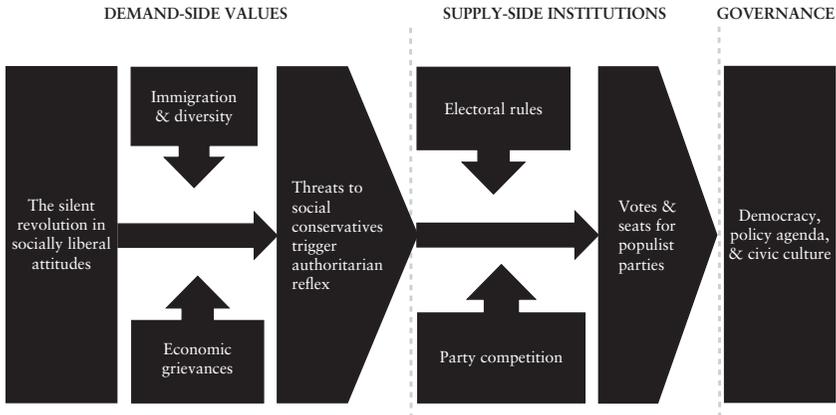# 2

The Cultural Backlash Theory

The cultural backlash theory weaves together old and new claims, as Figure 2.1 illustrates. The electoral marketplace combines three interactive components.[1] Demand-side factors involve societal forces shaping the public's values, attitudes, and beliefs, creating reservoirs of potential support in the electorate that parties attempt to attract. Supply-side factors involve the appeals that parties and leaders use when seeking to mobilize support and the institutional context, especially electoral systems regulating party competition, shaping how popular votes translate into seats and ministerial office. Finally, governance concerns the consequences where parties and leaders gain votes and elected office.

DEMAND-SIDE: THE SILENT REVOLUTION CATALYZES THE CULTURAL BACKLASH

The first premise in our argument concerns the silent revolution in cultural values that occurred during the second half of the twentieth century, transforming the cultures of post-industrial societies. More than 40 years ago, *The Silent Revolution* argued that the postwar era's unprecedentedly high levels of existential security led to an intergenerational value shift among Western publics.[2] This shift eroded materialist values emphasizing economic and physical security above all, bringing a gradual rise of post-materialist values prioritizing individual free choice and self-expression.

The rise of post-materialist values is the earliest-studied and most thoroughly documented example of changing human values and motivations. Survey data from 1970 to the present demonstrate an

32

DEMAND-SIDE VALUES   SUPPLY-SIDE INSTITUTIONS   GOVERNANCE

The silent revolution in socially liberal attitudes	Immigration & diversity	Threats to social conservatives trigger authoritarian reflex	Electoral rules
	Economic grievances		Party competition

Votes & seats for populist parties

Democracy, policy agenda, & civic culture

FIGURE 2.1. *The theoretical framework*

intergenerational shift from materialist to post-materialist values in relatively secure high-income societies, but not in less developed ones.[3] The rise of post-materialist values is part of a much broader cultural shift that has brought greater emphasis on environmental protection, peace movements, sexual liberalization, democracy and human rights, gender equality, cosmopolitanism, and respect for the rights of homosexuals, immigrants, handicapped people, and ethnic/racial minorities. These shifts are also associated with the erosion of conventional political participation, such as voting, membership of political parties, trade unions, and voluntary associations, which have given way to protests, demonstrations, and digital activism among the younger generation. Materialist/post-materialist values are only one indicator of this broad cultural shift – but a very good indicator, as Table 2.1 demonstrates. In the 1970s and 1980s, these values and norms were often referred to as 'counter-cultural' – a term that grew outmoded as they gradually became predominant in high-income societies. These values are so closely linked that Inglehart developed an index of survival versus self-expression values based on them.[4] In this book, building on these theories, we refer to this cluster as socially liberal or socially conservative values.

Today, this long-term evolution has transformed the balance of public opinion in post-industrial societies. Traditional moral beliefs, social norms, and behaviors that were conventional and mainstream during the

TABLE 2.1. *Socially liberal values*

Abortion, homosexuality, and divorce are justifiable	62
Post-materialist rather than materialist values (12-item index)	**61**
Trust people of another nationality	52
Willing to sign a petition	51
Reject being governed by a strong leader who does not have to bother with parliament	51
Protecting environment has higher priority than economic growth	51
When jobs are scarce, men do *not* have more right to a job than women	49

Note: First principal component in factor analysis. Based on data from the 2005–2007 wave of the WVS and EVS surveys in the following high-income democracies: Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Netherlands, Norway, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom, and United States. This factor explained 29.5 percent of the variance; complete data were available for 14,268 cases.
Source: World Values Survey/European Values Survey 2005–2007.

mid-twentieth century, reflecting fixed social identities founded on faith, family, and nation-state, are currently endorsed by a still substantial but shrinking minority of the population. The balance of public opinion has tipped, however, as growing numbers of citizens in Western nations have moved toward post-materialist and socially liberal values.

Economic and physical security have led to pervasive intergenerational cultural changes, bringing a shift from materialist to post-materialist values. People changed from giving top priority to economic and physical safety and conformity to group norms toward increasing emphasis on individual freedom. Growing up under much more secure conditions than their elders, the younger birth cohorts had considerably more tolerant social norms and as they replaced the older cohorts in the adult population, the prevailing culture of their societies were gradually transformed. It took decades for this to happen but it eventually gave rise to a positive feedback loop. People take for granted the world into which they are born. It seems normal and legitimate. The cultural norms of high-income societies were changing, which meant that the gap between contemporary conditions and the world into which one was born was much smaller for Millennials then for the Interwar generation. Conversely, as time went by, the older cohorts experienced a growing gap between the norms of the world into which they had been born, and the world in which they lived. The younger birth cohorts had experienced greater gender equality,

tolerant sexual norms, and cultural diversity since birth and they seemed familiar and unthreatening. For many older people, same-sex marriage, women in leadership roles, multicultural diversity in cities, and, in the US, an African-American President were disorienting departures from the norms they had known since childhood; they felt they had become strangers in their own land. The process of cultural change was reinforced by large-scale immigration, rising access to college education, and urbanization. The pace of long-term cultural change can be accelerated or weakened by period-effects associated with shifts in economic conditions and population migration.

The notion of '*values*' refers to deep-rooted and enduring priorities and goals for individuals, organizations, and society. Should society seek to maximize freedom, autonomy, and individual choice or respect for order, tradition, and stability? Should we give top priority to diversity or conformity? Higher wages or more leisure time? Individualism or communitarianism? Open or closed societies? The spiritual or the secular? Nationalism or cosmopolitanism? Minority rights or majority rule? Pluralistic bargaining or strong, decisive leadership? Materialism or post-materialism?

Milton Rokeach defines values as: 'an enduring belief that a specific mode of conduct or end state of existence is personally or socially preferable to an opposite or converse mode of conduct or end state of existence.'[5] Attitudes and opinions are less deep-rooted and enduring than values, shifting more easily in the light of new information or experiences, such as views approving or disapproving of government performance or public policies, and opinions about the risks of climate change or terrorism. But, like the base of an iceberg, values are understood here as bedrock orientations acquired from formative experiences during childhood and adolescence, often persisting for a lifetime, anchoring attitudes and opinions.

Structural Social Changes Drive Cultural Evolution

If common developments have occurred across diverse post-industrial societies, what underlies the trajectory of cultural evolution? We hypothesize that enduring processes of value change arise from secular processes transforming the deep tectonic plates of Western societies, including generational replacement, the expansion of access to higher education, urbanization, growing gender equality, and greater ethnic diversity. These processes have gradually shrunk the size of the social segments adhering to the core tenants of social conservatism, while expanding the segments

of the population endorsing socially liberal attitudes and post-materialist values.

The effects of *generational* change on social values have been extensively documented. This book identifies four main generational cohorts:

- The *Interwar* cohort that lived through two World Wars and the Great Depression (born 1900–1945);
- *Baby Boomers* who came of age during the growing affluence and expansion of the welfare state during the post-World War II era (1946–1964);
- *Generation X* socialized during the counter-culture era of sexual liberalization and student protest (1965–1979); and
- *Millennials* who came of age under the era of neo-liberalism economics and globalization associated with Reagan and Thatcher (1980–1996).

Rapid social change, which transformed the formative experiences of the Interwar and Millennial cohorts growing up in the US and other secure high-income societies, has had profound impacts on cultural values. As Chapter 4 demonstrates, in the US, younger generations hold attitudes that are far more liberal than their elders on a wide range of contemporary social issues – from opinions about the role of women and men to the scope of government, religiosity, homosexuality, race, drugs, guns, and pornography.[6] Similar generation gaps on moral and social issues are evident in Britain.[7] In the 2016 Brexit referendum, for example, age and education divided the UK public more than social class.[8] The Brexit result in 2016 reflects the views of older voters who feared the cultural threat of open borders and migration from Europe.[9]

Inter-generational differences arise from the historical experiences of given birth cohorts which anchor their attitudes and values. The composition of society is gradually transformed through long-term processes of population replacement; each day marks the exit of some older citizens and the entry of new ones. As Figure 2.2 shows, in 2002 the Interwar and Baby Boomer generations constituted almost two-thirds of the European electorate. By 2014, however, these cohorts had shrunken to less than half of the electorate – although they were still a majority of those who actually voted.[10] In America, as well, Millennials alone now comprise almost one-third of the eligible electorate.[11] The evolution of values through demographic processes of generational turnover generates powerful historical tides. As later chapters demonstrate,

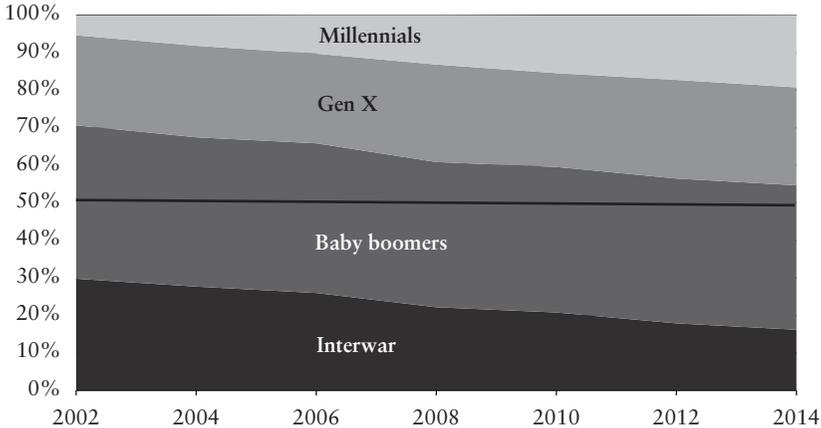**As % of the adult population**
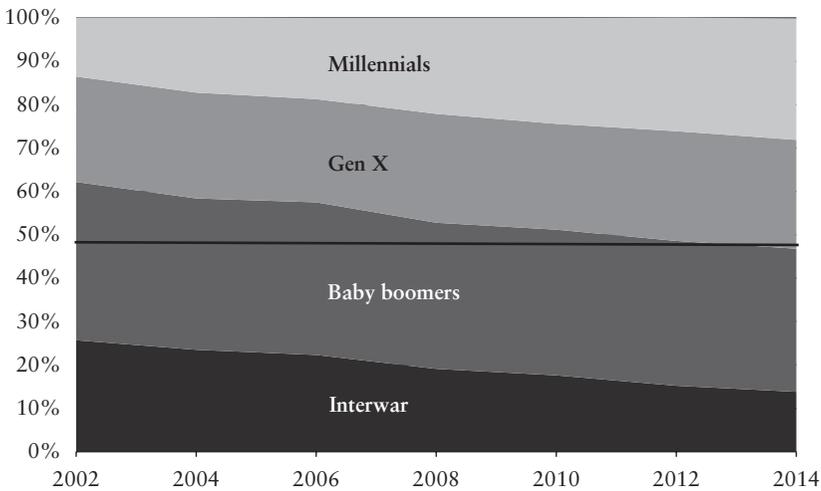
As % of voters

FIGURE 2.2. *The size of generational cohorts in Europe 2002–2014*
Source: The European Social Survey, Cumulative File Rounds 1–7.

generational differences are more important for long-term cultural change than period-effects, although we also find fluctuations around major decisive events, as well as life-cycle effects, which alter attitudes as individuals enter the paid workforce, settle down and start a family, and eventually retire.[12]
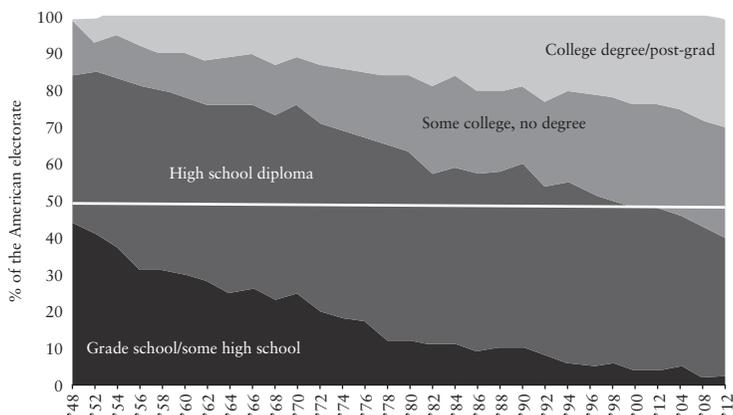
FIGURE 2.3. *The educational revolution, US 1948–2012*

The revolution in *education*, with rapidly growing access to college-level education, has also had a profound impact on Western cultures, helping shift attitudes in a more socially liberal direction. As Figure 2.3 illustrates, the proportion of Americans with only school grade education, or some high school, which was around 45 percent of the electorate immediately after World War II, has shrunk steadily to become a tiny share of the population today. By contrast, a majority of the American electorate now has at least some college education. Similarly, Figure 2.4 shows that across all high-income societies worldwide those enrolling in tertiary education tripled from one-quarter of the student-age population in 1970 to three-quarters today.[13] The transformation was even more marked by sex, where the proportion of women in tertiary education as a share of the student-age population quadrupled during these decades, overtaking men. The experience of attending university has also changed significantly during recent decades, with globalization and the demand for tertiary qualifications expanding student mobility to study abroad, diversifying the college population. Overall, in OECD countries, today around 6 percent of students in higher education are international, with this proportion rising to 20 percent in the UK.[14] In addition to being strongly linked with having post-material values and socially liberal attitudes, education expands
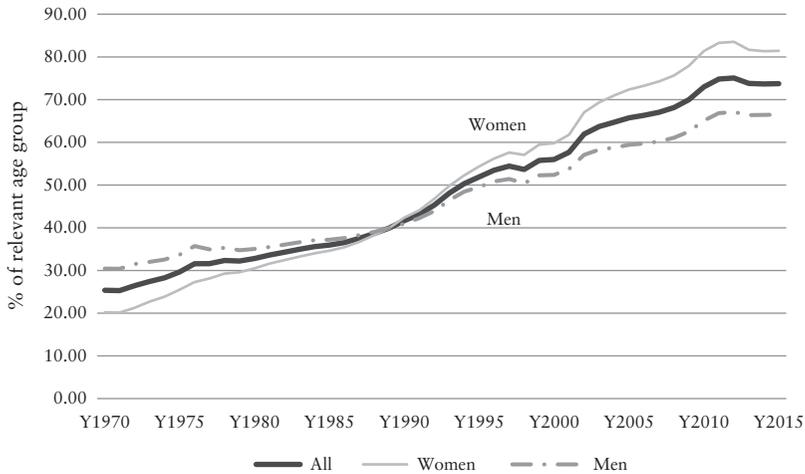
FIGURE 2.4. *Higher education by sex in high-income societies, 1970–2015*
Notes: Percentage gross enrollment in tertiary education by sex, as a proportion of the student-age population, high-income societies.
Source: World Development Indicators, World Bank, Washington DC, September 2017.

people's cognitive skills, knowledge, and capacities.[15] Millennials have grown up in the information age, where the technological environment has profoundly altered media usage, digital communications, networked connectivity, and geographic barriers to the world beyond local and national communities.[16]

Urbanization, combined with growing ethnic diversity in major cities, has reinforced a long-standing center–periphery cultural cleavage. During the twentieth century, the world became predominantly urban, with a majority of the planet's people now living and working in cities. World Bank data indicate that in the 1960s, in high-income societies, about 36 percent of the population lived in rural areas; by 2015, this proportion had shrunk to 19 percent (see Figure 2.5). Urban regions with opportunities for employment have also become the home for rapidly expanding ethnic minority populations. The population growth and cultural diversity of major urban conurbations like New York, London, and Paris contrast with the dwindling predominantly white populations remaining in the rural hinterlands.[17] The lifestyles and values of younger populations in multiethnic conurbations differ sharply from those of older, less-educated, and more homogeneous populations in declining small towns.[18] This has generated deep cultural
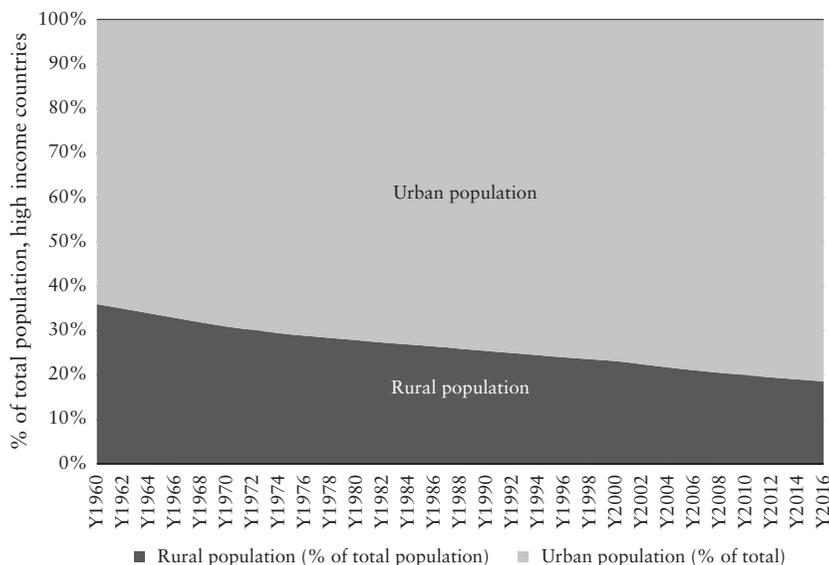
FIGURE 2.5. *Urbanization in high-income societies, 1960–2015*
Note: Rural and urban populations (percent of total population).
Source: World Development Indicators, World Bank, Washington DC, September 2017.

divisions between America's East coast and the Rust Belt heartland – with similar contrasts between populist support in Greater London versus Northern England, or Paris versus provincial towns.[19]

The growing *ethnic diversity* of post-industrial societies has been transformed by an inflow of immigrants, and the falling fertility rates of white populations, together with the higher fertility rates of non-whites. Younger cohorts also tend to be more accustomed to living in multicultural societies. In America, the youngest (Millennial) generation is the most racially and ethnically diverse; strikingly, almost one-third (30%) are 'new minorities,' born of Hispanic, Asian, and inter-racial couples. In states such as California and Texas, whites have become the minority among the post-Millennial generation that is about to enter adulthood.[20] The ethnic composition of the European Union member states varies greatly and the challenges of integration linked with race, language, and religion differ across the Atlantic.[21] Nevertheless, diversity in EU urban areas has rapidly increased in recent decades due to an influx of immigrants from outside the EU, as well as from the free movement of workers within the EU.[22]
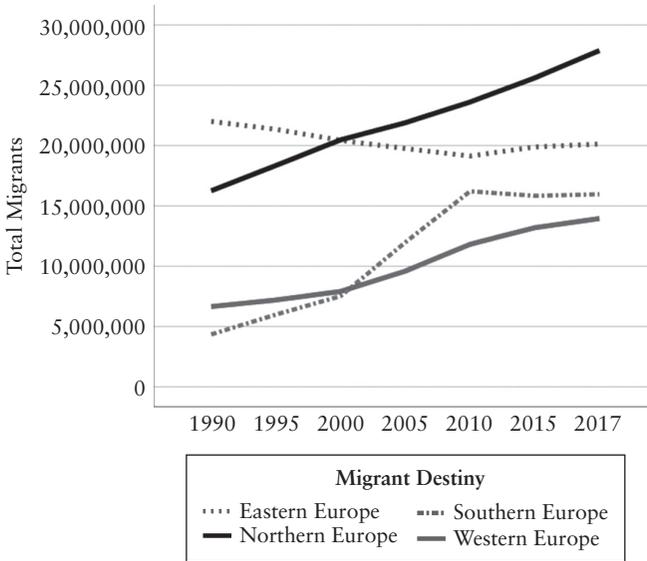
FIGURE 2.6. *Net migration into European regions, 1990–2017*
Note: Net migration is defined as the total number of people moving into a country (immigrants) minus the total number of people leaving a country (emigrants), including citizens and non-citizens, for the five-year period.
Source: UN Population Division. December 2017. *Migrants Stock by Origin and Destination, 2017.* New York: UNDESA.

Figure 2.6 illustrates some of these developments, as discussed in greater detail in Chapter 6. We can estimate trends in net international migration (the number of immigrants who are not native citizens minus the number of emigrants) in European countries broken down by major regions for five-year periods since the early 1990s. This substantial net migration has transformed Western Europe and Scandinavian societies. The influx of immigrants from the Global South is likely to have profound consequences not just for contemporary European societies but also for the future, because the aging white populations have much lower fertility rates than the immigrant families from developing societies.[23] By contrast, immigration was slower in Mediterranean Europe, while Eastern Europe saw a steady loss of migrants for two decades after the fall of the Berlin Wall, until the numbers stabilized at a lower level. Migration can be driven by many factors, including (1) opportunities to work, study, and live in other countries, and (2) to flee civil wars, economic crises, and the breakdown of political order in countries like Somalia, Libya, Sudan,

Eritrea, or Nigeria. The overall total of migrants includes a number who are at greatest risk – the refugees, asylum seekers, and stateless persons, 6.2 million of whom live in Europe.[24]

Period Effects Interact with Structural Change

Generational replacement, rising educational levels, growing ethnic diversity, gender equality, and urban growth all contribute to value change. But cultures are also influenced by period-effects, especially those associated with economic insecurity, such as job losses due to the decline of manufacturing industries, as well as rapid changes associated with migrant flows and the perceived risks of terrorism. Social conservatives endorsing social conformity, order, and stability are especially likely to feel threatened by the growing diversity of Western societies. In 2015, in 17 advanced industrial societies of North America and Western Europe, the percent of the population that was foreign born was twice as high as it had been in 1970.[25]

The recession, the refugee crisis in Europe, and major acts of terrorism gave rise to period-effects, which conditioned the impact of social structural change.[26] Public perceptions of these events were stimulated by direct experience, such as the impact of austerity cutbacks on the pocketbook economy among Greek and Spanish households dependent upon unemployment and welfare benefits. Such perceptions are expected to be influenced indirectly by communications through the legacy and digital media, by party campaign rallies, and by leadership discourse, especially messages exploiting popular fears and reinforcing anxieties. Period-effects can accelerate or retard the long-term processes of generational value change, with threats inhibiting the rise of socially liberal attitudes. Moreover, the historical heritage of past cultural values leaves an enduring imprint upon contemporary societies, as has the legacy of Protestantism or Catholicism, or living for decades under democratic governments or under communist rule, even when these experiences gradually fade in importance. Consequently, although the silent revolution has swept over many high-income societies, the pace of change varies considerably.

SUPPLY-SIDE INSTITUTIONS: FROM VALUES TO VOTES

But under what conditions do secular changes in societies and the evolution of cultural values translate into votes – and then seats in parliament and government offices? In particular, how can structural theories of

cultural change explain rising support for authoritarian-populist forces? This is a complex process, where the impact of value change is hypothesized to be mediated by several factors. On the demand-side, one major factor is an authoritarian reaction among social conservatives who perceive that some of their most cherished core values are being eroded. Moreover, a tipping point can occur in the balance between those holding socially liberal and socially conservative values, producing a backlash among the once-dominant group. On the supply-side of the market, leadership appeals and media cues can activate latent authoritarian attitudes among social conservatives in the electorate. Finally, the way that value cleavages in the electorate are translated into votes is conditioned by different rates of electoral turnout – such as the fact that the younger cohorts, whose attitudes are more socially liberal, are less likely to participate than older socially conservative generations. The electoral rules that translate popular votes into elected offices, and the patterns of party competition also matter.[27] Let us unpack these claims.

The Silent Revolution Reinforces Support for Progressive Forces

Massive but glacially moving shifts in Western cultures have been extensively documented in previous research. But their consequences for voting behavior and party politics have not been fully explained. These value changes motivate the rise of libertarian populists, when the rising tide of social liberalism among the younger, college-educated population is combined with deep disillusionment with the performance of mainstream political parties and leaders. Libertarian populists combine support for socially liberal policies with a sweeping critique of the failure of mainstream parties to address corporate greed, economic inequalities, global capitalism, and social injustice. Campaigning as outsiders, this appeal is likely to mobilize Labour Party members favoring Jeremy Corbyn, Bernie Sanders supporters in Democratic primaries, voters for Jean-Luc Mélenchon's La France Insoumise, the Five Star Movement in Rome, and community activists engaged in Pablo Iglesias' Podemos in Spain.[28] Political parties usually attract older voters, but by adopting digital tools, some like the Five Star Movement (M5S) in Italy, have succeeded in attracting a relatively young membership.[29]

At the same time, levels of youthful enthusiasm are rarely translated into equivalent levels of voting turnout at the ballot box.[30] The Millennial generation in the US and Europe are more likely than their elders to participate in direct protest politics, community volunteering, new social

movements, and online activism, but they are usually far less engaged through conventional electoral channels such as voting.[31] Libertarian-Populist parties seeking the support of younger, college-educated voters therefore face stiff competition from social movements championing the progressive agenda on issues such as environmental protection and climate change, LGBTQ rights, gender equality, Black Lives Matter, the 'Me-too' movement against sexual harassment, gun control, immigration rights, human rights and democracy, international development, and social justice. Populists advocating a socially liberal agenda also face competition at the ballot box from mainstream center-left parties and from Green parties, which have became established throughout Western Europe, such as Groen! and Ecolo in Belgium, Les Verts in France, The Greens in Germany, and D66 and GroenLinks in the Netherlands.

The Counter-Reaction Generates Support for Authoritarian Populism

If socially liberal values have gradually become predominant, shouldn't the silent revolution benefit the electoral fortunes of the standard-bearers for liberal social values, such as the Greens and mainstream social democratic parties advocating progressive policies, as well as social movements among feminists, environmentalists, minority rights, and democratic activists? How do we explain growing voting support for Authoritarian-Populist parties and leaders?

Newton's third law of motion holds that 'For every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction.' And from the start, the spread of post-materialist and other socially progressive policies stimulated a reaction on the part of social conservatives. These changes eventually reached a tipping point in the balance between social conservatives and social liberals in the electorate. This tipping point reflects a threshold effect in public opinion where cultural evolution is not linear. Changes in the relative size of majority and minority groups can spark a decisive shift in collective attitudes and behaviors, catalyzing a reaction when a previously dominant group perceives that their core norms and beliefs are being overwhelmed by social tides and they are losing their hegemonic status. This provides an opportunity for political elites to respond to their cultural grievances.

The 'tipping point' notion suggests that cultural interactions are influenced by the relative proportions of groups within a society. This concept has been explored by previous authors, providing insights into the dynamics of race and gender. In 1969 and 1971, Thomas Schelling published widely cited articles describing a general theory of tipping points to

account for racial dynamics.[32] Similarly, Mark Granovetter discussed the idea of racial thresholds, where the size of minority groups living within a local community was seen as triggering 'white flight.'[33] And Malcolm Gladwell popularized notions of tipping points drawn from epidemiology, reflecting the moment when a virus reaches a critical mass and sharply accelerates diffusion in the general population.[34] Thresholds also exist in formal constitutional rules, such as the minimum percentage of votes required before popular support is translated into parliamentary seats.[35]

In the field of gender studies and women's political representation, the concept of a 'critical mass' argues that the effects of women's presence in organizations partly depends on the relative size of the group. Rosebeth Moss Kanter advanced the notion that when only a few token women were included in corporate boardrooms, men, and women behaved similarly. Even if minorities have different interests or behaviors, they are under pressure to conform with established organizational cultures. But once women reached a certain threshold in an organization – constituting perhaps one-third of the board's members – then women could be empowered to express themselves more freely, challenging conventional behavioral norms and cultural attitudes.[36] The notion of a critical mass in organizations also influenced arguments about the design of gender quotas seeking to strengthen women's representation in public affairs. In particular, Drude Dahlerup hypothesized that women's interests are unlikely to have a major impact on political decision-making and the established policy agenda unless women constitute a 'large minority' of elected representatives.[37] This work inspired a substantial debate about the effects of a critical mass on women's access and power in parliaments, a process conditioned by the rules for decision-making within elected bodies.[38]

These diverse accounts share the notion that social change is not necessarily linear; instead, the relative size of groups is important for generating potential threshold shifts.

We argue that the slow process of value change arising from generational, educational, gender, and urban transformations have deepened cultural cleavages in many Western societies and changed the relative balance between liberalism and conservatism. Older social conservatives have gradually lost their hegemonic status, although remaining a large minority of society – and a bare majority of the voting public. In addition, traditional social conservatives are clustered disproportionately in declining rural communities based on manufacturing and agriculture, whereas the younger generations have moved away to cities in pursuit of college degrees and job opportunities, leaving behind aging, overwhelmingly

white, and less-educated populations. Thus, in hundreds of counties in America, more people are dying than being born.[39] Conversely, younger social liberals have expanded as a proportion of the overall population – and they are active through community volunteering, protests, and online activism – although they are substantially less likely to vote.[40]

How do people react to the profound cultural changes in Western social values? Several alternative scenarios are possible.

On the one hand, as the proportion of social conservatives erodes in society, their beliefs and behaviors could gradually fade away. In 1974, Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann developed the influential theory that people are more likely to remain silent when they feel that their views are in the minority.[41] The 'spiral of silence' theory posits that people fear social penalties, such as isolation, disapproval, or the loss of status and position, if they are seen to be holding controversial minority views that are not socially desirable, for example by expressing transgressive racial slurs, xenophobia, or misogynistic views in liberal societies. When they feel that their own views are at odds with the majority, people are more likely to self-censor themselves.[42] They tend to feel more comfortable in communicating socially acceptable views that reflect mainstream norms. Hence, social psychologists have found that the public expression of prejudice is strongly related to perceptions of prevailing social norms.[43] People may continue to be prejudiced – such attitudes do not change readily – but they may hesitate to express their views. Such self-censorship seems to underlie resentment against 'political correctness.' If this argument is correct, a snowball or band-wagon effect should be observable in the public square as socially liberal values are seen to gain acceptance in society, such as support for non-traditional families, gay marriage, affirmative action for women and minorities, legalizing recreational drugs, animal rights movements, environmental protection, and transgender rights.

This reaction depends on whether people are aware of changing social norms – which may not happen – for example where distinctive sub-cultures persist within isolated communities, or if the cues about what is socially acceptable come from media bubbles or dominant opinion leaders, or during periods of rapid transition and intense polarized debate where it may be unclear what social norms should guide acceptable ideas and behavior.[44] Moreover, conservatives who perceive that orthodox moral beliefs are slipping to marginal status within their societies are likely to feel threatened by the loss of respect for their values. If so, even if overt dissent is suppressed, this could trigger anger and resentment on the losing side. The more rapid the shifts in the balance of public opinion, the

greater the threat. As later chapters demonstrate, there are strong links between social conservatism (in expressing moral approval on issues such as divorce and abortion) and authoritarian values (as measured by the personal importance of security, conformity, and tradition).[45]

One obvious cultural threat to social conservatives comes from foreigners with different cultural values. But conservatives may view any challenge to conventional norms as threatening, whether linked to race, ethnicity, religion, sexuality, gender identity, lifestyles, or beliefs. Latent feelings of resentment and intolerance may be galvanized into political expression by non-conformity with group morals and values. Conservative reactions can manifest themselves as a violent, nativist force directed against the other, fueled by resentment against globalization, migrants, the closure of factories and plants, the blurring of genders, and the intrusion of different languages. Traditionalists may also reject 'politically correct' views on the benefits of global markets, feminism, diverse lifestyles, and multiculturalism favored by the urban, cosmopolitan liberal elite dominating the media, intellectual life, and parliamentary representatives.

Substantial cultural change has been occurring throughout advanced industrial society. These developments can seem immoral and decadent to those endorsing traditional values, social conformity, tradition, and order. Moreover, large immigration flows, especially from low-income countries, have changed the ethnic makeup of advanced industrial societies. The newcomers speak different languages and have different religions and lifestyles from the existing population – reinforcing the impression that one no longer lives in the society in which one was born. Studies have documented the substantial rise of hate crimes among militant White supremacist and neo-Nazi groups emboldened by the election of Trump in the United States, exemplified by the fatal clashes over the Confederate legacy in Charlottesville, VA.[46] The broader phenomena of Islamophobia has also been rising in Continental Europe, triggering attacks against recently arrived migrants, discrimination in employment and housing, and new laws passed since 2011 in Belgium, France, Austria, and the Netherlands banning the niqab or burqa in public.[47] White nationalist groups typically scapegoat ethnic minorities but they can also be seen to represent a broader reaction against rapid cultural changes that seems to be eroding the basic values and customs of Western societies.

Traditional identities concerning faith, family, ethnicity, and nation, common in the mid-twentieth century, are no longer predominant in Western societies, especially among cultural elites. A tipping point has emerged where social conservatives have become increasingly resentful at finding

themselves becoming minorities stranded on the losing side of history. They may also feel that they reflect the 'real' majority in America – especially if they live in isolated communities where friends, family, and neighbors share similar values, if they get much of their political information from conservative media bubbles like Fox TV and like-minded Facebook groups, and if opinion-leaders willing to champion and articulate socially transgressive opinions.[48] Politicians thereby have opportunities to mobilize social conservatives by blaming the erosion of traditional moral values on liberal elites, corrupt politicians, and the mainstream media, as well as denigrating rising out-groups who benefit from socially liberal attitudes and policies, such as women, racial minorities, and immigrants.[49]

Our study is not the first to link the rise of Authoritarian-Populist parties and leaders with the politics of resentment and alienation. In the US, for example, anthropological studies have depicted social trends as the end of white Christian America.[50] Declining rural communities in the American Mid-West and South have been described as inhabited by people who feel that they have become 'strangers in their own land.'[51] The shutting of factories and coal plants has produced declining numbers of secure, unionized jobs, triggering major social problems in which drugs, alcohol, and suicide have led to declining longevity. These social and economic developments may have fueled the politics of resentment, with older whites in rural America blaming global trade, racial minorities, and immigrants for eroding their economic security.[52] In Europe, as well, studies have depicted the white working class as the new minority in politics.[53] Several survey-based studies in particular European countries have demonstrated that populist attitudes, such as mistrust of elites and belief in popular sovereignty, are associated with voting for populist parties.[54] Numerous studies have also linked anti-immigrant and racist attitudes with support for radical right parties in Europe.[55]

But showing that cultural attitudes and values predict support for Authoritarian-Populist parties, by itself, does not account for why these parties have seen rising electoral fortunes in recent years. The impact of long-term cultural shifts, generating a tipping point among social conservatives, has been under-estimated.

Subsequent chapters provide new evidence demonstrating how long-term inter-generational, educational, and urbanization change have gradually shifted the balance between social liberals and social conservatives in Western societies, and how this, in turn, has triggered a cultural backlash among social conservatives with intolerant attitudes.

But much remains to be understood about tipping points in the balance of majority and minority views in public opinion, including the timing, nature, and consequences of these changes in given societies and communities, the way that these developments may serve to mobilize or demobilize citizens to participate at the ballot box, the role of electoral rules for translating voting thresholds into seats, and the broader consequences for party competition, the policy agenda, and liberal democracy.

Mobilizing Voting Turnout

We hypothesize that the tipping point in public opinion can catalyze social conservatives into voting for authoritarian-populist leaders.[56] But turnout depends on the context. Majorities among the population do not translate directly into representation in liberal democracies for many reasons, including the relative propensity of young and old to vote. In certain contexts, social conservatives may not bother to vote, especially if they are already disenchanted with politics and if the policy programs of mainstream parties fail to reflect the issues they care most about. In this context, those disillusioned with the political classes and disaffected electoral choices, might logically decide to stay home on polling day. On the other hand, where populist parties and leaders who champion their values are on the ballot, this provides a channel for political expression, mobilizing discontented sectors. The Interwar generation (with more traditional values) is also usually far more likely to vote than the millennial generation.[57] As a result, older groups can be disproportionately influential, constituting a majority of those who actually vote, even when they have become a smaller segment of the population.

Cleavages in Party Competition

The success of parties and leaders in using authoritarian-populist appeals to gain votes, seats, and public office is conditioned by electoral systems and institutional rules, patterns of party competition over the key issues, and the role of campaigns. In elections, political demagoguery and media frames can reinforce latent authoritarian values, whipping up fear of 'others,' especially when established authorities have failed to respond to public anxieties. Indeed, mainstream elites, who usually share broadly socially liberal and cosmopolitan values, are regarded by populists as part of the problem of moral corruption – not part of the solution.

From the start, the growing prominence of post-materialist values in the late 1960s and the 1970s stimulated a shift in party competition. As Inglehart pointed out decades ago:

Environmentalist parties have begun to emerge in many societies in which the electoral system doesn't tend to strangle new parties. Why? The environmentalist cause is only one of many post-modern issues favored by post-materialists. This electorate is distinctive in its entire worldview: they are relatively favorable to women's rights, handicapped groups, gay/lesbian emancipation, ethnic minorities and a number of other causes. But the environmental cause has emerged as the symbolic center of this broad cultural emancipation movement … Nevertheless, the rise of post-materialist causes has given rise to negative reactions from the very start.[58]

Deepening cultural divisions in the electorate disrupted established party systems. The major political parties in advanced industrial societies were established by the mid-twentieth century when economic issues were dominant, and divisions over social class and religion provided the main cleavages of party competition in the electorate. The classic economic left–right dimension was based primarily on polarization over welfare redistribution and the state role in the economy. On the left, working-class-oriented parties linked to labor unions favored Keynesian economic management and comprehensive welfare states. Parties of the right endorsed free-market policies with a smaller role for the state, as the horizontal dimension of Figure 2.5 indicates. Since the early 1970s, however, the traditional left–right cleavage, dividing political parties over the economic role of markets versus the state, rooted in the classic social identities of class and religion, has gradually faded in importance in many Western countries.[59]

Economic issues such as unemployment, healthcare, welfare, taxation, and social justice remain important problems, especially during periods of recession and financial crisis. But today the most heated political issues in Western societies are cultural, dealing with the integration of ethnic minorities, immigration, and border control, Islamic-related terrorism, same-sex marriage and LGBTQ rights, divisions over the importance of national sovereignty versus international cooperation, the provision of development aid, the deployment of nuclear weapons, and issues of environmental protection and climate change. The changing issue agenda encouraged the emergence of environmentalist parties during the 1980s in West Germany, France, the Netherlands, Belgium, Austria, and Switzerland. In these countries, pure post-materialists were five to 12 times as likely to vote for environmentalist parties as were pure materialists.[60]
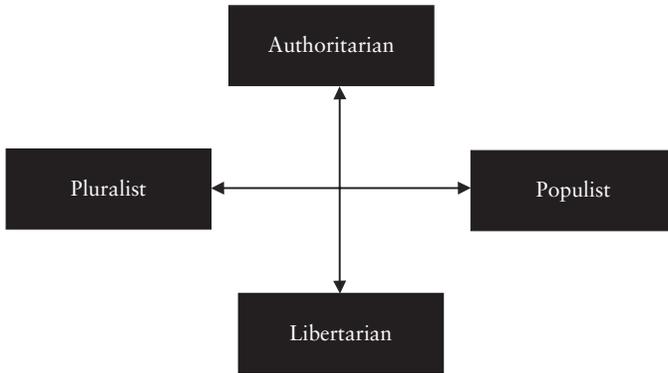
FIGURE 2.7. *Model of cleavages in party competition*

The growing salience of social issues gave rise to a cultural cleavage in party competition that cuts across the left–right economic cleavage.[61] The vertical dimension of Figure 2.7 reflects this cultural dimension, with parties like the Greens at one pole, and those such as France's National Front or the Alternative for Germany at the opposite pole. Other scholars, such as Pierro Ignazi, also argue that the value shift of the 1960s and 1970s stimulated the emergence of left-libertarian parties like the Greens, while simultaneously producing a reactionary backlash among those holding traditional moral values – a 'silent counter-revolution' in favor of the populist right.[62] Similarly, Bornschier suggests that a new cultural cleavage in the electorate identifies extreme right parties in several West European societies.[63]

The changing policy agenda stimulated a cultural backlash in which Authoritarian-Populist parties, leaders and movements channel active cultural resistance against the changes linked with these new issues. The grievances and resentment exploited by Authoritarian-Populists has helped legitimize xenophobic and misogynistic forces, making bigotry respectable in some circles, providing an avenue for its expression at the ballot box. The perceptions of threat among traditionalists have been activated by the message of Authoritarian-Populists, emphasizing fears of threats from 'outsiders' and criticizing the establishment for not responding to genuine public concerns.[64]

Trump's slogan 'Make America Great Again' – and his rejection of 'political correctness' – appeals to a 'golden past' when American society was more homogeneous, US leadership of the Western alliance was unrivalled, threats of terrorism pre-9/11 existed only in distant lands, and sex roles for women and men reflected traditional power relationships. The Us-versus-Them frame is used to stir up fears that provide a support base almost impervious to criticisms of Trump's actual policy performance.[65]

Similarly, the Brexit Leave campaign and UKIP Eurosceptic rhetoric also harks back nostalgically to a time before Britain joined the EU, decades ago, when Westminster was sovereign, society was predominately white Anglo-Saxon, manufacturing and extracting industries – producing steel, coal, cars – still provided well-paid and secure jobs for unionized workers, and, despite the end of empire, Britain remained a major economic and military world power leading the Commonwealth. UKIP rhetoric blends criticism of the European Union with concern about mass immigrations and hostility toward political elites in Westminster and Brussels.[66]

Similar nostalgic messages echo in the rhetoric of other Authoritarian-Populist leaders. This appeal resonates among traditionalists for whom rapid social change and long-term demographic shifts have eroded the world they once knew.[67]

How these value appeals translate into votes – and thus seats and ministerial offices – is conditioned by the institutional rules of the game, especially the electoral system, the strategic response to rivals from mainstream parties, and the campaign communication process through leadership appeals and the media.

INSTITUTIONAL RULES OF THE GAME

On the supply-side of the political marketplace, conditions that help explain the electoral success of Authoritarian-Populist parties, leaders and candidates include the *institutional rules of the game* regulating party competition during nominations, campaigns, and elections. The opportunities facing parties and candidates are constrained by laws and regulations governing ballot access and the nomination process, the use of Majoritarian, Mixed, or Proportional electoral systems, vote thresholds, as well as the rules governing coverage in the media and political advertising, laws concerning use of referenda and plebiscites, and regulations concerning campaign funding.[68] The legal institutional framework

can expand or restrict opportunities for political parties and candidates to compete for votes and seats.

From Duverger on, the classic literature suggests that electoral systems have important impacts on the number of parties that win seats.[69] Minor parties with spatially dispersed support, including authoritarian populists, have more opportunities to gain seats under Proportional Representation, with higher district magnitude and lower thresholds than under Majoritarian systems.[70] Many cross-national studies confirm this point, as do single nation case studies comparing the impact of changes in electoral systems over time.[71] Rules matter. In the 2016 US presidential elections, for example, the use of primary contests in the nomination stage allowed Donald Trump to mount a hostile takeover of the Republican Party. He then won the White House because of the design of the electoral college, despite losing the nation-wide popular vote. Similarly, in the UK, the Leave camp won Brexit with 52 percent of the vote because the rules required only a simple majority, not a super-majority, for passage of constitutional referenda. But rules can change – usually slowly, through piecemeal reforms, so they don't fully explain the timing of fluctuations in support for Authoritarian-Populist parties. Two case studies are selected to provide a fuller account in subsequent chapters that examines in depth the changing electoral fortunes for populist authoritarians in the US and the UK.

The Strategic Response by Mainstream Parties

The willingness of citizens to desert mainstream parties and support new challengers has been reinforced by social and partisan dealignment, widely documented in previous studies in both the United States and Western Europe.[72] This process has weakened traditional class anchors linking supporters with center-left and center-right political parties, increased potential electoral volatility, and provided opportunities for new populist leaders and parties to mobilize support.[73] The erosion of party loyalties and class identities seems most damaging for the electoral fortunes of center-left Social Democratic parties, but it has also weakened support for mainstream center-right parties. During the 'third-way' era of Clinton and Blair, many left-wing and right-wing parties converged toward the center in their economic policies. Socialists, social democratic, and labour parties on the left sought to broaden their appeal to public-sector professionals, as they could no longer win office if they depended on the shrinking blue-collar trade union base, leading to a decline of social class voting.[74] The public policy agenda also gradually shifted

as post-materialists became a larger share of the population, bringing less emphasis on economic redistribution. Economic issues are characteristically incremental, allowing left- and right-wing parties to bargain and compromise over the appropriate levels of taxation, unemployment, and welfare spending. By contrast, cultural issues, and the politicization of social identities, tend to divide into 'Us-versus-Them' tribes, bringing uncompromising and extreme party polarization, as exemplified in American debates about such issues as immigration, abortion, affirmative action, religious freedom, guns, and gay rights.[75]

How have mainstream parties responded to populist rivals? In the supply-side approach, political parties are viewed as rational actors deciding where to position themselves on any given issue dimension, and thus whether to emphasize libertarian-populist or authoritarian-populist appeals.[76] Which social sectors do parties target? Which issues are highlighted in their manifestoes and campaign speeches?

In this regard, established parties may react toward cultural shifts in public opinion and the rise of new challengers through three main strategies.

One approach attempts to delegitimize populist challengers, by drawing attention to their leaders' lack of experience, or the incompatibility of their rhetoric with liberal democratic values.[77]

Alternatively, mainstream parties may seek to isolate populists and exclude them from governing coalitions and party alliances. In the Netherlands, for example, following the March 2017 elections, after lengthy negotiations, in October 2017 Mark Rutte finally assembled a four-party governing coalition designed to keep Geert Wilder's PVV Party out of office, by an agreement involving the People's Party for Freedom and Democracy (VVD), Democrats '66, Christian Democratic Appeal, and Christian Union.[78] Similar grand coalition strategies were used by Angela Merkel to exclude the Alternative for Germany from ministerial office following the September 2017 federal elections. How well governing parties can maintain such a cordon sanitaire, however, depends upon the size of populist parliamentary parties and processes of negotiation over the formation of coalitions with other potential partners.

Finally, mainstream parties may co-opt populist language and adopt a hardline policy stance, promising to restrict immigration or protect trade, or use the anti-elite rhetoric, attempting to squeeze out populist rivals. Single-issue niche parties without a substantial parliamentary or organizational base are particularly vulnerable to hostile issue takeovers of this type. In this way, populist parties may be defeated but populism may still

flourish, as exemplified by the British Conservative Party's adoption of UKIP's Euroscepticism and anti-immigration stance.[79]

Finally, political communications through the mainstream broadcast and print media, and opportunities for party leaders to connect directly with their supporters via online social media, can also impact the electoral fortunes of any smaller party, including populists. Many populist leaders gained experience in television, and low-cost platforms such as Twitter and Facebook, and websites such as Breitbart news, have been invaluable for networking extremist social movements, distributing messages to sympathizers, and organizing rallies therefore.[80] The Trump presidency has been characterized by a constant stream of divisive and unsettling Twitter rants, bashing legacy media. There has been growing public concern about the impact of fake news, including the role of Russian bots and ads.[81] Social media have enabled smaller rivals, with limited organizational and financial resources and restricted access to mainstream media, to expand the reach of their communications among their followers, amplifying the impact of rallies therefore. The translation of the electorate's values into support at the ballot box is far from automatic, with the electoral rules, the parties' strategic issue positions, and political communication all helping shape electoral success.

NEW CHALLENGES FOR REPRESENTATIVE DEMOCRACY

These developments are generating new challenges for party competition, for confidence in democracy, and for democratic representation. If all citizens voted at equal rates, then cultural changes would be directly reflected in the policy agenda and the party composition of democratic assemblies, which would tend to evolve over the long-term in a more progressive direction. As Figure 2.3 shows, the number of Millennials in the electorate now equals the number of Baby Boomers among the population of European societies. But important generation gaps in civic engagement and voting turnout exist.[82] As Chapter 8 points out, citizens born in the Interwar years tend to have traditional values and are almost twice as likely to vote as the Millennials, so they remain a majority of voters. They are also far more likely to be party members. By contrast, Millennials (with progressive values) are more likely than older generations to engage in protest demonstration, but they are consistently underrepresented in voting. This generates a growing misalignment between

citizens' preferences and the policy agenda, which lags behind the spread of socially liberal values. The activism gap between young and old reinforces and exacerbates the values gap.

The generational contrasts in cultural attitudes are well established in the literature. In terms of their absolute size, as a proportion of the population, the Interwar generation is a steadily shrinking pool. The Baby Boom cohort has reached a tipping point in contemporary Western societies, as Millennials have become equally numerous. But older cohorts are considerably more likely to vote,[83] and they provide a strong base of electoral support for Authoritarian-Populist parties. The participation–generation gap, in which younger citizens vote at lower levels than their parents and grandparents, has existed for decades. But this generational turnout gap has grown over time: better-educated, more high-income and healthier senior Americans have become *more* likely to vote today than in earlier decades.[84] By contrast, Millennials have become even less likely to vote than young people during earlier decades.[85]

The result of these developments is a growing representational crisis in Western societies. Cultural changes have gradually shifted social values in a steadily more progressive direction in society. But election results over-represent the preferences of the older generations. This disparity means that parties reflecting socially liberal values, like the Greens, tend to be systematically under-represented in elected office relative to the level of public support for environmental policies. Conversely, Authoritarian-Populist parties and leaders are over-represented in elected office, compared with their share of support in society. These tensions are exacerbated most dramatically in contests determined by institutional rules generating winner-take-all majoritarian outcomes, exemplified by the 48:52 victory for the Leave camp in Brexit and by President Trump's victory in the Electoral College despite his loss in the popular vote. This disconnect raises serious concerns about the future of liberal democracy.

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