snsse.cdn.triggerfish.cloud/uploads/2020/02/samverkan-och-strid-i-den-parlamentariska-demokratien.pdf>

Oscarsson, H., Bergmann, T., Bergström, A., and Hellström, J. 2021. "Demokratirådets rapport 2021: Polarisering i Sverige." <https://snsse.cdn.triggerfish.cloud/uploads/2021/03/demokratiradets-rapport-2021-polarisering-i-sverige.pdf>

Wikforss, Å. 2022. "Demokratis grindvakter." In *Snabbtänkt: 2.022. Reflektioner från valet 2022 av ledande forskare*, eds. N. Bolin, K. Falasca, M. Grusell, and Lars Nord. https://www.miun.se/globalassets/forskning/center-och-institut/demicom/snabbtankt_2022_12okt.pdf

United Kingdom

Score 7

The main UK political parties seek to uphold liberal democratic values, but Brexit (and its implications) has prompted some contestation regarding which institutions should be most supported, such as when asserting the sovereignty of Parliament in relation to legal rulings. More generally, in Westminster, aggregation is done within parties more than by cross-party cooperation, and whipping is used regularly to push through legislation proposed by the party of government rather than seek routine cross-party support. The opposition, for the most part, seeks to oppose.

However, cooperation can happen on bills that lack a strong ideological base, and cooperation does arise in the various stages of passing legislation, including through opposition amendments being accepted or in parliamentary committees. In addition, the second chamber – the House of Lords, which has a sizable number of cross-bench members who are not affiliated with a particular party – will often propose and have accepted amendments that are the result of cross-party deals or a form of bargaining with the House of Commons, even though the latter has the final say.

In key respects, the encouragement of cross-party cooperation is more institutionalized in devolved systems, such as via the committee systems in Scottish and Welsh parliaments and the requirement for coalition government in Northern Ireland (Birrell et al. 2023).

Citation:

Birrell, D., Carmichael, P., and Heenan, D. 2023. *Devolution in the UK*. London: Bloomsbury

Italy

Score 6

Italy was governed until July 2022 by a national unity government headed by Mario Draghi. Following the prime minister's resignation, the president of the republic dissolved the parliament and called early elections for September 2022. The Draghi government took office at the beginning of the second year of the COVID-19 pandemic with a mandate to address two interconnected challenges: effectively managing the pandemic and utilizing the resources provided by the Recovery Fund.

Except for the Brothers of Italy (FdI), which opted to stay in opposition, all parties represented in parliament joined the government. In this new political landscape, parties that were competitors until recently faced the challenge of working together as partners in government. This required them to put aside their differences and find common ground on several issues centered on the health crisis and its economic repercussions, temporarily freezing the competition on the ideological left-right dimension.

At the same time, the parties had to distinguish themselves from their competitors to avoid losing votes, marking their differences mainly on cultural issues or their stance toward the Ukrainian war. In the end, conflict prevailed, bringing down the government (Russo and Valbruzzi 2022).

With the end of the pandemic and the Draghi government, the competition has reconfigured along traditional dividing lines between opposing coalitions. This bipolar structure is characterized by two main parties on the left – the Democratic Party (PD) and the Five Star Movement (M5S) – failing to coordinate electorally by competing separately in the September 2022 elections. On the right side of the left-right divide, there is a rather ideologically compact coalition formed by FdI, the

League, and Go Italy (FI). In this bipolar context, moderate-liberal actors are essentially excluded from competition. On paper, these divisions suggest a highly polarized political environment. However, since 2019, the FdI has moderated its stance on a number of issues, including its Euroscepticism. This moderate turn on the part of FdI calls into question the notion that the party's victory in the recent elections necessarily signifies an increase in the polarization of the Italian party system (Chiaromonte 2023). Despite Meloni's effort to move the party toward the center of the policy space, the positions of party members and grassroots voters remain rather extreme on many issues, thus contributing to an overall polarized environment.

The right-wing pre-electoral coalition won an absolute majority of seats after the September 2022 elections. A month later, Giorgia Meloni, the leader of FdI, was appointed prime minister. According to PopuList, the Meloni government is considered to be the first post-World War II radical right-wing government in Western Europe, consisting of two parties – FdI and the League – almost unanimously coded as far-right, Eurosceptic and populist, plus a relatively moderate partner like FI.

Despite similarities in their ideological profiles, the governing parties are divided on specific issues such as civil liberties, immigration, the economy, and their stance toward the European Union (EU). These differences have occasionally led to conflicts between the governing parties. However, the institutional context incentivizes parties to compromise in coalition policymaking.

On one hand, the electoral system forces parties to form pre-election coalitions to win elections, both at the national and local levels. On the other hand, the Italian parliament has strong internal institutions that make it easier for parties to control and change government policies. Therefore, to implement its program, the governing coalition must necessarily compromise.

Compromises and agreements between the majority coalition and the opposition have proven difficult on matters of constitutional reform, such as the proposed reform of the government formation process, which might have required a non-majoritarian approach.

In the most recent election (September 2022), left- and right-wing parties that can be categorized as populist collected more than 50% of the popular vote. Two populist parties – FdI and the League – are currently in power. According to most observers, these parties are characterized by a Manichean view of politics, anti-elitism, and people-centrism (see Populism and Political Parties Expert Survey data). Whether these attitudes represent a rhetorical strategy or may translate into specific policies to undermine the liberal-democratic order is still debatable. In the latter case, however, there may be consequences for the quality of democracy, as observed in countries such as Hungary or Poland.

Citation:

PopuList: <https://popu-list.org/>

Populism and Political Parties Expert Survey: <http://poppa-data.eu>

Russo, L., and M. Valbruzzi. 2022. "The Impact of the Pandemic on the Italian Party System. The Draghi Government and the 'New' Polarisation." *Contemporary Italian Politics* 14 (2): 172–190.

Chiaromonte, A. 2023. "Italy at the Polls. Four Lessons to Learn from the 2022 General Election." *Contemporary Italian Politics* 15(1): 75–87.

Spain

Score 6

All major political parties in Spain are committed to liberal democratic values and institutions. However, the rise of populist movements, including the ideologically radical but not extreme Vox, has intensified rhetoric around representative institutions. Vox advocates for some policies that counter several basic principles of liberal democracy, such as gender equality and minority rights (Santana et al., 2023). Among the main Spanish parties, Vox has the highest proportion of supporters who are dissatisfied with democracy and do not support it at all. Additionally, pro-independence political parties campaign against Spain's constitutional order.

Polarization significantly hinders cross-party agreements and the formation of parliamentary majorities. This polarization and fragmentation within the Congress of Deputies have severely affected the parliament's legislative function in recent years. Despite this, the first coalition government was in power from 2020 to 2023, and in 2023, a new minority coalition government was formed. Major political parties generally lack a cooperative attitude toward one another.

During the period under review, the General Council of the Judiciary – an autonomous body composed of judges and other jurists that exercises government functions within the judiciary to guarantee judicial independence – could not be renewed due to political deadlock. At the regional level, the financing scheme for regional governments has been pending an update since 2014, primarily due to significant disagreements among political parties.

Major political parties also struggle to cooperate in controlling the influence of anti-democratic actors. In contrast, the coalition government experienced few but notable policy dissonances between some members. Despite these challenges, the PSOE managed to form a majority for the investiture of Pedro Sanchez in November 2023 with ideologically divergent parties.

The ability to compromise and cooperate will continue to be crucial for governance and policy execution in the coming years. At the regional level, interparty cooperation in policymaking and implementation has a long tradition, with most regional governments formed by two or more parties.

Citation:

Santana, A. et al. 2023. "The Radical Right Populist Vox and the End of Spain's Exceptionalism." <https://theloop.ecpr.eu/the-radical-right-populist-vox-and-the-end-of-spains-exceptionalism>

Switzerland

Score 6

On the one hand, the Swiss consensus democracy ensures strong cross-party cooperation, with representatives of the main parties seated together in federal and cantonal governments. On the other hand, the Swiss party system has become programmatically polarized over the past three decades. The three polar parties are very far apart by international comparison: The Swiss People's Party (Schweizerischen Volkspartei, SVP) occupies the particularistic-right quadrant, while the Social Democratic Party and the Green Party are in the universalistic-left quadrant of the ideological space (Zollinger 2022; Zollinger and Traber 2023; Häusermann and Bornschieer 2023).

Even within the major right-wing party (Swiss People's Party), the core values of democracy are broadly accepted, if with two major qualifications. First, democracy is understood as decision-making by the people. The people are considered to be the ultimate sovereign, and their power is not viewed as something that should be limited by international law, membership in international organizations, human rights or domestic veto actors such as constitutional courts. This reflects a narrow Schumpeterian view of democracy that was prominently challenged by de Tocqueville, and which is today contested by a broader understanding of an embedded democracy (Merkel 2004).

The second qualification concerns populism and xenophobia. The Swiss People's Party is a radical right national-populist party (Mazzoleni 2008) based on nativism and populism, with a strong dose of authoritarianism (Mudde 2007: 22). The dichotomy between "them" and "us" and the staunch opposition to universalism, international openness and European integration is the electoral winning formula of the Swiss People's Party. The polarizing political program of the SVP is also evident in direct democracy votes, as the party regularly launches xenophobic initiatives, such as the ban on the construction of minarets that was accepted by the Swiss population in 2009, and the initiative against mass immigration that was accepted in 2014.

The increasing programmatic polarization has become a main hindrance to cooperation between political elites, particularly on issues relating to migration and international openness. The failure to reach a sustainable relationship with the EU is a major example of this polarization. The effectiveness of the other political parties in neutralizing the isolationist and xenophobic-nativist stance of the country's major party is limited by electoral constraints: A considerable share of voters of the two other major bourgeois parties (the center and liberal parties) and even of the Social Democratic party shares the isolationist-nativist views of the populist right.

Citation:

Häusermann, Silja, and Simon Bornschieer. 2023. *Democratic Conflict and Polarization: Healthy or Harmful?* Zürich: UBS Center for Economics in Society.

Mazzoleni, Oscar. 2008 [2003]. *Nationalisme et populisme en Suisse. La radicalisation de la "nouvelle" UDC*. Lausanne: Presses Polytechniques et Universitaires Romandes.

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Zollinger, Delia, and Denise Traber. 2023. "The Ideological Space in Swiss Politics: Voters, Parties, and Realignment." In *The Oxford Handbook of Swiss Politics*, eds. Patrick Emmenegger, Flavia Fossati, Silja Häusermann, Yannis Papadopoulos, Pascal Sciarini, and Adrian Vatter. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 116-136. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780192871787.013.1>

United States

Score 5

Bipartisanship, or cross-party cooperation, was once a hallmark of the U.S. political system. Until the party realignment in the South in the late 1960s, cross-party cooperation was more the norm than the exception in Congress. National unity scores were quite low at that time – lower than 60%.

When the parties were ideologically heterogeneous, bipartisan cooperation between elected officials on a range of significant policies was common. However, since the party realignment in the South, the U.S. parties have become nationalized – they have adopted ideologically coherent and nationally consistent policy platforms. Consequently, they are much less likely to engage in bipartisan cooperation in a context of increasing partisan polarization, a major source of gridlock. Party unity scores in Congress have grown to over 90%.

This trend aligns the United States more closely with oppositional parliamentary systems, such as in Westminster parliaments, where parties tend to take on "government" and "opposition" functions (Pierson and Schickler 2020). This parliamentarization in the presidential system is one reason for legislative gridlock in Congress.

Citation:

Ari Berman. 2015. *Give Us the Ballot*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

Paul Pierson and Eric Schickler. 2020. "Madison's Constitution Under Stress." *Annual Review of Political Science*.

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Richard Johnson. 2020. *The End of the Second Reconstruction*. Cambridge: Polity.

Australia

Score 4

There is general acceptance of liberal democratic values and institutions among the major political parties, with significant evidence of their commitment to sustaining these values. Major-party leaders and candidates typically frame critiques of political institutions around improving democratic integrity. However, commitment to

democratic values is weaker among some minor parties, as evidenced by their willingness to transgress parliamentary conventions and other norms.

The major parties' competitiveness can produce tribalism, hindering cooperation on important policy matters. However, the majoritarian nature of the Australian political system means that cross-party cooperation is generally less crucial than in proportional representation systems. The ruling party typically has a majority in the lower house and requires only a handful of votes from independents or minor parties to pass legislation through the upper house..

Canada

Score 4

Parties in Canada rarely cooperate. This is inherent in the adversarial nature – government and opposition – found in Westminster-style systems. Formal cooperation is uncommon and occurs only when minority governments are elected, typically lasting only for a short period until a new election is held. This is considered normal and proper (Lindquist and Eichbaum 2016).

In a Westminster system, the government is typically formed by the party that holds the majority of seats in the lower house of Parliament (e.g., the House of Commons in the UK). This majority is achieved by winning the most seats in general elections. Party cooperation is only required when the winning party holds a minority or plurality of seats in the legislature, not a majority.

The opposition exists to hold the government accountable for its actions and decisions and is expected to challenge the government party whenever possible. In the Westminster system, the opposition often forms a “shadow cabinet” that mirrors the structure of the government cabinet. Members of the shadow cabinet are assigned specific portfolios and are responsible for critiquing and developing alternative policies to those proposed by the government. Members of the opposition scrutinize government policies, challenge decisions, and provide an alternative viewpoint on legislation and policy to the public and media.

In a parliamentary democracy, if the government loses the confidence of the majority in the lower house, it may be replaced by the opposition. This can happen through a vote of no confidence or if the government fails to pass key legislation. The opposition thus serves as a potential alternative government if the existing government fails.

The first-past-the-post electoral system undermines cross-party cooperation by creating reasonable expectations of parliamentary majorities. When these majorities frequently occur, the governing party has no incentive to seek input from opposition parties.

Hungary

Score 4

There are significant differences between government and opposition parties regarding liberal democratic values. Hungary exhibits many features of an autocracy. Explicitly and outspokenly, Prime Minister Orbán advocates what he calls illiberal democracy – a contradiction in terms. By changing the rules of the democratic game with the help of a two-thirds majority in parliament, frequent constitutional amendments and a continuously maintained state of emergency, the government secures an unchallenged advantage over the opposition. The government is not advancing democratic values, but is threatening them. In a highly polarized environment, the opposition – with the possible exception of the newly formed rightist party Mi Hazánk Mozgalom (Our Homeland), which has an undemocratic core and pushes a strongly nationalistic and othering discourse – aims to restore democracy. Against this background, cooperation between the camps is technically unnecessary due to the overwhelming Fidesz majority, and is not sought by the government. Consensual voting and cross-camp consultations are extremely rare. Parliamentary committees in Hungary operate with a substantial Fidesz majority, rendering the efforts of opposition legislators almost meaningless. Calls to boycott parliament routinely emerge among opposition parties and intellectuals, but no large-scale abstention has occurred so far. The government majority pushes illiberal and anti-democratic policies, and the intense fusion of government and parliamentary majority results in state capture, severely limiting the ability to fight undemocratic tendencies.

The role of the opposition parties is to highlight disruptions of democracy and present policy alternatives. However, they cannot advance their agenda through parliament, as the government majority controls agenda-setting and voting procedures. Consequently, the opposition is relegated to civil society and street-level activism, where it faces severe government countermeasures and suffers from organizational shortcomings. Cooperation within the opposition has improved over the past decade despite substantial ideological differences ranging from the left to the right. The electoral system, with strong majoritarian components, enforces this cooperation. Only candidates supported by a united opposition can successfully challenge Fidesz-KDNP candidates, particularly in urban centers like Budapest and Szeged. The process of opposition primaries, established during the run-up to the 2022 elections, fostered cooperation and made the movement more visible to the public. The somewhat surprising election of a conservative candidate, Péter Márky-Zay, as the prime ministerial candidate highlighted this cooperation. However, this did not translate into electoral success; even Márky-Zay lost his constituency to a Fidesz grandee.

The electoral defeat of the broad opposition coalition in 2022 has brought this strategy into question, making cooperation between opposition parties and the

organization of primaries increasingly unlikely and difficult ahead of the 2024 municipal and European Parliament elections.

Israel

Score 4

The effective polarization between parties has increased over the last two governments, leading to a decline in inter-party collaboration. The opposition to the previous administration, the so-called Change Government (2021 – 2022), refused to cooperate on all issues, resulting in highly polarized Knesset votes. This trend persisted even when the proposed legislation came from opposition members in the preceding Knesset. Furthermore, upon assuming power, the current government eliminated most policy changes made by the earlier administration through coalition agreements. This rollback applied not only to ideologically contentious issues but also to non-partisan matters, such as transportation.

The present government shows little commitment to liberal democratic values, as evidenced by its attempts to overhaul judicial legislation, eliminate checks and balances between the three branches of government, and weaken the judiciary. According to the Chapel Hill Expert Survey, the formateur party, Likud, is extremely populist (Gidron 2023). Other parties in the coalition are likewise not committed to liberal democratic values, with some even explicitly opposing them.

The ultraorthodox parties are illiberal, rejecting the supremacy of the rule of law and not allowing women to run for office within the parties. The other two parties are extremely right-wing, advocate for Jewish supremacy and discriminate against minorities (Chapel Hill Expert Survey). This is also reflected in the coalition agreements, which state that the government will support a ban on discrimination against minorities in providing services.

The parties supporting liberal democracy are currently in opposition. During the attempt to reform the judiciary, opposition parties united against the government's moves. However, since the beginning of the war with Hamas on October 7, opposition to the government has decreased. One opposition party has even entered the government, while the remaining opposition parties are ideologically distinct from one another, which makes it difficult for them to collaborate. As a result, the government's anti-democratic activities face little organized opposition from elected politicians.

Citation:

Chapel Hill Expert Survey <https://www.chesdata.eu/>

Gidron, N. 2023. "Why Israeli Democracy Is in Crisis." *Journal of Democracy* 34 (3): 33–45. <https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2023.a900431>

Slovakia

Score 4

The majority of political parties in Slovakia support democratic values. However, during the 2023 election campaign, several mainstream political parties, such as Smer-SSD, distanced themselves from liberal values. Alongside “systemic” parties that support liberal democratic values (like SaS), there are several “anti-system” parties (for more, see Gyarfášová, 2018; Rybář and Spáč, 2020; Rossi, 2020; Malý and Nemeč, 2023).

Slovakia has several far-right movements that support the country’s fascist past, such as Slovenská pospolitost’ (Slovak Togetherness, SP). Since the mid-1990s, SP has advocated for the abolition of democracy in favor of a corporatist regime. The Supreme Court dissolved the party in 2006. Leaders, including Marián Kotleba, formed a new party, Kotlebovci – Ľudová strana Naše Slovensko, recognized as ultra-right and neofascist (Gyarfášová, 2018). This party was elected to parliament in 2016 and 2020. In 2021, some members of parliament left to form Republika, which also used moderate rhetoric. In the 2023 elections, both parties failed to pass the 5% threshold, although Republika reached 4.75%. The Slovak National Party (SNS) gained 5.62% and 10 MPs, mainly due to popular figures from conspiracy circles with radical conservative and pro-Russian attitudes. Paradoxically, due to preferential votes, only SNS chair Andrej Danko was elected as a party member, with the rest being radical independents, several of whom became ministers or state secretaries.

The political spectrum in the Slovak parliament after the 2023 elections includes:

Smer: A formerly social-democratic party led by Robert Fico that is criticized for weak anti-corruption efforts and its shift toward nationalism and extremist rhetoric.

Progresívne Slovensko: A left-wing liberal, pro-European movement, elected to parliament for the first time.

Hlas: A social-democratic party formed after splitting from Smer in 2020, formally pro-European.

SaS: Freedom and Solidarity, a liberal, mostly pro-European party.

SNS: Slovak National Party, nationalist with limited acceptance of liberal democratic values and a reserved stance on EU membership.

KDH: Christian Democratic Movement, center-right, conservative on gender and family issues, pro-European.

OLaNO: Now rebranded as “Slovakia,” a center-right movement supporting traditional Christian and family values.

The ruling coalition consists of Smer, Hlas, and SNS. There is ongoing debate about whether this coalition structure poses risks to EU and NATO memberships, though analysts note Fico’s experience and pragmatism (see Karnitschnig, 2023). However, his election rhetoric regarding the war in Ukraine and amendments to the Criminal Code have raised concerns domestically and internationally.

Ruling coalitions prepare and sign agreements to manage different ideological positions, though adherence can vary. The 2020–2022 coalition led by OĽaNO often ignored its agreement, leading to Prime Minister Matovič’s resignation in 2021 and the coalition’s collapse in 2022 (see Malý and Nemeč, 2023).

Officially, all liberal democratic parties reject cooperation with anti-democratic entities. However, there were instances in 2022–23 where the ruling coalition relied on support from Republika to pass legal proposals (see Jabůrková, 2022). Matovič’s chaotic pandemic governance and past collaboration with the radical right are key reasons why the three 2023 post-election opposition parties (PS, SaS, and KDĽ) do not cooperate with his “Slovensko” movement.

Overall, the post-2023 election developments have blurred the boundaries between parties’ normative attitudes. The current Smer-SD-led coalition operates pragmatically, focusing on office-seeking and power interests.

Citation:

OĽa Gyárfášová. 2018. “The fourth generation: from anti-establishment to anti-system parties in Slovakia.” *New Perspectives. Interdisciplinary Journal of Central & East European Politics and International Relations* 1: 109-133.

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France

Score 3

With France’s diverse party system, it is no surprise that several parties can be considered as challenging the existing institutional order. While almost no party directly contests liberal democratic principles, France is home to populist and radical parties on both the left and the right of the political spectrum. Populist parties received about half of the votes in the legislative elections of 2022. This results from both the continuing progress of the radical right and the new dominance of La France Insoumise on the left, working through the NUPES alliance. What is more surprising is that almost all parties have contested the established order in one way or another. Macron’s success was built on denouncing the incumbent elite’s incapacity. Both the Socialist Party and the Republicans, once the dominant governmental parties, have

not only lost most of their influence, but are also now under the influence of the more radical parties. PS has happily participated in the NUPES alliance. The Republicans have increasingly considered not only coming closer to the position of the National Rally, but even directly collaborating with it.

Since the elections of 2022, France has been governed by a minority government. This is the result both of the mediocre performance of the presidential party in the legislative elections and the incapacity to forge a governmental coalition that extends beyond the president's supporters. Despite several attempts to negotiate a more structured and durable agreement with the Republicans, both during the formation of the government and during the pension reform process, these efforts have failed. The government has considered no alternative to this coalition.

This more generally reflects the workings of a polarized party system. France has a long tradition of polarization. The divide between left and right has been a constant feature of French politics, reflecting ideological and social tensions as well as tensions between the center and periphery. All this has contributed to the country's antagonistic political and social structure. Consensual collaboration has been the exception rather than the rule.

Things may have changed following the 2017 presidential election, since the new president managed to form a coalition with elements from the center-right and center-left, pushing the remaining parties to the extremes of the political spectrum. But the idea of overcoming the sterile left-right polarization for the benefit of more consensual progressive policymaking seems to have failed. Macron's strategy has even increased polarization between his movement and the extreme right, marginalizing all other parties as he has tried to force moderates to rally around his flag. The result is that moderates have been split between rallying to Macron and rallying to more radical alternatives. This, in turn, weakens one of the constraining rules of the game in French politics – the so-called *cordon sanitaire* around the far right.

Zemmour's surge has helped in this regard, but it reflects more generally the evolution toward a three-bloc politics, not unlike the situation of the Fourth Republic, with centrist parties opposed to radicals on both extremes.

In the end, this process has failed in several respects. On one hand, reform has proved to be increasingly difficult. The pension reform and the bill on immigration have shown that the only ways to act have been either through the so-called 49.3 procedure – which allows measures to be passed though the National Assembly without a vote – or with a drift in bill content toward the positions of the radical right. On the other hand, it has also contributed to the “normalization” of the hard-right National Rally, and has created the option of explicit collaborations if not coalitions with it.

Poland

Score 3

The Polish political landscape was highly divided along ideological lines and split into two blocs: populists and anti-populists. The first bloc dominated from 2015 until the October 2023 elections and represented right-wing populism and national conservatism in the United Right (Zjednoczona Prawica), with the dominant Law and Justice (PiS) party led by Jarosław Kaczyński.

Due to the lack of a stable majority in the parliament (227 out of 460 seats), the government depended heavily on internal discipline and the support of minor parliamentary circles like Kukiz'15 – Direct Democracy (Kukiz15). The conservative spectrum concluded with the far-right Confederation (Konfederacja), which, although not aligned with or supportive of the United Right, called for anti-immigrant regulations, strong opposition to further integration of the European Union and highly liberal economic policies.

In 2022 and 2023, internal divisions within the United Right led to constant intragovernmental conflict between Justice Minister Zbigniew Ziobro and Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki. Ziobro, head of a junior ally of the Law and Justice party (PiS), Sovereign Poland, controlled 20 out of 228 seats in the coalition parliamentary club. His small but critical group played a decisive role in passing governmental proposals. The main arena for conflict was on issues relating to the European Union, as the prime minister was a realist, while the justice minister voiced a hard euroskepticism, including support for Polesxit. Ziobro's 2019 judicial reform violated EU law, and led to the introduction of a mechanism linking the disbursement of EU funds with adherence to the rule of law. Despite the intense and open political conflict, Morawiecki supported Ziobro during a vote of no confidence put forward by the opposition.

The anti-populist bloc gathered various parties from the center-right to the left. The strongest in terms of public support was the liberal-centrist Civic Platform (Platforma Obywatelska, PO), which led the government from 2007 to 2015. The party evolved from a Christian-liberal to a more catchall party with a strong commitment to individual liberties. In the 2023 elections, it focused on building a so-called wealth-care state, further Europeanization, empowerment of local communities and strong anti-PiS rhetoric.

As an alternative to Law and Justice and the Civic Platform, smaller parties formed a political alliance, the Third Way (Trzecia Droga), on 27 April 2023. This coalition included the centrist Poland 2050 (Polska 2050) led by Szymon Hołownia and the agrarian Polish People's Party (Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe, PSL) led by Władysław Kosiniak-Kamysz. Leftist voters could support the New Left (Nowa Lewica), which was formed in 2021 by a merger of the Democratic Left Alliance (SLD) and Spring (Wiosna). In February 2023, the New Left created an electoral

alliance with Together (Razem), the Polish Socialist Party (PPS), and the Labor Union (Unia Pracy).

In the months leading up to the 2023 parliamentary campaign, Donald Tusk, PO's leader and a former European Council president, advocated for the creation of a unified list of opposition parties in order to win the "unity premium." However, in the elections to the lower chamber of parliament, the Sejm, the opposition ran for victory divided into three blocks: the Civic Coalition, the Third Way and the New Left. Despite this division, the opposition successfully formed a united government.

The final count gave PiS 35.4% of the vote, followed by the Civic Coalition at 30.7%, the Third Way at 14.4%, the Left at 8.6% and the far-right Confederation at 7.2% (Euronews 2023). Despite winning the elections, PiS was unable to form a majority government as its potential coalition partner, the Polish People's Party, declined to cooperate.

The coalition agreement's main priorities included restoring the rule of law, addressing the climate crisis and improving Poland's track record on women's rights. The document also focused on education and healthcare, depoliticizing the public media and combating hate speech. Issues that created a political fracture included LGBTQ+ rights and energy policy, but the most pressing one was opposition to the Third Way's plan to liberalize Poland's strict abortion laws.

As a result of dropping the abortion issue from the coalition agreement, a small faction of the Left, the Razem (Together), decided to leave the coalition but support it in the parliament. In the elections to the upper chamber of the parliament, the Senate Pact between the KO, Polska 2050, PSL and Nowa Lewica, along with independent candidates, resulted in a stable majority of 66 seats out of 100.

Citation:

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