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MARK BOVENS & ANCHRIT WILLE

DIPLOMA DEMOCRACY

The Rise of Political Meritocracy



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In the course of the past years, various chapters of this book, in various stages of sophistication, have been presented as academic papers at a variety of conferences, such as the European Consortium for Political Research general conferences, the Council for European Studies conferences, the Dutch Workshop European Social Survey, and the annual Dutch-Flemish Political Science Conferences. We have benefited enormously from the comments of our discussants at these conferences, such as Paul Dekker, Harry Ganzeboom, Leah Haus, Marc Hooghe, Tom van der Meer, Christopher Lesschaeve, Martha Montero-Sieburth, Juan Rodriguez Teruel, Tim Reeskens, George Ross, Jef Smulders, Guido Tiemann, Lori Thorlakson, Bram Wauters, and Pieter de Wilde.

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1

Diploma Democracy

The Rise of Political Meritocracy

Lay politics lies at the heart of democracy. Political offices are the only offices for which no formal qualifications are required. Every adult citizen has the constitutional right to run for office. Any citizen can become a member of parliament, an alderman, or a minister, regardless of his or her educational qualifications or professional status. Lay politics was the essence of Athenian democracy after the reforms of Cleisthenes, and lay politics is still the keystone of modern representative democracy. In Germany, for example, article 38 of the *Grundgesetz* specifies that ‘Any person who has attained the age of majority may be elected’ to the German Bundestag. Likewise, article 4 of the Dutch *Grondwet* proclaims: ‘Every Dutch citizen has the equal right to choose members of representative bodies, or to be chosen as a member’.

Contemporary political practices are diametrically opposed to this constitutional ideal. Most contemporary democracies in Western Europe are governed by a select group of well-educated citizens. They are diploma democracies—ruled by those with the highest formal qualifications. University graduates have come to dominate all relevant political institutions and arenas, from political parties, parliaments and cabinets, to organized interests, deliberative venues, and internet consultations.

Have a look at the parliaments in Western Europe. In the British House of Commons, after the 2015 elections, nine out of ten MPs were university graduates. This was the highest percentage ever in the long history of this institution. In the 2013 Bundestag, 86 per cent of the MPs had attended an institute of higher education. Only ten members, less than two per cent, had *Hauptschule* as their highest degree, the lowest number in the post-WWII era. After the 2012 elections, almost 97 per cent of the members of the Dutch Tweede Kamer had attended college or graduate school. More than 90 per cent had formally acquired at least a college degree—the highest percentage since the introduction of universal suffrage in 1918. In Denmark, Belgium,

and France, between 75 and 90 per cent of the MPs have the equivalent of a college or a graduate degree. This is not because everybody goes to college nowadays—over 70 per cent of the electorate in Western Europe is still only educated up to secondary level, at the highest.

This rise of a political meritocracy is part of larger trend. In the information society, educational background is a very significant social marker. Educational qualifications are important indications of social status and they are very closely correlated with lifestyle, cultural attitudes, and political preferences. Like class or religion, educational background is an important source of social and political divides.

Tell us what your highest diploma is, and we will tell you who you are and what you do. If you are a university graduate, you will watch public television, such as BBC or Canvas, and read ‘quality’ papers, such as *The Guardian*, *Die Zeit*, or *Libération*. You will do your utmost to get your children into a public school in the UK, a Gymnasium in Germany and the Netherlands, or one of the Grandes écoles in France. You will spend your holidays in an apartment in Tuscany, on a *camping écologique* in the south of France, or walking a coastal path in Britain. You will live in a university town, a green pre-war suburb, or in the nineteenth-century, gentrified parts of the inner cities, such as Prenslauer Berg in Berlin, De Pijp in Amsterdam, or Notting Hill in London. You will be moderately in favour of the European Union, worry about climate change, the state of higher education, and xenophobia, and vote for a Green or social liberal party.

On the other hand, if your educational career ended after junior high school or primary vocational training, the chances are that you will watch commercial television, such as SBS, VTM, or ITV, and read tabloid papers—if you read any newspaper at all—such as *The Sun* in England, *Bild* in Germany, or *BT* in Denmark. Your children will attend a local state school in the UK, a large ROC in the Netherlands, or a *lycée professionnel* in France. You will spend your holidays in a caravan at a local campground, make day trips to the seaside, or you will board a charter flight to a holiday resort in Spain or Turkey. You will live in former industrial areas and manufacturing towns, in the post-war satellite cities, such as Marzahn in Berlin, Lelystad in the Netherlands, or Slough in England, or, in the twentieth century, outskirts of the major cities. You will be sceptical about the EU, worry about crime and immigration, and vote for a nationalist party, or perhaps not at all.

Given these very considerable differences in lifestyle, social environment, and worldviews between well-educated and lower-educated citizens, the rise of a political meritocracy has important political consequences. Well-educated and less well-educated citizens do not always share the same concerns and preferences. Those who are well educated tend to be cosmopolitans, whereas the lower-educated citizens are more likely to be nationalists. This is

not a matter of more or less *Enlightenment*, but is related to other preferences and interests. Well-educated citizens benefit from open borders; those with less education experience the burdens of Europeanization and mass immigration. For the well-educated and their children, the free movement of persons, labour, and capital within the EU offers many opportunities to study and work abroad. For those with less education and their children, it means having to cope with increasing competition in the labour market, a boarding house for Bulgarian migrant workers next door, and an influx of non-native speakers in their schools and neighbourhoods.

Plato's Dream Come True

This book documents the rise of a political meritocracy and its consequences for democracy and the political landscape in Western Europe. As with many pieces of political theory, the roots of this essay can be traced to Plato. Each year, the students at both our institutes read Plato's *Republic*. In the introductory lectures, Plato is traditionally portrayed as the counterpoint of democratic governance as we know it. Over the past years we had both grown increasingly uncomfortable with the juxtaposition of Plato's meritocratic polity, run by philosopher-kings, and contemporary parliamentary democracy, supposedly run by ordinary citizens. This juxtaposition simply no longer rang true. Upon closer inspection, modern parliamentary democracy comes surprisingly close to Plato's ideal of a state governed by academically trained experts.

Plato's ideal state, as sketched at length in the *Republic*, is ruled by the best and the brightest, carefully selected after years of study and rigorous intellectual tests and academic trials. His political class is an academic upper crust, a small professorial *corps d'élite*, consisting of the brightest men and women of the *polis*. This book will argue that Plato's supposedly utopian ideal, of a state governed by academic experts, has more or less been realized in contemporary Western European parliamentary democracies. The selection mechanisms and the institutional context may be different, but the outcomes are surprisingly, and discomfotingly, alike. An example is the former Belgian federal cabinet-Di Rupo that was installed in 2011. All thirteen new ministers were extremely well educated: they all had, at the very minimum, a master's degree (*licentiaat*). Several ministers had completed two studies, and at least three held PhD degrees. Eight had worked at a university before embarking on a political career and two, Johan Vande Lanotte and Paul Magnette, retained their chairs as university professors while in office. Likewise, in the third Merkel cabinet, installed in Germany in 2013, fourteen out of fifteen ministers had the equivalent of a master's degree, nine had a PhD degree, seven had worked at a university, and two were university professors before entering politics.

In many Western democracies, all branches of government are dominated by the well-educated. This holds true for almost every other political arena, as we will demonstrate in this book. Modern parliamentary democracy is a Platonic meritocracy, a state run by university graduates and former academics. Plato's dream has come true.

Diploma Democracy

The concept of meritocracy was coined by Michael Young in his satirical essay *The rise of the meritocracy*, first published in 1958, from which we take our subtitle. The book was written as a fable, as a quasi-scientific report situated in 2034. It fits within the British tradition of dystopian science fiction novels, such as Orwell's *1984* and Huxley's *Brave New World*. In his fictional report, Young describes how the British class system transformed from an aristocracy into a meritocracy between 1945 and 2034. This was purportedly the result of the expansion of higher education and the application of strictly scientific principles to the admission of students to schools, and to the selection of personnel in firms, officials in the civil services, and leaders in politics and business. Merit—defined as IQ+effort—determined social status, instead of birth, inheritance, or nepotism.

In his introduction to the Transaction edition, Young (1994) describes how difficult it was to get the book published. The manuscript was turned down by eleven publishers and was only published because a friend had started a publishing house. Soon after, however, Penguin picked it up and in the sixties, hundreds of thousands of copies were sold. According to Young, the title must have been one of the reasons for its success. His neologism 'meritocracy'—partly Latin, partly Greek—was attractive to many, because of the role it assigned to education. 'In all industrial societies the growth of massive educational systems has been one of the most significant phenomena of the century' (Young 1994: xiv). However, 'meritocracy' did not become a current concept for empirical, descriptive reasons alone. The notion of meritocracy also legitimized new forms of social stratification. Social class was the most familiar form of closure in Britain at the time Young's essay was published, and so the notion of meritocracy could be read as an attack on class stratification (Dench 2006). It legitimized new forms of elite formation based on educational achievements and technical qualifications. Also, it fitted very nicely within the neo-liberal worldview that became dominant in the latter half of the twentieth century, because it implies that individuals, through their competencies and efforts, are responsible for their own career.¹

Young's book was written as fiction, whereas our book is definitely meant as a work of non-fiction. Over the past half-century, the concept

of meritocracy—literally ‘rule by the meritorious’—has become a standard concept in social and political theory. It is a contested concept, however, as ‘merit’ can be defined in many ways. In this book, merit is used in the Platonic sense of prolonged intellectual and academic training. In modern society, there is a convenient indicator for this type of merit: the length of formal education, as measured by the highest diploma. We therefore use the term *diploma democracy* as shorthand for a modern political meritocracy. A diploma democracy is a democracy which is dominated by the citizens with the highest formal education qualifications. In less academic terms: a diploma democracy is ruled by the citizens with the highest degrees.

Exploring the Rise of Political Meritocracy

This book explores the context, contours, and consequences of the rise of such an education-based, political meritocracy. It is an amplification of an earlier book on diploma democracy, which was published in Dutch (Bovens & Wille 2011). Its aim is first of all to explore the extent to which contemporary West European democracies are dominated by higher educated citizens. Originally, our study was confined to the Dutch parliamentary democracy, with which we are most familiar. However, in this book, we will expand our argument to other advanced West European democracies, notably Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, and the UK. An analysis of national and international survey data will be made to examine trends with regard to voting and a range of other forms of political participation, participation in civil society organizations, and the educational stratification of the political elites.

Secondly, our aim is to discuss the consequences of this rise of political meritocracy. After all, why should the rise of an education-based meritocracy in politics be something to worry about? Is it not reassuring to know that our representatives and leaders have had such a solid academic grounding? Plato, the founder of the first Academy, certainly thought so. He would probably have approved of the professorial Di Rupo and Merkel Cabinets. However, the rise of an education-based meritocracy does not fit easily within the normative foundations of modern representative democracy. According to Robert Dahl (1979: 131), the great theorist of modern democracy, ‘the doctrine of meritocracy [is] the enduring rival to democratic ideas.’

Citizens with low or medium educational qualification levels currently make up approximately 70 per cent of the electorate, yet they are virtually absent from cabinets, parliaments, and, for that matter, from most other political arenas. This dominance of well-educated citizens may lead to an ‘exclusion bias’ in politics, in which particular types of opinions are not

represented. For example, surveys suggest that those with lower education qualifications predominantly worry about crime, social security, and the cost of living, whereas the well-educated are much more concerned about the quality of schools. Also, the well-educated are much more positive about the benefits of the EU and immigration than the less well-educated segments of the population. Such biases in representational relationships can be a serious threat to the legitimacy and stability of parliamentary democracy.

This book has limited ambitions. We want to document the rise of political meritocracy and discuss its consequences. We look at European countries where we would expect the rise of political meritocracy to be more prominent than elsewhere in the light of their high percentages of well-educated citizens and the meritocratic character of the educational system and the labour market in these countries. The countries in question are Belgium, Denmark, the Netherlands, the UK, and, to a lesser extent, Germany and France. We substantiate this selection in Chapter 4. We could have included other countries, such as Austria, Switzerland, or Finland, but we have refrained from doing so for pragmatic reasons. This is not a study in comparative politics; we will not systematically compare a range of parliamentary democracies in order to document dissimilarities or to charter the workings of the different political systems. Our undertaking is first of all explorative and argumentative. Therefore, a few prominent cases will do. Focusing on a restricted set of similar cases leads us to answer the general question of what is common to all cases, rather than the question of variation between them (Caramani 2010). However, at some points in the argument we will present more general data on larger samples of European countries, to put our findings in a broader perspective. And, when looking at civil society and the political elites, we also will take the EU level into account.

We also would like to emphasize that this is an argumentative rather than an explanatory study. The main aim of our exercise is to take stock of the education gaps in political participation. That is, to *describe* the differences among educational groups and at some point later in this book to consider their political implications. We realize that description 'is not very fashionable in political science these days' (Schlozman et al. 2012: xxi) and often considered, mistakenly, a 'mundane task' or 'residual category' of 'little intrinsic scientific value' (Gerring 2012: 721). However, a better and more complete description of the educational differences in the full range of political participatory behaviours is helpful to gain a better picture of the extent to which contemporary West European democracies are diploma democracies.

Our main purpose, therefore, is not to *explain* who is active and who is not. We are not primarily interested in explaining political behaviour or even in explaining the rise of political meritocracy. We are not election researchers,

seeking to explain and predict voting patterns and other forms of political behaviour. We will use data gathered in election studies and social surveys, but our agenda is different from theirs. We are interested in the macro effects on representative democracy of the dominance of the well-educated, not in the effects of education per se. However, we will discuss in passing social mechanisms that might elucidate this dominance of well-educated groups in politics. What is so important about education? Does it enhance efficacy, skills, or political socialization? Or is it a proxy for other factors, such as cognitive abilities, network position, or socio-economic status? Is the absence of less-educated citizens in political office caused by educational inflation, or is it a side effect of the decline of mass organizations and the transformation of political parties and social movements into professional organizations? These issues will be discussed in the course of our examination of the major political arenas in parliamentary democracies.

Outline: Concepts, Contours, and Consequences of Diploma Democracy

The first part of the book introduces our main *concepts* and *contexts*. Chapter 2 is concerned with diplomas and the educational expansion. It demarcates the various educational categories, it documents the spectacular rise in the number of well-educated citizens over the past decades, and it explores to what extent this educational revolution has constituted a new critical juncture in society. Chapter 3 is concerned with democracy and the participatory expansion. It discusses the various conceptions of representative democracy that are relevant for an assessment of the rise of political meritocracy, and it explores the potential effects of the participatory revolution on democratic equity. Chapter 4 explores to what extent an emerging social and political educational cleavage can be observed across Europe. By using a broad notion of cleavage, which includes socio-structural differences, attitudinal, and institutional-behavioral differences, we attempt to establish to what extent the advent of new divisions related to the expansion of higher education occurs across a range of European countries.

The second part of the book sketches the *contours* of an emerging diploma democracy in six mature Western European democracies: Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, the Netherlands, and the UK. Chapter 5 examines the differences between educational groups regarding the major forms of political participation. Chapter 6 does the same for civil society and organized interests. Chapter 7 concentrates on the meritocratization of the political elites.

The *consequences* of diploma democracy are the subject of the third and final part. In Chapter 8 we assess the rise of diploma democracy and discuss some potential tensions between political meritocracy and representative democracy, such as descriptive deficits, policy incongruences, biased standards, and cynicism and distrust. Finally, Chapter 9 looks at ways to remedy, or at least mitigate, some of the negative effects of diploma democracy.

Note

1. See Donovan (2006) and Mijs (2015) for the mixed reception of Young's essay.

Part I

Concepts and Contexts

2

Diplomas

Meritocracy: From Science Fiction to Factual Description

Life sometimes imitates art. Written in the 1950s as science fiction, Michael Young's book has turned out to be surprisingly realistic in hindsight. Many Western European countries underwent major educational transformations in the second half of the past century, which have strongly enhanced the meritocratic nature of society. This has resulted in a sharp increase in the number of well-educated citizens in society, but also in increased social stratification along educational lines. The level and type of education attained has become a very important resource influencing a person's chances in life and position in society.

Diplomas are important screening devices. Take the case of Ellen Joncheere. In 2013, she was headhunted to become the new CEO of the NMBS, the Belgian national railways. Eventually she had to withdraw her candidacy, because it turned out she did not have a master degree. There were no doubts about her managerial competencies, she was a successful CEO of a large firm in waste management, but a MA-degree, in any type of discipline, was a prerequisite for the job. Another example is Annissa Tamsamani, a junior minister in the Belgian Verhofstad-II cabinet. In 2003, after seventy-four days in office, she had to resign, because it was suggested she had lied about having a tertiary degree.¹

Differences in educational capital also have led to new social divisions. As Larry Mead (2013: 171) observed: 'The longer meritocracy exists, the more it serves to intensify inequality rather than reducing it.' In France, for example, there is growing unease about the system of *Grandes écoles*. They were meant to be the apex of the republican ideal of meritocracy—only open to the best and the brightest, regardless of class or social status, who were selected through a rigorous system of entry exams. However, over the past decades, the influx of students from lower social classes and immigrant families has slowed to a trickle. This has transformed these schools into a bulwark for the well-educated (upper) middle classes who can provide their children with the necessary economic and social capital to successfully pass the *concours*.

According to Richard Descoings, the late director of Sciences Po: ‘We used to have an aristocracy of blood. Now we have a new aristocracy of status conferred by success in getting into this school or that. In France, you crack the champagne when you get on to the admission list for one of the *Grandes écoles*, not when you graduate.’²

In Britain too, the golden age of social mobility is over, according to John Goldthorpe (2016), the Oxford based sociologist of stratification. Younger generations from less well-off families face less favourable mobility chances than did their parents or grandparents. One of the reasons is that the more well-off parents use their cultural, economic, and social resources to ensure that their children remain at the top of the educational and social ladder. They provide their children with a competitive advantage in the educational system and in the labour market, by enabling them to attend elite schools and elite universities. These investments in elite education do pay off. According to the Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission (2014), 75 per cent of senior judges, 59 per cent of the cabinet, 57 per cent of permanent secretaries, 50 per cent of diplomats, 47 per cent of newspaper columnists, 44 per cent of public body chairs, 38 per cent of members of the House of Lords, and 12 per cent of the Sunday Times Rich List attended Oxbridge—compared to less than 1 per cent of the population as a whole.

This chapter documents how education and diplomas have become such important social markers in Western societies. Education can be the result of informal processes—through family, neighbours, peers, or life experiences—or of formal learning that is dispensed by special institutions, such as schools and universities. Modern Western societies rely on the latter. They are ‘credentials societies’ in which ‘certification of achievement—through the college degree, the professional examination, the license—becomes a condition of higher employment’ (Bell 1972: 34).

The length of formal education, as measured by the highest degree, has become a major determinant of social status, income, and, as we shall show later in this book, entrance into the political elites. First we will describe the relationship between education and meritocracy and how we classify educational levels. Second, we will describe how the enormous educational expansion in the second half of the twentieth century has constituted a critical juncture for the rise of new social and political divides.

Meritocracy and Diplomas

The Elements of Meritocracy

According to Jonathan Mijs (2015: 3), the concept of meritocracy can be broken down into three constituent elements: (1) careers are open to talents;

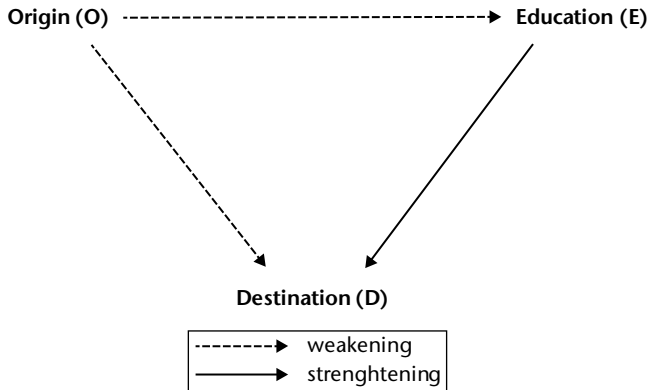


Figure 2.1. The OED triangle

(2) educational opportunity is matched to natural ability; and (3) achievement and not ascription is the basis for social inequality. Natural ability and achievement, instead of social origin and inherited social capital, determine one's success in school and in the labour market. To determine whether trends over time are tending towards such a meritocratic configuration, the so-called 'OED triangle', is often used (see Figure 2.1).

The triangle helps to identify the pattern that should emerge in order to produce a more meritocratic society.³ First of all, the relationship between class origins and educational qualifications, the O–E arrow, should weaken over time. Tertiary education should be open to intellectual talents, irrespective of their social class. On the other hand, the association between educational qualifications and social destination, the E–D arrow, should become stronger. The selection of candidates for high-status jobs should be based primarily on educational qualifications and not on origin, social networks, or nepotism. As a result, the direct impact of class origins on social destination, the O–D arrow, should weaken.

Diplomas and Educational Stratification

Education is the engine of meritocracy. The educational system recognizes with diplomas those who reach a level of educational attainment. The diplomas are taken as measures of merit and are used as criteria of eligibility for occupations and positions (McNamee & Miller 2009: 14). The educational system is therefore also a system of stratification—a division of society into permanent groups or categories, such as the 'lower', 'medium', and 'higher' educated.⁴ Characteristic of the educational hierarchy is that it is structured according to the level of the diploma conferred by a particular educational institution. At the top of the

hierarchy are the institutions that offer doctoral degrees, while institutions offering primary or elementary level education are at the bottom.

There is a wide variety in educational systems among Western democracies and, therefore, also in the classification of diplomas and the level of education. Educational institutions are rooted in different national traditions of education and occupational training, which have ties with different parts of the labour market and educate students for different occupations or professions (Bleiklie 2003: 345). These factors make it difficult to talk about a clear and unequivocal hierarchical system across countries, or even over time within countries. As Schröder and Ganzeboom (2014: 120) observe:

Due to the crucial role of education in modern society, countries keep reforming their education systems, forever increasing or decreasing the number of different school types and programmes, abolishing some and adding others. . . . Comparative measurement in cross-national designs and also in a historical perspective, to some extent, always means comparing the incomparable.

Formal education is, thus, a difficult variable, methodologically, to use in comparative and longitudinal research. For example, one of the basic tools for describing and analysing different levels of formal education in statistical research is the international standard classification of education (ISCED). The 2011 version distinguishes no fewer than nine levels of education (UNESCO 2012).⁵ It is common practice to condense these nine levels into three, rather crude, categories: low, medium, and high. They underscore a common stage of learning.

Citizens with no formal qualifications at all, with primary education, or who have been educated up to the first level of secondary education (ISCED levels 0, 1, and 2) are considered to have a *low* level of educational attainment. In Western Europe, these are the citizens who have left school at the end of compulsory education. Recent cohorts would have spent around ten years in school⁶ and have finished school at the age of about sixteen. They have no formal diplomas, or a diploma from the first stage of secondary education, such as junior high school, primary vocational training, or middle school. These are the low-skilled citizens who work in industry, construction, service delivery, or who are unemployed.

Those who have completed upper secondary, post-secondary non-tertiary education, or short-cycle tertiary education (ISCED levels 3, 4, and 5) belong to the group with a *medium* level of educational attainment. In Western Europe, they have typically spent between eleven and fourteen years in school, leaving the educational system between the ages of seventeen and twenty. They have a diploma from senior secondary education, secondary vocational training, primary professional education, or advanced vocational training. These are the medium-skilled, vocationally trained employees that

work at the medium levels in industry, construction, service delivery, finance and administration, health and child care, welfare, or who are self-employed.

Citizens with a degree from long cycle tertiary education (ISCED levels 6, 7, and 8) belong to the *highly educated* group. In Western Europe, they have spent about fifteen years or more in school and are twenty-one or older when they graduate. They have at least a BA degree from a college, a university, or from a professional university, such as, for example, a *Fachhochschule* in Germany, a former polytechnic in the UK, *Institutes Universitaires de Technologie* (IUT) in France, or a *Hogeschool* in the Netherlands. On the Continent, they will often also have an MA degree, or even an advanced research degree, such as a PhD or doctorate. These are the well-educated professionals and managers that work in research and development, the creative industries, legal and financial services, cultural institutions, healthcare, higher education, and ICT.

In most parts of this book we will stick to these three educational levels, but occasionally, if this is relevant for our argument, we will differentiate within them. We do realize that the adjectives ‘low’, ‘medium’, and ‘high’ imply a social hierarchy. For this reason, the OECD uses more neutral terms, such as ‘primary’, ‘secondary’, and ‘tertiary’ education, to differentiate between levels of education. For reasons of parsimony, we will follow common practice and distinguish lesser, medium, and highly educated groups of citizens. Wherever this is feasible and more adequate, we will also use the more neutral triplet.

The Expansion of the Educational System

The most striking feature of the educational system in Western Europe and many other industrial societies is the sheer scale of its expansion in the second half of the twentieth century (Lauder et al. 2006: 7). This includes an increase in the number of students, but also an increased massification and diversification of higher education.

The Increase in Educational Attainment

The global expansion of education includes, first of all, an increase in educational attainment. According to Robert Barro and Jong Wha Lee (2013: 188), the world population aged fifteen and above was estimated to have an average of 3.2 years of schooling in 1950, increasing steadily to 5.3 years in 1980, and 7.8 years in 2010. In advanced countries,⁷ the average in 2010 was about eleven years of schooling, compared to 7.1 years in developing countries. Figure 2.2, which is based on their data, summarizes the progress in educational attainment of the population aged fifteen years and older in the past half-century.

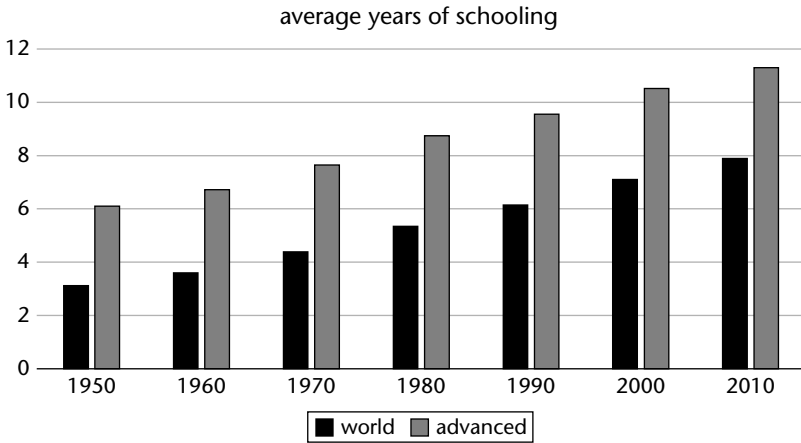


Figure 2.2. Educational attainment by years of schooling, worldwide and advanced countries (population age 15+, source: Barro & Lee 2013: 187, table 3)

According to Barro and Lee, the biggest improvement in average years of schooling among the younger cohorts was recorded between 1970 and 1990, in the advanced countries. Many European countries carried out major educational reforms in the twentieth century aimed at increasing compulsory schooling, and unifying and improving curricula.⁸

The Massification of Higher Education

Complementary to the expansion of compulsory schooling was the broadening of the access to higher education. This has resulted both in higher enrolment rates and in higher absolute numbers of tertiary institutions, students, and staff. In 1970, UNESCO estimated that there were roughly 32.5 million students enrolled in higher education worldwide. By the year 2000, this number had increased to nearly 100 million, and in 2010 to 178 million (Tremblay et al. 2012: 17). In the advanced countries in particular, this has resulted in a significant increase in the percentage of the total population that has obtained tertiary qualifications (see Figure 2.3). This has increased from a few percentage points in the 1950s to about 20 per cent in 2010.

In a seminal report to the OECD, Martin Trow (1974) distinguished three stages in the expansion of higher education. In the first stage, called the *elite university* phase, participation in higher education is less than 15 per cent of the relevant age group. In the second, *mass higher education* phase, participation rates exceed 15 per cent but remain below 50 per cent. Third, at its *universal stage*, higher education participation rates exceed 50 per cent of the relevant age group. Whereas the elite university is by and large the privilege

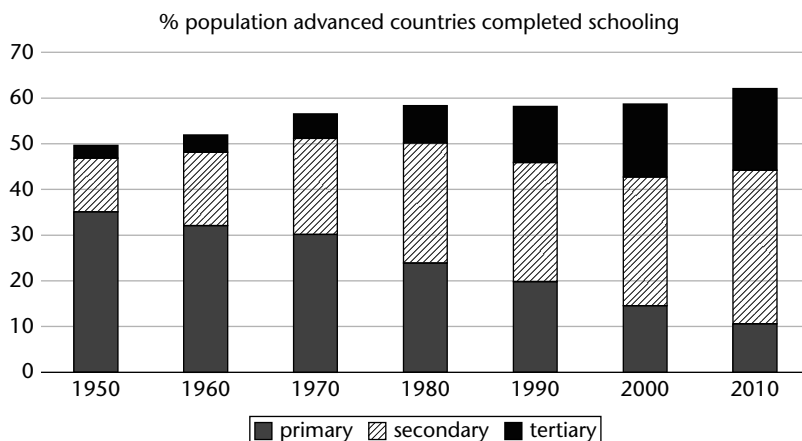


Figure 2.3. Educational attainment by education level, advanced countries (% of population age 15+ completed schooling, source: Barro & Lee 2013: 187, table 3)

of the upper class, mass higher education can already be referred to as a right of the middle classes; in the universal phase, a majority of the population participates in higher education.

Available statistics suggest that enrolment in higher education in economically advanced countries in the second half of the last century developed from a small elite sector, in which some 5 per cent of adolescents participated, to a greatly expanded mass system. In Europe, the evolution of systems of elite higher education into systems of mass higher education took place from the 1960s and early 1970s onward (Trow 2005). In some cases, such as Finland and Sweden, a universal system is emerging in which over 50 per cent of the adolescents takes part.⁹

The Increasing Diversification of 'Higher' Education

Prior to the 1960s, higher education in Western Europe was the exclusive sphere of the university.¹⁰ Vocational training in engineering, social work, teacher training, business administration, and nursing was not perceived as higher education. This was provided by separate professional schools, where students were trained for a specific occupation or a profession (Kyvik 2009: 3). In the late 1960s, it became increasingly clear that it was impossible for the traditional research universities to accommodate large numbers of students (Christensen & Newberry 2015). Other types of higher education institutions, geared mainly towards teaching and professional training, were thought to be appropriate for absorbing the growing numbers of students (Trow 1974). New types of institutions were created in order to deal with a growing, more

diversified group of students, and the rapidly mounting need of private and public organizations for better educated employees (Trow 2005: 17).

These new institutions—whether ‘universities of applied science’, ‘university colleges’, ‘institutes of technology’, or ‘polytechnics’—provided a comprehensive education (Kyvik & Lepori 2010: 4). During the final decades of the twentieth century, terms such as ‘post-secondary’, ‘tertiary’, and ‘third-level’ gained in popularity. The traditional adjective ‘higher’ suggested a certain degree of cognitive rigour, an expectation that students learn to question prevailing rules and tools and understand theories, methods and substance of ‘academic’ knowledge (Teichler 2004: 3). In the 1980s, the OECD became a fervent advocate of substituting the term ‘higher’ education by ‘tertiary’ education. In this book we will use both terms interchangeably.

The Educational Revolution as a Critical Juncture

Daniel Bell was among the first to recognize that the process of democratization and expansion of higher education, which started in the 1960s, had major consequences for contemporary Western societies. According to him, in the post-industrial society ‘the major class... is primarily a professional class, based on knowledge rather than property’ (Bell 1973: 374). A host of theorists have followed his lead and used knowledge and education to delineate new structural divisions.¹¹ For Talcott Parsons (1971: 97), these educational developments, especially in higher education, were so important that he referred to these by the term the ‘educational revolution’. The enormous increase in educational attainment, the growth of university enrolments, and the diversification and expansion of academic occupations were, for Parsons, as important as the industrial and democratic revolution had been. The educational revolution, to some extent, synthesized the themes of the other two: equality of opportunity and equality of citizenship.¹²

Educational expansion, together with secularisation, increased social mobility, and affluence, was assumed to weaken the distinctiveness of class and the salience of religious identities. Class and religion were no longer the only sources of identity, but were cross-cut by other sources of political attitudes and preferences (Evans & De Graaf 2013: 4–5). The most influential theorist in this respect was Ronald Inglehart (1977; 1989) who developed an influential theory of intergenerational value change from materialist to *post-materialist* values. Inglehart examined changes in religious beliefs, work motivation, political conflict, attitudes toward children and families, and attitudes toward divorce, abortion, and homosexuality.

Recently, this discussion has been supplemented by a line of research that points to the increasing importance of education as a key to understanding emerging cultural divides in politics.¹³ Allardt (1968) and Kriesi (1998) have argued that the ‘educational revolution’ of the 1960 and 1970s has constituted a ‘critical juncture’ for the rise of new political differences and conflicts. In knowledge economies, levels of formal education not only determine to a large extent socio-economic positions, they also affect attitudes and political preference formation (Kalmijn & Kraaykamp 2007: 568–9). Well-educated and less well-educated individuals exhibit significant differences in attitudes and preferences regarding cultural issues such as immigration, ethnic diversity, and European unification, as we shall see later in this book. Some even argue that educational differences constitute the basis for a new type of social and political cleavage in society (Stubager 2010).

The contours of such an emerging educational cleavage will be traced in Chapter 4. Here we will explore competing claims with respect to the impact of the educational revolution. The role ascribed to education in the development of society is debatable and, to some extent, contradictory. For some theorists, the educational revolution functioned as a critical juncture, opening up new opportunities for social mobility and the rise of new practices and new social structures. Others have emphasized how the educational revolution initiated new closures.

New Openings and Emerging Social Opportunities

Education as the Engine of Social Mobility

According to some, the educational revolution has changed the social opportunity structure in many West European societies. In numerous respects, the notion of meritocracy, coined in the 1950s by Young, has become the dominant ideology. If you are talented enough, and study hard, you can achieve success, no matter where you start in life. In the post-industrial society, educational and occupational success is based on individual achievement rather than on social background, ethnicity, or gender (Lauder et al. 2006: 9–10).

In this perspective, the increasing importance attached to education reflects its role as the key institution in administering meritocratic justice. By extending access to formal education, governments have managed to expand the social opportunities for children from less privileged backgrounds. Mass higher education may have helped to make the labor force more productive, but the rationale was never just economic. The other goal was equal status—a society where ordinary people could claim equivalence (Mead 2013: 171).

‘Stay in school and get ahead’, has become, therefore, one of the modern mantras of our times. Those with higher levels of formal schooling are generally expected to have better chances of occupational and financial success. High levels of education are perceived as a form of social capital that is associated with higher income, increased opportunities for employment, and better job security:

the educational system has come to play a central role in supporting social mobility, both upward and downward—providing opportunities to the bright and hardworking children of those of ‘humble’ origins, but at the same time preventing ‘the lazy, dull, or troubled children’ of the advantaged classes from enjoying the fruits of their parents’ success. (Treiman et al. 2003: 2)

Education, so the argument goes, has become the primary engine of social mobility in the modern world.

New Closures and Diminishing Returns

The educational revolution, however, has not only created new ways of getting ahead. The claim that the educational system and the competition for high-status jobs are based on merit is contested by theoretical perspectives that focus on issues of social exclusion. It may be argued that the expansion of higher education has also led to exclusionary forces and professional enclaves and that the educational meritocracy has generated a new educational aristocracy.

Diplomas as Screening Devices

The cases of Ellen Joncheere and Anissa Tamsamani illustrate how in contemporary Western societies, diplomas function as important screening devices (Woodhall 2001). Evaluation on the basis of degrees has in today’s ‘credential society’ become the dominant gatekeeping strategy to fill jobs with well-trained people. As the famous French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1977: 21) put it: ‘a school diploma is a piece of universally recognized and guaranteed symbolic capital, good on all markets.’ In today’s large organizations, employers and those making hiring decisions have taken to using these ‘educational credentials’ as a shorthand to sort out the right candidates. Diplomas have become the hard ‘evidence’: ‘a cost-effective way to limit the pools of eligibles and to aid in the hiring of people presumed to have qualities that organizations value in filling a position’ (McNamee & Miller 2009: 112).

Diplomas are positional goods, however. Their value diminishes as more people acquire them. Educational expansion will thus give rise to ‘credential inflation’. The American sociologist Randall Collins (2002: 24) describes how:

The process of credential inflation is largely self-driven; it feeds on itself. A given level of education at one time gave access to elite jobs. As educational attainment has expanded, the social distinctiveness of that degree and its values on the occupational marketplace have declined; this in turn has expanded demand for still higher levels of education.

These factors influence the extent of upward mobility in a society, and the degree to which intergenerational transfer of privileges takes place. In this theoretical account, education is not about fairness and equity, but about the reproduction of stratification and privilege. Pierre Bourdieu (1984; 2006) has shown how schooling is a resource and a social marker for certain positions that are characterized and recognizable by symbols, such as clothing, language, and ways of thinking and behaving. The curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment reflect the norms, rituals, expectations, and practices consistent with the upbringing of children from professional middle-class backgrounds. Various researchers have described education, particularly higher education, as a mechanism for social reproduction.¹⁴ In this perspective, the education system is not the neutral arbiter of a meritocratic selection process. On the contrary, it primarily serves to legitimate the unequal allocation of credentials, jobs, and rewards. By sorting people into categories of its own making (PhDs, MAs, BAs, high school graduates, dropouts), the education system generates new class stratifications and actually promotes social inequality. Education systems have thus fallen short of the meritocratic ideal.

New Privileges and Elites

Education has progressively come to be seen as the primary means of upward social mobility. Opportunities to get ahead on the basis of self-employment or starting a new business, which was a major route to upward mobility in the past, have declined. Lawrence Mead (2013) has observed that the idea that success in school was the only road to achievement was absent in the 1960s. Many people who failed in school succeeded later, while the idea of success was broad and varied. Success could be achieved in various ways, using different talents. In business or politics, success required a range of skills, and it was difficult to say who was a success until late in life. This has changed in recent decades: 'The meritocracy, however, has created a less forgiving hierarchy based on academic prowess alone. It now seems much clearer who is successful and who is not. That verdict is also delivered much earlier in life when it shapes self-esteem more strongly.' (Mead 2013: 169).

Moreover, while the equality of educational opportunity is increasing at lower levels of education, access to universities and other elite institutions continues to be viewed as the purview of the already higher educated. In other

words, the effect of social origins on educational attainment is the greatest at the high end of the educational spectrum:

Today most students at elite schools come from families where the parents were already college-educated... There is thus little prospect that disadvantaged groups... can achieve equal status just by levelling the playing field. The competition is simply too tough... The... project to equalize status through education has achieved much but it has hit diminishing returns. (Mead 2013: 172)

Educational inflation has also generated a drive for new privileges. Traditionally, Britain and France boast selective institutions that play a large role in both the stratification process, and the selection of elites at the top of political positions. Britain has a highly selective private system of grammar schools alongside a largely non-selective state school system.¹⁵ In France, there is unease about the admission to the *Grandes écoles*, the elite universities, as was shown in the quote from Richard Descoings, the late director of Sciences Po, at the beginning of this chapter. In their study of the social background of students in four of the most selective French schools, Michel Euriet and Claude Thélot (1995) found that between 1950 and 1993, the proportion of students recruited from the lower social classes significantly diminished.¹⁶ These trends have generated public debates about improving the access to these elite universities.

The Persistence of Tertiary Education across Generations

There is empirical evidence that European societies are not progressing unambiguously towards a more meritocratic configuration, according to the dynamics of the OED triangle. The OED triangle has been the subject of extensive cross-national and technically sophisticated economic and sociological research.¹⁷ In more recent years, the association between education and social stratification, instead of growing stronger, has lessened: 'In five out of six European societies studied over the late twentieth century... the ED association was found actually to weaken: i.e. individuals' social destinations—in this case defined in terms of class—were becoming *less* closely related to their educational attainment' (Goldthorpe 2014: 267). In an OECD study that measured intergenerational social mobility in twelve developed OECD countries, Britain comes out as the least socially mobile society, followed closely by Italy and the United States. Denmark has the largest intergenerational social mobility, followed by Australia and Norway (OECD 2010: 185). According to this study, a child growing up in a poor family in Denmark has three times the chance of doing better than his or her parents than a child growing up in Britain, the United States, or Italy.

Across all OECD countries, coming from a more highly educated family increases the probability of achieving tertiary education relative to having a medium parental educational background (OECD 2010: 188). Likewise, a sizeable drop in the probability of achieving tertiary education is associated with growing up in a lower educated family vis-à-vis a medium-educated one (Causa et al. 2009: 18). The same applies across the EU. In the EU-28, there is persistence in attending tertiary education across generations. In 2011, according to Eurostat:

the persistence of high educational attainment (63.4 %) is the most significant among the education groups. The higher is the educational level of the parents, the higher is the rate of persistence: the persistence of medium educational attainment is 59.2 % and of low educational attainment only 34.2 % . . . if a person is born into a family with low educated parents, the possibility to be low educated themselves is 34.2 %, while if the parents had high education, the possibility to be low educated is just 3.4 %. (Grundiza & Lopez Vilaplana 2013: 3)

This is not all that different from the sort of social closure Michael Young described in his 1958 satire.

The Rise of the Well-Educated in Society

The average reader of this book may take for granted that large segments of society are well educated. After all, he or she is likely to live in a social world that is largely inhabited by well-educated people. Most of his or her friends, colleagues, family, and neighbours will probably have at least a college degree. This, however, is not self-evident. In fact, it is a very recent phenomenon.

Throughout most of the twentieth century, the vast majority of citizens in most European countries had few educational qualifications and, in effect, fell into the low educated category. Some made it to vocational training, thus qualifying as medium educated, but only a very small proportion of the population acquired a college or university degree. For example, according to the 1960 census in the Netherlands, only 85,000 citizens had academic qualifications—a tiny figure representing less than 1 per cent of the labour force—and one that included 8,000 Catholic priests, who had completed the major seminary. Another three per cent, about 200,000 citizens, qualified as having a medium level of education, while an overwhelming 96 per cent was classified as low educated. Similar figures apply for Belgium: in 1961, 2 per cent of the population had completed tertiary education, 6 per cent had secondary qualifications, and the rest, a vast 92 per cent, had primary qualifications only (Elchardus 2012: 41).

Two generations ago, in the early 1960s, there were no distinct educational groups in society. The major divides were between social classes, most notoriously in the UK, but also in Germany and Italy; or between religious groups, such as Catholics and Protestants in the Netherlands and in Northern Ireland, or between religious and secular segments, for example in Belgium and France.

Nowadays, in most European countries, the percentage of well-educated citizens is higher than that of the less well-educated. In 2015, according to the OECD, 21 per cent of the EU-22 workforce (age 25–65) had primary educational qualifications; 52 per cent secondary qualifications; and 27 per cent had at least the equivalent of a bachelor degree.¹⁸ In 1992, only 11 per cent classified as tertiary educated. The number of well-educated citizens in the EU has therefore more than doubled in the past twenty years. There are still considerable differences within Europe, as we will show in Chapter 4. The southern and eastern countries, such as Portugal, Slovakia, Croatia, Slovenia, the Czech Republic, and Bulgaria, tend to have the lowest percentages of well-educated citizens, and the western and northern countries, such as Belgium, Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Estonia, and Finland, the highest.

This rapid increase in the number of well-educated citizens in Western Europe does not mean that the groups with low and medium levels of educational attainment have all but disappeared in the information society. On the contrary, the well-educated group remains a small educational stratum. In 2015, almost 75 per cent of the workforce did not qualify as being well educated. Since the OECD-figures only comprise those between twenty-five and sixty-five years of age, the number of well educated among the electorate will be even lower, because most of the elderly citizens will not have tertiary degrees. Despite the impressive increase in educational qualifications in the past decades, the well-educated are a minority in European advanced democracies—a substantial and very vocal and politically active minority, as we shall see, but a minority nonetheless. Between two-thirds and three-quarters of all EU citizens do not have a college or graduate degree.

How the differences in formal qualifications affect political participation and citizenship will be the subject of the coming chapters. As we shall see in Chapter 4, levels of education are important drivers of differences in income levels and we also see strong levels of educational homogamy, particularly among well-educated citizens, which is indicative of social closure. Along with the growing importance of international migration, processes of globalization, and Europeanization—which intensified in the 1990s and early 2000s—this trend has set the stage for a profound transformation of political conflicts in the different European countries.

Against the background of these social and political transformations, the dominance of the well-educated in politics is less innocent than the Platonic

dream suggests. It does raise serious questions about the representativeness of contemporary democracy. To this notion of democracy we now turn.

Notes

1. We owe these examples to Bram Spruyt.
2. *The Financial Times*, 9 January 2010.
3. Compare Whelan & Layte 2004: 10.
4. For a general discussion of processes of stratification see Tilly 1999; Massey 2007: 6.
5. Some databases, for example the ESS, use earlier versions of the ISCED in which only five or seven levels were distinguished. In the appendix to his book an overview is provided of the various datasets that have been used, and of the various ways in which educational groups have been classified in these datasets.
6. Depending on the minimum age of entry into the formal school system. In most European countries compulsory education starts around the age of five or six.
7. The 'advanced countries' are: Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Luxembourg, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, United Kingdom, United States. (Barro & Lee 2013: 198).
8. See Leschinsky & Mayer 1990; Fort 2006. Fort provides an extensive description of changes in compulsory schooling in fourteen European countries, with particular attention to the historical developments of each national education system.
9. See Osborne 2003: 5; Kivinen et al. 2007: 233.
10. See Bleiklie 2005; Kyvik 2009; Christensen & Newberry 2015.
11. See Wright 1985.
12. See Kriesi 1993: 23; Turner 1993.
13. Compare Kriesi 1998; Houtman 2001; Stubager 2010; Dolezal 2010; Bornschier 2010.
14. See, among others: Treiman et al. 2003: 2; Collins 1979; Bowles & Gintis 1976; Lauder et al. 2006: 11–13.
15. See Sutton Trust 2008; Barnardo's 2010. Lack of mobility has been an issue in the United Kingdom. Since 2010 there is an advisory non-departmental public body, the Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission (SMCP), that monitors the progress of government and others in improving social mobility and reducing child poverty in the UK. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/social-mobility-and-child-poverty-commission>.
16. See the discussion by Dogan 2003: 46–7.
17. Compare Causa & Johansson 2010; Erikson & Goldthorpe 2010; Goldthorpe 2014; Breen & Karlson 2014.
18. OECD, *Education at a glance 2016*, table A1.1.

3

Democracy

Government by or for the People?

A diploma democracy is a democracy which is ruled by the citizens with the highest degrees. Is this a problem? That depends on your idea of democracy. To some, a 'diploma democracy' is a contradiction in terms. After all, wasn't democracy supposed to be all about rule by the people, as opposed to rule by a well-educated or otherwise privileged elite?

Although ideals of democratic governance can vary in many ways, the definition 'rule by the people', originating etymologically from the terms *demos* + *kratia*, is often used as a starting point (Dahl 2006: 8). This leaves open the question as to which 'people' should rule. There are generally two very broad views on this issue: a more direct one, of 'government *by* the people', and a more representative view of 'government *for* the people'.¹

According to the first view, democracy implies the maximum possible participation of citizens in shaping laws and policies. This means direct involvement of ordinary citizens in political decisions, thus making the idea of 'sovereignty of the people' as real as possible (Dahl 2000: 37–8). For example, in the Athenian democracy—much to the dismay of Plato—each citizen could attend the *ecclesia*, the town meetings, and could cast his vote on each topic that was discussed. Also, the members of the executive, the *boulè*, were chosen by lot from the citizenry each month. From this classical perspective, rule by an educational elite is something that is to be loathed—an *anathema*.

The problem in contemporary democracies is, of course, that millions of citizens cannot assemble in a single place to discuss issues, nor do they speak clearly with one voice. That is why 'large scale' democratic politics has adopted representative institutions (Dahl 2000: 85). Representative government places a limit on participation by the people, with as result that democracy is seen increasingly to develop in the direction of 'government *for* the people'. According to this view, citizens are 'controllers' rather than participants. However, this arrangement serves more than practical purposes alone.

Most liberal or representative models of democracy depart from the notion that citizens, in general, are not sufficiently qualified to participate directly in political decisions.² The average citizen usually does not think enough about political issues and, above all, lacks the competence to do so. From this perspective, one of the obvious difficulties of a direct democracy is that everyone has an equal right to vote, even though most citizens are not properly educated on all political issues. The fear that the uninformed masses would steer the course of society has led many great political thinkers to express their concern about this ‘shortcoming’ of democracy. Far from enhancing democracy, encouraging a more widespread popular participation might, in fact, destabilize it. In the words of Joseph Schumpeter (2011 [1942]: 262):

The typical citizen drops down to a lower level of mental performance as soon as he enters the political field. He argues and analyses in a way which he would readily recognize as infantile within the sphere of his real interests. He becomes a primitive again. His thinking becomes associative and affective.

These two views on the role of citizens embody the most important models of democracy. Direct or deliberative democracy relies on the more expansive and ambitious versions of democracy and aims to shape the notion of ‘government by the people’. Liberal or representative democracy, the dominant form of democracy, is a process-oriented model of ‘government for the people’. Common to both views is that they concern the procedures of political decision-making, not substantive political ideologies. They stipulate the mechanisms for *free* and *equal* voice so that citizens can communicate about their preferences, their needs, and their views, and can hold political decision-makers accountable.³

Democracy, therefore, is not one idea or even one set of ideas about the way a political community might be governed, but a diverse collection of related conceptions. We address some of these conceptions in this chapter. In the following pages, we look first at the different understandings of democracy and the principal elements underlying them. Then we address how democratization in the past decades has opened up new opportunities for many citizens to participate and to voice concerns. Yet, as we shall see in Chapters 5, 6, and 7, this has at the same time closed down opportunities for other citizens to influence decision-making, and paved the way for a diploma democracy.

Principal Elements of Democracy

There is not one model of democracy, but there are several.⁴ Different models bring distinctive normative expectations to bear on elite and citizen

engagement in decision-making. The models differ in the emphasis they put on the different yardsticks or elements, such as *representation*, *responsiveness*, *accountability*, and *legitimacy* that are used to assess the quality of democratic processes. Evaluations of a political state of affairs, such as the rise of diploma democracy, may vary greatly, depending on the way these different yardsticks are perceived.

Representation: Who Are to Be Made Present and How?

Representative democracy fuses two ideas from vastly different origins—democracy and representation (Dahl 1989). The most straightforward definition of representation comes from Hanna Pitkin (1967: 10), who says that representation is simply ‘how the absent thing is made present’ again. Representation, according to Pitkin, means ‘acting in the interest of the represented, in a manner responsive to them’. In other words, political representation is the activity of making citizens’ voices, opinions, and perspectives ‘present’ in the public policymaking processes, and it occurs ‘when political actors speak, advocate, symbolize and act on the behalf of others in the political arena’ (Dovi 2014).

These almost deceptively simple definitions hide the fact that representation is a complex and much contested concept encompassing important questions. First, there is the question of *who* or *what* is to be represented: the personal characteristics of individuals, such as gender, age, profession, class, or education, their opinions, their interests, or the common good. Second is the question as to *how* should they be represented: as delegates bound by strict mandates, or as trustees free from specific instructions (Cotta & Best 2000: 493).

The question of who or what is to be represented touches on what Pitkin (1967) refers to as *descriptive*, and Ankersmit (2002) as *mimetic* representation. In essence, this suggests that policymakers should form a ‘microcosm’ of society: a representative sample of the population. The absence of a given descriptive group may lead to inequalities in political power. Moreover, it suggests that the unrepresented or under-represented groups ‘cannot rule or are not suitable for rule’ and this carries with it ‘a legacy of second-class citizenship’ (Mansbridge 1999: 649–50). Under-representation or exclusion of certain social groups may thus undermine the democratic legitimacy and confidence in public institutions. From this egalitarian perspective of representation, the rise of diploma democracy, particularly with regard to Members of Parliament and holders of public office, is a serious problem.

The idea of descriptive or mimetic representation raises difficult questions, however. To begin with, there is the problem of defining the characteristics according to which representation is to be evaluated. Which personal characteristics are politically relevant: gender, age, ethnicity, educational

achievements? Next, there is the difficulty of achieving this. Since all societies are divided in complex ways along multiple axes, descriptive representation on all relevant demographic dimensions cannot be realized within the confines of a legislature or an executive of manageable size (Verba et al. 1995: 165). And then there is the issue of ‘where—and on what basis—one draws the line . . . at what point do efforts to achieve good descriptive representation start to look ridiculous?’ (Farrell & Scully 2007: 48). Should political parties reserve seats in parliament for the proverbial senior lesbian, physically challenged citizens from the Sikh community?

The representative ideal is that citizens and their interests should be represented in democratic deliberations and decisions in proportion to their numbers in the polity. With regard to diploma democracy, the issue is how politically relevant the educational differences among the citizenry are. In most modern western democracies, gender and ethnicity have been regarded as important social characteristics, which justify affirmative action in a variety of social and political arenas.⁵ Does that also apply to educational inequalities? We will return to this issue in Chapters 8 and 9.

Affirmative action is a crude way to rebalance inequalities between socio-demographic groups in representative bodies. Surely, there are other ways in which the representation of interests can be advanced. While elected politicians may not share the same characteristics as their constituents, this does not mean that they do not, to use Pitkin’s words (1967: 209), act ‘in the interest of the represented, in a manner responsive to them’. Well-educated representatives may act as spokespersons for their less educated constituents. The next question, therefore, is: what do representatives need to *do* and *how* should they do this?

One of the issues is whether representatives should act as *delegates* or as *trustees*—this is also known as the *mandate-independence* controversy (Pitkin 1967).⁶ Delegate conceptions of representation require representatives to follow their constituents’ preferences and to act on a mandate. According to this view, delegates should act as a ‘mouthpiece’ for the wishes of their constituency and have little to no autonomy from their constituency. Essentially, representatives are to act as the voice of those who are—literally—not present, simply following the expressed preferences of their constituents, and there is little room for representatives to act according to their own conscience. An important question from this perspective is whether well-educated representatives are sufficiently responsive to the needs and interests of their less well-educated voters. Are the well-educated MPs sufficiently able to recognize the interests and preferences of their less educated constituents, and can they make them ‘present’ in parliament? This is particularly open to question if there are large differences in social characteristics and political attitudes between educational groups and if they have few social contacts in daily life.

From this delegate perspective, the rise of diploma democracy is problematic, because it may enlarge the gap between the well-educated representatives and the lesser educated segments of the electorate.

In trustee models, on the other hand, representatives have sufficient autonomy to deliberate and act in favour of the greater common good and national interest, even if it means going against the short-term interests of their own constituencies.⁷ This model, which was defended by Edmund Burke and John Stuart Mill, provided a solution to the problem of uninformed constituents who lack the necessary knowledge on issues to take an educated position. Edmund Burke assumed that participation of the people in the elaboration of public policy decisions presupposed an excessive simplification of issues; otherwise the citizens would not be able to comprehend them. John Stuart Mill stated that while all individuals have a right to be represented, not all political opinions are of equal value. He even suggested a model in which constituents would receive votes according to their level of education; that is, citizens with university degrees receiving the most votes, and working-class citizens receiving fewer votes. From this perspective, the rise of diploma democracy is unproblematic and even to be applauded, because it will enhance the quality of political debate and decision-making.

Representation in this trustee vision of representative democracy is therefore not just a one-way road from society to politics, from bottom to top. It is also, and even predominantly, a process from top to bottom, from politics to society, in which representative elites are expected to educate and lead the demos. The representatives take the initiative to address the citizenry, proposing ideas and solutions, shaping interest and identities, and asking the consent of the represented on these proposals (Cotta & Best 2007: 4). From this perspective, diploma democracy is not a contradiction in terms, but rather a *pleonasm*.

Responsiveness: Matching Policy Preferences and Policy Outcomes

A second approach to assessing the quality of democracies is to focus on *substantive representation* or *policy responsiveness*. In democracies, the outcomes that a government produces should, in one way or another, reflect the policy preferences of the citizens. Hence the concern of political researchers is often to assess the extent to which parties or governments manage to respond to the policy preferences of their constituents.⁸ It is the regular repetition of elections which allows voters to influence the decisions of those who govern, and which stimulates their representatives to be responsive.

The idea that voters make their choice of representatives between competing elites only once every so many years and then let their representatives govern, as suggested in so many theories of representative democracy, is

becoming supplanted by the idea of dynamic representation. Studies on democratic representation show that different mechanisms apply during elections and between elections (Arnold & Franklin 2012). *During* elections, electoral turnover is the representational mechanism (Esaiasson & Narud 2013: 3). Citizens can bring public policies in line with their preferences by voting for parties and representatives that share their values and views on specific policies, and they can retrospectively reward good representatives and punish bad ones. *Between* elections, responsiveness is the mechanism through which the representative relationship is maintained (Esaiasson et al. 2013: 22). Between elections, elected officials have a strong incentive to adapt their decisions to the opinion of the mass public (Bühlmann & Kriesi 2013: 50). From a dynamic perspective, assessing the quality of democracy means that we not only must evaluate and judge the patterns of representation, but also those of policy responsiveness. In a diploma democracy, educational inequalities in political participation may bend the responsiveness of the political elites in the direction of the policy preferences of the well-educated.

As with representation, responsiveness is not a one-way road from society to politics. From bottom to top democratic responsiveness would result in policies that mirror the public's expressed preferences. But ideas of dynamic responsiveness are increasingly being modified by theories that show that public opinion is the product of the debate and struggle for attention in the public sphere. Democratic responsiveness is not restricted to a bottom-up process in which public opinion is an exogenous factor. In 'rational anticipation' of electoral repercussions, representatives adapt public policies to changes in public demand (Stimson et al. 1995). Or, from a top-down perspective, citizens adjust their preferences as a reaction to the terms proposed by the elite (Soroka & Wlezien 2010). The political supply of information, the issuing of positions and political preferences by the elite is, in this perspective, crucial for understanding the quality of the democratic process. In a diploma democracy, educational inequalities among opinion leaders, in civil society, lobby groups, and the media; and among political elites, in parties, parliaments, and cabinets, may bias public opinion in the direction of the policy preferences of the well-educated. We return to this issue in Chapter 8.

Accountability: Ex Post Control

How diploma democracy is evaluated also depends on your perspective on accountability. In a representative democracy, there has to be a variety of institutional accountability mechanisms that safeguard citizens' control over their governments. This involves mechanisms that oblige decision-makers to inform representative bodies and the general public about their policies and performance, to provide justifications for their choices, and to answer

questions and engage in debate about their decisions.⁹ Ultimately, accountability mechanisms also imply the possibility of sanctions or rewards, depending on the evaluation of the performance of the executive. An important corollary is that, between elections, elected representatives need to check whether the executive is using its resources wisely, whether it is implementing the policy intelligently, and whether the policy is producing the desired effects. Representative institutions must, therefore, have *ex post* control instruments at their disposal, including questions, interpellations, and plenary debates, to evaluate executive performance, backed up by the eventual possibility to withdraw confidence from a minister or a cabinet, or to impeach a president.

As government policies become more complex in modern societies, so do the organizational arrangements needed to implement them. The thickening of government by the increase in the number of layers in the hierarchy, and the number of people in each layer, has coincided with the ‘diffusion of accountability’ (Light 1995: 640). It has intensified the ‘problem of many hands’ (Bovens 1998), because it complicates the process of identifying who is accountable for failure of performance. For the general public, it becomes more difficult to assess the responsibility of political leaders and to evaluate an incumbent officeholder’s performance, as even the most minimal views of electoral accountability suggest. Also, the accumulation and dispersion of accountability forums—parliaments, courts, audit offices, stakeholder panels, network peers, ombudsmen, media—do not form a coherent and comprehensive accountability system (Papadopoulos 2010). One of the relevant issues in this respect is whether these accountability forums are sufficiently representative to prevent elite domination and to maintain popular legitimacy. Another issue is what standards these accountability forums use to hold the political elites to account. In a diploma democracy, educational inequalities in the composition of accountability forums may bias accountability processes in favour of the preferences of the well-educated.

Legitimacy: Confidence and Support

In the end, representativeness, responsiveness, and accountability all contribute to the legitimacy of democratic governance. Each in its own way can help to enhance confidence in the government of the day and in the fairness of the political system as a whole. High levels of representativeness will mainly provide input legitimacy, and can enhance popular confidence that the preferences and interests of a broad array of citizens will be taken into account in political decisions. They also make it possible for the electorate to better identify with political representatives and public officials. High levels of responsiveness are important for output legitimacy. They align citizens’

preferences with policy outcomes. Accountability provides throughput legitimacy, because it supplies the mechanisms for procedural fairness and checks and balances. Flaws in each of these elements of democracy may not only provide biases in policy agendas, but they may also lead to low levels of support for the government and to diminishing confidence in democratic institutions. We will return to these issues of democratic legitimacy in Chapter 8.

The Participatory Revolution

In the last part of the twentieth century, many Western countries went through a modernization of their democratic institutions by a so-called participatory revolution. From the late 1960s onwards, a general expansion of the political action repertory was seen, which was characterized by new, direct forms of action, such as demonstrations, the organization of petitions, and strikes (Barnes & Kaase 1979). Originally, these were initiated by student protesters. Later, however, they were also adopted by environmentalists, women's lib, the peace movement, and other social movements, and eventually by neighbourhood associations, teachers, nurses, farmers, and a wide spectrum of society (Dalton et al. 2003a: 8).

Nowadays, far more citizens than in the era of Burke and Mill have the resources necessary to deal with the complexities of politics and to make their own political decisions. The public's access to information about politics has increased in many ways, due to expansion of the mass media, especially television and the internet. The increasing skills and resources of average citizens have stimulated new expectations about citizenship and the organization of democratic politics. A belief has emerged that 'the people' can, and should, be trusted to make complex political decisions and to otherwise actively participate in the democratic governing of society. As Dalton (2006: 7) notes: 'Engaged citizens may still vote, but this is less central to their definition of citizenship.' They also email their representatives, sign internet petitions, and engage in political action through Twitter, Facebook, or other online media. Occasionally, they take to the streets to demonstrate. Popular demonstrations have become a recurring feature of representative democracies: witness the protests over globalization, economic inequality, and corporate greed, as well as the rallies to save pensions, to object against welfare cuts, the increase of tuition in higher education, or the influx of immigrants.

Governments have reacted to this participatory revolution by developing more 'horizontal' styles of policymaking, in which a broad array of citizen groups, interest organizations, and other stakeholders are involved in agenda-setting, decision-making, and implementation (Pierre & Peters 2005). They are

increasingly embedding public participation in decision-making by means of citizen's assemblies, deliberative public meetings, and online public dialogues. Policies are not only discussed by elected officials in the hallways and meeting rooms of parliaments and town halls, but also by local activists, interest group representatives, and independent experts in community centres, conference halls, and commercial congress facilities. Self-regulation and voluntary agreements have supplemented, and in some cases replaced, formal rules and regulations. In addition, new venues have been created for citizens to discuss and evaluate street-level policy implementation, such as citizen panels in public bureaucracies, city panels and neighbourhood councils in local government, student bodies in schools and universities, and patient councils in hospitals and healthcare institutions. This transition from government to governance has opened new channels for citizen participation and, at the same time, weakened the central position of traditional representative institutions in Western democracies.

The liberal or representative model of democracy is slowly being supplemented with new, more direct democratic conceptions, such as participatory and deliberative ones. However, the question which then arises is: 'who participates and deliberates in these new political venues?' We will discuss this issue in Chapter 5.

New Openings and Emerging Political Opportunities

The participatory revolution has changed the political opportunity structure in modern democracies, in much the same way as the educational revolution has changed the structure of social opportunities. The extension of political participation has removed some of the barriers to equal political voice and control. Together, these new democratic arrangements have opened up the opportunities to influence democratic choice in at least three different fields: in terms of preference formation, political mobilization, and aggregation. At the same time, new barriers to political equality have appeared in these fields, as we will show in the next section.

New Opportunities for Preference Formation

In the 1970s and 1980s, many social scientists anticipated that the rising educational level of the population would diminish the differences between the public and the political class. In the 1990s, the proliferation of information sources reinforced that expectation. Several theories indicate that in advanced industrial societies the structural opportunities and resources for getting information have expanded, and that this has increased the cognitive

abilities and political skills of citizens for preference formation.¹⁰ The general public today has the potential to be better informed than a generation ago (Blumler & Kavanagh 1999). The proliferation of media channels has created a new age of information abundance. In the 1970s, TV news about politics was available in the living room about twice a day. Citizens had to wait for newspapers to be printed and delivered if they wanted more than these news messages. In the 2010s, political news is available 24/7, from cell phones, tablets, and news channels.¹¹ The media environment has evolved from offering little political information and little choice to providing plenty of diverse media content to a broad audience. The ‘top-down’ influence of newspapers and broadcast media has waned in the face of the ‘explosion’ of information available via the internet (Craig 2004). As Brants and Voltmer (2011: 9) indicate: ‘With its openness, interactive structure and flexibility, the Internet has fundamentally changed the position of the public, from being at the consuming end of political communication to active, creative and vocal citizenship’.¹²

New Opportunities for the Mobilization of Preferences

Political organizations, such as political parties, interest organizations, and social movement organizations, play a key role in structuring and mobilizing the individual preferences during election campaigns and between elections (Bühlmann & Kriesi 2013: 48). In the past decades, widespread social fragmentation has produced individuation. Group-based ‘identity politics’ has lost more and more ground. The decline of mass organizations is affecting political parties and other traditional pillars of organized mass society (Van Biezen et al. 2012). However, the dense networking potential of today’s new communication technology enables different forms of political organization and ‘DIY’ (Do It Yourself) actions that are more personalized and ‘in which individually expressive personal action frames displace collective action frames in many political causes’ (Bennett 2012: 20).

A whole array of professionally organized single issue organizations, interest groups, and ad hoc pressure groups, numerous charities, cause and campaigning groups, think tanks, and international agencies have entered the fray to cater to newly arising interests and preferences. They accommodate the expanded political repertoires that are no longer exclusively focused on the formal institutions of the state. The rise of the internet has facilitated these civil associations, by making it easier and less costly for them to organize support, coordinate action, and to contact members and sympathizers (Blumler 2013). Some of these groups are supported by professional publicity departments, and are capable of creating an impressive level of visibility and attention for ‘their’ issues in the media and on the political agenda.

New Opportunities for the Aggregation of Preferences

The participatory revolution has also extended and innovated the devices for identifying and aggregating the preferences of the people. Elections are being called for an increasing number of political offices, particularly at the local level. The referendum and the citizen initiative have been introduced in many liberal democracies as a supplement to representative elections, to inform politicians by means of a vote on a preferred policy by the public. The frequent use of mass survey techniques and the rising importance of opinion polls in day-to-day political decision-making have emerged as very influential ways of obtaining information on what the population thinks or what kind of policy agenda it endorses. Similarly, the introduction of new deliberative and participatory forms of policymaking, through citizen panels, consultations, and other forms of horizontal policymaking, have opened new venues for citizens to participate in political deliberations and policy formation.

New Closures and Diminishing Democratization

The various transformations of the past decades have opened up the decision-making system in many respects, but have not engendered an unequivocal process of democratization. New mechanisms have developed that may also restrict or even close down access to the democratic process.

New Closures for Political Preference Formation

Although the rise of the internet and the proliferation of television channels in recent years have made more information available than ever before, they have also made it easier to avoid exposure to political news than in the 1970s, when there were only a few broadcast networks available. Prior (2007: 15–19) argues that in the 1950s and 1960s, broadcast television nudged people who did not care very deeply about politics into watching the news. And even in today's news saturated media environment, politically uninterested people might find it difficult to avoid the abundance of politically relevant material. Yet with the arrival of the internet, and with the many media choices, political learning as a by-product has become less common. The information overload allows 'more people to choose what they want to consume—and only that' (Blumler 2013: 1). Some authors suggest that media bias and selective avoidance may lead to increasing intolerance of dissent, may create segregated communities (Glynn et al. 1999), and may impair democratic processes because of increasing polarization and reduced deliberation (Sunstein 2009).

New Closures for Political Mobilization and Organization

Political parties still remain the most important political organizations. However, the marked and often dramatic decline in party membership between the 1960s and 1990s has changed the nature of many party organizations in Western Europe. The drop in party membership has put an end to the organizational format of the mass party. Modern political parties have become cadre parties (Koole 1992) or cartel parties (Katz & Mair 1995), who communicate with the electorate via the media and the internet (Scarrow 2014). Political parties are moving further away from civil society and closer to the state. The reduction in membership has occurred in tandem with dealignment among the citizens (Mair & Van Biezen 2001).

The new array of single-issue organizations, lobby groups, and ad hoc, online pressure groups is subject to a similar process of homogenization. After an initial period of bottom-up mobilization and organization, they tend to professionalize and specialize. Many modern civil society organizations operate on the basis of small, often highly professional cadres, with very limited grassroots membership participation. These new political organizations often become the domain of well-educated specialists who have the bureaucratic skills and expert knowledge to participate in policymaking processes and implementation trajectories. We will return to this in Chapter 6.

New Closures for Political Aggregation

In Western Europe, the introduction of elections at the regional and European level has created new second order elections. These elections are perceived as less important than national elections, which are of a first order nature. A core assumption underlying the notion of second order elections is that there is 'less at stake' in these elections and that turnout is lower, because voters are less interested in casting their vote (Dandoy & Schakel 2013: 21). Therefore, opening up the political arena to democratic decision-making processes at the supranational and regional level does not mean that these occasions are similarly used by voters to express their voice as they do at the national level. Some voters are more likely to disconnect themselves from these second order arenas than from the national, first order arena. It therefore also represents a new barrier in the use of this institutional channel of voice and choice.

Likewise, the new deliberative and participatory forms of policymaking may suit some citizens better than others. Meetings at which people have to discuss policies in their community are fraught with the possibility of conflict. Mansbridge (1980: 273) concluded that face-to-face assembly allows those

who have no trouble speaking in public to defend their interests. Rather than creating community, face-to-face meetings ‘may frighten away the very people’ they are trying to enlist as participants. Such meetings are difficult because they usually increase the level of emotional tension. Moreover, citizens who can speak or write well, or who are more comfortable organizing and taking part in meetings, are likely to be more effective when they get involved in politics. Those who possess civic skills find political activity less daunting and costly and, therefore, are more likely to take part (Verba et al. 1995). More ‘political talk’ does not necessarily equate to more democratic outcomes (Mutz 2006).

The Rise of the Well-Educated in Democratic Politics

The participatory revolution is closely connected to the educational revolution which we described in Chapter 2. Firstly, it is in large part a product of the post-WWII educational expansion. The enormous extension of higher education has produced large cohorts of citizens who would pass the thresholds of Burke and Mill. They are well informed, if not experts, on a range of policy matters and possess the information and communication skills to be effective in politics. They started entering the political stage in the 1970s, demanding more participatory possibilities, and have never left since. Secondly, the participatory revolution paved the way for the rise of the well-educated in politics to the detriment of the lesser educated. As we shall see in Chapters 5 and 6, these new venues for political participation are the domain of the well-educated. More horizontal, deliberative forms of policymaking are perfectly fitted for university-trained citizens. They have acquired the necessary expertise and skills to be successful in these rather demanding political arenas.

This raises the question of what the net results of all these participatory innovations contribute to answering Robert Dahl’s classic question of ‘who actually governs?’ Have these modernizations deepened and broadened democracy, or have they basically shifted the political powers to new elites? There is something paradoxical about the fact that, in an era in which there are more channels to participate and in which the legitimacy of democracy as a political system is higher than even before (Norris 2011), some of the eldest democracies in the world are taking on the trappings of Platonic meritocracies. We will discuss the implications of the rise of the well-educated in politics in Chapter 8. First, however, we will try to document their rise as a distinct social group and their dominance in a range of political venues.

Notes

1. In the Gettysburg address, Lincoln formulated these different perspectives on democracy. He referred to 'government *of* the people, government *by* the people, and government *for* the people'. The first two are process oriented and are the basis for representative and participatory democracy. The last vision refers to a substantive conceptualization and is the basis for output legitimacy. Compare: Bühlmann & Kriesi 2013: 44.
2. See Budge 1996: 69; Kriesi 2005.
3. See Dahl 2006; Schlozman et al. 2012: 2.
4. See Held 2006; Manin 1997.
5. See Mansbridge 1999; Krook 2010; Celis & Childs 2012.
6. There are various intermediate forms of action between these two classic polar positions. See Andeweg & Thomassen 2005; Mansbridge 2011; Judge 2014.
7. See Pitkin 1967; Dovi 2014.
8. Compare Miller & Stokes 1963; Schmitt & Thomassen 1999; Powell 2004; Soroka & Wlezien 2010; Gilens 2012.
9. See Bovens 2007.
10. See Klingemann & Fuchs 1995; Dalton 2013; Norris 2002, 2011.
11. See Prior 2007.
12. See also Kriesi 2013: 39.

4

Education as a Cleavage

An Educational Cleavage?

In the 1960s and 1970s, the time when both authors of this book were growing up, Dutch society was strongly divided along religious lines. Social and political life was organized within pillars, with each pillar having its own separate school system, separate newspapers, separate broadcasting networks, and separate political parties.¹ For example, the three-story apartment building in which one of the authors lived as a child was occupied by three families, one family to each floor. His family was Catholic, and they lived on the first floor. The flat below, on the ground floor, was rented by a devout Protestant family. Above them, on the second floor, lived a secular family. As a young child, he would play with the Protestant and the secular children in the playground behind the flat. This changed as soon as they went to primary school. The Protestant children living on the ground floor went to the local Protestant denominational school, the secular kids from the second floor went to the public primary school, and the Catholic children went to the local Catholic school. After school, each would go to separate, denominational sports clubs and Sunday schools—although the Protestants would play soccer on Saturday and go to Bible class on Sunday, whereas the Catholics would play soccer on Sundays and attend Bible class during weekdays; and the lucky secular kids, it should be noted, had no Bible class at all and could play soccer all weekend. Childhood friendships across religious lines were rare. Religious homogamy was very common and the various social groups would only meet in the army, when conscripted, or at work. This division also extended into politics. Protestants would vote for the various Protestant parties, the large majority of Catholics—in the late 1950s up to 95 per cent—would vote for the Catholic Party, while the secular citizens would vote for the social democrats or for the liberal party.

The situation was similar in other countries, such as Belgium, Austria, and to a lesser extent, Germany, as well. However, historical developments in the various

countries resulted in different cleavages and in different combinations of these cleavages. Belgium was not only divided along the lines of class and religion, but also linguistically—with Flemish being spoken in Flanders and French in Wallonia. In Britain, on the other hand, class divisions were sharper and more predominant and enduring than in other Western European countries.

In the twenty-first century, many of these class and religious divisions have faded. This does not mean that modern Western European societies have become undivided and homogeneous. Today's toddlers may play together in day-care centres, but as soon as they go to primary school, their paths often diverge according to the educational backgrounds of their parents. Nowadays in the Netherlands, well-educated parents send their children to schools offering alternative educational approaches, such as Montessori, Dalton, Steiner, and Jenaplan schools, or they enrol them in private schools. Lesser-educated parents send their kids to the local neighbourhood school, or to state schools. After school, the children with well-educated parents play hockey, or tennis, and they are driven to ballet, theatre, or music classes.² Children whose parents have less education play soccer or handball, if they are members of a club at all.

The two educational groups hardly meet or mingle. The well-educated live in the university towns, in green pre-war suburbs, or in the nineteenth-century, gentrified parts of the inner cities, whereas the less well-educated can be found in former manufacturing towns, in the post-war satellite cities, or, in the twentieth-century outskirts of the major cities.³ Nor do they mate; educational homogamy has replaced religious homogamy. In the Netherlands, 85 per cent of all marriages are between partners with (almost) similar educational qualifications. Only two out of a thousand marriages are between a partner with a university degree and a partner with primary qualifications only.⁴ These educational divides have become visible in the political landscape, too, as we shall see. Green and social liberal parties, such as Groenlinks and D66, get the majority of their votes from the tertiary educated. Nationalist parties, such as the PVV, mainly attract voters with primary and secondary levels of education.

The emergence of social divides along educational lines has not been limited to the Netherlands. It has been documented extensively for Belgium by political sociologists from Brussels (Elchardus & Glorieux 2012) and for Denmark by Rune Stubager (2010). The purpose of this chapter is to move beyond these single country studies and to identify through a comparative, descriptive analysis, to what extent the contours of an educational cleavage can be observed across Europe. Our approach is macro-oriented and exploratory. By using a broad notion of cleavage, which includes socio-structural differences, attitudinal, and institutional-behavioural differences, we attempt to establish the extent to which new divisions related to the expansion

of higher education and the participatory revolution have advanced across European countries. At the end of this chapter, we select six Western European countries for a more detailed analysis of the rise of political meritocracy and its consequences.

Cleavage as a Social and Political Concept

A Restructuration of Cleavages

First, however, we have to be more precise about our central concept. The concept of cleavage was first formulated by Seymour Martin Lipset and Stein Rokkan (1967). It denotes ‘a specific type of conflict in democratic politics that is rooted in the social structural transformations that have been triggered by large-scale processes’ (Bornschieer 2009: 1). Lipset and Rokkan identified a number of such large-scale ‘critical junctures’ in the history of European society, which eventually led to the formation of cleavages within European society. Among these are the Reformation, the emergence of nation states, and the Industrial Revolution.

The socio-economic cleavage over the distribution of economic resources is frequently seen as the most pervasive political conflict in modern democracies (Lijphart 1999). Differences in social class and property, for example between lower versus upper classes, workers versus owners, manual versus non-manual workers, coincide both with differences in political preferences (left versus right) and with party formation and voting behaviour (social democrats versus liberal-conservative parties). But other opposing social groups sometimes also coincide with coherent, and opposing preferences, and with subsequent political behaviour and party formation, and are therefore also referred to as cleavages.⁵ These are distinguished, for example, by religion, such as religious–secular, or Catholic–Protestant as in the Netherlands of the twentieth century; by ethnicity, language, such as Flemish–francophone in Belgium; or by geography, for example urban–rural or centre–periphery in Scandinavia.

As a result of the increasing modernization of Western societies, traditional cleavages have eroded over the last decades.⁶ Some scholars claim that the dealignment of traditional links between social groups has led to a decline of ideological and structural voting.⁷ Modern political parties mobilize their voters primarily on the basis of issues rather than group identity, making traditional cleavage politics less relevant. Another line of research suggests a shift in the type of structures that underpin new issue divides. Cleavage-like categories such as age or generations, gender, and the rise of social cultural professionals are at the basis of new political conflict lines (Deegan-Krause 2007: 541).

Recently, this position was supplemented by a line of research that points to the increasing importance of education as a key to understanding emerging

political and social conflict lines. Political scientists and sociologists have started to pay attention to the importance of education in the rise of new, cultural conflicts in Western, post-industrial societies.⁸ Increasingly, education is studied separately from class or income as a source of political attitudes and preferences, particularly with regard to post-materialistic issues.⁹

Cleavages: Three Elements and Three Levels

The term 'cleavage' has proven to be a rather 'stretchy' concept.¹⁰ It has been used progressively to denote any controversial conflict matter in party systems. Stephano Bartolini and Peter Mair (1990: 215) have tried to restrict the use of the concept by defining a political cleavage as consisting of three different elements:

an empirical element, which identifies the empirical referent of the concept, and which we can define in *social-structural* terms; a *normative* element, that is the set of values and beliefs which provides a sense of identity and role to the empirical element, and which reflect the self-consciousness of the social group(s) involved; and an *organizational/behavioural* element, that is the set of individual interactions, institutions and organizations, such as political parties, which develop as part of the cleavage. (emphasis added)

The existence of distinct or even opposing social groups is not sufficient to speak of a political cleavage. A cleavage is more than mere social conflict or political opposition (Bartolini 2000). According to Hanspeter Kriesi (2010: 673), 'a structural division is transformed into a cleavage, if a political actor gives coherence and organized political expression to what otherwise are inchoate and fragmentary beliefs, values and experiences among members of some social group'. For a social division to become a political cleavage, all three elements—the social-structural, attitudinal, and a behavioural or organizational element—have to be present at the same time. Kevin Deegan-Krause (2007), using the three elements defined by Bartolini and Mair, recognizes three different levels of cleavage formation. The first level is called a *difference* and refers to the situation in which only one cleavage element is present, for example, the existence of clearly distinguishable social groups. The second level is called a *divide*, referring to a situation in which two cleavage elements are present. The third level is the *full cleavage* situation in which all three elements of Bartolini and Mair are present and combined.

Different Stages of Cleavage Formation

The cleavage concept is a very demanding one that limits the possibilities of finding any new examples of cleavages.¹¹ The concept has a static bias.

The search for ‘full cleavages’ hampers a more dynamic and explorative approach—one in which the contours of evolving divisions become progressively manifest. Using the cleavage concept as structured by Deegan-Krause makes it possible to study the different stages of cleavage crystallization.

Rather than focusing on full cleavages, we suggest an approach in which stages of cleavage formation are examined, to enable the study of the rise of new political conflict lines in a more dynamic perspective. Newly emerging political divisions do not directly manifest themselves as full-fledged cleavages. The latter result from a process of adaptation, restructuring, and ‘freezing’ of these new divisions. Societies in which these different cleavage elements are superimposed on one another differ from societies in which differences are limited to one element only. In the latter case, conflicts will remain moderate, and their capacity to divide will remain restricted. Where different elements coincide and overlap, they are more likely to create deep social differences and evolve into full political cleavages. Within a particular country, increasing or decreasing levels of cleavage formation at various points in time might be expected to be found. Also, we would expect different countries, at the same point in time, to differ with regard to the extent that divisions along these various elements can be observed.

In this chapter we will explore the cleavage formation, that is, the degree of *consolidation* of educational differences, in European societies. A high degree of overlap between values and preferences, political behaviour, and socio-demographic characteristics such as educational levels, is indicative of the rise of a new cleavage. This is the basis on which we attempt to explore the contours of an emerging educational cleavage in Europe, and it has meant dividing our main question—can we discern the formation of an educational cleavage in Europe?—into three subquestions, along the lines of Bartolini and Mair’s conceptualization.

Although the focus of this chapter ultimately lies at the country level, it is important to consider that the various elements that make up a divide or a ‘full’ cleavage are measured at the *individual* level. Systematic differences (or gaps) between those with a low and those with a high level of education constitute the different cleavage elements. A full educational cleavage presents itself as a compounded division that encompasses socio-structural, attitudinal, and behavioural differences that are manifested at the level of individuals. It is important to stress, however, that our approach does not aim to explain individual voting behaviour or party choice. Rather, it moves back from the micro to the macro level and explores the advent, occurrence, and political significance of a new social structural division, related to the expansion of education across distinct European countries. We will construct an index of *cleavage crystallization* (or formation) that aims to measure to what extent the various differences along educational lines are merging. The aggregate

measures of the covariation of the differences between the educational groups give an indication as to what extent it is possible to generalize about the rise of new educational divides and, possibly, a full cleavage throughout Europe.¹²

Social Differences: Educational Groups as Social Groups

A first explorative question is whether we can observe structural social differences between the well-educated and those with less education. Are they distinct groups in society, on a par with the Catholics and Protestants of our childhood? As the post-industrial economy is increasingly based on knowledge and information, we would expect a process of educational structuration to involve increased group homogeneity along educational boundaries. Hence we would expect a socio-structural segmentation along educational lines; and concurrently, educational patterns of stratification and segregation.

According to the literature, education is more important than class in more highly modernized and wealthy countries or regions.¹³ Therefore, we expect the educational divides to be more developed in the Western European and Nordic countries.¹⁴ In these countries, with a broadly accessible system of higher education and a meritocratic labour market, we would expect to find more established patterns of social division along educational, instead of class, lines. The Southern European countries are characterized by segmented insider–outsider labour markets and they are highly family oriented.¹⁵ There we would expect fewer social divisions along educational lines. In Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) the situation is less clear-cut. With the collapse of socialist communism, labour markets have rapidly shifted from closed to more open employment systems. For many, the economic transition has increased career insecurity, as skills acquired under socialism have tended to become less marketable. Prevailing wisdom holds that the consolidation of the market institutions will enhance meritocratic allocation of rewards (Domański 2011).

Cleavages are rooted in demography. The first issue is whether we can observe substantive social groups. Does it make sense at all to distinguish different educational *segments* in society? As we saw in Chapter 2, for a large part of the twentieth century the overwhelming majority of citizens in most European countries had few educational qualifications and in effect, fell into the low-educated category. Back then, it made little sense to speak of distinct educational groups, because the group of well-educated citizens was so small. This changed as a consequence of the educational revolution. In 2015, according to the OECD, 27 per cent of the EU-22 workforce was well educated—more than double the 11 per cent who classified as well-educated EU citizens in 1992 and more than twenty-five times higher than the meagre 1 per cent

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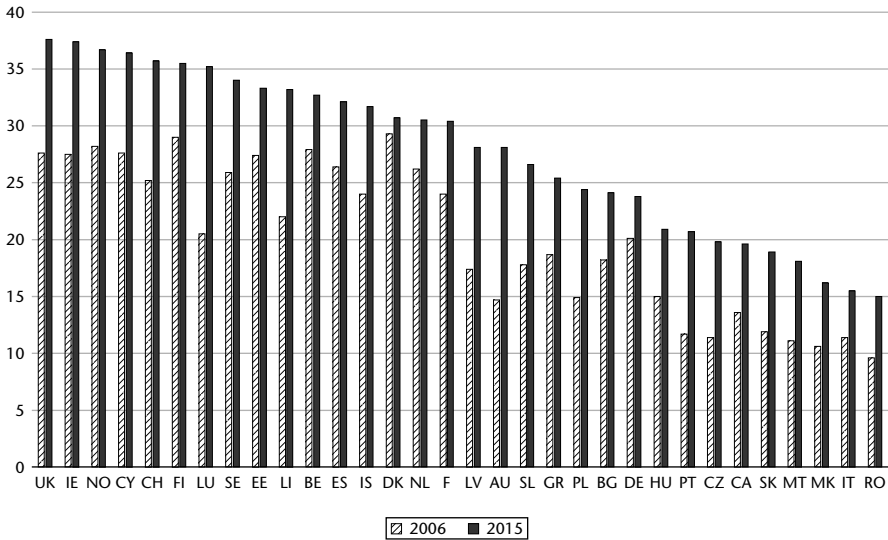


Figure 4.1. Tertiary level educational attainment in European countries (% , from 15 to 64 years, Eurostat 2006 & 2015)

recorded in the 1960s. This massive expansion of the number of well-educated citizens provides the demographic basis for cleavage formation. However, there are still considerable differences within Europe, as can be seen from Figure 4.1. The southern and eastern countries, such as Hungary, Portugal, Slovakia, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Italy, and Romania, tend to have the lowest percentages of well-educated citizens, and the northern and western countries, such as the UK, Ireland, Norway, Switzerland, Finland, Sweden, and Belgium, the highest.

A second issue is whether these different educational groups coincide with different *social strata*. In all contemporary industrial societies, education has come to play an important role in selecting people for positions in the occupational structure (McNamee & Miller 2009). Tertiary educational credentials are required for professional, technical, and managerial occupations and for most non-clerical white-collar jobs in large private and public sector organizations (Collins 1979). People with higher education earn more and are less likely to be unemployed (Wilkinson & Pickett 2010: 103–17). This is confirmed by the ESS data, as shown in Figure 4.2. In all European countries large differences in net household income can be observed between educational levels. These differences tend to be the largest in former communist countries, such as Poland, the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Slovenia.

Thirdly, education is an important driver of new patterns of *social segregation*. The increased participation of men and women in higher education

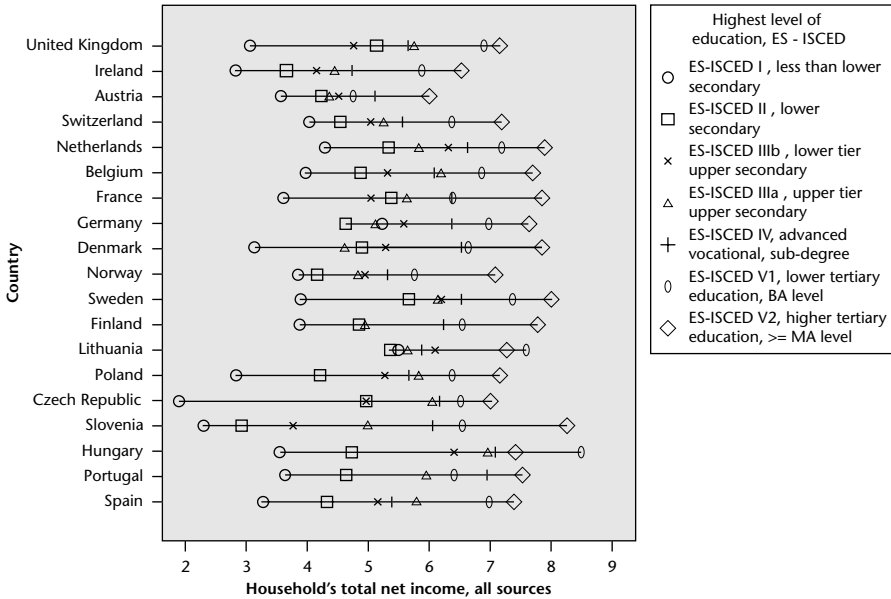


Figure 4.2. Education and household total net income, all sources (0 = 1st decile, 10 = 10th decile. Mean score by education, ESS 2014)

means that the chances of meeting members of the opposite sex with the same educational level at an age when individuals typically start to date, have also grown. Girls began to enter higher education on a large scale in the late twentieth century (Esping-Andersen 2009: 21). Women’s inroads in academia have created the necessary condition for homogamy, which is used here as a proxy measure for educational segregation. In the past, most people found their partners close to home, as opportunities to meet partners from further away were much more limited. The greater participation in education, combined with the more social and spatial mobility, individual affluence and opportunities to travel, and internet access, have caused personal relationships to become less and less territorially based. Hence, social-structural categories, such as education, play an increasingly pivotal role in partner choice.¹⁶

The ESS 2014 data in Figure 4.3 indicate that there is a strong correlation between the educational characteristics of the partners in a relationship. The growing opportunity to meet people with the same level of qualification in the course of the educational career is a by-product of the selection process in the educational system (Blossfeld 2009: 519–20).

As a result, the likelihood of educational homogamy significantly increases with the level of educational attainment. According to the German sociologist Heike Wirth (2000), this has caused a tendency for increased social distance between the upper and lower educational groups. In her research, the highest

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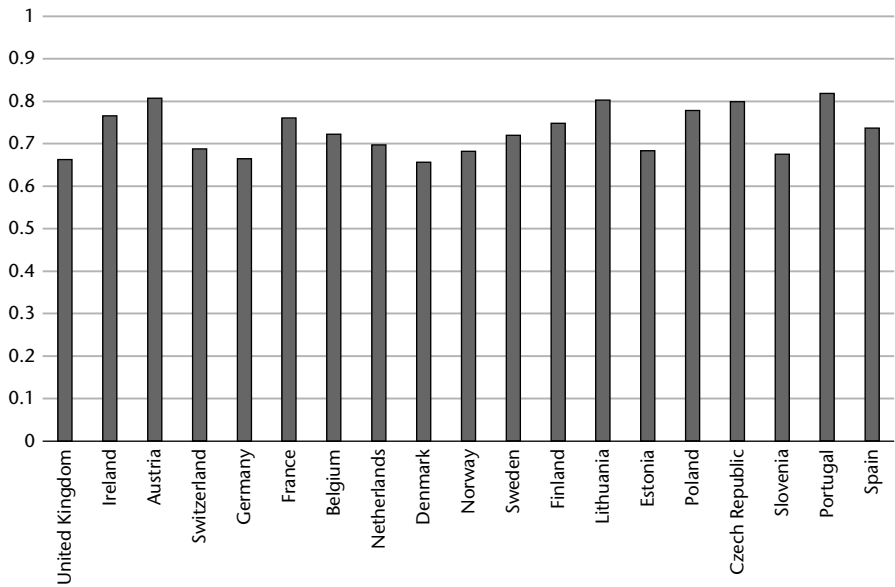


Figure 4.3. Educational homogamy (Correlation education respondent with education partner. Gamma graphically shown; individual level, ESS 2014)

degrees of social closure are found for the most privileged educational group, that is, university graduates, as well as for the least privileged educational group. In our sample, this is particularly the case in western and northern European countries such as Norway, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Sweden, the UK, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Lithuania, as can be observed in Figure 4.4. Educational homogamy increases social inequality, as the educational resources of well-educated (and less educated) partners are then pooled and cumulate. It indicates a level of external ‘closure’ of the evolving educational social-structural categories that is essential in Stephano Bartolini’s (2000) understanding of the cleavage concept.

Attitudinal Differences: Cosmopolitans versus Nationalists

For a social difference to become politically relevant, these new groups must share distinct values and beliefs. To what extent do higher-educated groups have different *political preferences* than the lesser educated groups? Education is an important source of values and beliefs that are independent of socio-economic interests and income.¹⁷ Well-educated and less well-educated individuals exhibit significant differences in attitudes and preferences regarding

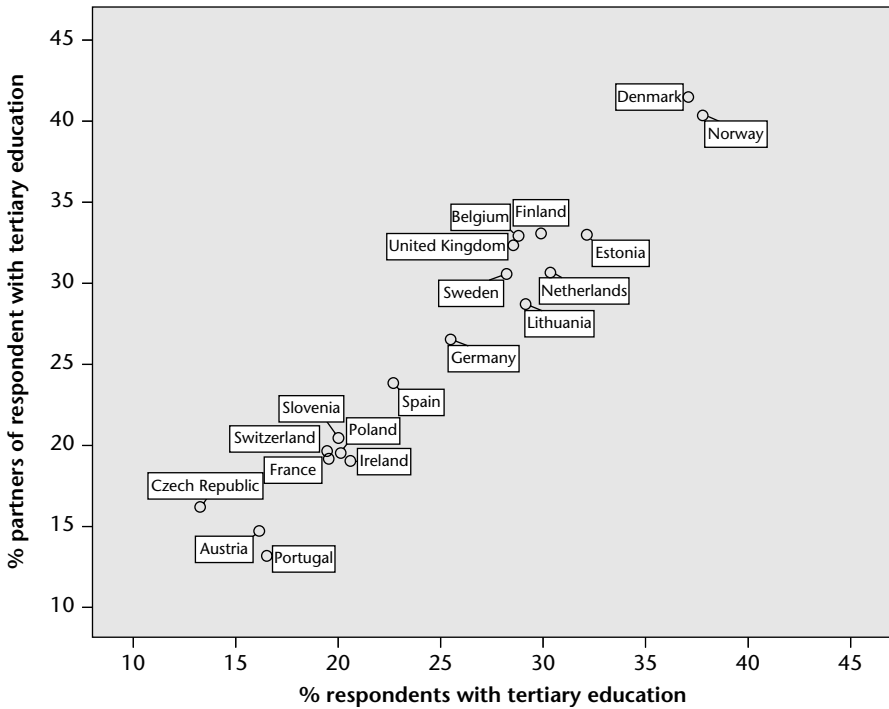


Figure 4.4. Homogamy of the well-educated (Relationship between % respondents having a tertiary educational attainment and % partner with tertiary education. Country level, ESS 2014)

cultural issues such as immigration, ethnic diversity, and European unification, that have become much more salient in the past decades.

Traditionally, most voters and political parties in Western Europe can be positioned along a social-economic, left–right dimension and along a religious–secular dimension. Figure 4.5 depicts the mean scores of educational levels on a left–right scale. There are remarkably few differences in left–right orientation between educational levels across Europe. No clear pattern, across education levels or across countries, can be observed with regard to left–right placement. Clearer differences are seen regarding income redistribution. In most countries, the lesser educated are somewhat more in favour of reducing differences in income levels than the well-educated, as can be seen from Figure 4.6.

In addition to these traditional conflict dimensions, which reach back to the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, a new cultural conflict dimension has manifested itself in the past three decades.¹⁸ The crucial themes along this cultural dimension are immigration and integration, globalization, and European unification. This new division between what could be called

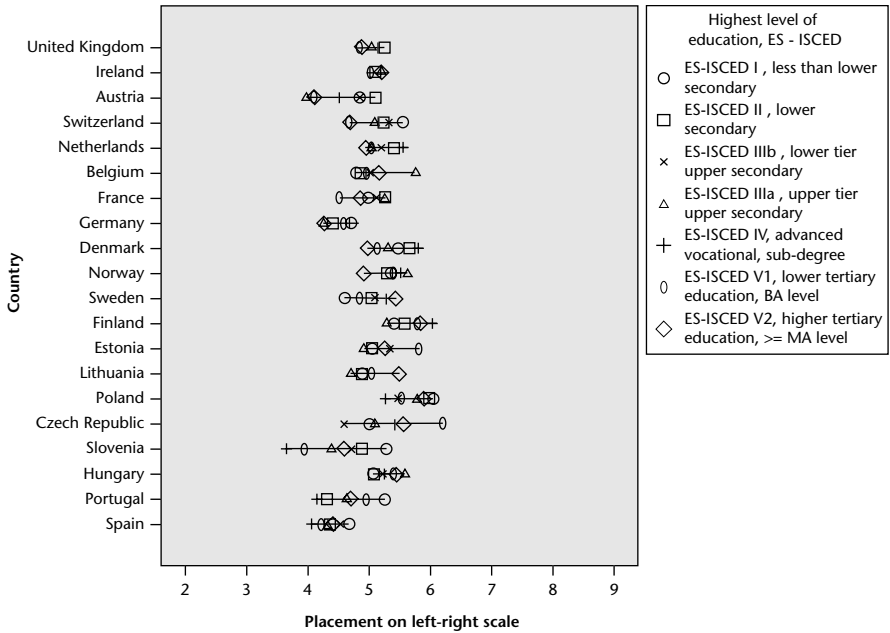


Figure 4.5. Education and left–right scale (Where would you place yourself on a ‘left’ and ‘right’ scale, where 0 means the left and 10 means right? Mean score by education, ESS 2014)

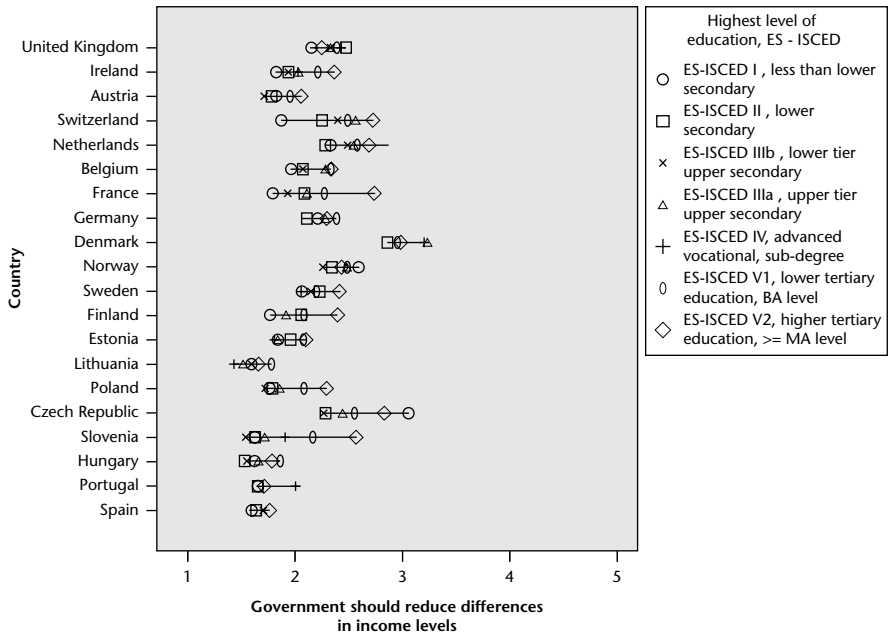


Figure 4.6. Education and income differences (Government should take measures to reduce differences in income levels, 1 = agree strongly, 5 = disagree strongly. Mean score by education, ESS 2014)

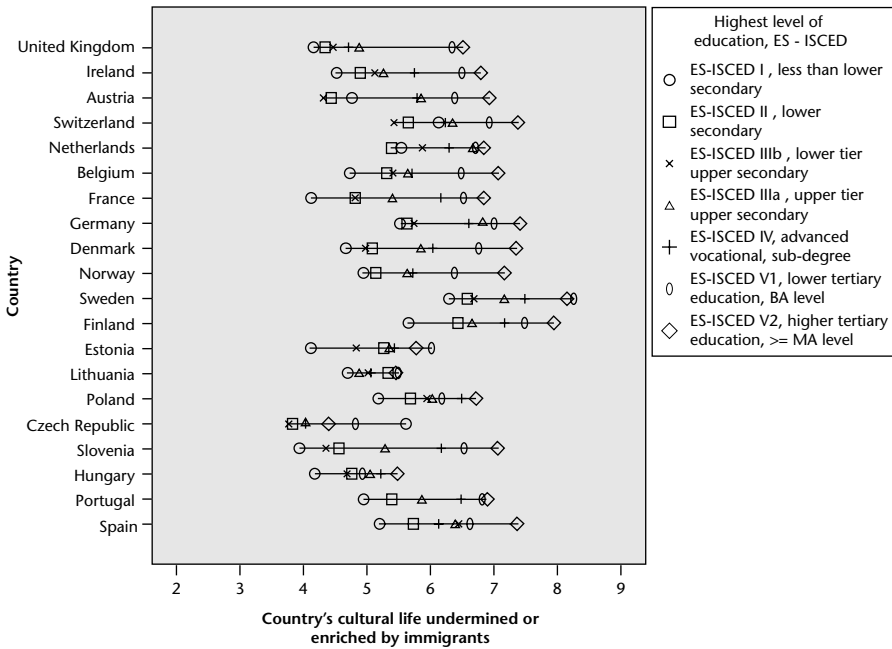


Figure 4.7. Education and immigrants (Country's cultural life is generally undermined (= 0) or enriched (= 10) by people coming to live here from other countries. Mean score by education, ESS 2014)

'cosmopolitans' and 'nationalists' has emerged gradually, fuelled by the waves of non-Western immigration and the process of European unification.

This division between cosmopolitan and nationalist attitudes coincides in most European countries with the educational chasm. The educational gap is particularly strong when it comes to the issue of the admittance and treatment of immigrants. Ranged on one side of this new line of conflict are the citizens who accept social and cultural heterogeneity and who favour, or at least condone, multiculturalism. These are the more highly educated, as Figures 4.7 and 4.8 show. On the other side are citizens who are very critical about multiculturalism and who prefer a more homogeneous national culture. These are predominantly citizens with lower educational levels.

Within each of the countries the differences between the well and the less educated are very consistent. Levels of cosmopolitanism differ very strongly between countries however—notably with southern and eastern countries scoring on average much lower. For example, in the Czech Republic and Hungary, the respondents with the highest educational levels are less cosmopolitan than even the least educated respondents in countries like Sweden, Finland, Switzerland, and Germany.

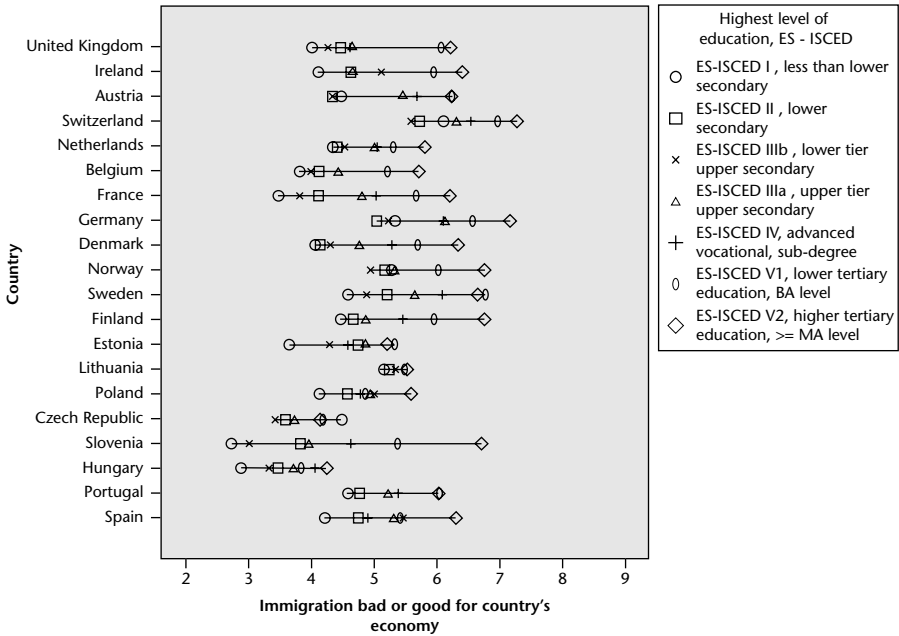


Figure 4.8. Education and immigration (good or bad for economy, 1 = bad for economy, 10 = good for economy. Mean score by education, ESS 2014)

With regard to EU-unification, the differences within and between countries are somewhat less pronounced. In most western and northern countries, the well-educated are more positive about the process of EU unification than the less educated. However, in some eastern member states, such as Lithuania and the Czech Republic, the least educated are more positive about the benefits of the EU, as the mean scores show in Figure 4.9.

Institutional Differences: Social-Liberal versus Nationalist Parties

To what extent are these educational differences reflected in the political landscape? Cleavages have sides, and the behavioural dimension of a cleavage manifests itself in voting for *specific* political parties or support for *particular* political organizations. In our childhood, the protestant adults by and large would vote for the various Protestant political parties, and almost all the Catholics would vote for the Catholic Party. What kinds of parties attract the higher educated and what parties are popular with voters with lower levels of educational achievement? We looked at two indicators in particular: voting for two newly emerging party families, i.e., nationalist parties on the one hand and the Green and social-liberal parties on the other.

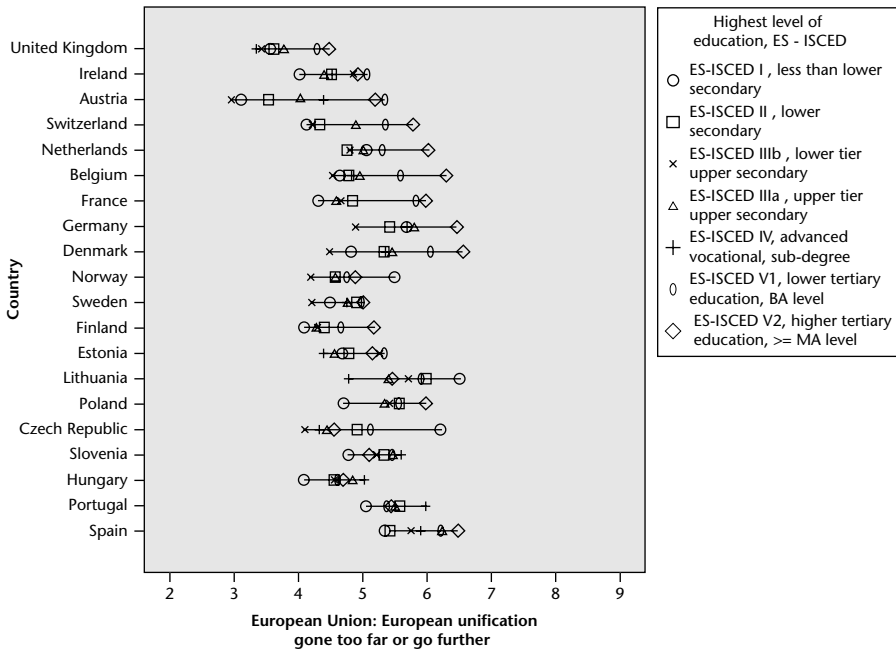


Figure 4.9. Education and European unification (0 = has gone too far; or should go further = 10. Mean score by education, ESS 2014)

While European party systems continue to bear the footprint of class and religious cleavages, a restructuring of political space occurred in the past decades. The educational and participatory revolutions of the 1960s and 1970s encouraged the rise of protest politics that has influenced the party politics in Western Europe. New actors with new types of preferences entered the political stage. In a long-term perspective, the rise of the left libertarian pole of the new cultural dimension of conflict, and the expression of a new value division, were part of the secularization of the religious cleavage (Bornschieer 2010: 2). This development has led to the emergence of Green and social liberal parties and a transformation of the political left (Kriesi et al. 2012).

On the other side of this cultural conflict, a remarkable change in the European political landscape has occurred over the past decades: the emergence of nationalist populist parties such as the FPÖ in Austria, Vlaams Belang in Belgium, the Danish People’s Party, the True Finns Party, France’s Front National, AfD and Pegida in Germany, the Jobbik Party in Hungary, Lega Nord in Italy, the Party for Freedom in the Netherlands, the Sweden Democrats, and UKIP in the UK.

As can be observed from Figure 4.10, these nationalist parties tend to draw large proportions of the low- and medium-educated voters, and relatively few

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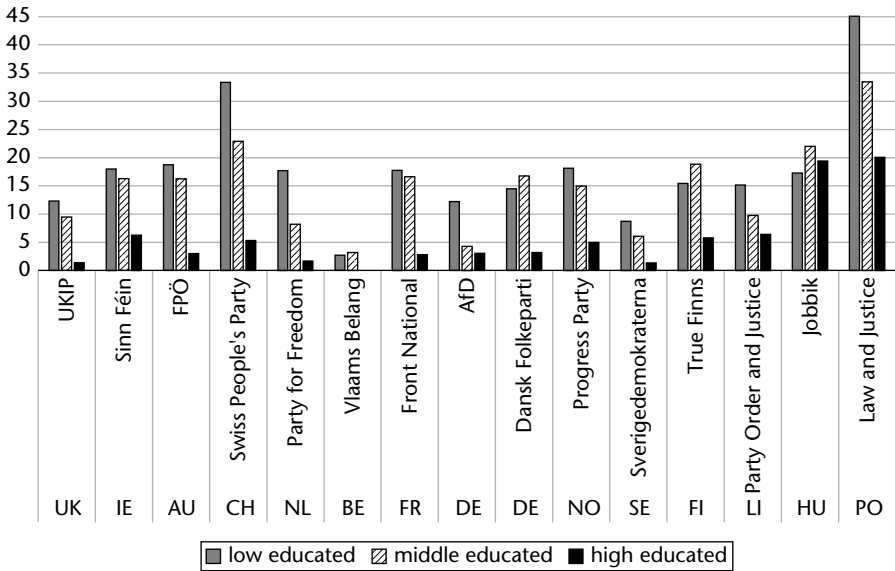


Figure 4.10. Education and voting for nationalist party (%), ESS 2014)

well-educated voters. This is particularly the case in western and northern European countries, such as Denmark, France, Switzerland, the Netherlands, Norway, and Sweden. It is not the case in Eastern European countries, such as Hungary and Poland. In Hungary, the Jobbik Party attracts more well- and middle-educated than less educated voters.

At the other end of the field are the Green and libertarian parties, such as Groen! and Ecolo in Belgium, Les Verts in France, Die Grünen in Germany, D66 and GroenLinks in the Netherlands, and the Liberal Democrats in the United Kingdom, to name but a few. Since the late seventies, the Green parties have become established political actors throughout Western Europe. According to Dolezal (2010: 548), they 'are supported by voters who are young, highly educated, work as social-cultural specialist or are students. . . . These structural components are connected with environmental, libertarian, and pro-immigration attitudes'. Our analysis of the ESS data yields similar conclusions, as can be observed from Figure 4.11. In all countries, the Green and social liberal parties predominantly attract voters from the high end of the educational spectrum.¹⁹

Both party families, the nationalist populist parties on the one hand, and the Greens and social-liberals on the other hand, embody the institutionalization of the new conflict line, particularly in western and northern Europe. They have gained a place in the political arena, because they represent groups of voters who not only share a particular set of issue attitudes, but

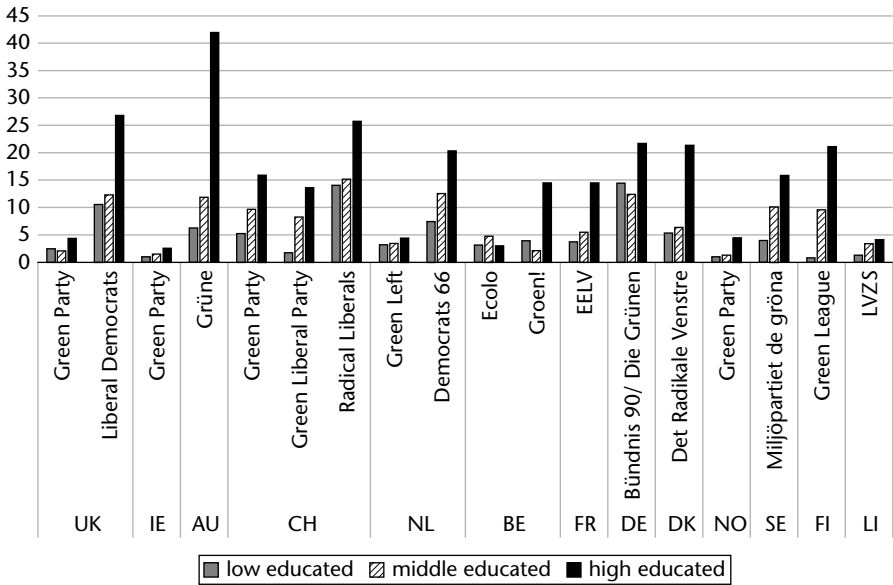


Figure 4.11. Education and voting for green party or left liberal party (%), ESS 2014)

also specific social characteristics—their educational background. Again, education is independent from social class or income. If education coincided with socio-economic class, we would expect class voting along the traditional left–right dimension, with the least educated predominantly voting for traditional leftist, labour parties and the well-educated for right-wing, conservative parties. According to Dutch sociologists Jeroen van der Waal, Peter Achterberg, and Dick Houtman, cross-cutting cultural voting that is rooted in educational differences has caused a gradual erosion of the pattern of leftist working-class voting. Class voting still exists, but socio-economic class cannot explain the rise and the support of both the Green-liberal and of the populist-nationalist parties. The well-educated increasingly vote for social liberal parties instead of for conservative, right-wing parties, while many of the less well-educated no longer vote for leftist, social democratic parties but for nationalist, conservative parties (Van der Waal et al. 2007: 416–17). As they aptly expressed it in the title of their seminal book: ‘Farewell to the leftist working class’(Houtman et al. 2008).

However, in at least one respect the process of cleavage formation has not fully materialized. Unlike with other cleavage dimensions, such as class, religion, or region, these new political parties do not explicitly articulate the interests of lower or higher educated citizens. There is no such thing as a ‘University Graduate Party’ or a ‘Union for the Low Educated’, in contrast to, for example, the ‘Labour Party’, the ‘Christlich Sociale Union’, or the ‘Leg

Nord', whose names explicitly refer to the social groups they organize and represent. Educational levels as such are not very attractive labels for rallying supporters. 'Lower educated'—unlike, for example, 'working class' in the past—is not a positive label for identification, because of the social stigma of inferiority that is attached to it (Spruyt 2012). For the less educated, a regional or national identity provides much more positive labels. Likewise, the well-educated, because of the liberal ethos of egalitarianism, feel embarrassed to openly distinguish and organize themselves on the basis of their higher qualifications (Kuipers & van den Haak 2014).

Different Stages of Cleavage Formation across Europe

This chapter explored the formation of an educational cleavage in different European democracies. Rather than focusing on full cleavages, we looked at stages of cleavage formation across twenty European countries. We carried out a first systematic exploration of various cleavage elements in a comparative perspective. It is still too early to reach definite conclusions about the standing of this new emerging cleavage. More compelling evidence of the existence of a 'full cleavage' would require an extended discussion of a range of other issues, including more, and much more sophisticated, indicators of the various elements, that goes far beyond the limits of a single chapter.²⁰

Nevertheless, on the basis of this first exploration of the three cleavage elements, a few preliminary conclusions can be drawn regarding the rise of new educational political conflict lines in West European politics. First, the structural element. In all European countries, the numbers of the well-educated have risen sharply in the past four decades, and in many countries the well-educated have become a very sizable social group—from a quarter to even beyond one third of the population in western Europe. Levels of education are important drivers of differences in income levels, and we also see strong levels of educational homogamy, particularly among the well-educated, which is indicative of the sort of social closure Lipset and Rokkan had in mind. Segmentation and segregation along educational lines are strongest in the Nordic and Western European countries—the impact of large cohorts with higher levels of education. The stratification along educational lines is, however, more evident in the Eastern European countries.

Second, these new social categories also diverge on various core values and political preferences. Significant differences can be observed regarding the relatively new cultural issues that have become salient in the past decades. The well-educated endorse more cosmopolitan, pro-immigration, and pro-European values than the lesser educated.²¹ This can be observed across all twenty countries, although on average all educational groups tend to be much

more cosmopolitan in the Nordic and Western countries than in the Eastern European countries.

These shared political preferences must also produce institutions, organizations, and opportunities for political behaviour that articulate these preferences, in order to transform social and attitudinal differences into political divides. We see the emergence of such institutional elements in particularly the countries of western and northern Europe. The arrival of two new types of party families is evident: Green and social-liberal parties on the one hand, versus the new nationalist-populist parties on the other. The electorate of the former party family is predominantly well educated, whereas the nationalistic parties, with the exception of the former communist countries, tend to get most of their votes from the group of lower and medium-educated citizens. The association between education levels and support for emerging political parties shows that the social differences have become politically important.

To what extent do the social-structural, preferential, and behavioural differences coincide? In their seminal essay, Lipset and Rokkan (1967: 152) warned that 'any attempt at comparative analysis across so many divergent national histories is fraught with great risks. It is easy to get lost in the wealth of fascinating detail and it is equally easy to succumb to facile generalities and irresponsible abstractions.' In an attempt to avoid both these traps, we have formalized the differences between the countries—based on the correlations of education within each of the distinct cleavage elements—and present the results in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1 consists of the three key elements of cleavage formation that we have distinguished here. It records whether the contours of these elements are present (or observable) in a given country. A plus in this assessment table indicates that education is associated with the indicators grouped under the cleavage elements. With regard to most indicators, we used a correlation value higher than 0.2 as a threshold. For rating the status of educational homogamy in the different countries, we have used a yardstick of 15 per cent of the population that has tertiary qualifications and has a partner with tertiary qualifications. These 'ratings' or plusses need to be interpreted with a great degree of caution, as this assessment is the result of a first, exploratory analysis, and the differences are sometimes very small.

On the basis of this initial, provisional analysis, we can perceive some patterns. The degree to which the contours of this educational cleavage have been crystallized out varies within Europe. Educational differences matter most in the western and northern countries of Europe, such as Belgium, Denmark, and to a somewhat lesser extent the Netherlands, the UK, Finland, Austria, and Switzerland. In these countries, the contours of something resembling a full cleavage are visible. The link between education and the cleavage elements is the weakest in the countries of southern and eastern Europe.

Table 4.1. Education and cleavage elements (% , correlations and associations, ESS 2014)

	Structural element			Political preference			Political behavior	
	relation income-level education (pearson corr)	homogamy: % tertiary education with partner tertiary education	Criterion: >0.2 (income) and >15% (homogamy)	relation preference immigration and education (pearson corr)	relation preference EU and education (pearson corr)	Criterion: >0.2	relation vote choice and education (cramer's V)	Criterion: >0.2
1 United Kingdom	0.38	19.5	+	0.30	0.11		0.23	+
2 Ireland	0.37	10.7		0.28	0.10		0.13	
3 Austria	0.16	8.2		0.34	0.28	+	0.27	+
4 Switzerland	0.30	11.2		0.26	0.22	+	0.21	+
5 Germany	0.29	14.3		0.29	0.20	+	0.11	
6 France	0.41	11.2		0.34	0.19		0.22	+
7 Belgium	0.41	20.4	+	0.29	0.20	+	0.28	+
8 Netherlands	0.34	18.4	+	0.28	0.19		0.23	+
9 Denmark	0.37	25.8	+	0.37	0.26	+	0.22	+
10 Norway	0.32	26.5	+	0.29	0.07		0.19	
11 Sweden	0.27	17.1	+	0.28	0.10		0.19	
12 Finland	0.36	18.9	+	0.28	0.14		0.27	+
13 Lithuania	0.26	18.8	+	0.08	-0.01		0.19	
14 Estonia		20.1		0.12	0.06		0.13	
15 Poland	0.35	11.6		0.15	0.03		0.23	+
16 Czech Republic	0.31	7.3		0.08	0.05		0.23	+
17 Hungary	0.34			0.09	0.04		0.07	
18 Slovenia	0.50	8.4		0.31	0.02		0.25	+
19 Portugal	0.48	11.6		0.27	0.06		0.22	+
20 Spain	0.49	13.3		0.26	0.17		0.22	+

Even though the countries in the sample are all democratic, their particular histories and political opportunity structures seem to play a role in the emergence of the various elements. For example, in the UK, the attitudinal differences have developed into a positional divide only recently. While in 2010, the social liberal Liberal Democrats successfully moved to the fore, the majoritarian electoral system makes it very difficult for new nationalistic parties, such as UKIP or the more extreme British National Party, to enter the British Parliament. This is different for the European Parliament (EP), however, due to the system of proportional representation that applies in EP elections. In 2014, UKIP became the largest British party in the EP with 27.5 per cent of the votes—whereas in the 2015 national elections, the party obtained only one seat in the British Parliament. Similarly, in Germany, a strong Green party has evolved, while nationalistic counterparts have emerged only recently and had not yet entered the *Bundestag* when we completed this study in the fall of 2016.

Cleavage Formation and the Rise of Political Meritocracy

It is clear that although education as a socio-demographic category played only a minor role in the Lipset and Rokkan framework, it has now become more salient in contemporary politics. Whether this new educational division superimposes on top of the others (reinforcing cleavages) or cuts across the others (cross-cutting cleavages) can have clear consequences for the conflict lines in society. Where lines of education, class, religion, or regions coincide, they are more likely to create deep social differences. Against the background of the emergence of these educational differences, divides, and in some cases a nascent cleavage, the rise of a political meritocracy can have a significant impact on the working of European democracies.

We will discuss these consequences in Chapter 8. First, we will establish the extent to which the selected Western democracies have become political meritocracies. The institutionalization of the educational divide will not only occur in the form of political parties. It will also translate into differences in political participation, in transformations in civil society, and in different patterns of political elite formation.

Country Selection

The aim of this book is not to focus on the variation between countries (or on its determinants) but to address broad common developments. Descriptive analysis allows us to establish the scope of the educational divide. Given these limited ambitions, we predominantly look at those European countries where

we would expect the rise of political meritocracy to be more prominent than elsewhere, because of the high percentages of well-educated citizens in the population and the meritocratic character of the educational system and the labour market. These are Belgium, Denmark, the Netherlands, the UK, and, to a lesser extent, Germany and France. Of these six western countries, Denmark and Belgium scored highest on our cleavage indicators, followed by the Netherlands and the UK. Germany also scored high on the social and attitudinal elements, but did not have a nationalist party in the Bundestag when we finished this book. France scores high too, except for the homogamy among the tertiary educated.

We could have included other countries, such as Austria, Switzerland, or Finland, but we have refrained for pragmatic reasons. This is not a study in comparative politics. In the rest of this book we will not systematically compare a range of parliamentary democracies in order to document dissimilarities or to charter the workings of the different political systems. Our enterprise is first of all explorative and argumentative. Therefore, a few countries will do. The focal point of the remainder of this book, our ultimate dependent variable, is the rise of political meritocracy. Chapter 5 will examine the dominance of the well-educated in the major venues for political participation; Chapter 6 looks at civil society organizations; and Chapter 7 will concentrate on the meritocratization of the political elite.

Notes

1. Compare: Lijphart 1975; Verba et al. 1978.
2. See Van der Houwen 2010: 45.
3. Compare De Vries 2009; De Voogd 2011.
4. See Te Riele et al. 2012; Latten 2005: 12.
5. See Lipset & Rokkan 1967: 9–26; Deegan-Krause 2007: 540.
6. See Clark & Lipset 1991; Evans 1999; Evans & De Graaf 2013.
7. Compare Dalton et al. 1984; Franklin et al. 1992; Van der Brug 2010.
8. Compare Van der Waal et al. 2007; Enyedi 2008; Houtman et al. 2008; Kriesi et al. 2006; Kriesi et al. 2008; Bornschier 2010; Bovens & Wille 2011; Bovens 2012.
9. Compare Van de Werfhorst & De Graaf 2004; Kalmijn & Kraaykamp 2007; Van den Berg & Coffé 2012.
10. Compare Knutsen 2009; Bornschier 2009; Kriesi et al. 2012: 8–12.
11. See Kriesi 2010: 673–85; Kriesi et al. 2012: 9.
12. In order to address our questions and to analyse the emerging contours of an education cleavage in European democracies, we have used the data from the 2010 (round 5) European Social Survey (ESS). The data are based on the cumulative data file (edition 2.0) and we included twenty-three countries in the analysis. Excluded from our analysis are Israel, Lithuania, Ukraine, and Turkey. Austria,

- Italy, and Malta were not part of the ESS survey. The most important variable in our analysis is our independent variable: educational attainment. The international standard classification of education (ISCED) was used as the basic tool for describing and analysing different levels of education. Respondents were asked to state their highest achieved level of (formal) education, ranging from 'did not complete primary education' to 'second stage of tertiary education'.
13. See Kalmijn & Kraaykamp 2007: 568; Van den Berg & Coffé 2012: 175.
 14. Countries such as Sweden, Finland, Denmark, Norway, and the Netherlands top the Knowledge Economy Index of the World Bank Institute. See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Knowledge_Economic_Index.
 15. Compare Esping-Andersen 1990; Ferrera 1996.
 16. Compare Wirth 2000; Blossfeld & Timm 2003; Haandrikman 2011.
 17. See, for example, Van der Waal et al. 2007: 407.
 18. Compare Achterberg 2006; Pellikaan et al. 2007; Aarts & Thomassen 2008; Houtman et al. 2008; Van der Brug 2008; Kriesi et al. 2008; Fligstein 2008; Van der Brug & Van Spanje 2009; Bornschie 2010, 2012; Kriesi 2010; Kriesi et al. 2012.
 19. The political support shown by the different educational groups for these new political parties also emerges at the level of party affiliation—the political parties people feel closest to.
 20. For example, establishing a full cleavage also would require far more extensive monitoring and measuring of the emergence of these new potential cleavages and of the social and political conditions for their formation, development, and survival. Likewise, it would require more analysis of the institutional and organizational actors that form and keep these social groups together as groups, articulate and construct preferences, and contribute to the production and reproduction of these new education cleavages—i.e., what are the equivalents of the unions and churches in previous cleavage formations? Which political actors or organizations create and exploit new identifications? How do they differ from country to country?
 21. Compare also Houtman et al. 2008; Kriesi et al. 2008; Fligstein 2008; Kriesi et al. 2012.

Part II

Contours

5

The Education Gap in Political Participation

The Hamburger *Bildungskampf*

In 2008, the German city of Hamburg decided to reform its secondary school system, with the aim of enhancing the educational opportunities of pupils from less privileged families.¹ One of the central elements of the plan was a proposal to postpone the selection of students for the pre-academic (*Gymnasium*) and more vocational (*Realschule*) tracks by two years. By extending the period of ‘joint learning’, students from less well-educated families would have more time to develop their talents. The reforms were based on research in Scandinavian countries and experiments in other German cities, which showed that late selection helps to enhance the educational careers of talented children from poorly educated and low-income families. Soon the proposal became the object of vehement protests from well-educated parents with children in the *Gymnasia*. They started an emotional campaign ‘Wir wollen lernen’ (we want to learn) to halt the reforms. With the help of the local media and tabloid press, they managed to force the local council to hold a referendum in 2010, in which the citizens of Hamburg were asked to accept or reject the reform proposal. The protesters won—58 per cent voted in favour of maintaining the early selection in schools, whereas the reform proposal received only a 45 per cent ‘yes’ vote.

The votes were not evenly spread across the city, however. To begin with, a mere 40 per cent of the citizens went to the polling booth. In the well-to-do parts of the city, the turnout was high—in the richest neighbourhoods over 60 per cent. In the parts of the city inhabited by the less well-educated, the turnout was much lower—around 12 per cent in the poorest areas. The very citizens who were meant to profit from the reforms could not be mobilized to vote, let alone to campaign in favour of the reforms.

The 2010 Hamburg *Bildungskampf* neatly illustrates the topic of this chapter: educational differences in political participation and their political implications. We will first explore the degree to which educational differences

matter in the extent and form of political participation of citizens in a variety of arenas. The aim of the exercise is to take stock of the education gaps in participation.

This stocktaking exercise is based on a cross-arena comparison. In the academic division of labour, normally either voting, or non-electoral political actions, or party membership, are studied. As a result, much of the literature on the impact of education follows a rather compartmented approach, with a focus on distinct political arenas. We, however, propose to study these arenas simultaneously, to allow a better understanding of the true extent of the education gap. We focus on the six countries that were selected in Chapter 4: Belgium (BE), Denmark (DK), France (FR), Germany (GE), the Netherlands (NL), and the United Kingdom (UK). In order to explore education differences in political participation in these European democracies, we have used a range of reports and data from the European Social Survey (ESS), ISSP, and the Eurobarometer. The appendix describes the data and variables.

The Participation Pyramid

Political participation can take many forms. Together, these forms can be thought of as a participation pyramid (Milbrath 1965) in which acts vary in terms of their difficulty and which can therefore be ranked from easy to difficult. The acts most commonly engaged in are ranked at the bottom, while those less frequently employed are rated at the top. Figure 5.1 represents

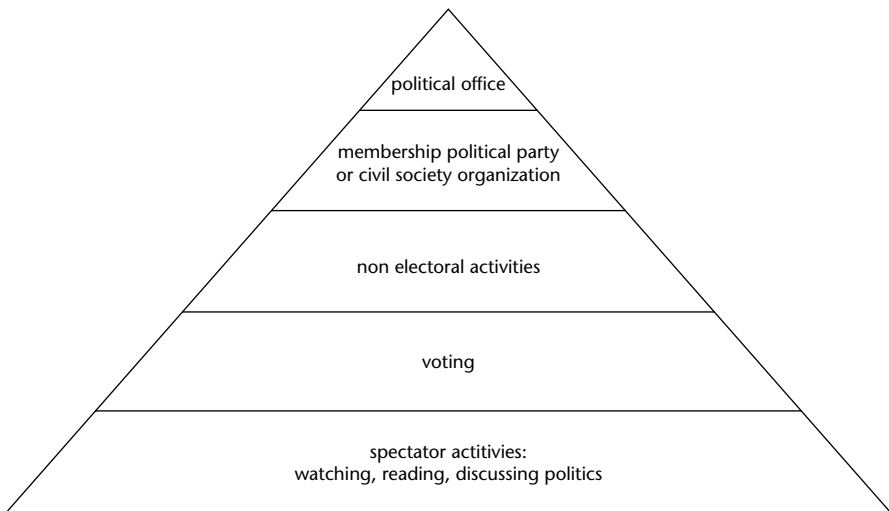


Figure 5.1. The participation pyramid

this pyramid. Activities such as watching, reading, and talking about politics form the base of the pyramid. Holding political office is at the peak of the pyramid.²

Political activities also vary in the extent to which an activity can be multiplied. Voting is an activity for which there is a mandated equality—each citizen has one and only one vote in each election (Verba et al. 1995: 9, 168–9). Other activities dictate no such equality of inputs. Individuals may spend as many hours campaigning for a good cause, attend as many political meetings or demonstrations, and write as many emails to public officials as their time and inclination permit. Moreover, these activities differ in their capacity to convey detailed messages to policymakers. Voting is a blunt instrument when it comes to the translation of the specific political preferences of voters. Many other acts are more ‘information rich’ (Verba et al. 1995: 9, 169) in that they explicitly state the specific political preferences or wishes of participants.

Are the well-educated significantly more likely to engage in all these forms of political participation, and how large are the disparities between educational groups? Are there differences in the forms of political participation engaged in by the highly educated versus those with less education? Does the expanded political action repertory, with a great range of political activities available to ordinary citizens, result in smaller educational inequalities? In this chapter, we will discuss the spectator activities, voting, non-electoral activities, and membership of political parties. Membership of civil society organizations will be the topic of Chapter 6, and holding political office the topic of Chapter 7.

Education Gaps in Participation

Spectator Politics: Watching, Reading, and Talking Politics

At the bottom of the political participation pyramid, we find the most rudimentary forms of political engagement. For most of us, the lion’s share of our political involvement is not spent by engaging in political activity, let alone decision-making, but rather in watching politics and listening to others doing politics (Green 2010: 4). People talk about politics, comment on the news they have watched and the newspapers they have read, give their personal views on current local, national, or world issues while discussing current affairs at birthday parties, in the pub, at the dinner-table, in class, or at the workplace. Politics often starts with spectatorship.³ In fact, this is where political discourses are shaped. This is where people are exposed to similar and dissonant political views, where political opinions are formed and calibrated, and where the ‘public sphere’ begins. Some of the political information that citizens

receive may come from discussions with friends and family. But most of it comes from the media, as opposed to direct experience of the political process. The digital revolution has made the circulation of information simpler, and facilitated access to information on political topics. It has contributed to the rise of the 'monitorial citizen', as Schudson (1998) called it.

What role do spectator activities play in the different educational groups in the six countries? In the ESS, respondents were asked about the amount of time they spent on politics and current affairs and how they spent it on average weekdays—by watching it on television, by listening to the radio, or by reading the newspapers.⁴ The responses could vary from 'none' to 'more than three hours'. Figure 5.2 shows the educational differences in media behaviour for those who watch and read about politics for a half an hour or more on an average weekday. Most people watch politics on television, only one in twenty does not. On average, about 60 per cent of the respondents watch for half an hour or longer. The lesser educated are just as likely as those with a tertiary education to spend an extended period of time watching politics.

The educational differences are larger when it comes to reading about politics. Those with a tertiary education in the six countries are more likely to read about politics for longer than half an hour, compared to those with primary or secondary education. The middle category leans towards the lower educated group when it comes to reading the news. On average, one out of three of more highly educated respondents in Belgium, Denmark, and the Netherlands spends more than a half an hour reading about the news, compared to one out of five or six in the lower educated groups in these countries. Similar differences can also be observed regarding talking about politics. In all six countries, large majorities of the well-educated report they sometimes or often discuss politics with friends. For the less educated this applies to less than half of the respondents in most countries.

All in all, when it comes to spectator activities, while highly educated people appear to read and talk more about politics, the groups do not differ largely in the amount of time they spend watching politics.

Voting

The next layer of the pyramid is voting. In parliamentary democracies, this is the pivotal form of political participation. Electoral systems have evolved slowly in Europe. To enhance democracy, rights have been extended and barriers to voting have been removed.⁵ Many countries nowadays allow resident non-nationals to vote in local elections. One of the most significant transformations in the democratic process throughout Western Europe has been the widespread introduction of regional and European elections. As a result, electorates in Europe now have more opportunities to participate in

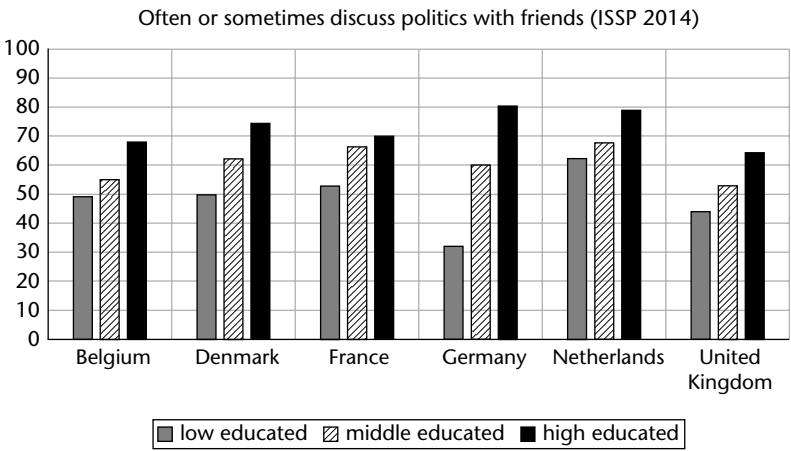
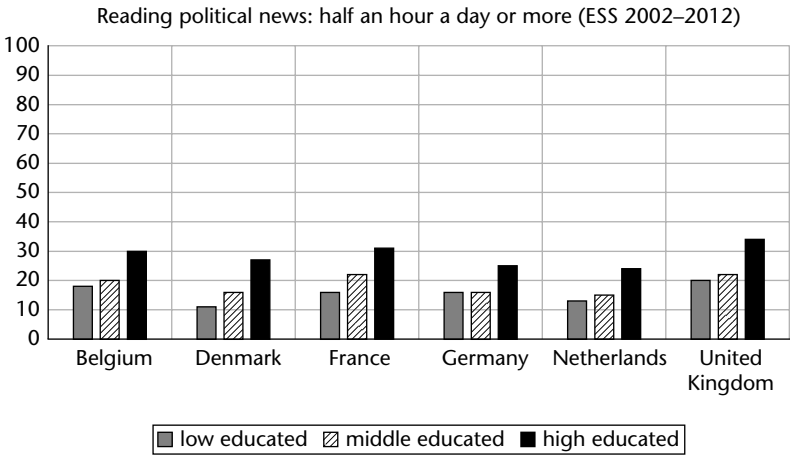
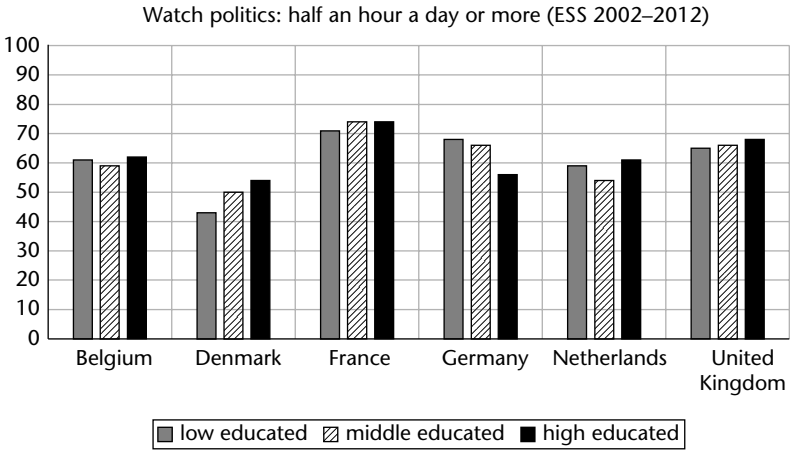


Figure 5.2. Education and spectator activities (% , six rounds ESS 2002–2012, ISSP 2014)

elections than ever before. Of all political activities, voting is one of the least demanding forms of political participation, and is by far the most common activity that provides an equal opportunity to all to participate.

In the literature, education is considered to be one of the strongest predictors of voter turnout. A meta-analysis of Kaat Smets and Carolien van Ham (2013) shows that in two thirds of the studies education is positively and significantly related to individual level turnout.⁶ At the same time, this positive relationship between education and voter turnout at the individual level is contradicted by a dynamic trend at the aggregate level: over time, rising levels of education in society did not increase aggregate turnout. On the contrary, the average turnout has declined in established democracies, from about 85 per cent in 1960 and over 80 per cent in 1980 to about 75 per cent in 2011.⁷ Richard Brody (1978) famously termed this inconsistency as the ‘puzzle of political participation’.

One of the reasons for this puzzling outcome may be that participation has become increasingly unequal. Armin Schäfer and Wolfgang Streeck (2013) point out that, due to the falling turnout level, participation is growing more unequal as, particularly, the most disadvantaged groups are failing to vote. Voters with more education participate more frequently: ‘these differences tend to grow larger as turnout declines, because lower overall participation rates go along with more unequal participation’ (Schäfer & Streeck 2013: 13).⁸ Klaus Armingeon and Lisa Schädel (2015) indicate that educational inequality in electoral participation has risen indeed in the past decades. Based on an analysis of ninety-four electoral surveys in eight Western European countries between 1956 and 2009, they observe that the difference in national election turnout has increased between the half of the population with the lowest level of education and the half with the highest. This increase in unequal turnout levels varies across countries. In some countries, such as Germany, Norway, Sweden, and Italy, inequality in participation is clearly on the rise. In the UK, Denmark, and the Netherlands, no such long-term increase in educational inequality in voter turnout levels has occurred.

Notwithstanding whether or not inequalities have increased, our analysis of the ESS data, displayed in Figure 5.3, reveals that in every Western European country in our sample, the well-educated are more inclined to vote.⁹ Unsurprisingly, given its system of compulsory voting, the analysis shows that in Belgium, electoral participation is highest and the educational gap is smallest. But also in Denmark, where there is no compulsory voting, the education gap is relatively narrow.

The existence of variation across countries implies that ‘unequal participation is not universal’ (Gallego 2015: 33), or unavoidable. The educational differences in turnout depend on different conditions. First, the type of election is important. Nationwide elections are the most salient ones for most

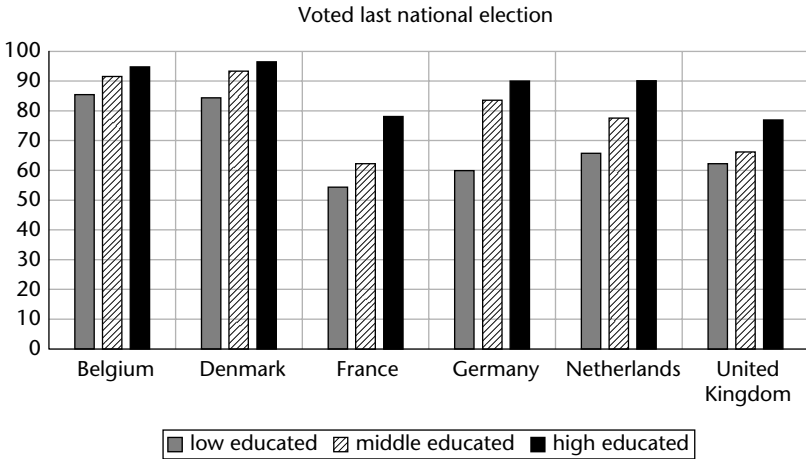


Figure 5.3. Education and voting in last national election (% , ESS 2014)

citizens, with participation and turnout rates that are much higher than those in regional, local, or European elections.¹⁰ Elections for the latter institutions have thus been categorized as ‘second order’ (Reif & Schmitt 1997). A key explanation for the lower rates of participation, and larger participation gaps, is the subordinate role played by these ‘second order’ elections. There is less at stake than at national elections, they have less political salience than national elections, and consequently, voters have less incentive to vote (Gaxie 1978: 227). This also implies that looking at national elections only, underestimates the existence of educational gaps (Schäfer & Streeck 2013: 11–12).

Next are the contextual characteristics. Aina Gallego (2010, 2015) demonstrates that voter turnout is more equal where voting is easy. Education is less related to the probability to vote where the ballots are simple, where registration is state initiated, and where the number of electoral parties is small. Those factors effectively counterbalance the lack of individual resources.¹¹ Importantly, these findings suggest that differences in the turnout rates of different groups can be reduced by making the electoral procedure very easy, or by introducing compulsory voting. We return to this topic in Chapter 9.

The increased opportunities to vote in second order elections, such as local elections, referendums, and for remote supranational institutions, have increased democratic access to a number of decision-making arenas, but at the same time also widened the educational gap (Wille 2011: 108–10). They multiply the demands on voters to become informed on the issues of each election. Sometimes voters simply do not have enough information to choose between specific competing policy programmes, or they cannot accurately assign credit and blame to the right office holders. Sometimes they do not even know about the specific policy in question, or about the basic structure of

government and how it operates.¹² Complex and divided government makes it complicated for voters to know which politicians they are to 'hold accountable' in what election.

Conventional Participation Outside Elections

Voting is a pivotal but relatively rare and general form of political participation. Citizens try to influence the political process in the periods between elections in a variety of other ways. Many of these activities have the capacity to convey more precise messages and to generate more pressure to respond than a single vote is able to do. Contacting an elected official, wearing a badge, handing out flyers, joining election campaign rallies, organizing the community, talking to a councillor during a neighbourhood meeting, are all considered 'conventional' forms of participation outside elections. They are acts of political involvement related to the electoral process, or attempts to influence the political process through well-accepted, often moderate forms of political participation.

An analysis of the ESS data for our six Western European countries reveals the existence of statistically significant differences between educational groups in all six countries regarding these conventional activities outside elections. Figure 5.4 displays the size of the differences between those with higher and those with lower levels of educational achievement for activities such as wearing campaign badges, donating money, contacting a politician, attending a rally, or working for a political party, action group, or organization.

In all six countries, the well-educated are more inclined to influence the political process outside elections through these 'conventional' methods, although wearing a badge, attending a rally, and working for a political party are less popular forms of participation. Donating money, and working in an organization are the most popular activities; and relatively large differences are seen between higher and lower educated groups for these forms of participation in all six countries.

Protest Participation Outside Elections

Participation patterns in Western democracies have changed considerably over the last couple of decades. During the early 1970s, the political science literature expanded the scope of the political participation research to include 'protest' forms of participation, such as demonstrations, the organization of petitions, and strikes. In more recent years joining *boycotts* and *buycotts* has become popular too. The consumer boycott was used in the seventies and eighties to protest against political regimes, such as apartheid in South Africa,

The Education Gap in Political Participation

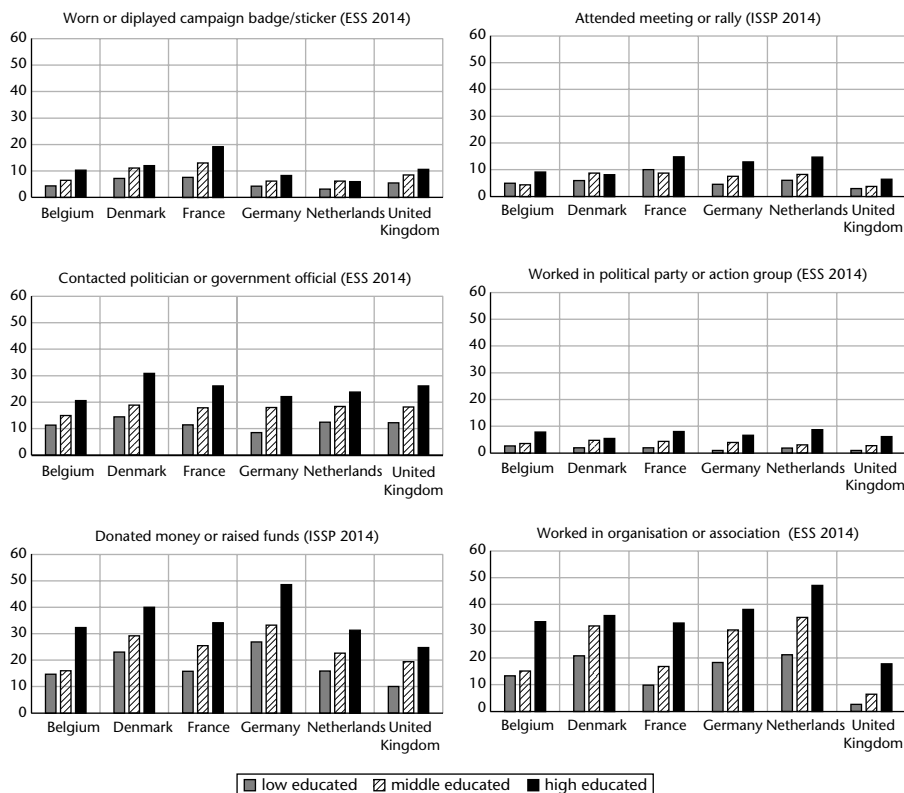


Figure 5.4. Education and conventional participation outside elections (% , ESS 2014, ISSP 2014)

or the Pinochet regime in Chile. Buying fair trade and environmentally friendly products instead of regular brands, has turned consumption into a public issue and a venue for individual political action (Balsiger 2010: 312). Some brand this as a new form of Do-It-Yourself-politics (DIY) and argue that the distinction between citizen and consumer roles in public life is becoming increasingly blurred.¹³ By applying direct public pressure on corporations to adopt higher environmental, or labour standards, ‘citizens have out-sourced their politics from the voting booths to the supermarkets’ (Simon 2011: 147). Examples include the campaigns against Apple, Microsoft, and the sweatshop labour campaign against Nike.

Initially, these protest forms of political participation were carried out mostly by a well-educated middle class. The greater inclination of the well-educated to take part in street protest was related to the fact that this group in general tends to be over-represented in all forms of political participation, both ‘conventional’ and ‘unconventional’. The literature is not conclusive,

however. Verba, Schlozman, and Brady (1995) showed in their study from the 1990s that the inclination to take part in a street protest is less affected by an individual's level of education, compared to other forms of political participation. In their follow-up study, they found that, while political inequality in general has increased, the differences between the highly educated and the lesser educated regarding participation in street protests have narrowed (Schlozman et al. 2012: 122–4). Other surveys support this finding.¹⁴ The education gap in protest activity has closed over the past decades and protest and demonstrations have 'normalized'. On the other hand, a sample of fifty-two demonstrations in five European countries (the UK, Belgium, the Netherlands, Spain, and Switzerland) in the period 2009–2012, shows that over 60 per cent of the protest participants either currently attend or have attended university (Olcese et al. 2014).

Our Figure 5.5, based on the ESS surveys, shows a mixed picture too. In Belgium, Denmark, and the Netherlands, relatively few citizens tend to take part in demonstrations and no differences between educational groups can be observed. In France, Germany, and the UK, demonstrations are more popular, especially among the better educated.

Educational differences are comparatively larger for other cause-oriented activities. In all six countries, the well-educated sign political petitions more often. Also, they are more engaged in joining boycotts. Figure 5.5 shows that those with higher levels of educational attainment participate twice as often in boycotts, compared to those with a lower educational background, in most countries. Political consumerism and product boycotts can achieve a great deal of public attention, but they are highly selective in their social base. The literature indicates that political consumerism might even be more strongly biased than other forms of political participation.¹⁵

Internet Activism

The use of the Internet and social media has become a popular form of political mobilization and participation—the so-called *internet activism*. The use of social networking sites such as Facebook, Google Plus, and Twitter has spawned new opportunities for communication and information-sharing among citizens, and between citizens and elected politicians. These range from circulating a petition among friends, linking and liking political content, to connecting with issue-oriented groups that support a specific cause, or following the posts of politicians or other public figures.

Despite the obvious and growing importance of online media for participation, the debate on their specific contribution is still unresolved (Della Porta 2013: 86). The internet, and social network sites in particular, can provide an opportunity to groups of people who were less active in the

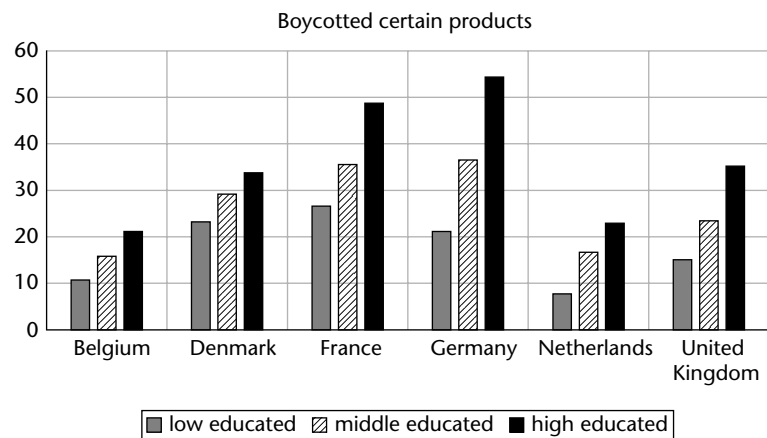
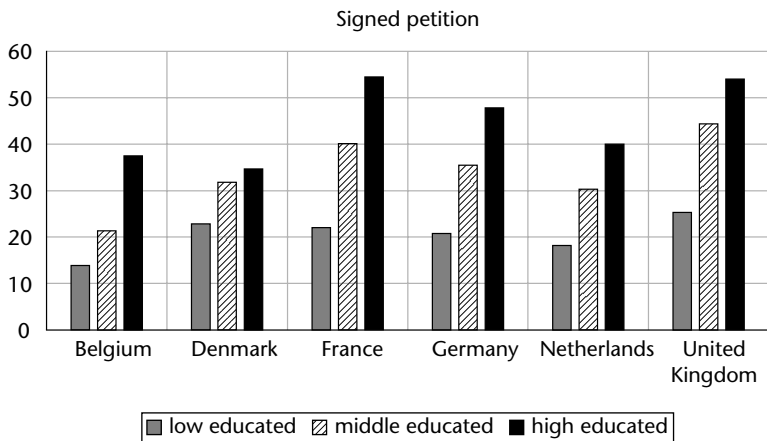
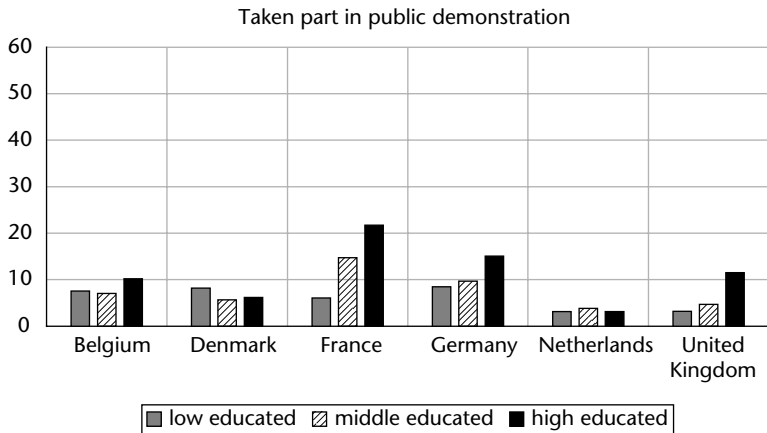


Figure 5.5. Education and protest participation outside elections (% , ESS 2014)

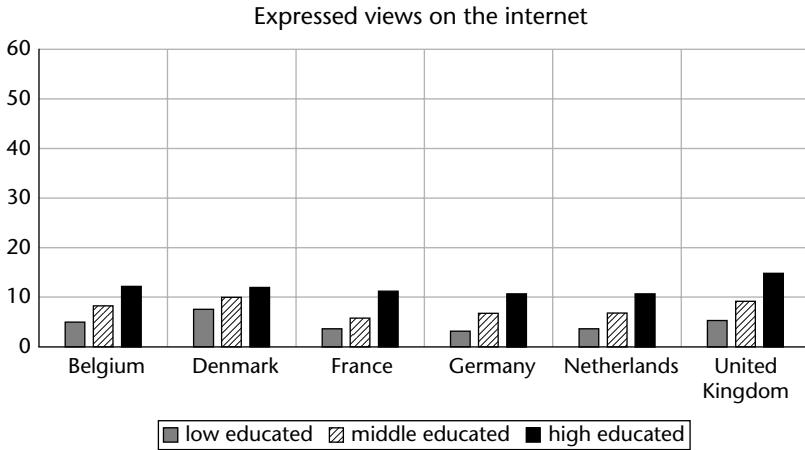


Figure 5.6. Education and online participation (% , ISSP 2014)

traditional political channels—these are also known as *slacktivists*.¹⁶ While some are positive about the democratic prospects of the new media, others indicate that ‘online political opportunities do nothing to change the fact that those with higher education and higher income are much more likely to be politically active than those who are less socio-economically advantaged’ (Oser et al. 2013).

Figure 5.6 shows that in Western Europe, respondents with a higher level of education are two to three times more likely to express their views via internet and social media than people with low qualifications. Hence, while differences are seen across the various countries, it is clear that this relatively new form of political participation affords disproportionate representation to the well-educated, who have easy access to the internet and possess digital skills.

Participation in Deliberative Settings

Governments and public institutions are increasingly embedding ‘public participation’ in public policymaking by means of citizens assemblies, deliberative public meetings, and online public dialogues. This has increased the number of channels for citizen participation. Deliberative protagonists advocate the idea of strong ‘participatory democracy’, as alternative to ‘thin democracy’, or ‘politics as zoo-keeping’, as Benjamin Barber (1984) called it. *Voice* rather than *votes* is perceived as the new vehicle of empowerment. Although there are no exact data about the scale and the extent to which deliberate procedures are applied, these reforms have become popular with local, regional, and national governments, and are even making inroads at the European level.¹⁷

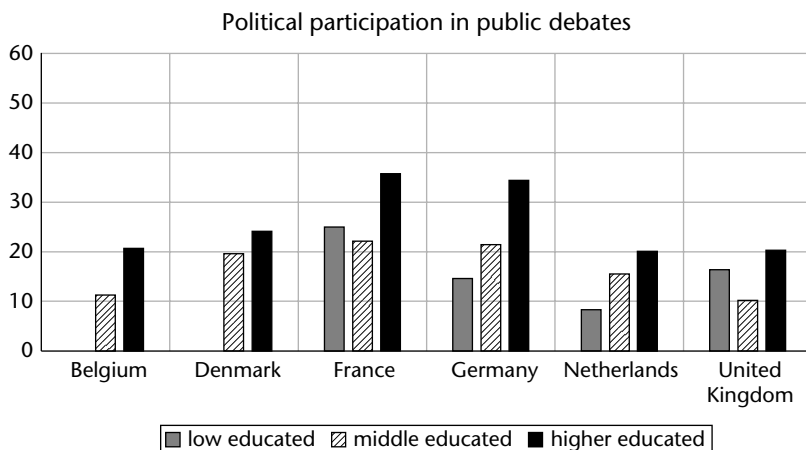


Figure 5.7. Education and taking part in a public debate (%), Flash EB 373 2013)

Analyses of different forms of citizen participation reveal that the more demanding the act of participation is in terms of the required skills and commitment, the more likely it is that it will be disproportionately engaged in by people with a higher socio-economic status (Mansbridge 1980). Studies into deliberative forms of policymaking have repeatedly demonstrated that highly educated men have more influence than other citizens.¹⁸ They are over-represented in these arenas, they converse more easily, and they are rhetorically skilled, which means that they are listened to more often than other participants.¹⁹

The Eurobarometer data, displayed in Figure 5.7, show indeed that educational differences can be observed in participating in a *public debate*, such as consultations, deliberative assemblies, or interactive policymaking sessions, but in some countries the gap is less pronounced than in others. We find the smallest gaps in Denmark and the UK, and the largest gap in Germany. Nearly one in three highly educated individuals have taken part in public debate at the local or regional level in Germany, whereas only one out of every seven of the less well-educated has attended these sorts of meetings. This suggests that, although some progress has been made in opening access to the decision-making, concern about growing disparities in voice in these forms of activity is warranted.

Political Party Membership

For much of the twentieth century, political parties were the most important vehicles for political participation in modern democracies. But party membership has shrunk in Europe since the 1980s, and at an especially fast rate in the

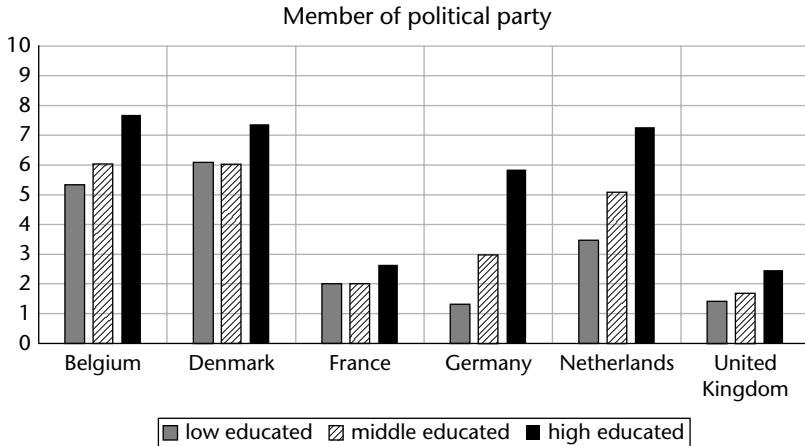


Figure 5.8. Education and party membership (%), ESS 2002–2010

first decade of this century.²⁰ In roughly ten years up to 2008, party membership fell in Germany by 20 per cent. In the UK, where the decline is even more pronounced at 36 per cent, the political parties have lost around one million members over the course of the last three decades. As a result, only about 1.1 per cent of the UK electorate were party members in 2010, making membership levels in the UK among the lowest of Europe. It is only slightly higher in France (1.9 per cent in 2009) and Germany (2.3 per cent in 2007). In the UK, the Caravan Club now has more members than all the political parties put together, writes the *Economist* magazine.²¹

Who is still a member? According to the ESS data of 2002–2010²² presented in Figure 5.8, the well-educated are more inclined to join a political party than citizens with less education. In all countries, with the exception of Denmark and France, membership rates of the well-educated are significantly higher than those of the less well-educated.

An increasing volume of literature based on intra-party surveys shows that party members are relatively unrepresentative when it comes to educational background.²³ The modern political party has become a party of, and for, well-educated professionals. Yet, the differences between parties are large as can be seen from Figure 5.9, which shows the educational distribution of party members for the countries where the differences are largest. In Germany, for example, no less than two thirds of the members of the Grüne, and more than half of the FDP members, fall into the category of the well-educated (Spier Klein 2015). This is different for the CDU and the CSU, where members with low educational qualifications still account for almost half of their membership. The educational profiles of party members in Belgium and the Netherlands are comparable. Very few members nowadays are low educated and the well-educated are

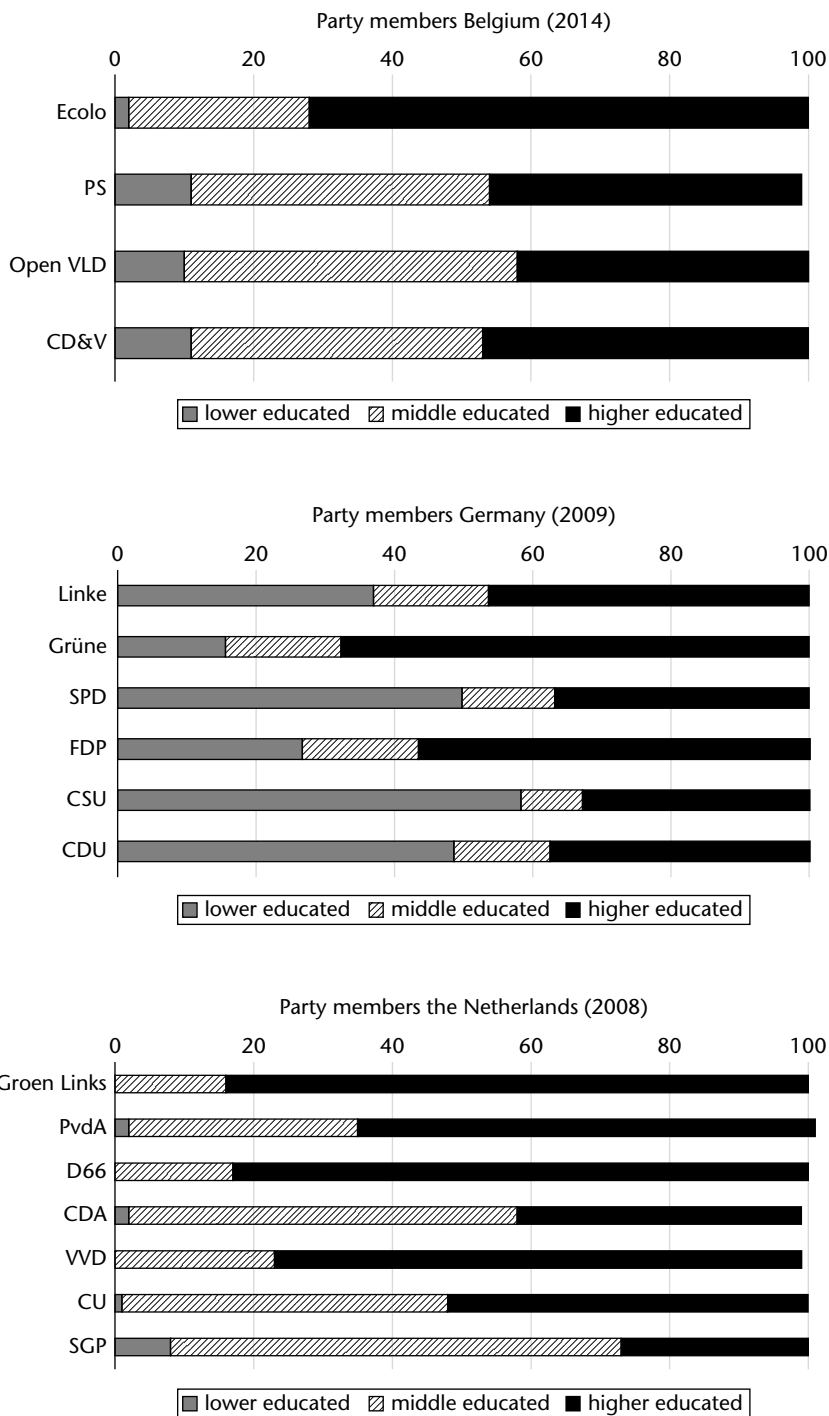


Figure 5.9. Educational background of party members in Belgium, Germany, and the Netherlands (%). Based on intra-party surveys. Sources: Belgium: Van Haute & Gauja 2015; Germany: Spier Klein 2015; Netherlands: Den Ridder 2014)

over-represented among the members. In Belgium, one party stands out because of the exceptionally high educational attainment levels of its members: almost 75 per cent of the grassroots members of Ecolo, the green party, hold a higher education qualification at degree level (Van Haute & Gauja 2015). In the Netherlands, the same phenomenon is seen in social-liberal parties such as D66, and GroenLinks, where the well-educated account for over 80 per cent of their membership (Den Ridder 2014).

The Concentration of Activity

Participatory Inequalities

A consistent pattern of participatory inequalities is visible across nearly all the different forms of participation: higher levels of education mean higher levels of political activity. But across what areas or types of participation are these gaps more or less prominent? Table 5.1 examines the extent to which these gaps are observable for activities that are measured in the ESS.²⁴ The table represents the odds ratios (OR) for the different activities.²⁵ The OR shows the probabilities of the well-educated becoming active in relation to the less well-educated becoming active. There is a distinctive but skewed pattern across the different forms of political participation. Wearing a badge and participation in a demonstration are, on average, the least unequal in terms of participatory input. The largest participatory gaps are evident for becoming active in an organization or political party.

Table 5.1 reveals also differences between countries. For example, when it comes to the political activity within political parties, Denmark, the Netherlands, and Belgium show relatively small differences between the educational groups, whereas in the UK and France the differences are relatively large. In general, the largest education gaps in political participation can be found in the UK, and the smallest in Denmark.

Table 5.1. Education gaps in political participation, six countries (odds ratio, ESS 2014)

ESS 2014	badge	demons	contact	boycott	petition	organization	political party	mean country
Belgium	2.7	1.5	2.7	2.4	3.8	3.4	4.3	3.0
Denmark	1.8	0.9	2.9	2.0	1.8	2.5	3.1	2.1
France	2.7	3.7	3.7	2.5	4.2	4.4	7.5	4.1
Germany	2.1	2.8	2.5	4.9	3.5	2.6	3.7	3.2
Netherlands	2.1	1.5	2.1	3.2	3.0	3.0	4.8	2.8
United Kingdom	2.3	3.5	3.0	3.2	3.5	11.5	6.3	4.8
Mean activity	2.3	2.3	2.8	3.0	3.3	4.6	4.9	–

The Education Gap in Political Participation

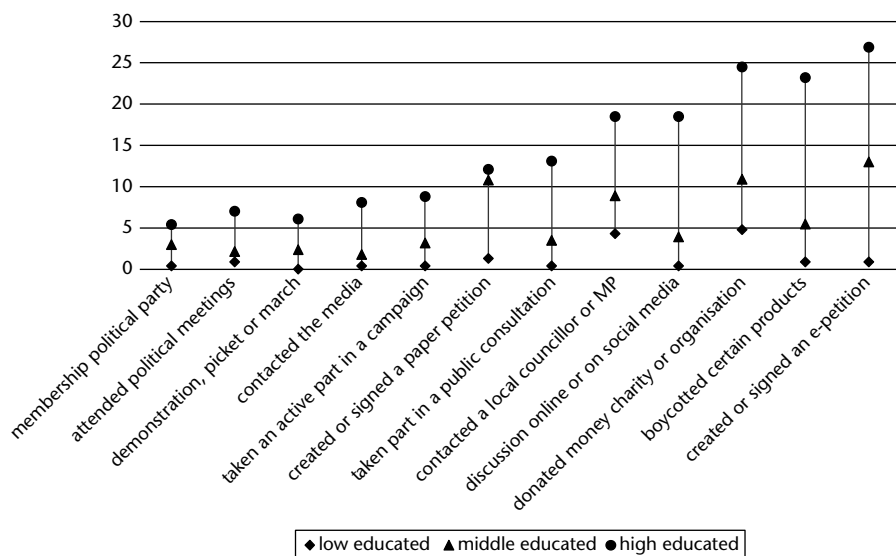


Figure 5.10. Education gaps in different forms of political participation, UK (%), Hansard Society Audit 2015)

Our analysis thus far shows a rise of participatory inequalities in the newer forms of political participation. To illustrate how an extended repertoire of political activities is accompanied by stronger participatory inequalities, we have projected the educational gaps estimated by the British data of the 2015 Audit of the Hansard Society in Figure 5.10. The Audit surveyed a sample of 1,124 respondents in the UK and asked about their participation in twelve political activities in the past year. It is clear from the figures that the new, more personalized and less collective forms of action, such as public consultations, online discussions, boycotts, and e-petitions, show larger differences in participation between the different educational groups than the old-school activities, such as attending political meetings and joining demonstrations.

Participants, Incidental Participants, and Non-participants

It is important to ask not only whether the well-educated are over-represented in each particular participation area, but also how much overlap there is in these activities. Does the same group of highly educated citizens participate in this set of political activities, or is participation more equally distributed when considered on an overall basis? How many well-educated citizens engage in more activities than average? How many have engaged in one or two activities in addition to voting? And how many are merely ‘spectators’ and have not participated in any of these activities?

To examine the extent of concentration of political activity, we counted the number of activities undertaken, besides voting, by each respondent, and then classified citizens on the basis of the frequency of their participation. We distinguished three groups: the *non-participants*, who have engaged in no activity at all; the *incidental participants*, who have engaged in one or two activities in addition to voting;²⁶ and the *participants*, who have engaged in three or more activities. All are displayed in Figure 5.11. This classification provides a clear picture of how much political activity the average citizen undertakes and what the backgrounds of the (non-) participants are.

The very active *participants* constitute a relatively small part of the body politic. Figure 5.11 shows that a disproportionate number of these activists belong to the group with a high level of individual attainment. The proportion of participants who are well-educated is between three to six times higher than that of people with less education. The well-educated are also over-represented in the group of *incidental participants*. In all countries, the less educated tend to be over-represented among the *non-participants*. Large parts of the less educated did not participate in any political activity at all.

Figure 5.12 shows that in all countries educational level correlates with political activity. The higher the level of educational qualifications, the higher the mean number of political activities.

Education: A Cause or a Proxy?

In the six European countries, just as in the United States and elsewhere in Europe,²⁷ the well-educated are over-represented in almost every participatory venue. Their voices resonate more strongly in the ballot box, are heard more loudly in political parties, and they dominate the deliberative settings in conference halls and on the internet. Educational background is of major importance for the form and extent of political participation of citizens.

How to explain these large differences in participation? The relationship between educational differences and political participation has generated a larger volume of literature than can be dealt with here. One of the relevant issues for the topic of this book is whether the length of formal education is a direct cause of participation, or only a proxy for other factors, such as social network position, cognitive ability, or socialization.²⁸

Education as a Cause

Numerous studies have underpinned the strong causal relationship between educational attainment and political participation. 'Formal education is almost without exception the strongest factor in explaining what citizens do

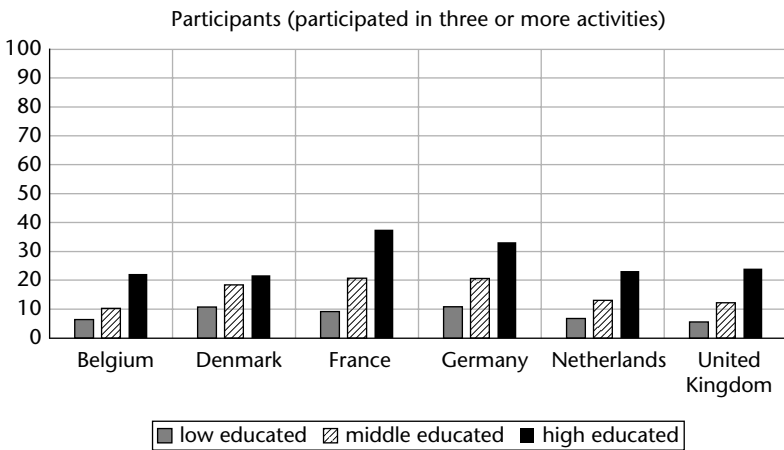
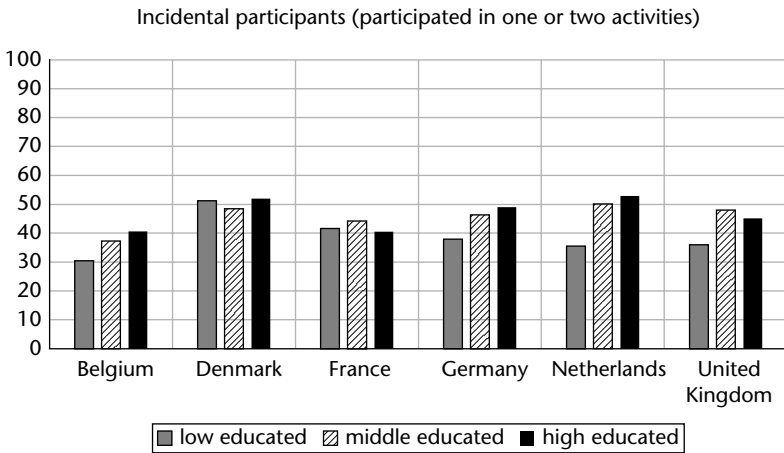
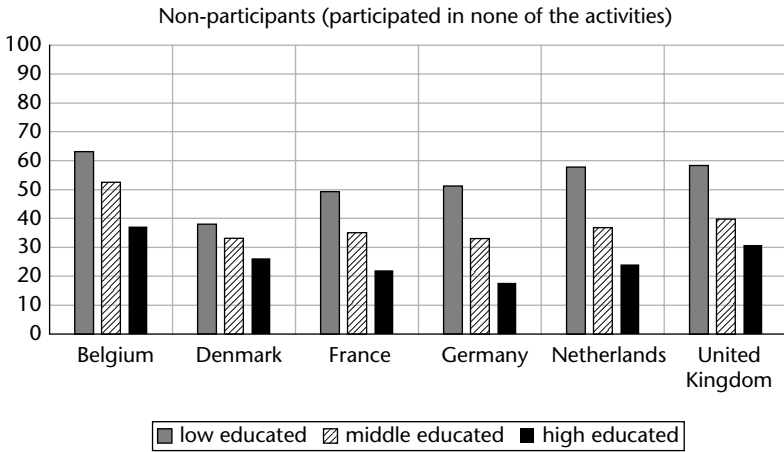


Figure 5.11. Non-participants, incidental participants, and participants by education (% , ESS 2014)

Diploma Democracy

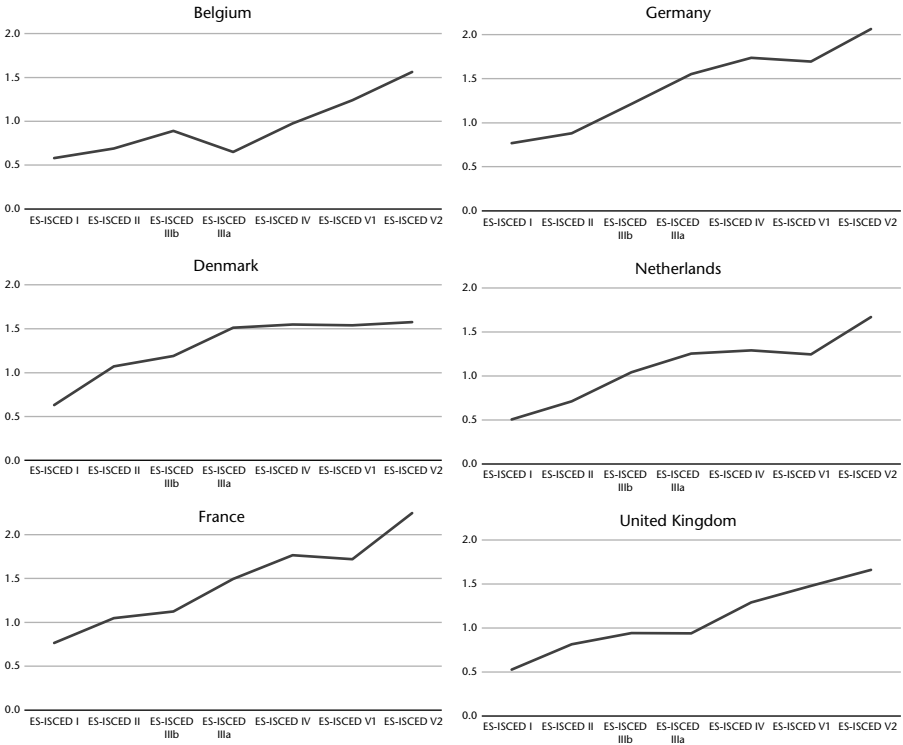


Figure 5.12. Education and number of political activities (mean number), ESS 2014

in politics and how they think about politics’ (Nie et al. 1996: 2). At least three different sets of explanations are given for this robust relationship.

First, a necessary condition for involvement in political activities is *motivation*. As Sydney Verba and his colleagues (1995: 354) put it: ‘Political participation is the result of political engagement.’ The various indicators of political engagement—for example, interest in politics, efficacy, and political knowledge—provide insight into the desire, knowledge, and self-assurance that impel people to be engaged in politics. Moreover, education is an extremely powerful predictor of civic engagement.²⁹ Education can also make participation easier by providing individuals with *political knowledge*. Education has a large impact on cognitive capacity—the ability of individuals to gather information on a variety of subjects, organize facts, and efficiently process information (Campbell 2006: 59). Better-informed citizens are more likely to participate in politics, are better able to discern their self-interests, and are better able to connect their enlightened self-interest to specific opinions about the political world (Delli Carpini & Keeter 1996). The well-educated citizens of Hamburg are a case in point.

Second, education enhances participation by developing *skills* that are relevant to politics (Verba et al. 1995: 305). Civic skills, the communication and organizational abilities that allow citizens to use time and money effectively in political life, constitute an important resource for political participation. Civic skills are acquired throughout life at home and, especially, in school. Norman Nie and his colleagues (1996: 40–4) call this the cognitive pathway to political engagement. They argue that verbal cognitive proficiency is the most relevant cognitive skill in relation to democratic citizenship. Success in democratic politics largely depends on analytical and rhetorical skills, because democratic politics largely rely on the utilization and manipulation of language through argument and debate. For many highly educated people, writing letters or emails, engaging in debates, and running meetings are all in a day's work. Yet they can be very intimidating for people for whom these are not regular activities.

Third, education is not only presumed to transform individuals, it also stimulates social participation. Social settings often function as the recruitment *networks* through which solicitations for political activities are mediated.³⁰ These bring citizens into politics by exposing them to political cues, even in the context of activities having no connection to politics. Since the social networks of the less well-educated mostly include people with similar levels of education, and since they are less integrated in civil society organizations, they are less likely than people with higher levels of education to encounter the stimulus needed to embark on political activities.³¹ The development of an educational cleavage, as argued in Chapter 4, implies that the impact of education will become more and more indirect, and that the differences in, for example, the structure of social networks, that are highly correlated with education, have an independent influence on political behaviour.

Education as a Proxy

The idea that education in itself causes participation has been progressively challenged. One critique contends that relative, rather than absolute, education levels are most important for both aggregate participation levels and inequality in participation.³² Because education is the key to success in the labour force, the argument goes, an individual's education is only meaningful in a comparative sense. A related critique of the conventional view is that the apparent relationship between education and participation is, in point of fact, spurious. Advocates of this theory assert that education is a proxy for pre-adult characteristics that, in fact, affect participation levels (Persson 2015). Compared to highly educated people, those with less education are more likely to come from financially and culturally disadvantaged families and from families in which the parents themselves were also less likely to be socially active.

Once these influences are taken into account, education is left with no independent effect.³³

Given the main topic of this book, this debate about the causal relationship between education and participation is not of prime relevance to our argument. After all, as we said in the first chapter, this is not a book about the effects of education *per se*. Our ambition is limited to documenting the dominance of the well-educated in contemporary politics and to discussing the consequences of this. However, we will return to this issue in Chapter 9, in the discussion on ways to mitigate the rise of political meritocracy. If education is a direct cause of different levels of participation, then it makes sense to search for educational remedies, such as enhanced citizenship programmes. However, if education is only a proxy, we should be looking in other directions.

The Paradox of the Participatory Revolution

The Political Invisibility of the Less Well-educated

Ever since the seminal work of Almond and Verba (1963: 379–87), political scientists have shown repeatedly that educational levels substantially affect the political interest and participation of citizens.³⁴ As far back as the early seventies, Philip Converse (1972: 324) considered education to be the universal solvent for ‘the puzzle of political participation’. The notion that formal education strongly correlates with citizenship characteristics is basically uncontested, and research on political participation has consistently revealed a robust and positive relationship between number of years of education and political participation.³⁵

However, systematic analysis of the implications of this relationship for the functioning of modern democracies is largely lacking. A battery of variables, such as gender, age, education, income, etc.—some theoretically motivated, others simply used as controls—are usually included in survey analysis, yet little attention is given to how these variables make a difference. This undertheorized approach to the meaning of these variables inhibits a real understanding of the impact of educational differences on the workings of our democracy. The large differences in political behaviour between those with lower levels and those with high levels of education emphasize the need to rethink the treatment of education as a *usual suspect* in survey work (Achen 1992). This is particularly salient in the light of the fact that, since the ‘educational revolution’ of the 1970s, the number of well-educated citizens has risen enormously and in many Western European countries now equals the number of citizens with less education.

Much of the literature is concerned with the causal relationships between education and political participation. Far less attention has been given to the political consequences of the gap in participation between the well and the less educated. One of the reasons for this is probably that, of all demographic characteristics that function as background variables, education has been politically the least visible. Political groups have been organized on basis of gender, income, religion, race, and ethnicity (Verba et al. 1995: 172). So far, education as a category has not mobilized a politically visible group with a clear shared interest, demanding equal rights or an improved position. Although education frequently appears on the political agenda as a policy issue, it is always considered a means to improve the position of groups that are otherwise socially or politically disadvantaged. In political research, education tends to be packaged together with other politically relevant characteristics. For example, having little education is often tied to a number of other characteristics, such as income, race, and gender. Hence, education is not a politically visible characteristic. There are no parties for the poorly educated. This may be the reason why the impact of educational differences on the workings of our democracy has long been a neglected field of study.

More Democracy, Less Political Equality

The repertory of political activities has changed considerably in the past decades. Mass-based forms of participation are in decline, while individual acts of engagement are on the rise, especially among younger age groups. The emergence of new forms of political participation may have reduced age and gender-based inequalities, but they do not offer a solution for inequalities based on education.³⁶ Education remains highly significant, both for conventional and newly emerging political acts. The well-educated currently comprise around a third of the population in the six countries, yet they dominate almost every participatory venue.

One of the paradoxes at the heart of contemporary democratic politics is that more democratic opportunities have brought less political equality in this respect. The creation of new political arenas and governing structures, local, regional, and European, has created more opportunities for participation. Online media have greatly expanded the repertoire of actions available to activists. More deliberate forms of policymaking have evolved to broaden the access to public decision-making. Strengthening democracy is often presumed to reduce political inequalities, to improve the quality of political representation, and to increase legitimacy of the political system in the process. But is this presumption correct? Our analysis of different forms of citizen participation supports the view that the more demanding the act of participation is, the

more likely it is that that type of participation will be disproportionately engaged in by higher-educated citizens.

These disparities need not be a problem if the various educational groups share the same preferences on the most salient issues. The well-educated could then act as active spokesmen for the least educated, who are less able and willing to devote their time to engaging in political debate and advocacy. However, as could be observed in the battle over the school reform in Hamburg with which we started this chapter, educational background is not politically neutral. Less well-educated and well-educated voters sometimes can have very divergent interests and political preferences. Accordingly, some interests might be muted, not because of a lack of concern regarding a particular controversy, but instead because some citizens have difficulty making themselves heard on the political stage.

Notes

1. The case description is based on Mängel (2010) and Rommele & Schober (2010). We thank Guido Tiemann for bringing it to our attention.
2. We depart from a broad conceptual definition of political participation. First, we define watching, talking, and reading about politics as an act of political participation, and we think that political participation should be understood as something done by people whether they are in their role as citizens, or as politicians or professional lobbyists. We differ in this approach from Van Deth (2014: 351–2).
3. The term ‘spectator democracy’ is often negatively used as the opposite of ‘participatory democracy’, to refer to a democracy with many passive citizens, who most of the time are superficially interested in politics, in which only a few citizens are active and engaged in politics. Green (2010: 4) suggests, however, that such spectatorship is inherent to the very nature of politics itself: ‘When a politician makes a speech, there are thousands who tune in to hear what he or she has to say. When public interest organizations engage in public protest, the very logic of their efforts assume a non-acting but watching broader public who might be inspired to join the cause’. Rather than continuing to insist that spectators ought to become actors, theorists must accept that spectators are part of the reality of modern democratic politics and try to develop theories which give them a role as spectators. Also Manin’s (1997: 197–9) notion of audience democracy and Rosanvallon and Goldhammer’s (2008: 17) counter-democracy recognize the reality and relevance of spectatorship.
4. The ESS drafted an additional set of questions which asked respondents how much time they spent on media consumption. These questions made it possible to identify what proportion of their media time is spent on news, politics, and current affairs.
5. In Western Europe, barriers to enfranchisement based on property were lowered during the late nineteenth century. Education and gender barriers disappeared by the middle of the twentieth century or even later. All six countries lowered the voting age for both men and women to eighteen by the late twentieth century (UK

- and the Netherlands in 1970, Germany in 1971, France in 1974, Denmark in 1978 and Belgium in 1981).
6. Smets and Ham (2013: 348) show that a standard deviation change in educational level increases turnout by roughly 0.72 standard deviation units. See also Campbell 2009; Gallego 2010.
 7. Compare Schäfer & Streeck 2013, Armingeon & Schädel 2015. Although the decline in turnout is a general trend across Western Europe (Mair 2013), there is a variation across our six countries. In Germany and France, turnout dropped over 20 per cent between 1970 and 2010, whereas Belgium and Denmark scored a mere 3 percentage points lower than in the 1970s.
 8. Scervini and Segatti (2012) also demonstrate that the decline in participation rates is correlated with education differences between individuals.
 9. A caveat is in place here. This measure of voting turnout relies on the accuracy of the reports supplied by survey respondents. Days, weeks, or even years after elections they were asked whether they had voted. Verbal self-reporting, to be sure, is not a totally reliable way of capturing actual behaviour. Self-reported turnout rates in surveys overestimate actual turnout (Schmeets 2008). Non-voters may be too embarrassed to admit their failure to vote (Lewis-Beck et al. 2008: 86); and, at least in the United States, the well-educated are most likely to over-report voting (Silver et al. 1986).
 10. See Franklin 1999; Lijphart 1997.
 11. Compare Blais 2000; Rosenstone & Hansen 1993; Verba et al. 1978; Verba, Schlozman, & Brady 1995.
 12. See Delli Carpini & Keeter 1996; Lupia & Johnston 2001: 194.
 13. See Bennett 2012.
 14. See Aelst & Walgrave 2001: 481.
 15. See Stolle et al. 2005; Marien et al. 2010.
 16. *Slacktivists* (the term is a combination of the words slacker and activism) are lazy activists: individuals with a political opinion, who participate from behind their computer. By simply clicking a button, they can spread their opinion on a political issue through blogs.
 17. In the autumn of 2007, Tomorrow's Europe brought together a representative group of 362 citizens from all twenty-seven EU member states for a weekend of deliberation in Brussels, discussing the future of the EU. Tomorrow's Europe was thus the first Europe-wide Deliberative Poll). In addition, the European Commission's Interactive Policy Making (IPM) initiative allows European citizens, consumers, and businesses to send their problems relating to different EU policies directly to the European Commission. This system has been put in place to facilitate the stakeholders' consultation process by the use of easy-to-use and straightforward online questionnaires, making it easier both for respondents to participate and for policymakers to analyse the results.
 18. Compare Mansbridge 1980; Wille 2001: 100–2; Van Stokkom 2003; Mutz 2006.
 19. Compare Sanders 1997; Hartman 1998; Hooghe 1999.
 20. See Van Biezen et al. 2012; Scarrow 2014.
 21. *Economist*, 4 August 2012.

22. Later rounds of the ESS did not contain an item on party membership.
23. Compare Seyd & Whiteley 2004; Scarrow & Gezgor 2010; Whiteley 2011; Van Biezen et al. 2012; Den Ridder 2014; Scarrow 2014.
24. The differences in internet participation have not been empirically tested in any detail, because of the unavailability in the ESS data and the incomparability with other surveys. Data from the different ESS rounds (2002–2014) contain no items on digital political participation. The ISSP has measured internet use, however, and the data are clear. The overtime trend emphasizes the increasing diffusion of the medium among the population at large. Another telling fact is that, as education levels rise, so does internet use.
25. The odds ratio (OR) is one way to quantify how strongly the presence or absence of participation is associated with educational attainment. If the OR is greater than 1, then participation in an action is considered to be ‘associated’ with having education, in the sense that the being well educated raises (relative to being not well educated) the odds of participation in an activity.
26. This category is also labelled as ‘accidental activists’ (Wille 1994), as ‘monitorial citizens’ (Schudson 1998), or as ‘standby citizens’ (Amna & Ekman 2014).
27. Compare similar studies of participation and political equality in Europe: ‘the widest gulf between activists and non-participants are in terms of educational attainment’ (Teorell et al. 2007: 410). Research by Li and Marsh (2008) in the UK show that educational differences have a far more pronounced effect than other variables. Also, studies performed under auspices of the OECD in Austria (Walter & Rosenberger 2007) and Norway (Lauglo & Oia 2007) show that education’s impact on civic engagement is strong.
28. Verba et al. 1995 endorse the first position. For the second position see: Nie et al. 1996; Kam & Palmer 2008; Berinsky & Lenz 2011.
29. See Putnam 1995; Verba et al. 1995; Nie et al. 1996: 17.
30. Compare Nie et al. 1996; Verba et al. 1995.
31. See Nie et al. 1996; Gesthuizen 2005; Rolfe 2012: 126–50.
32. See Nie et al. 1996; Tenn 2005; Persson 2014a.
33. See Kam & Palmer 2008; Janmaat & Mons 2011; Janmaat et al. 2014; Eckstein et al. 2012; Persson 2014b.
34. This paragraph is based on Bovens & Wille 2010.
35. See Verba & Nie 1972: 95–101; Verba et al. 1978; Gaxie 1978; Marsh & Kaase 1979; Rosenstone & Hansen 1993; Verba et al. 1995: 433; Nie et al. 1996; Lijphart 1997: 2–3; Putnam 2000; Gesthuizen 2005; APSA 2006: 1.
36. Compare also Marien et al. 2010; Stolle & Hooghe 2011.

6

The Meritocratization of Civil Society

The Rise of the EU Nerds

'We are young, European, and working in the "Brussels bubble".' In an open letter, published in the *European Voice* (May 8, 2013) five political-science graduates, working as public-affairs consultants, defended their profession. Their letter read as follows:

We chose to become public-affairs practitioners because we were passionate about politics and the prospect of a challenging job that would test our ability to marshal the facts and argue a case. We are European Union nerds who enjoy discussing the positive and negative aspects of comitology, and who always feel some excitement when walking down the corridors of the European Parliament, the European Commission, or the buildings of permanent representations. We like pushing policymakers on the finer points of the financial-transaction tax or the new data-protection rules, or discussing how an EU-US free-trade agreement would affect transatlantic relations. These things matter—they affect the trajectory of Europe and 500 million Europeans. We take pride in being part of an informed conversation on issues that are always on top of the political agenda, and in being a part of the change.

These five 'European Union nerds' are a fine illustration of the rise of political meritocracy in civil society. They are passionate about influencing the course of EU policymaking, they are experts in EU politics, and they make their living out of it. Their letter also signifies several larger trends in Western European civil societies: the enormous increase in the number and importance of civil associations, the dominance of the well-educated within these organizations, and a shift from grassroots participation to professionalization.

Many popularly rooted mass organizations, such as trade unions, women's federations, veterans' associations, and fraternal groups, have witnessed a decline in membership and political influence in a number of advanced democracies. Their role as intermediary between politics and society has been taken over by professionally managed advocacy groups that operate with university

educated public affairs consultants. In the ‘third sector’, too, active engagement and participation ‘by the people’ have given way to meritocracy, or, in other words, to rule by the well-educated. These trends will be the main topic of this chapter. But before we document them, we will first introduce our main subject: civil society organizations.

Civil Society Organizations

‘Wonder Babies’ of Democracy

Interest groups, such as the public affairs firms that employ the EU-nerds, are part of the civil society—sometimes also known as the ‘nonprofit’, the ‘voluntary’, the ‘third’ or the ‘charitable’ sector. The civil society arena includes within it an enormous collection of entities—self-organized citizens, sport and leisure clubs, churches, hospitals, social movements, NGOs, business associations, labour unions, interest groups, charities, and a myriad of other manifestations of public participation.¹

Civil society organizations sometimes seem to be the ‘wonder babies’ of democracy. They are supposed to foster social cohesion, social trust, and the functioning of democracy (Putnam 2000: 223–4). They are expected to empower the disadvantaged; to bring unaddressed problems to public attention; to articulate a variety of preferences; to provide alternative platforms for engagement at the local, regional, national, and EU level; and generally to ‘mobilize individual initiatives in pursuit of the common good’ (Salamon 2010: 168–9). Participation in civil society organizations is deemed to imply strong democratic credentials. They are thought to be the training grounds for skills that nurture political participation—Alexis De Tocqueville called them ‘schools of democracy’.

Not all of these credentials have been empirically validated. For example, there is little empirical evidence in Western Europe for the ‘school of democracy’ thesis.² Participation in civil society organizations does not in itself foster democratic competences or inclinations. However, and most important for our topic, they have been proven to be important venues for political recruitment, and hence, if not schools, they are at least ‘pools of democracy’.³

Classifying Civil Society Organizations

We start out with a broad definition of civil society that refers to the set of institutions, organizations, and behaviours situated between the state, the business world, and the family (Anheier 2000: 17). This broad concept of civil society includes an enormous variety of associations. Therefore, in the literature it is common to classify them along two axes: purpose and organizational form.⁴ The results of this classification are presented in Table 6.1.

Table 6.1. Types of civil society organizations

		Aims and relationship to the state		
		civil society I voluntary organizations	civil society II social movement & cause groups	civil society III professional organizations
Relationship to constituents	full participation	Self-help organizations	Community advocacy groups	
	limited participation	Sport clubs Religious organizations		Trade Unions
	token participation		Amnesty International Greenpeace	Professional Associations, National Chambers of Commerce, NGOs, Think tanks

Source: Adapted from Hasenfeld & Gidron 2005: 100

The first axis is defined by the primary aim of the organization. Civil society organizations can be segmented into three distinct sectors that can be roughly labelled as: 1) ‘volunteer-run associations’, which are characterized by neutral or recreational aims, such as social clubs; 2) ‘social movements’ or cause organizations that pursue broader societal causes and use protest and political means to achieve them; examples are political parties and activist groups; and 3) ‘non-profit organizations’ that pursue sectional interests. Examples of the latter are lobby organizations and interest groups, such as trade unions and professional associations that attempt to influence public policy.

The second axis plots the organization’s relationship to its constituents. These relationships define the internal organizational structure. These, too, can be divided into three types. ‘Total participation’ refers to organizations, which are both controlled and run by their constituents, with as archetype the volunteer-run ‘grassroots’ associations. ‘Limited participation’ refers to organizations in which constituents define and shape policies and approve programmes, but rely on paid staff to carry out daily operations. These organizations often have a powerful elected board that represents their constituents. Prime examples are protestant churches and labour unions. ‘Token participation’, finally, refers to organizations in which constituents hardly play a role. They are controlled and run by paid staff. This is the case with most non-profit organizations. The framework presented in Table 6.1 is not only useful to incorporate the massive diversity in civil society, it can also help to understand the dynamics of meritocratization.

The Context: An Associational Revolution

A Non-Profit Boom

According to Lester Salamon (2010: 168), one of the world's leading scholars on the civil society sector, the number of philanthropic, volunteering, and civil society organizations has expanded spectacularly over the past decades throughout the world: 'we seem to be in the midst of a global associational revolution, a massive upsurge of organized private, voluntary activity in virtually every corner of the globe'. Salamon is the director of the Johns Hopkins Center for Civil Society Studies, which runs the Comparative Nonprofit Sector Project that analyses the development of the civil society sector in over forty countries across the world.⁵ In the US, for example, there was an 'advocacy explosion' in the 1960s and 1970s, during which the number of interest groups 'skyrocketed', and this expansion continued through the 1980s (Fiorina & Abrams 2009: 130). Between 1981 and 2006, the number of explicitly political groups—those listed in the Washington Representatives directory—more than doubled (Schlozman et al. 2012: 349). The third sector grew significantly in all the countries of Europe, as well (Salamon et al. 1999). At the beginning of the twenty-first century, the workforce employed in the non-profit sector was larger in relative economic terms in most Western European countries than in the US. It varied from 6.8 per cent of the economically active population in Germany and 11 per cent in the UK, to 13 per cent in Belgium, and 15.9 per cent in the Netherlands—compared to 9.2 per cent in the US (Salamon 2010: 188).

Some basic statistics on the scale of these sectors in the early twenty-first century bear this development out for France, Germany, the UK, and the EU. Figure 6.1 shows an impressive increase in the number of civil society organizations in France and Germany. From the late 1970s on, in France the non-profit boom spawned some 60,000 to 70,000 new associations every year—with as result that by 2010, there were around 1,200,000 associations operating (Archambault et al. 2014: 221–2). In Germany, the number of non-profit organizations (*eingetragene Vereine*) jumped more than six-fold from 86,000 in 1960 in what was formerly West Germany, to 580,000 in 2011 (Archambault et al. 2014: 221). Increasing governmental action and expenditure has stimulated the creation of these new organizations at all political levels.⁶

There has been a steady proliferation of non-profit organizations in the civil society in the UK too. Figure 6.1 shows that the number of registered charities in Britain in the post-Second World War period rose to 180,000 in 2010. Since this number includes every small-scale charity in the UK, this figure also indicates that a similar cumulative increase can be seen for the main national NGOs, although in smaller numbers (Hilton et al. 2013: 42–5). In 2013–2014, the National Council of Voluntary Organizations (NCVO 2016) calculated there were over 160,000 civil society organizations in the UK.⁷ A small number

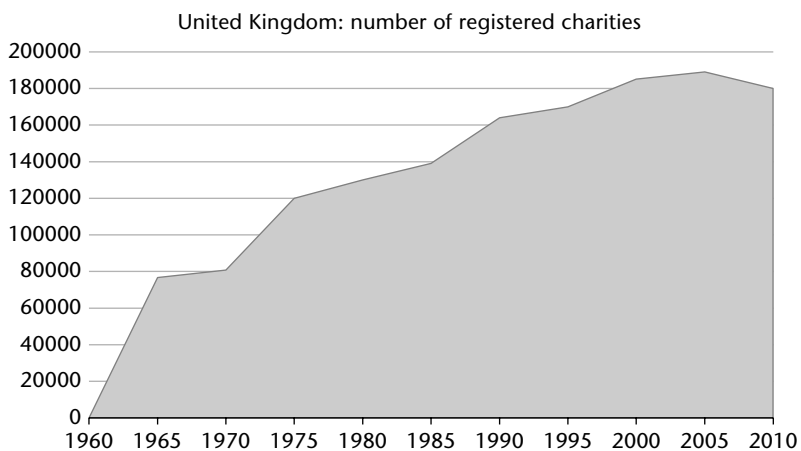
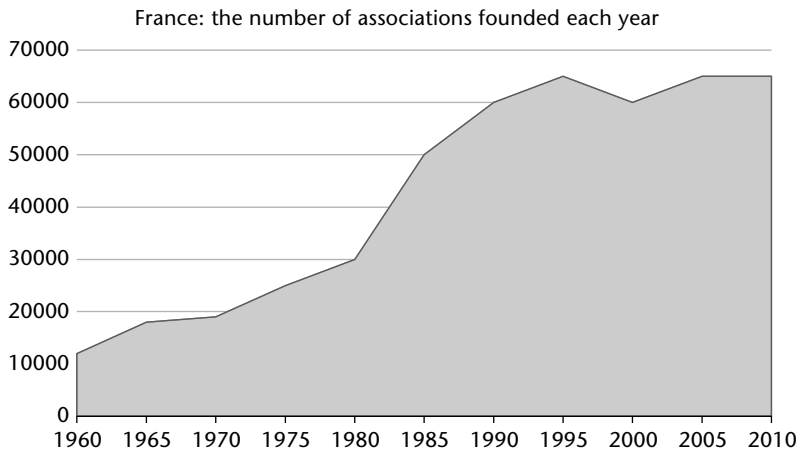


Figure 6.1. Growth of civil society organizations in France, Germany, and UK 1960–2010 (abs, sources: France and Germany: Archambault et al. 2014: 221–2; UK: Hilton 2011: 238)

of truly enormous NGOs lead the way, most of which are active on a national or international scale.⁸ ‘The Oxfams and the Greenpeaces of this world—the 438 organizations classified as “major” by the NCVO—had a combined income of £15.5 billion, or 44 per cent of that for the entire sector’ (Hilton et al. 2013: 3).⁹

Expansion at the European and International Level

At the EU level, too, civil society organizations have mushroomed over the past two decades.¹⁰ Brussels is estimated to be the second largest city in the world for lobbyists, after Washington. The number of interest groups exploded in the early 1990s and has remained at a high level since then (Berkhout & Lowery 2010: 457). The EU has been looking at ways to incorporate NGOs, civil society, and business representatives in its decision-making, as a way to try to make the Union more democratic.

A joint transparency register launched by the European Commission and the European Parliament gives a complete picture of the many active players, such as public affairs professionals, NGOs, semi-public organizations, churches, think tanks, foundations, and so on, that try to influence MEPs, commissioners, officials, and journalists.¹¹ The Transparency Register has been set up to answer core questions such as: what interests are being pursued, by whom and with what budgets? The system is operated jointly by the European Parliament and the Commission. Anybody who wants to lobby the European institutions must sign up to the EU Transparency Register. This is the only way to gain access to the European Commissioners, their cabinets and directors-general, but also to the European Parliament building. The register has grown considerably since it came into effect in June 2011. Figure 6.2 shows that of approximately 9,500 special interest groups and organizations registered in the EU register in 2016,¹² more than half (52 per cent) are companies, trade and business associations, trade unions, and professional associations. Another 25 per cent are NGOs, and 12 per cent are professional consultancies, law firms, or self-employed consultants. The data presented in this figure indicate that certain interests are more likely to be defended in Brussels than others. Many of the groups promote corporate interests rather than representing citizen concerns.

Processes of internationalization have opened up new venues for civil society organizations, and today a huge number of advocacy organizations, interest groups, non-governmental organizations, and philanthropic foundations are active at the international level.¹³ Many organizations have become large-scale global actors and developed protest business organizational structures (Jordan & Maloney 1997). For instance, *World Wildlife Fund* (WWF) has offices in over eighty territories. It employs 6,200 staff, has more than

The Meritocratization of Civil Society

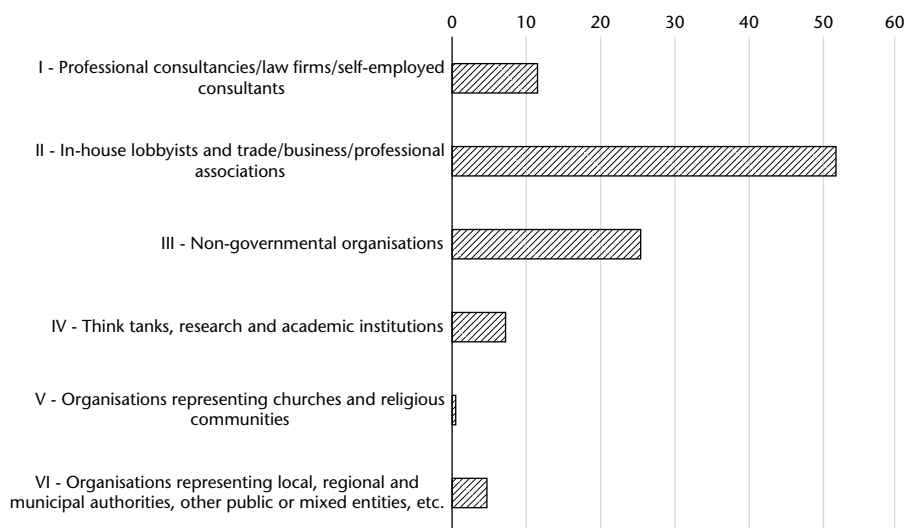


Figure 6.2. Interests represented by organizations in the Brussels arena 2016 (% , source: Transparency Index, consulted 22 June 2016)

5 million supporters, and has invested around \$11.5 billion over the past years in more than 13,000 projects (Maloney 2015b: 101). *Greenpeace* is present in more than fifty-five countries across Europe, the Americas, Asia, Africa, and the Pacific. In 2014, it had over 3 million supporters worldwide, received over €292 million in grants and donations, and spent some €107 million on fundraising.¹⁴ Amnesty International has opened regional offices in cities in Africa, Asia-Pacific, Central and Eastern Europe, Latin America, and the Middle East. In 2015, the organization received donations from more than 2 million individuals, raised €278 million for human rights work, and spent €260 million.¹⁵ This demonstrates the change from the ‘politics of the amateur’ to the politics of the professional’ (Maloney 2015a: 156).

The expansion of civil society and non-governmental organizations, at the national, European, and international level, is probably one of the most important political developments of the past forty years. Given their important functions in modern democracies, the next question is: who governs these ‘pools of democracy’?

Participation: The Education Gap in Membership

Education Gaps in Membership and Volunteering

The ultimate principals of civil society organizations, almost by definition, are their members. After all, they are voluntary institutions, initiated and run by

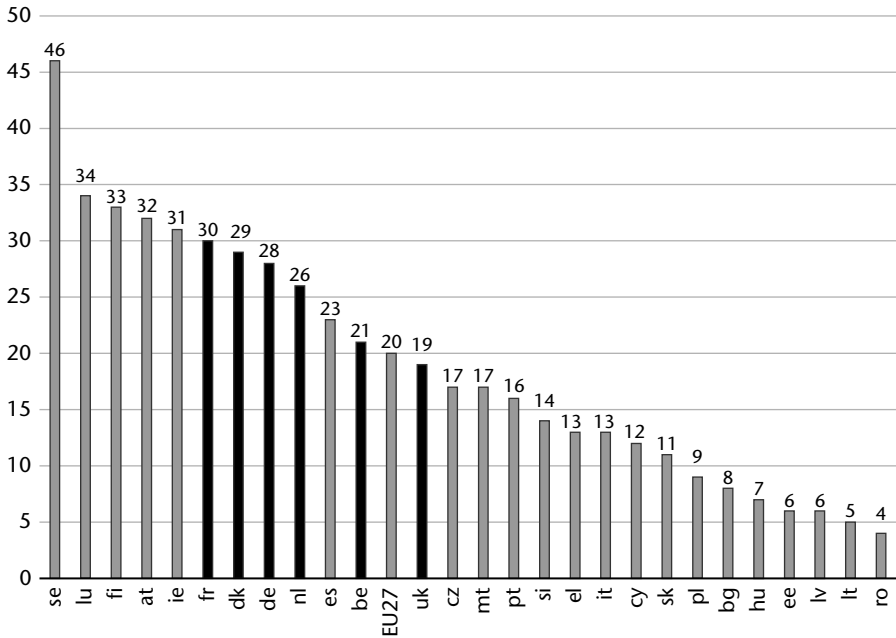


Figure 6.3. Membership of civil society organizations across Europe (% , Flash EB 373 2013)

private citizens. We therefore first look at membership patterns in civil society. Survey data about the membership of individuals of civil society organizations, based on random samples of the public, allow us to establish who the members of these ‘pools of democracy’ actually are. Using data taken from the Eurobarometer, Figure 6.3 presents a snapshot of the membership in civic organizations across the EU member states. It shows that European civil society is characterized by substantial cross-national variation in levels of civic participation.

Immediately obvious is the slope in membership of civil society organizations from the North-West to the South-East regions of Europe. The Scandinavian and Western European countries have the highest percentages of membership, followed by the countries of Southern Europe, with the countries of Eastern Europe lagging behind. This pattern is consistent with findings in the literature.¹⁶ Civic cultures and historical developments, which influenced social and political trust, explain many of these differences.

For the reasons outlined in Chapter 4, and to keep the analyses manageable in terms of the number of nations and cultural compatibility, we again focus on the six selected Western European countries—Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, the Netherlands, the UK—to get a more detailed picture of the

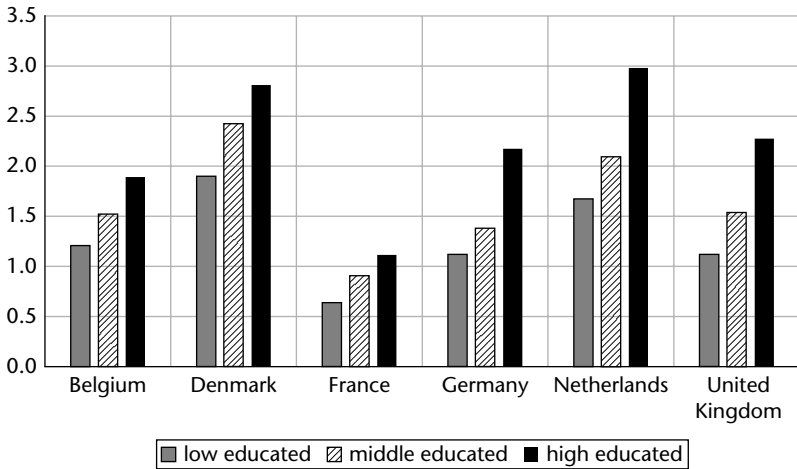


Figure 6.4. Education and number of memberships of associations (means, ESS 2002)

educational gaps in associational membership. Using ESS data, we first looked at differences in membership across the educational levels.

Figure 6.4 shows that an education gap in civil society membership is visible in all six countries. The number of memberships of civil society organisations increases with the level of educational attainment. In most countries, citizens with tertiary qualifications are twice as often member than citizens with primary qualifications only. A comparison of the membership proportions of the various type of organizations, displayed in Figure 6.5, shows that education gaps are manifest for almost all types of associations. Regardless of the type of association, well-educated citizens are more likely to be a member. The only exceptions are trade unions in Belgium and the Netherlands, and churches.

Not only do we see that organizational membership is stratified by education, but also, the intensity of involvement, in terms of time and money, and the volume of activities, rise with educational level.¹⁷ If we move beyond membership and focus on volunteering, similar forms of educational stratification emerge. The importance of volunteering is often emphasized when it comes to civil society. The UK, the Netherlands, Germany, and Denmark have long-standing traditions in volunteering and have well-developed voluntary sectors. A report on volunteering by the European Commission (2010), based on national surveys and reports, identified a clear positive correlation between level of education and the level of volunteering. Volunteers come from the more highly educated segments of the population: the more well-educated people are, the more likely they are to volunteer, as Table 6.2 shows.

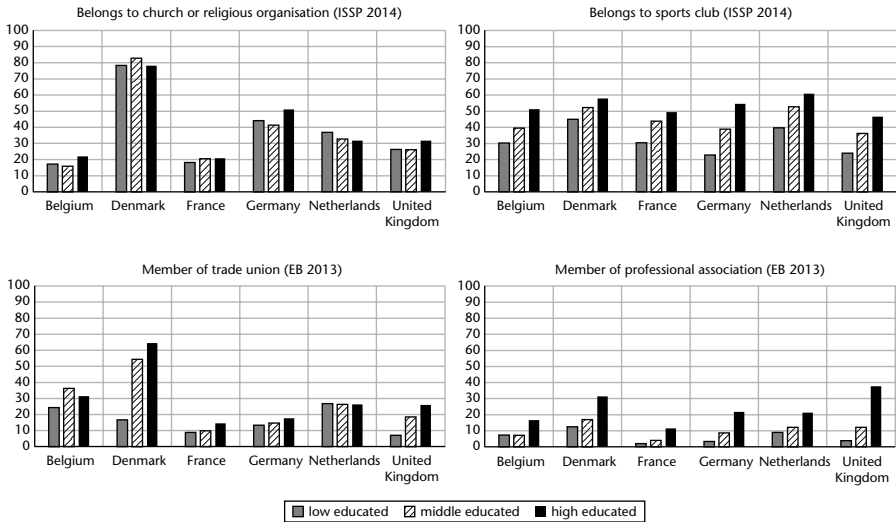


Figure 6.5. Education and associational membership (%; source: Flash EB 373 2013, and ISSP 2014)

Largest Gaps for Cause Groups and Professional Associations

Thus far, it is clear from the various data and from previous studies that civic participation is associated with education. However, these educational inequalities also vary with the different types of organizations (Van der Meer 2009). The aims of the organizations shown in Table 6.1 can have substantial and relevant impacts on the educational differences in organizational membership. The resources that are required to participate differ from association to association,¹⁸ and hence the educational gaps across the various types of association do so, as well. This is clearly visible in the ESS data that are displayed in Figures 6.6 and 6.7. By calculating the better educated: less educated ratio, we were able to determine the educational gap in membership for different types of civil society organizations in the six countries studied.

If we look at the aggregate pattern across the ten different organizations in Figure 6.6, we find the largest educational differences in membership for the political activist and interest organizations, such as environmental, humanitarian, and professional associations. The smallest educational gaps can be observed in social clubs, churches, labour unions, and sports clubs. With the exception of the unions, the latter are all non-political organizations. This means that the most activist political organizations in civil society—those actors who energetically try to influence the political agenda—are the domain of the well-educated.

Figure 6.7, compiled on the basis of a study by Dutch political scientist Tom van der Meer (2009: 116–17), also using the ESS 2002 data, shows a similar pattern in all six countries in our sample.¹⁹ Civil society I organizations, such

Table 6.2. Educational profile of volunteers

Percentage of individuals engaged in volunteering according to the highest education level attained		
Belgium	Denmark	France
<p><i>Flanders:</i> Primary education: men: 13.7%/women: 12.9% Secondary education: men: 22.6%/women: 15.1% High school: men: 25%/women: 22% University: men: 32.7%/women: 31%</p> <p><i>French Community:</i> Secondary education: 16% Technical and professional education: 11% High school: 29% University: 32%</p> <p><i>Source: European volunteer centre and Association of Voluntary Service Organisations 2004</i></p>	<p>Primary education: 25% Vocational education: 36% Short non-vocational education: 36% Medium length non-vocational education: 42% University: 45% <i>Source: Boje, Fridberg & Ibsen 2006: 58</i></p>	<p>Primary education: 34% Secondary education: 39% Tertiary education: 42% Section 1.01 <i>Source: France Bénévolat 2016: 9</i></p>
Germany	The Netherlands	United Kingdom
<p>Only limited information on education levels available in the National Survey.</p> <p>Low education level: 22% Medium education level: 32% High education level: 42%</p> <p><i>Source: Federal Ministry for Family, the Elderly, Women and Youth 2006</i></p>	<p>Primary education: 24% Preparatory vocational education: 36% Secondary education: 42% General and vocational secondary education 45% Tertiary/higher education: 54%</p> <p><i>Source: CBS 2008</i></p>	<p>Several surveys (National Survey of Volunteering 1997 and Citizenship Survey 2007–2008) report that those with higher educational qualifications were more likely to volunteer than those with fewer or no qualifications.</p> <p><i>Source: Study on Volunteering in the European Union 2010: 8.</i></p>

Sources: based on information from national reports on volunteering compiled from the different studies on http://ec.europa.eu/citizenship/europe-for-citizens-programme/studies/index_en.htm (information retrieved 1 July 2016). See national reports on this website for further information.²⁰

as voluntary and leisure organizations, are among the most equal organizations in terms of educational background characteristics. Although the well-educated may play tennis or hockey and the less well-educated handball or soccer, they all participate in these type of organizations. In most countries, much larger differences are seen amongst the membership of civil society II organizations, such as social movements, cause groups, and activist associations, and civil society III organizations, such as interest groups and professional associations. These organizations draw their members disproportionately from among the well-educated.

Diploma Democracy

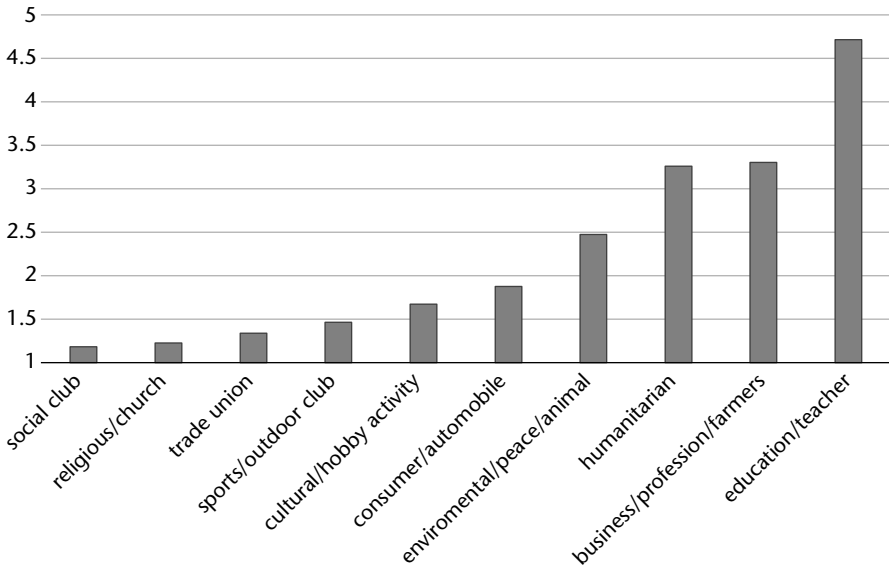


Figure 6.6. Education gaps membership associations (mean ratio higher-lower educated membership in the six countries, ESS 2002)

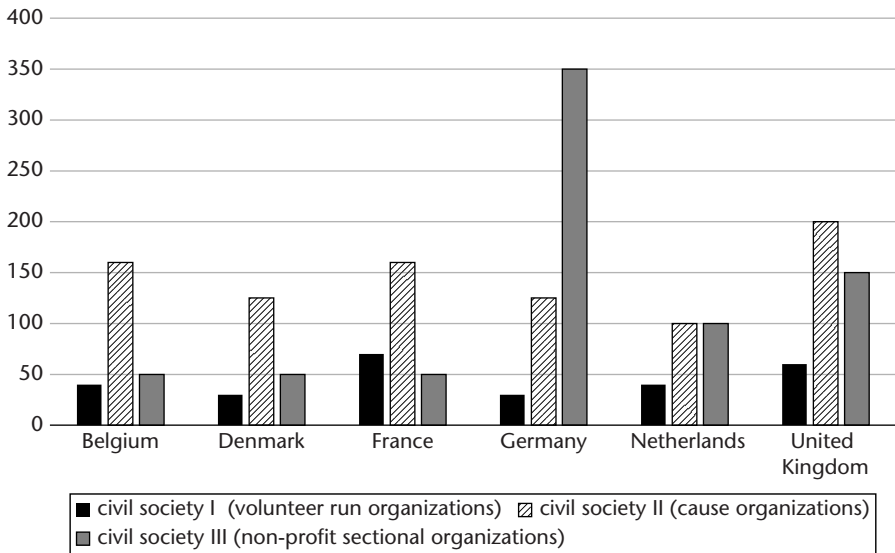


Figure 6.7. Educational differences in participation: type of civil society organization (% relative participation rates high educated–low educated, source: based on ESS 2002 and adapted from Van der Meer et al. 2009: 117)

The effects of the participatory revolution, the topic of Chapter 5, and the associational explosion, the topic of this chapter, run parallel. The rise of a wide range of new social movements and professionalized groups, and the emergence of new forms of participation, have had serious impacts on the levels and the nature of mobilization in civil society organizations. Whereas the traditional mass organizations, such as unions, churches, and mass parties attracted members from all social strata, the new social movements and single-issue organizations draw their members from the greatly expanded, university educated upper middle class.²¹

Transformation: From Participation to Professionalization

The rise of political meritocracy in civil society is not just a matter of an education gap in membership of civil society organizations. It also manifests itself through a transformation of the nature of civil society organizations themselves. Several factors have combined to bring this transformation about, such as the growth of institutional funding that reduces the reliance on individual membership, the professionalization of the policymaking process itself, and an increasingly technocratic approach to influencing policy outcomes.²² The arena in which civil society organizations operate is highly competitive and the need to secure adequate funding has led to processes of 'businessification' and 'professionalization'.²³

From Total Participation to Token Participation

The shift in membership from popularly rooted mass organizations to professionally managed advocacy groups in many cases also implies a shift in forms of participation. In the Netherlands, civic organizations estimate that passive members or donor members make up two-thirds of their membership, and that the relative size of this group has grown in recent decades at the expense of that of the group of active members and volunteers (De Hart 2005: 65). This process of increasing passivity is accompanied by a trend towards professionalization: two-thirds of organizations have seen an increase in the numbers of paid staff (De Hart 2005: 65).

Moreover, many single-issue advocacy groups are no longer membership groups in the traditional sense (Fiorina & Abrams 2009: 131). The public interest group sector has witnessed a development of large-scale memberless organizations that offer limited opportunities for citizen involvement (Maloney 2012). These groups have found that most citizens are content to be financial supporters, rather than active members and that offering such limited involvement is an efficient way to mobilize support. They have no

members, let alone local chapters, and operate solely through mailing lists, newsletters, and financial donations. 'Members are a non-lucrative distraction' as the American sociologist Theda Skocpol (2003: 134) put it.

From the 1970s on, civic groups watched as many of their less well-educated members gradually fell away. The wave of professionalization in the 1980s saw local volunteers being replaced by paid staff. Increased financial support of citizen interest groups by governmental organizations reduced the need for member contributions. After all, seeking and serving members becomes unnecessary when funding by governmental bodies makes it possible for interest groups to focus fully on professional activities. Why spend a great deal of organizational resources on grassroots membership? Consequentially, the members of these groups grew less connected, and those doing the lion's share of the outreach in the associations became less embedded in the organizations.

This transformation meant a shift from 'total', or 'limited', participation to 'token participation', and also a shift from 'from organizations with intensive mutual contacts between the members to organizations in which there are (virtually) no contacts at all' (De Hart 2005: 65). Civic engagement and grassroots political involvement is needed less and less in these types of voluntary organizations. Kay Schlozman and her colleagues (2015) show that in the US, organizations without members have become the predominant organizational form in terms of both numbers and spending. A similar trend is seen among organizations operating at the EU level: here, too, members are experienced more as a restraint than a resource.²⁴

The emergence of *astroturf* participation, in which action is sponsored by elite consultants working for powerful interest groups and corporations, represents a further step in the ongoing professionalization of organized interest politics (Maloney 2015b: 107–8). 'Astroturfing' refers to political action that appears to be grassroots and spontaneous, but in fact comes from an outside organization, such as a think tank, or consulting firm, that, as a marketable service, incentivize public activism.²⁵ A substantial number of transnational civil society organization are, as Peter Kotzian and Jens Steffek (2013: 56) indicate, 'creations of a very small number of international professionals, and at times even founded by international organizations themselves.' These non-grassroots organizations are using the cover of a citizen-based group to voice opinions and to gain access to the political agenda.²⁶

These transformations of associational life illustrate the need to update contemporary understandings of representation of citizens by civic organizations. Civic organizational membership has come to represent something more akin to 'affiliation' rather than to fully engaged 'participation' (Walker et al. 2011: 1321). The willingness of governments to extend participatory

democracy and to 'bring citizens in' by funding civic organizations has, as a perverse side effect, actually 'driven citizens out' (Greenwood 2007).

'Hired Guns': The Professionalization of Civil Society Organizations

Many of these interest groups no longer try to influence policy via the mobilization of large numbers of members and supporters, but through the deployment of expertise and technical knowledge.²⁷ They serve as a channel to provide specific expertise to government bodies from a variety of sectors. They are embedded in the detailed work of government, whether through changing the terms of the debate, through representative work on countless official advisory or expert committees, through the drafting of technical regulations, or through their increasing acceptance of official funding. In their open letter to the public, discussed at the start of this chapter, the five young consultants put it in the following way:

public affairs is much more than lobbying. We provide expertise to our clients, EU and national institutions, and other interested stakeholders. This expertise is based on a well-rounded understanding of the facts, and we believe that hearing these views helps politicians draft better legislation.

This politics of expertise means that civil society organizations write policy papers and sometimes play a central role in regulating and implementing policies.²⁸ They recruit highly qualified professionals, such as lawyers, engineers, and economists, and, as these 'hired guns' gain in power, the role of members and activists diminishes (Skocpol 2003). According to Heike Klüver (2012: 505), highly professionalised interest groups 'find it much easier to provide information to decision makers than interest groups that largely rely on untrained volunteers.'

Together with Sabine Saurugger, Klüver (2013) mapped interest group professionalization in the EU, drawing on a large new data set on organizational structures of interest groups. Figure 6.8 is based on their findings and shows the education level of interest group employees, for different types of interest groups. The vast majority of associations is characterized by a high level of staff education. About 62 per cent of all cause groups and 58 per cent of all sectional groups in their sample were found to have a high-average (MA) level of staff education. Similarly, 22 per cent of all the cause groups and 22 per cent of all the sectional groups could be classified as having, on average, a very high (PhD) level of staff education.

Klüver and Saurugger (2013: 17) found no systematic differences in staff education levels between cause and sectional groups, regardless of whether the interest groups lobbied for private, interests, such as those of the European

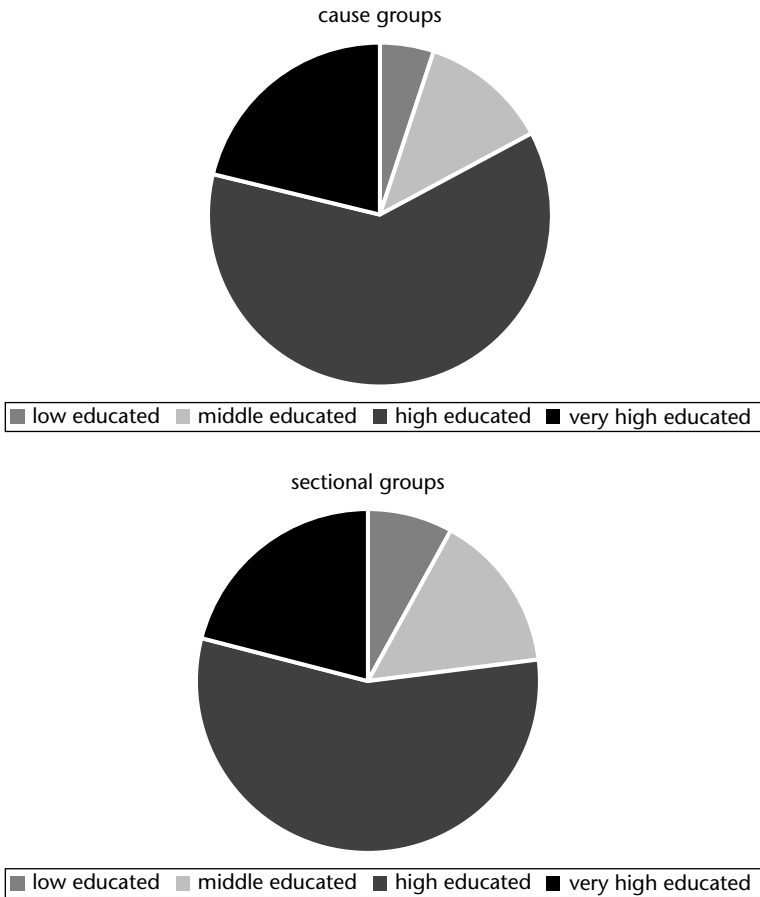


Figure 6.8. Education level staff EU-interest groups (%), source: based on data from Klüver & Saurugger 2013: 13)

automobile industry, or for a general cause, such as environmental protection or human rights. Similar professionalization patterns are observable, irrespective of interest group type.

From Activists to Communication Professionals

It is important to view this transformation of the third sector in the context of more fundamental developments that are underway in European societies. The expansion of education and the service sector, and a further professionalization of the modern welfare state since the 1960s has led to the emergence of a new category of professionals. This new class of 'knowledge workers' not

only provided the personnel to fill the positions created by the transformation of the welfare state, it also contributed to the rise of new social movements and the massive expansion of the modern civil society.²⁹ These new professionals have found employment in local government, engineering, the financial sector, architecture, law, and medicine (Hilton et al. 2013: 10). They are the 'social and cultural specialists', as Hanspeter Kriesi (1989) called them, the occupational segments among whom support for the new social movement, protest activities, and the other modes of unconventional participation was concentrated.³⁰

The key factor underlying this transformation was, again, the expansion of tertiary education. Matthew Hilton and his colleagues describe how these professionals:

were the sons and daughters who had often been the first within their family to receive a university education. . . . They were the higher-degree educated ecologists and environmental scientists who would gather in the environmental organizations. . . . They were . . . the engineers and development economists who would staff Oxfam and Christian Aid, and who would pass through the revolving doors of international institutions to spearhead the technocratic solutions to third-world development. They were what would be later termed 'expert citizens' rather than 'grass-roots activists'. (Hilton et al. 2013: 8–10)

This process continues in the twenty-first century. Two types of professionals are particularly on the ascent: lawyers and communication specialists. Sabine Saurugger (2009: 2) describes how the majority of European interest groups, working in areas as diverse as agriculture or electricity providers, recruit fewer and fewer grassroots personnel with a local background. Instead, communication and law professionals are recruited for these strategic positions: 'All staff members of COPA (Comité des organisations professionnelles agricoles de l'UE) responsible for lobbying the EU have a university degree. They have never worked for any of the national Farmer's Unions before, or had a career in the farming sector.' This replacement of local activists by lawyers and communication professionals can also be found in other policy sectors. For example, in the field of trade unions, this professionalization is called 'high level unionism', or the 'elite and expert unionism' (Saurugger 2012: 77). So far, the professionals have not systematically replaced the activists in all EU-level civil society organisations. According to Saurugger (2012: 77–8): 'in a number of groups—farmers, the European Women's Lobby, and the trade unions—activists still represent the majority amongst the elected representatives. It is in the secretariats that we see a professionalization of the association, with staff moving from association to association in order to pursue their career path.'

The Opening and Closing of Civil Society

Pools of Diploma Democracy

The 'associational explosion', the rise in number and influence of civil society organizations and interest groups since the 1970s, has transformed the meaning of civil society group activity and democratic citizenship. Initially, the social and political movements changed from 'largely class-based and closed camps to more open coalitions' (Evers and Laville 2004: 37). This meant an opening up of civil society for a new array of interests, causes, and concerns. Mass political parties, the unions, churches, and women's groups saw declining levels of participation, but new social movements, pressure groups, non-governmental organizations, and advocacy groups have dramatically expanded their numbers and membership since the early 1970s.

These new civic groups are heavily skewed towards well-educated citizens. They are run by highly educated professionals. They interact with university educated members of parliament, with professional policymakers, and academically trained public managers. And they recruit their members and acquire their financial donations almost exclusively from the well-educated strata of society. Despite the positive functions that are usually assigned to civil society, it seems equally clear that, even in the broadest definitions of participation, large sections of the population do not engage, or only passively, in contemporary civil society activity. Civic engagement tends to be sustained by a relatively small core of professionals and full-time activists, drawn disproportionately from those in society with higher levels of education. From this perspective, civil society organizations are, indeed, not the 'schools of democracy' they were proclaimed to be. And as 'pools of democracy', they tend to be rather narrow and closed off, since they contain a relatively small and confined sample of the citizenry—they are 'pools of diploma democracy'.

The next question is what these transitions in civil society imply for the functioning of modern democracies. The high level of educational attainment of these associational 'representatives' have made them less representative in mimetic terms. As Elmer Schattschneider (1960: 34–5) so eloquently put it: 'The flaw in the pluralist heaven is that the heavenly chorus sings with a strong upper-class accent.' This casts doubt on their capacity to speak in the name of 'their' constituencies. Civil society organizations are expected to convey issues and interests 'upwards' from citizens to political decision-makers, and political information 'downwards' from the political level to citizens. In recent years, various studies of political representation by interest groups have raised concerns about the extent to which representation of interests by these groups is unequal, and the extent to which groups fail to represent their members equally.³¹

In the case of the US, David Kimball and his colleagues (2012) found evidence that the lobbying agenda does not reflect the policy priorities of the public. They show that the types of issues that are most important to the public differ from the types of issues that lobbyists bring to the attention of government officials. Theda Skocpol (2002, 2004) goes even further, arguing that the shift from huge membership organizations to lean professional advocacy groups has pushed American society in the direction of an oligarchy.

The net effect of these changes in civil society in Western Europe may well be a similarly skewed and unbalanced system of agenda setting as in the US. As Beate Kohler-Koch and Christine Quittkat (2013: 15–16) point out for the EU level:

NGOs are prevented from serving as the citizens' transmission belt by structural reasons as well as by their own self-image. The many stages of the European multilevel system, the complexity of EU governance, and the necessity of professionalization create distance and favor the separate existence of an NGO elite fixated on Brussels. . . . Their mission and legitimacy are not based on a mandate but derived from a script written together with dedicated members.

The professionalization of civil society has had significant impacts on democratic politics. Understanding these effects is key for appreciating the rise of diploma democracies. We will return to this issue in Chapter 8.

Notes

1. Compare Salamon 2010; Fioramonti & Thümler 2013.
2. See Hooghe 2003; Van der Meer & Van Ingen 2009.
3. See Nie et al. 1996: 369; Van Ingen 2009.
4. This classification is based on: Kriesi 1996: 153; Hasenfeld & Gidron 2005; Van der Meer et al. 2009.
5. See <http://ccss.jhu.edu/>.
6. See Gray and Lowery 1996; Maloney 2015b.
7. If the widest definitions of the sector are employed such that all forms of associational life are included, the NCVO estimated there to be approximately 160,000 organizations all over Britain, ranging from the tiny, local, and informal to the huge, global, and highly organized NGOs. To obtain this estimate, data from a variety of sources was compiled together. Retrieved from: <https://data.ncvo.org.uk/a/almanac16/size-and-scope/> (28 April 2016).
8. The same NCVO survey found that less than 3 per cent of all civil society organizations could be classified as 'large' or 'major'. This small proportion of organizations, with an annual income of £1m or more, account for 80 percent of the sector's total income.

9. Organizations with an income of £100,000 or less make up 83 percent of the sector in terms of the number of charities, but account for less than five percent of the total income according to the 2016 NCVO survey.
10. Compare Berkhout and Lowery 2010: 449; 8–9; Mahoney 2008: 26–30; Maloney 2015a; 2015b; Lowery & Gray 2015.
11. The Transparency Register has been set up to answer core questions such as: what interests are being pursued, by whom and with what budgets. The system is operated jointly by the European Parliament and the Commission. Anybody who wants to lobby the European institutions must sign up to the EU Transparency Register. This is the only way to gain access to the European Commission's top officials (Commissioners, their cabinets and directors-general) but also to the European Parliament building.
12. Consulted 22 June 2016.
13. Compare Slaughter 2004; Johanssen & Lee 2014; Hall et al. 2014.
14. Greenpeace Annual Report 2014, p. 28–9, retrieved from: http://www.greenpeace.org/international/Global/international/publications/greenpeace/2015/ANNUAL_REPORT_2014.pdf (1 July 2016).
15. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/2015-global-financial-report/>, retrieved 1 July 2016.
16. Compare, amongst others, Dekker & Van den Broek 2005; Morales 2009: 42.
17. See Verba et al. 1995; Van Der Meer 2009: 112; Schlozman et al. 2012: 378.
18. See Verba et al. 1995; Van der Meer 2009: 113; Schlozman et al. 2012: 375–81.
19. A score of 0 means the groups are equally likely to participate. A positive score means that the higher educated group is more likely to participate (by that factor) than the less educated, whereas a negative score implies the opposite. The figure runs from –1 to infinitely positive. The less educated hardly participate compared to the well-educated, indicating maximal inequality (Van der Meer 2009: 116).
20. Comparative conclusions should be treated with caution: countries have used different surveys and different categorizations of educational attainment, different methodologies, and survey samples.
21. See also Kriesi 1993: 195, 260.
22. Compare Maloney 2012, 2015b; Saurugger 2012.
23. Compare Zald and McCarthy 1987; Jordan and Maloney 1997; Maloney 2012, 2015b.
24. See Saurugger 2009; Kohler Koch 2010.
25. See Howard 2006; Walker 2014.
26. Many movements and campaigns can be placed on a continuum between grassroots and astroturf. For example, the Brexit campaign incorporated elements of grassroots infrastructure in its reliance on the anger and discontentment of the participants. It also had elements of astroturf, namely the large extent to which it relied on support from political elites.
27. See Crenson & Ginsberg 2002; Saurugger 2012.
28. See Maloney 2012; Van Deth & Maloney 2012.
29. See Kriesi 1989, 1993: 23; Hilton et al. 2013: 54–79.
30. Compare Kriesi 1989, 1993: 27–43; Rootes 1995: 227; Bang 2005.
31. Compare Piewitt et al. 2010; Kohler-Koch 2010; Schlozman et al. 2012, 2015; Rodekamp 2013.

7

Political Elites as Educational Elites

Ed Miliband's Greatest Talent

In his first year as the leader of the British Labour Party, Ed Miliband was asked about his chosen talent if he were to appear on Britain's Got Talent. He answered that he used to be able to solve Rubik's Cube in ninety seconds. This reply earned him the reputation of being a geek, a reputation that contributed to his devastating loss of the 2015 parliamentary elections. His geeky reputation was not entirely undeserved. Ed Miliband grew up in the privileged milieu of North London intellectuals. His father was a Marxist professor in politics and his mother, also an academic, was a political activist.¹ He was a bookish child who gained A levels in mathematics and physics, and read Philosophy, Politics and Economics at Corpus Christi College in Oxford. He later went on to graduate from the London School of Economics, and he spent three semesters at Harvard University teaching economics and political theory. Shortly after his graduation from the LSE, he was appointed as a special adviser to Chancellor Gordon Brown. In 2005, at the age of thirty-five, he was elected into Parliament and soon served as junior minister in the Blair and Brown cabinets. In 2010 he won the leadership of the Labour Party, but he never quite managed to overcome the perception that he was nerdy, or even cartoonish in nature. The first image that comes up on Google when you type in 'Ed Miliband', is an unflattering picture of him awkwardly eating a bacon sandwich.

The rise and fall of Ed Miliband is exemplary for the transformation of the British Labour Party in which 'manual workers and trade union secretaries with low formal qualifications have been almost wholly replaced by graduates of public schools and universities' (Jun 2003: 173). This transformation of Labour can be observed throughout Western Europe. For most of the twentieth century, social democratic parties counted many less-educated citizens among their members and representatives. Nowadays, these parties are dominated by geeky professionals who have moved into politics straight out of university.

From Aristocracy to Meritocracy

When Daniel Bell, in the early 1970s, explored the rise of meritocracy in Western societies, he assumed that the realm of politics would not be affected: 'Only in politics, where positions may be achieved through the ability to recruit a following or through patronage, is the mobility ladder relatively open to those without formal credentials' (Bell 1972: 30–1). The past forty years have proven him wrong.

Contemporary political elites are educational elites. In twenty-first-century Western Europe, almost all incumbents in political office have very high formal credentials. Have a look at the 150 members of the Tweede Kamer, the Dutch House of Representatives, installed in September 2012. While twenty-two of the members had bachelor's degrees, no fewer than 115 members held at least a master's degree. A further eight members had studied at university or at a university of applied sciences, without ever having completed their studies—often because they had become too involved in politics. Only two members had lower educational qualifications. In other words, 145 out of 150 members, almost 97 per cent, had attended college or graduate school, and 91 per cent had formally acquired at least a college degree—the highest percentage since the introduction of universal suffrage in 1918. Low and medium educated citizens have almost completely disappeared from the Tweede Kamer. Similar figures apply to Members of Parliament in other advanced Western European democracies, as we will show in this chapter. Cabinets are even more tilted towards the well-educated. In the countries in our sample, with an occasional exception, the ministers are all extremely well educated.

This dominance of the well-educated in political office is a relatively modern phenomenon. During the nineteenth and a large part of the twentieth century, political elites were formed on the basis of class or property—ownership of land in agrarian societies, and capital in the industrial society. Often they were better educated than the average citizen—the upper classes in general had much better access to education—but this was not the prime source of their political power; that was based on status, land, or wealth.

In the information society, however, knowledge and information are the most important social and economic goods. Political power is increasingly concentrated not among the landed gentry, patricians, or manufacturers, but among the 'symbolic analysts', 'creative professionals', and all those other citizens with ample capacity to process information²—or to solve a Rubik's Cube in ninety seconds. Aristocracy, rule by the nobility, and plutocracy, rule by the wealthy, have given way to meritocracy, rule by the well-educated.

This chapter takes stock of the educational background of those citizens that are active at the highest level of the participation pyramid depicted in

Figure 5.1. This level concerns those who hold political positions—the members of the legislative and executive branches. We focus on the national level; on members of the lower houses of parliament and on cabinet members. Given the increasing importance of EU governance, we will also look at the members of the European Parliament and the members of the EU Commission.

First, we will document to what extent these political elites in Western European democracies have become educational elites. A second aim is to analyse whether this is a sign of an emerging political meritocracy. Thirdly, we explore why educational background is important in the selection of members of the legislative and executive branches. Why have university graduates become so dominant? What are the mechanisms that produced this bias?

As in the previous chapters, we limit our analyses to Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, the Netherlands, and the UK. We also look at the supranational level, the EU. The evidence on the educational profiles of MPs and the cabinet ministers is drawn from different primary and secondary sources, which are summarized in the Appendix. Our practice throughout was to use the most recent available data that allow us to provide an indication of the educational backgrounds for legislatives and executives in the six different countries and the EU, after the most recent election, and to compare these with previous periods. We partly relied on data collected by colleague researchers working on comparable projects.

The Legislative Branch: Parliamentary U-Curves

The Long-Term Trend: Parliamentary U-Curves

Most Western European countries have had parliaments since at least the mid-nineteenth century. The proportion of Members of Parliament with a university education in this parliamentary era shows a U-shaped trend. This U-curve pattern, which holds for nearly all six countries, is also reported by the French political scientists Daniel Gaxie and Laurent Godmer (2007: 111–13). This can be seen from Figure 7.1, which in large part is based on their data. The proportion of university graduates among members of Parliament was very high during the second half of the nineteenth century. However, at the beginning of the twentieth century, less educated social groups started entering the various parliaments due to the extension of suffrage and the rise of new political parties, particularly socialist and communist parties (Gaxie & Godmer 2007: 111). During the first half of the twentieth century, the proportion of deputies with university degrees decreased substantially in most countries. After World War I, the number of MPs with higher educational qualifications increased, first gradually and then sharply from the seventies

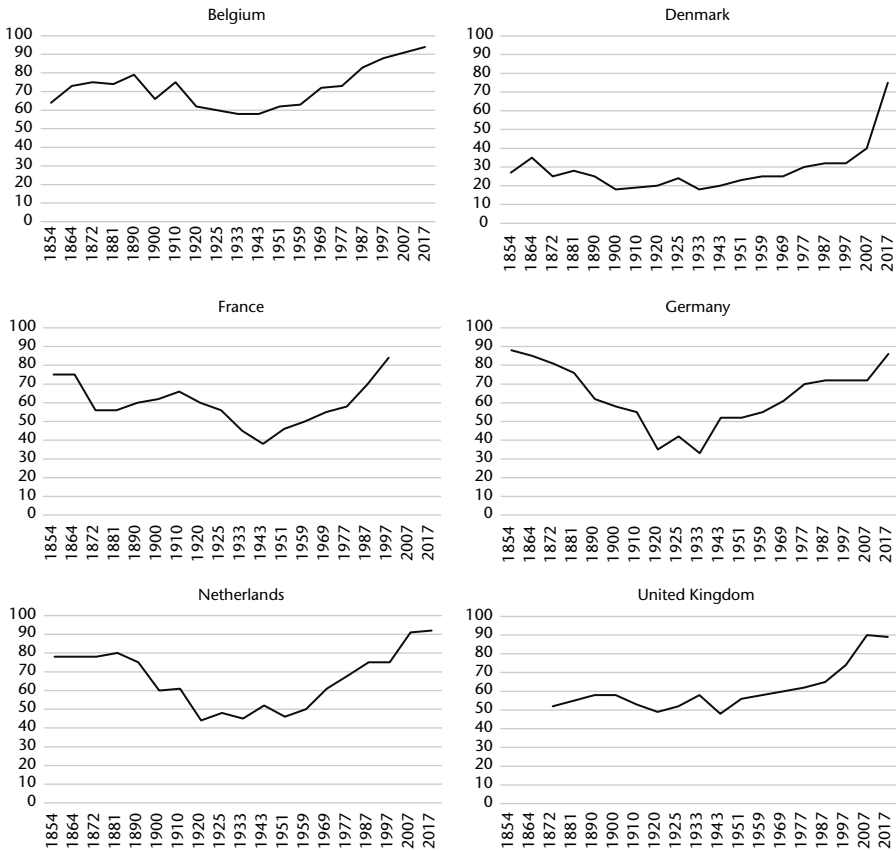


Figure 7.1. MPs with higher education since 1854 (%; source: Gaxie & Godmer 2007: 112; Belgium data: Verleden & Heyneman; own data)

onwards. In most countries, the social democratic parties in particular have seen rapid increases in recent decades in the number of MPs with university degrees.

In Belgium, at the end of the nineteenth century, the percentage of members of the federal Parliament with a university degree (WO) reached a peak of 74 per cent (Verleden 2014: 63). After the socialists entered Parliament, this percentage started to drop, a process that accelerated after the electoral reforms of 1919. The percentage of university graduates was at its lowest in 1958, when this stood at 40 per cent. From the sixties onwards it started to rise, reaching between 70 and 80 per cent in the twenty-first century (Verleden 2014: 63). Of the members of Parliament that sat after the elections of 2010, 94 per cent had graduated at an institute of higher education (Verleden 2014: 66).

Denmark is the only exception to this general U-curve pattern. In Denmark, no U-curve is seen during the twentieth century. Instead, the trend shows a slowly upwardly tilting, rather flat line. The Nordic countries traditionally have had far fewer members of Parliament with university degrees than other European countries.³ In Denmark, a majority of the members of the Folketinget had only a basic education well into the twentieth century (Gaxie & Godmer 2007: 110). Conversely, the number of well-educated MPs has always been relatively low during most of the past century (Gaxie & Godmer 2007: 112). However, in the past decade, the situation in Denmark has converged rapidly with the other countries in our sample. After the 2011 elections, the well-educated made up 74.9 per cent of the Folketinget (Folketinget 2012: 3).

In France, up to 75 per cent of the French members of Parliament had a university degree in the second half of the nineteenth century. After the extension of suffrage, this percentage gradually declined, dropping to less than 40 per cent after World War II (Gaxie & Godmer 2007: 111; Cotta & Best 2000: 497). This was largely due to the growth of the socialist and communist parties, both of which had many MPs with only a basic or medium level of educational attainment. In the 1950s, this trend started to reverse. In 1958, half of the members of the Assemblée nationale held graduate degrees; in 1968 this had climbed to about two-thirds, and in 2002 had reached 82 per cent (Costa & Kerrouche 2009: 333). In 2002, many of the French representatives had been educated at either Sciences Po (14.5 per cent), the Ecole nationale d'administration (ENA, 6 per cent), or at one of the other *Grandes écoles* (4.5 per cent). Another 14.5 per cent also held PhDs (Costa & Kerrouche 2009: 333).

In Germany, the familiar U-curve is once again in evidence. In the nineteenth century, over 80 per cent of the members of the Reichstag had graduated from university. This percentage gradually declined as suffrage expanded. The lowest numbers of university graduates, between 30 and 40 per cent, occurred in the Weimar era, when the Reichstag had large numbers of less educated representatives from Christian-democratic, social-democratic, communist, and national-socialist parties. For example, between 1920 and 1949, the majority of SPD deputies (between 50 and 58 per cent) and a substantial part of the Christian Democratic deputies (between 20 and 34 per cent) had only elementary education (Gaxie & Godmer 2007: 117–18). After World War II, the percentage of university graduates in these parties rose steeply (Anderson 1993: 6) and now, in the twenty-first century, the less educated have all but disappeared from the Bundestag. In the 2013 Bundestag, 543 (86.1 per cent) of the 598 MPs had attended an institute of higher education—of whom 521 (82.6 per cent) actually had graduated.⁴ Only ten

members (1.6 per cent) had *Hauptschule* as their highest level of educational attainment and qualified as less educated, a number that was the lowest in the post-World War II era.

The same pattern can be observed in the Netherlands. In the nineteenth century, when the nobility and the patrician class dominated Parliament, some 75 to 80 per cent of the MPs in the Netherlands had a university degree (Van den Berg 1983; Secker 1991). As suffrage was expanded, this percentage declined substantially. In the decades after 1918, the year in which universal suffrage was introduced, the percentage of university graduates among members of the Tweede Kamer averaged between 40 and 50 per cent. It was not until the late fifties that this percentage started to rise, and by the late sixties, some two-thirds of the members of Parliament were university graduates (Secker 2000: 292; Cotta & Best 2000: 514–16). In the twenty-first century, we see that over 90 per cent of all members of Parliament have college or graduate qualifications. There are virtually no MPs with only an elementary education (Bovens & Wille 2016).

In the UK, large differences can be traced in educational background in the House of Commons between MPs of the Conservative and Labour Parties during much of the twentieth century (see Figure 7.2). The Conservatives have always been rather well educated—indeed, for much of the past century the number of university educated Tory MPs varied between 50 and 70 per cent. Labour MPs traditionally were far less well educated. Before World War II, the proportion of university graduates among Labour MP’s was under 20 per cent.



Figure 7.2. University-educated MPs, United Kingdom 1906–2015 (%), source: Butler and Butler 2011; Sutton Trust 2015)

After World War II, this percentage rose steadily, reaching 87 per cent in 2015 (Sutton Trust 2015). On the Conservative side, this percentage grew from an average of two-thirds in the period 1945–1974 to 91 per cent in 2015. After the 2015 elections, nine out of ten MPs were well educated (Sutton Trust 2015), the highest percentage ever.

British MPs have become much better educated in the past eighty years. However, in one respect, they have become less of an educational elite. Over the course of the past decades, the proportion of members graduating from Oxbridge has been gradually shrinking. In 1979, 36 per cent of the MPs elected from the three main parties had attended Oxford or Cambridge (McGuinness 2010: 7), whereas after the 2015 election, only 26 per cent of all MPs had done so (Sutton Trust 2015: 3).

The new kid on the block is the European Parliament, which has been directly elected by EU voters every five years since 1979. It will not come as a surprise that a substantial majority of the Members of European Parliament (MEPs) has academic qualifications (see Figure 7.3). A team of French researchers (Beauvallet-Haddad et al. 2016: 113) concludes, based on an analysis of the biographies of all Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) serving in the sixth (2004–2009), seventh (2009–2014), and eighth term (since 2014), that

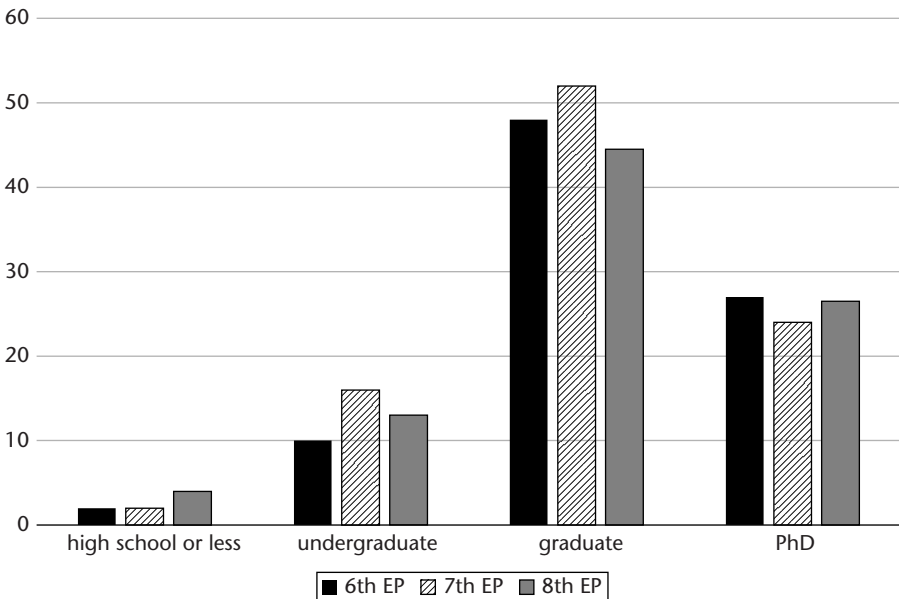


Figure 7.3. Education of members of the European Parliament 2004–2014 (% , source: Beauvallet-Haddad et al. 2016: 115)

more than eight in ten MEPs are higher education graduates. What is striking is the very high percentage of PhDs—no less than 26.5 per cent of the MEPs has a doctorate degree.

The Executive Branch: An Elitist Tradition

We do not have data that go back to the nineteenth century on the education qualifications of ministers for all the countries in our sample. However, the data that are available show that the post-World War II European executive has always been better educated than the legislative. This can be observed from Figure 7.4, which provides some data on Western European cabinet ministers, from the post-war period until 1984 and in the 2010s. In the post-war decades, the percentage of university graduates among cabinet ministers varied between 65 per cent in Denmark, to 90 per cent in the Netherlands. This is far higher than the percentage for Members of Parliament during those decades. However, particularly in countries with a high proportion of ministers from socialist or social-democratic parties, citizens with primary or secondary qualifications still stood a chance of becoming a cabinet minister. In most Western European countries, the number of university graduates among the ministers increased substantially after 1984. The ministers in

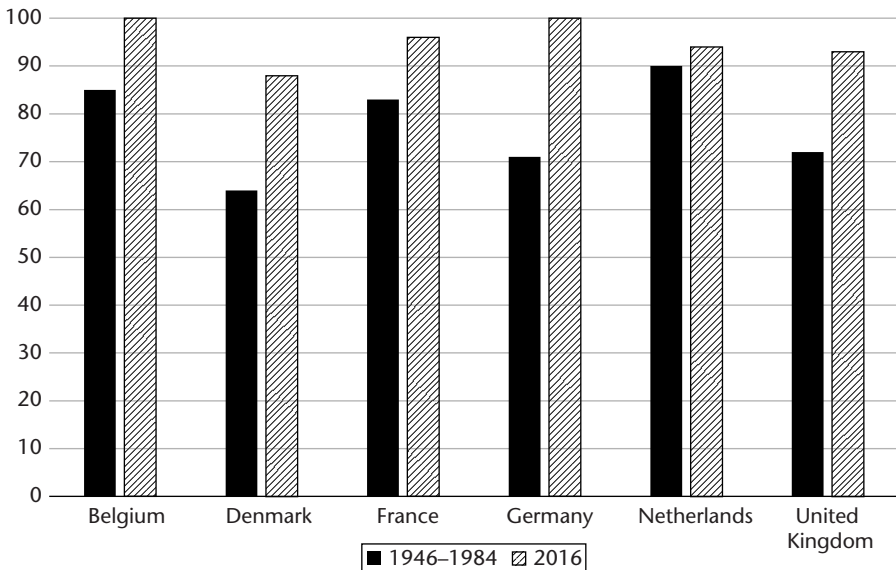


Figure 7.4. University-educated cabinet ministers 1946–1984 and 2016 (%), source: Thiebault 1991: 26; own data)⁵

most contemporary cabinets in the countries in our sample, with an occasional exception, are all (very) well educated.

In Belgium, about 85 per cent of the Belgian federal cabinet ministers in the period 1948–1984 were university graduates (Thiebault 1991: 25–6). Later, during a period that started with the Verhofstadt-cabinets in 1999 until 2014, this percentage rose to 95 per cent.⁶ Of the 126 cabinet ministers serving during this period, more than 83 per cent had a master's degree as the highest level of educational attainment, and another 12 per cent held a PhD. For example, all sixteen ministers of the Belgian federal cabinet-Di Rupo, installed in December 2011, had graduate diplomas (*licentiaat*). Several ministers had completed two studies, and four held the equivalent of a PhD degree. Eight had worked at a university before embarking on a political career and two were university professors when they entered the cabinet.

In Denmark, in the first decades after World War II, about two-thirds of the cabinet members had a university degree—again, the lowest percentage in our sample. However, over the past ten years, the level of highest education qualification achieved by the members of the Danish cabinets, too, has risen. For example, almost all the ministers in the second Rasmussen cabinet, installed in June 2015, have at least a bachelor's degree from a teaching college, a business school or a university. Of the nineteen ministers, nine have an master's degree, and one also has a PhD. Only one minister—Troels Lund Poulsen, the minister for Business—did not go to college after finishing secondary school. On the other hand, only one minister worked as an academic—briefly—before entering politics.⁷

In France, the government is overwhelmingly populated by university graduates. According to figures from Valentin Behr and Sébastien Michon (2012: 5–6), over 90 per cent of the members of the French government in the period between 1986 and 2012 held university degrees (compared to 80 per cent between 1959 and 1984).⁸ Many were graduates of the prestigious *Grandes écoles*, in particular Sciences Po and/or the ENA. Between 1986 and 2012, 36 per cent of the members of government had graduated from these top schools, versus 20 per cent in the period from 1959 to 1984. However, Behr and Michon (2013: 335–6) also reported that the percentage of graduates from the most prominent *Grandes écoles* (ENA, ENS, Polytechnique, ENFOM) was dwindling, having declined from around 50 per cent in the 1990s to a mere 18 per cent in more recent cabinets. Since 2007, in the cabinets of Fillon (2007–2012) and Ayrault (2012–2014), the number of ENA-graduates in particular has dropped significantly. This trend is related to the smaller share of higher civil servants in French government.

As in the other countries, the members of the German cabinet tend to be even better educated than the average MP. Between 1949 and 2012, 81.4 per cent of all the 194 ministers that served in the Federal cabinets had

a university degree (Scharfenkamp 2013: 8). In the first decade of the twenty-first century, the German cabinet members had a very high academic profile, even compared to the other cabinets in our sample. For example, of the twenty-one ministers that served in the Merkel-II (2009–2013) cabinet, all had graduate diplomas, with the exception of Dirk Niebel who had a bachelor's degree in Administration and Ilse Aigner, who had a professional degree in electrical engineering. No fewer than fourteen ministers had PhD degrees and seven had worked at a university, including Chancellor Angela Merkel, before embarking on a political career.⁹ Quite significantly, several ministers were accused of having plagiarized their doctoral dissertations, and two ministers—Karl-Theodor Zu Guttenberg and Annette Schavan—were forced to resign for this reason. The Merkel-III cabinet, installed in 2013, boasted similarly high academic qualifications. Fourteen out of fifteen ministers had the equivalent of a master's degree, nine had a PhD degree, seven had worked at a university, and two were university professors before entering politics. Johanna Wanka, who served as the Minister of Education in both cabinets, was a rector before she became a minister. The contemporary German cabinets are by far the most learned cabinets in Western Europe.

Ministers in the Netherlands have always been extraordinarily well educated compared to the rest of the population. Although a university education had always been an important asset for a career as a political executive, after World War II, a graduate diploma developed into a crucial credential for anyone seeking political office. In the decades since 1940, at least 82 per cent of all ministers have had a graduate diploma. Between 93 and 97 per cent of the ministers in the Dutch cabinet belong to the group of the well-educated.¹⁰

With regard to the British cabinet members, three patterns can be observed between 1895 and 2010.¹¹ First, once again, an U-curve can be seen over time. In the late nineteenth century the cabinets were dominated by Conservative graduates from the universities of Oxford and Cambridge. Between the twenties and the late fifties, the number of university graduates dropped considerably and varied between 30 and 50 per cent. From the late fifties onwards, the number of university graduates rose steadily; since the nineties there have only been one or two cabinet members who did not have a university education. Secondly, as was to be expected given the figures for Members of Parliament, there are quite large differences between Conservative and Labour administrations. Throughout most of the twentieth century, Labour cabinets, on average, boasted fewer university graduates than Conservative cabinets. This ended with the Blair cabinets. Nowadays, Labour ministers are as highly educated as Tory ministers. Thirdly, the members of cabinets are, on average, more highly educated than the backbenchers in Parliament. Also, the percentage of Oxbridge graduates is much higher among cabinet members than

among Members of Parliament. In the Cameron cabinets, for example, 69 per cent of the ministers serving in the first cabinet and 50 per cent in the second cabinet had graduated from Oxford or Cambridge. And with the exception of Gordon Brown, every university-educated British Prime Minister since 1937 has studied at Oxford (Sutton Trust 2015).

The EU executive is no exception to this general pattern of very learned ministers. The great majority of commissioners are highly educated and enjoy the benefits of a university education—often abroad. In the early years (1952–1995) of the European Commission, 83 per cent of the commissioners had a university education (MacMullen 2000: 43)—a percentage that has increased even further in recent commissions. For example, all twenty-eight commissioners in the Juncker Commission, which took office in 2014, have a university education, and at least four commissioners have a PhD degree. Only one official, agriculture commissioner Phil Hogan from Ireland, has an undergraduate degree (BA).¹²

The Emergence of a Political Meritocracy

From Upper Class to Middle Class

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, therefore, a very substantial majority of the Members of Parliament and almost all the cabinet ministers in Western Europe were university graduates. To what extent can this be seen as a mark of an emerging political meritocracy? To answer this question, a more extensive analysis of the relationship between social origins, higher education and political offices is required.

In the nineteenth century, higher education was accessible only to a very select group, and education level was simply another indicator of social status.¹³ While access to education was dependent on social status, the selection of a well-educated executive was tantamount to selecting ministers from the upper social strata. This changed in the second half of the twentieth century, as illustrated by Figure 7.5, which shows the social origins of university educated cabinet ministers in the Netherlands.

The diagram shows that, at first, university-educated ministers were mainly drawn from the upper classes. Of all the university-educated ministers in office in the period 1848–1888, 88 per cent came from an upper-class background; just 4 per cent had a middle-class background. In the period after World War II, this had shifted considerably: half of the ministers with an academic education originated from a middle-class background; half came from an upper-class background—highly educated ministers from lower-class backgrounds were, and still are, uncommon. The strong increase in

Diploma Democracy

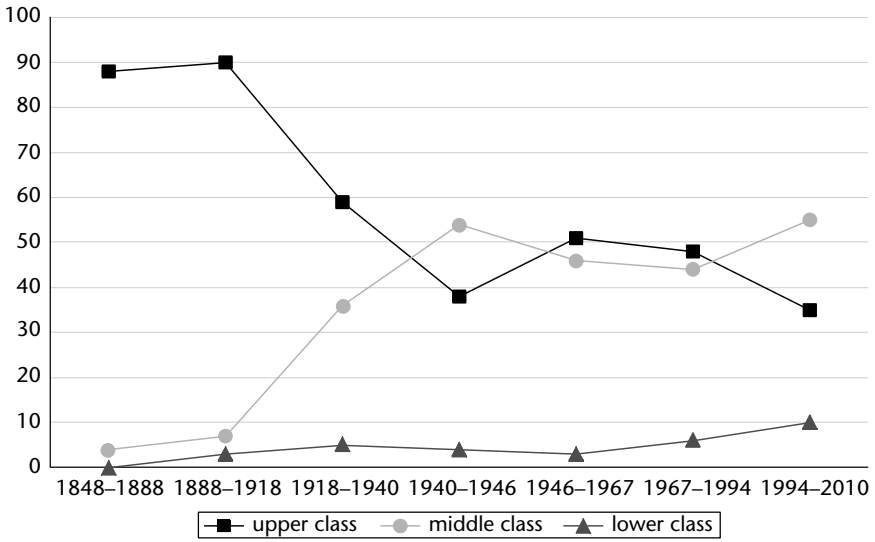


Figure 7.5. Social background of university-educated ministers in the Netherlands 1848–2010 (%; source: Secker 1991: 94; own data)

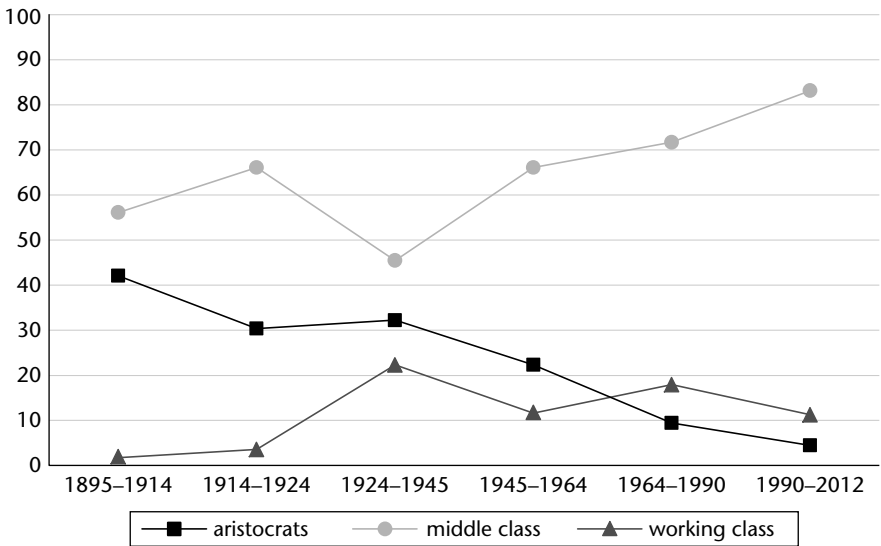


Figure 7.6. Social composition of British cabinets 1895–2010 (%; source: Butler & Butler 2011)

university-educated ministers in the period after 1940 is due to an increase in ministers from a middle-class background.

Similar trends are evident in the UK. According to Kavenagh and Richards (2003: 175), political leadership in Britain was traditionally ‘exercised by men of high birth and breeding’. However, due to universal suffrage, organized mass political parties, and increasing professionalization of political life, the political power of the aristocracy slowly eroded. As a result, ‘there has been a gradual movement from prestige to meritocracy in recruitment to the political elite’. Figure 7.6 shows how, since World War II, aristocrat ministers have gradually disappeared from the cabinet—as have ministers from working-class backgrounds.

From Ascription to Achievement

Figure 7.7 helps to clarify the transformation of a political aristocracy into an educational meritocracy. It is the political equivalent of the OED triangle which we saw in Chapter 2. Arrow (a) represents the impact of social origins on educational opportunities. Arrow (b) represents the impact of educational achievement on access to elite posts. Thus, the indirect effect of social origins on ministerial recruitment is the product of (a) and (b), and this decreased in the period 1888–1940. Arrow (c) represents the direct effect of social origins on the recruitment of ministers. If this effect is strong, then the recruitment for minister posts is biased towards members of upper classes, even if they lack educational attainment. For example: in the Netherlands, the percentage of ministers from upper class backgrounds without a graduate degree was 64 per cent in the period 1848–1888. This percentage rose to 77 per cent in the period 1888–1918 (Secker 1991: 94), but fifty years later, in the period 1967–94, had fallen to 0 per cent.

The pattern of ministerial recruitment changed because the increasing accessibility of higher education diversified the social composition of the

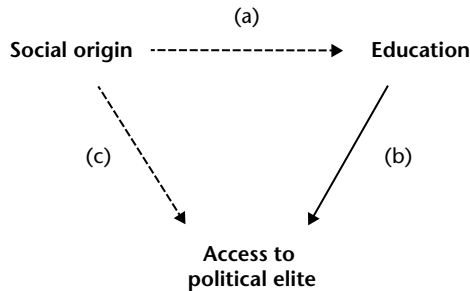


Figure 7.7. Social origins, education, and recruitment of political elites (source: figure adapted from Aberbach et al. 1981: 57)

pool of university graduates, thus weakening the direct effect of social origin on education. The greater accessibility of universities made tertiary education less socially exclusive, and thus significantly enlarged the pool of university-educated candidates available for political careers.¹⁴ *Achievement* became more significant for recruitment to the political elite than *ascription*.

Education has become a dominant sorting mechanism in determining access to the political elite. Nowadays, graduates from middle-class backgrounds have far more opportunity for advancement in the political hierarchy than aristocrats without a graduate degree. In the Dutch cabinets, for example, ministers are disproportionately drawn from the well-educated segment of the population; but when the professions of the fathers of the ministers are considered, the social origins of the current Dutch political executive appear to be predominantly middle class. Among the fathers of the ministers in the second Rutte cabinet, for example, we find a sales representative, several civil servants, a solicitor, a banker, a teacher, a wholesaler in paper, a small publisher, a consultant, and a milkman. Similarly, among the fathers of the very well-educated ministers in the Belgian Di Rupo government, we find several professional politicians, a farmer, a teacher, a grain merchant, a salesman, and a miner. Di Rupo himself was the son of an immigrant worker, and three of his siblings were placed in an orphanage after the early death of his father.

Among parliamentarians, we see similar mechanisms at work. The data show a marked decline in the representation of the nobility, and this group has now become non-existent or negligible in most European parliaments (Rush 2007: 31). The post-war accessibility of tertiary education, which we described in Chapter 2, contributed to an *opening up* of the parliamentary profession to a rapidly increasing number of graduates (Gaxie & Godmer 2007: 125). Opportunity structures widened, especially in the second half of the twentieth century. This made it easier for political party members from the (lower) middle-class sections of the population to attain tertiary education, in readiness for a parliamentary career. As a result, a fast-growing number of would-be parliamentarians or political leaders held university degrees and were ready to compete within their political parties, whereas in previous periods their middle-class origins would have prevented them from entering either university or parliamentary positions. At the same time, this trend also contributed to the *closing* of the political profession. An academic degree became a prerequisite for such a career (Gaxie & Godmer 2007: 129).

From Political Amateurs to Professional Politicians

The rise of political meritocracy has gone hand in hand with a long-term trend of political *professionalization*. This can be observed at the level of the individual

politician, the political party, the political institutions, and the political system (Borchert 2003: 8–10).

The period from 1900 up to World War II can be characterized as a period of formation and consolidation of political parties everywhere in European democracies. This period saw the rise of a new type of MP: the professional politician (Fiers & Secker 2007: 141). As MPs steadily acquired more duties, it became increasingly difficult to combine parliamentary activities with any other occupation. As a result, more and more MPs in Europe became paid party politicians. They received a salary comparable to the senior civil service (Fiers & Secker 2007: 158). Parliamentarians became what Max Weber (1919) called *Berufspolitiker*, professionals who effectively live *for* and *off* politics.

This professionalization of politicians would not have been possible without the evolution of political parties (Fiers & Secker 2007: 154). With the emergence and success of the *mass party*, driven by its appeal to specific swathes of the electorate, it was crucial for parties to have influential representatives in key positions of the state system (Fiers & Secker 2007: 154). In the period 1920–1960, the new mass political parties and interest groups provided the channels through which citizens from the lower and middle classes could emerge as pivotal political figures (Cotta & Best 2000: 516). They offered aspiring ministers a functional substitute for the prestige, skills, and relationships previously derived from social status and high state office. As they developed in the direction of *catch-all parties*, with more openness to a wider electorate, the ties to trade unions and predefined sectors in society became looser; and this brought a stabilization in the recruitment of party officials. Electoral strategies became more competitive and the profile of the candidates became important. With the transformation into *cartel parties*, political parties became an integral part of the state itself, helped by the allocation of state subsidies (Koole 1992; Katz and Mair 1995, 2009). Politics was becoming more and more a profession in itself, offering opportunities for a more prolonged career in the party. Party functionaries had a real chance to climb the ladder in politics.

This process of professionalization is also seen at the level of the political institutions and the political system, a development that is closely tied to the rapid increase in the size and the complexity of the public sector in the twentieth century. The public sector has become multi-layered, as a result of the expansion of the European Union and the increasing importance of regional and urban governance. As was described in Chapter 6, the number of public institutions has grown, due to the steep rise in the number of agencies, regulatory authorities, and bodies of oversight. A vast number of lobby groups, think tanks, and public affairs consultants make a living by mediating between private interests and political institutions. This has made the work of political officials more demanding. They have to negotiate

between various levels of governance, navigate through complex divisions of power, and deal with the very professional and suave representatives of special interests. Career politicians and candidates with professional expertise in the public sector at large have a competitive advantage in dealing with these challenges, compared with those who have other occupational backgrounds (Borchert & Stolz 2002: 23). The best preparation for high political offices is to have 'on-the-job occupational training' (Borchert & Stolz 2002: 24).

From Outsider Recruitment to Insider Recruitment

This professionalization of politics also has had its effects on the recruitment patterns of the political elites. Research on pathways to politics, conducted by Catherine Durose from Birmingham University and a team of colleagues, commissioned by the British Equality and Human Rights Commission, has provided insights into how the political recruitment patterns have changed during the past half century (Durose et al. 2011; 2013). These researchers describe how new, professional pathways into politics have emerged in the past decades. Although their analyses only concern the UK, very similar recruitment patterns can be observed in the other countries in our sample.

During much of the twentieth century, local parties and local (elective) offices served in most countries as a training ground and assessment centre for those aspiring to 'higher political office' (Borchert 2011). In France, the vast majority of parliamentarians began their political careers in the local arena before being promoted to the national stage.¹⁵ Several positions, such as that of mayor or municipal officer, have always been compatible with holding a seat in Parliament. In Germany, local politics functioned as the recruitment base for federal and state legislators, with both party office and public office serving as points of access (Borchert & Stolz 2011). In the UK, too, these pathways have traditionally been facilitated through long-standing involvement within a political party at the local level, for example as an activist, a party agent or councillor (Durose et al. 2013). For many, and particularly older, established Tory politicians, political activism started at a young age, in some cases encouraged by their parents' involvement in politics. In the case of the Labour Party, it often started with involvement in a local trade union.

These traditional pathways provided less-educated aspiring politicians with 'on the job' training in political skills and offered them relevant work experience. As we saw, this was particularly the case for the Western European Christian and social-democratic parties. Mass political parties, unions, and fraternities had many active members with little formal education to whom they provided courses and trainings, as well as hands-on experience in discussing, lobbying, negotiating, and running a meeting.

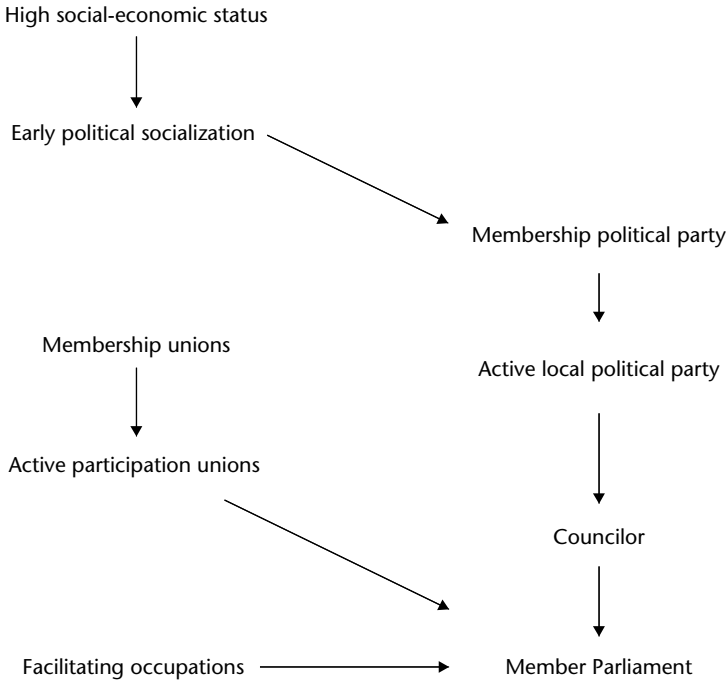


Figure 7.8. Traditional pathways to politics (based on: Durose et al. 2013: 252)

Another traditional, somewhat more professional, career path that can be distinguished in political recruitment, is through paid employment in particular occupations. These ‘politics facilitating’ occupations, such as teaching, journalism, or the civil service, generate specific skills that can be usefully transferred into politics, such as good verbal communication, the ability to present a written argument, scrutiny, and investigation. Careers in these occupations provided ‘brokerage’ (Norris and Lovenduski 1997) for a political career. They offered opportunities, particularly for medium-educated citizens, to acquire relevant political skills and access to the political elites. These more ‘traditional’ pathways into national politics are pictured in Figure 7.8, which we have adapted from Durose and her colleagues (2013).

Catherine Durose and her colleagues describe how in recent years the former activists and those with ‘politics-facilitating’ professions have been side-lined and replaced with ‘professional politicians’. This is visible in the declining number of politicians from the trade union movement and the teaching professions. In contrast, the ‘professional politician’ route into national politics is becoming progressively the norm.

Along this new pathway, aspiring politicians first go to university, during which they may get involved in some form of activism. This is then followed

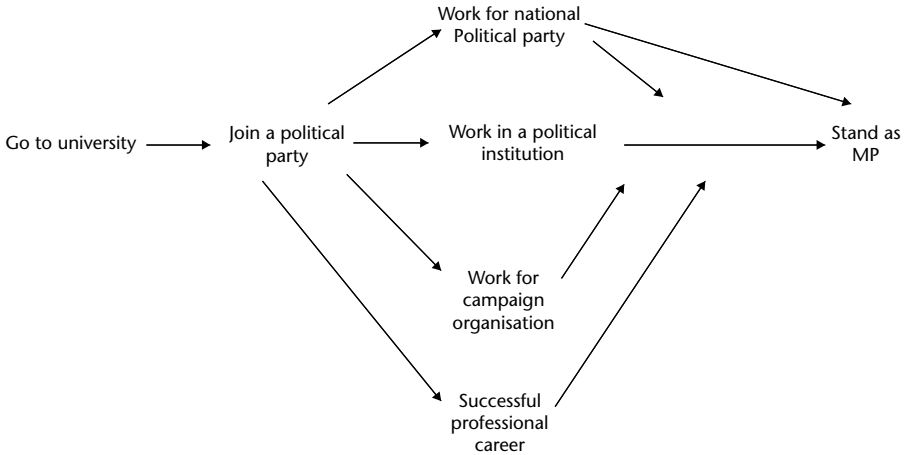


Figure 7.9. New professionalized pathway to politics (source: Durose et al. 2013: 259)

by working in a para-political occupation, for example as an aide to an MP or to a parliamentary group, as a special advisor or political assistant to a minister, or by working at party headquarters, for a think tank or policy body, a lobby group, media organization, or within an international political organization. Specialization in these jobs polishes political, communication, and networking skills. Figure 7.9 shows these more professionalized venues into politics.

Ed Miliband’s rise to political prominence in the Labour Party is a prime example of this new pathway. As a teenager, he worked as an intern to MP and family friend Tony Benn. Shortly after he graduated from Oxford, he became a policy adviser and speech writer for Labour’s Shadow Treasury team. After he obtained his master’s from the LSE, he was appointed as a special adviser to Chancellor Gordon Brown. His antagonist, David Cameron, followed a very similar path. After he graduated from Brasenose College in Oxford, Cameron’s first job was at the Conservative Research Department, which is part of the Tory Party Headquarters. After five years of working behind the scenes, he, too, became a special adviser, first to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Norman Lamont, and later to Home Secretary Michael Howard.

In France and Belgium, this professional career path often runs through a *ministerial antechamber*. The number of members of the ministerial antechambers varies, but, on average, there are 300 official members in France (Dogan 2003: 55). In Belgium, it has been estimated that there are twenty-eight advisers for each minister (Pelgrims and Brans 2006: 16). The passage through these ministerial antechambers, *cabinets* as they are called in France and Belgium, is nowadays considered the royal road to high public office. University graduates enter these political advisory positions after they have finished their university education, with the clear intention of leaving them a few years

later, hoping for a promotion in the state hierarchy, in a large public corporation, or a public institution (Dogan 2003).

The rise of this new pathway to politics is clearly visible in the changing background of MPs. In Belgium, for example, the percentage of MPs who had previously worked for a union has gradually declined, from about 20 per cent in the 1960s to almost zero in the past decade. However, the percentage of MPs who had previously worked as an aide in parliament or in a ministerial cabinet rose steeply, from about 10 per cent in the early 1970s to about 35 per cent in 2010 (Verleden 2014: 64–5). Of the 182 members who sat in the 2010–2014 Belgian federal Parliament, only three had worked for a union, whereas fifty-eight had worked in a ministerial cabinet and twenty-one had previously worked as an assistant to an MP or a party (Verleden 2014: 66). When candidates are selected for eligible positions, ‘party staff members or previous personal staff of ministers have a competitive advantage over other occupational categories’ (Put & Maddens 2013: 59). Likewise, in Germany, the politicized bureaucracy, offers a broad array of these professional stepping stones for aspiring politicians (Borchert 2011).

In the UK, the number of MPs who were politicians or political organizers before coming to Westminster rose from 3 per cent in 1979 to 14 per cent in 2010 (McGuinness 2010: 6). Moreover, Peter Allen (2013) found that MPs with pre-parliamentary experience in Westminster reach higher offices in Parliament and in the cabinet and do so at a faster pace than MPs who followed the traditional local pathway to politics. Particularly the ‘special advisers’ do exceptionally well (Goplerud 2015). For example, David Cameron, Nick Clegg, and Ed Miliband, the former leaders of the main British political parties, had all been special advisers before they became MPs. Christine Durose and her team (2013) reported that many candidates and politicians commented on how these professionalized paths had helped them to either negotiate or circumvent the closed cliques and patronage of local politics as an important step on the path to standing for selection. This new professional pathway is virtually inaccessible to aspiring politicians who did not attend college or graduate school—of the special advisers, 99.1 per cent had a university degree, and half of them had gone to Oxbridge (Goplerud 2015: 336).

These more professional pathways to politics are also clearly visible in the European Parliament (EP). Past members of the EP have worked as professors, researchers or in other academic positions, as information or communications professionals, or as journalists. Willy Beauvallet-Haddad and his colleagues (2016: 108) calculated that over a quarter (26 per cent) of the members of the EP that started its parliamentary term (eighth) in July 2014 had gained previous experience as a parliamentary assistant, a member of a cabinet of a minister or European commissioner, or as staffer in a political organization. About 11 per cent of the MEPs are professional politicians: they have never, or

seldom, worked outside politics (Beauvallet-Haddad et al. 2016: 108). The strong increase of career politicians is the result of the empowerment of the EP over the last thirty years (Salvati 2016: 71).

The shift in background and career lines of parliamentarians and ministers implies a shift in the access to political office, from an *outsider recruitment system*, characterized by a high degree of lateral entry from outside careers, towards an *insider recruitment system*, which requires a long internship within political institutions as a prerequisite for admission to the political elite. Insider recruitment systems ensure that candidates are more experienced and fully socialized into the norms of the political institutions. They maximize internal integration within the elite. Outsider systems provide the executive with external inputs and outside experiences. They maximize integration of the political elite and other parts of society.¹⁶

Explaining: The Supply and Demand of Higher Educated Political Candidates

How can the present and persisting dominance of the well-educated among the political elites be explained? Why have the university graduates profited so much from the professionalization of politics? Political elites are subject to formal and informal selection processes. Before office holders are democratically *elected*, they are first *selected*. One approach to explaining the rise of an educational meritocracy is to consider the political recruitment process as any other job market and to look to supply and demand in the political market place (Norris 1997: 209). The *supply side* is determined by the motivation and political capital of the candidates. By political capital we mean all the assets that facilitate political careers, which vary by party or political networks. The *demand* for candidates is produced by the qualities of the job and by the attitudes of 'recruiters' to get the right people on board.¹⁷ This approach offers several potential explanations for the dominance of university graduates.

The Supply Side: Educational Inflation

A very obvious reason for the increasing numbers of the well-educated among political executives is the increasing supply of university graduates—a direct consequence of the enormous rise in level of education in the post-World War II decades. Because the number of seats in parliament and the number of cabinet posts in most countries has barely grown since the 1960s, the educational environment has become more competitive. 'As the population becomes more and more educated, an ever increasing amount of education is required to arrive at the same relative position in the networks that, in turn,

act to facilitate political engagement' (Nie et al. 1996: 131–2). This means that the relative position of the least educated has deteriorated substantially.

The decline in participation of the less-educated is therefore due to *educational inflation*. A secondary school diploma, which in the 1950s would have been quite an achievement, nowadays has little value in most political arenas, because there are so many university graduates to compete with. Similarly, the elitist character of an average university title has declined with its relative diffusion. This could explain the disappearance of the less-educated in public office—they have simply been crowded out by the increasing number of the well-educated among their peers. As on the job market, their relative position has deteriorated; they increasingly find themselves at the end of the queue. In their research on successful and unsuccessful political candidates in the UK, Catherine Durose and her team (2013: 260) cite a local councilor, an unsuccessful parliamentary candidate, reflecting on how her lack of higher education was used against her in the selection process:

When I was trying to become a parliamentary candidate I was asked on more than one occasion what my qualifications were and they meant academic qualifications. One woman even said it was a real shame because one of the other candidates was a lawyer and another one had a PhD and although I seemed like a really nice woman I wasn't really [of] their calibre.

Apparently, the well-educated are in much higher demand on the political market. But why would this be the case in established democracies?

The Supply Side: Network Centrality

American political scientists Norman Nie, Jane Junn, and Kenneth Stehlik-Barry (1996: 45) argue that an important explanation for the dominance of the well-educated in politics is due to network centrality: 'Those with higher levels of formal education are substantially more likely to be found closer to the central nodes of politically important social networks, while those with less education are more likely to be found at the periphery.' According to them there is a threefold relation between education and social network centrality. A high level of educational attainment leads to high-status occupations that involve a variety of managerial and supervisory responsibilities, which pull people towards the centre of social networks. Second, educational attainment leads to higher family incomes, which reinforces the centrality of university graduates in social and economic networks. Third, university graduates are much more likely to be members of voluntary organizations, which also reinforces their position in social networks that are relevant for political recruitment. University graduates are very prominent among the social elites that supply candidates for the political elites.

Although Norman Nie and his colleagues focused on political engagement and forms of political participation such as voting, working on political campaigns, and attending meetings, these explanations also appear relevant for occupying political office. In the Netherlands, ministers of the former Balkenende-IV Cabinet (2007–2010), for instance, occupied, on average sixteen positions in voluntary associations and non-political organizations, beyond their regular professional activities. This indicates an extremely high social network centrality. Scheuch (2003: 121) indicated how, in Germany, top politicians accumulate memberships in public bodies and associations, and how this tendency to move into a broker position between the various sectorial elites further increased after unification.

The Demand Side: Political Skills

Tim Besley and Marta Reynal-Querol (2011b) present robust evidence, drawn from a wide range of countries over more than 150 years, that political selection with respect to education differs between autocracies and democracies. They found that democracies are more likely than dictatorships and autocracies to select government leaders who have a graduate education: ‘Democratically elected leaders are around 20 percent more likely to be highly educated than leaders chosen in autocracies’ (2011b: 563). Likewise, Mark Hallerberg and Joachim Wehner (2013) found that economic and financial political officials in established democracies tend to be generalists, whereas new democracies have greater incentives to select technical specialists. Apparently, different political regimes demand different competencies of political leaders. What does the job of a political executive in an established democracy demand? Does it require specific skills or competencies?

A large part of the job of political executives in established democracies consists of *talking*: talking with other members of the cabinet, talking with the legislature, with senior civil servants, with interest groups, or with party members. Moreover, over the past forty years, the role of the media in politics has greatly expanded in established democracies, thereby increasing the need for communication skills. Performances of political executives, whether at party conferences or ministerial visits to schools, that used to be given to a fairly small audience, are currently witnessed by potential TV, radio, and internet audiences. The opportunities to broadcast public performances have become much larger. The growing importance of the (new) media in the day-to-day life of politicians has a significant effect on the nature of the executive and legislative job and on the required relevant competencies. Public communication takes up more and more of executives’ time and resources.¹⁸ Ministers today have to be much more concerned with the media presentation of their policies, their departments, and themselves.

Against this background, it comes as no surprise that university graduates—lawyers and social scientists in particular—are dominant among the West European political executives.¹⁹ They boast a very high verbal proficiency, both orally and in writing, which is a very relevant skill if one is to be successful as a politician.²⁰ *Mutatis mutandis*, these skills also are needed to be successful as a Member of Parliament (Gaxie and Godmer 2007: 129). After all, the word ‘Parliament’ comes from the French verb ‘parler’.

The Demand Side: Cadres That Clone

Research in the United States suggest that the underrepresentation of the working class in legislatures is best explained by the ‘demand-side characteristics of the political environment, such as parties, interest groups and institutions’ (Carnes 2016a: 98). Another explanation for the dominance of the more highly educated, therefore, lies in the transformation of most political parties from mass parties into cadre or cartel parties, which we discussed above. In Western Europe, cooptation mechanisms within parties are the single most important selection stage within political careers. Parties thus control access to a career in politics—parties are ‘the eye of the needle’ (Norris 1997, Wessels 1997) through which all recruitment takes place. In the cartel party, neither the voters nor the average rank and file members of political parties have much influence upon the composition of the list of candidates. The cadres in political parties determine which individuals are to represent them in Parliament and in political offices.

Josje den Ridder (2014) shows how in the Netherlands, the members of the major political parties are better educated than their electorates, and that those elected are the best educated of all—as we saw, almost all the Dutch MPs have a university education. Comparable findings are reported for MPs in the UK (Norris and Lovenduski 1997: 169) and in Germany (Wessels 1997: 88). These data corroborate ‘the law of increasing disproportion’ at the top of the political hierarchy (Aberbach et al. 1981: 47). This may be the result of ‘homophilia’: the like choose the like. The university-educated cadres in political parties, wittingly or unwittingly, select candidates that resemble themselves.

Two Faces of Political Meritocracy: Democratization and Professionalization

Two contradictory processes have affected the selection of political elites in the past century: ‘democratization’ and ‘professionalization’ (Cotta & Best 2000: 495). Whereas democratization refers to an extension of the social niches from which the political elites are drawn, professionalization refers to a restriction of

Table 7.1. The rise of political meritocracy

	Traditional political elite	Meritocratic political elite
Social origin	Upper class	Middle class
Political capital	Status, family, social network	Education; professional and political expertise
Access	Ascription: hereditary	Achievement: merit-based

the admission to the political arena. These trends are contradictory, since democratization is socially inclusive, while professionalization is exclusive.

Democratization resulted in an opening up of the political elites and the replacement of the old upper class by a university-educated middle class. In many Western European democracies, hereditary patrician elites were replaced by meritocratic, educational elites over the course of the twentieth century. University-trained politicians took over the legislative and executive branches of government. The massive expansion of higher education, which we discussed in Chapter 2, produced large numbers of university graduates both within and outside the elites. The blurring of social barriers as a result of emancipatory movements during the twentieth century—seen first in the religious parties, later in the social democrats—and the democratization process in the sixties and seventies, opened up the ranks for political office and brought about a substantial change in the recruitment of Members of Parliament and ministers. The connection between social origin and the opportunities for a political career weakened, and by the twenty-first century, educational achievement rather than ascription determined the chance of recruitment to political office. This is depicted in Table 7.1.

Professionalization, on the other hand, meant the emergence of full-time, highly specialized politicians. The most important result of this change was the ‘academization’ of the political elite. Accessing politics without a university degree has become less and less likely. Moreover, politics has become a full-time career. The professionalization of politics has reduced the transferability of skills between politics and other careers (Kavenagh & Richards 2003: 190). Specialization encourages politically relevant communication and networking skills needed for professional politicians, but at the same time produces a narrowing of political outlook and experience.

The end result is a somewhat less biased political elite than before the introduction of general suffrage, but still a highly biased political elite. Despite the impressive increase in educational qualifications in the past decades, the well-educated remain a minority in European democracies. In Western Europe, citizens with primary and secondary level diplomas still account for at least two-third of the adult population. Nevertheless, they are virtually absent in the parliaments and cabinets. As a consequence, some voices may be much better heard in the political arena than others.

While theories of democracy seem to have made their peace with democratic elitism and the professionalization of politics, it is questionable whether less- and medium-educated citizens feel represented by a political field dominated by university graduates such as Ed Miliband. Being 'book-smart' is not the same thing as understanding people. This is the topic of Chapter 8.

Notes

1. Biographical information on Ed Miliband was retrieved from Wikipedia, consulted 19 February 2016.
2. See Reich 1991; Castells 1997; Florida 2004.
3. Compare Gaxie & Godmer 2007: 114; Jensen 2003: 93; Narud 2003: 306; Hagevi 2003: 361.
4. Source: DHB Kapitel 3.9 Schul- und Hochschulbildung, p. 5 (8 May 2015).
5. The 2016 data of ministers are collected from the Belgium federal government cabinet of Charles Michel (in office since October 2014), the Danish cabinet of Lars Lokke Rasmussen (in office since June 2015), the French cabinet of Manuel Valls (in office since March 2014), the German cabinet of Angela Merkel (in office since 17 December 2013), the Dutch cabinet of Mark Rutte (in office since 5 November 2012), the UK David Cameron cabinet (in office from 8 May 2015 till 13 July 2016).
6. See Table A.7.1 in the Appendix.
7. Authors' calculations on the basis of http://www.stm.dk/_a_2819.html (consulted 7 August 2015).
8. See Table A.7.2 in the Appendix.
9. Authors' calculations on the basis of https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Second_Merkel_cabinet and personal biographies available online.
10. See Table A.7.3 in the Appendix.
11. On the basis of Figure A.7.1 in the Appendix.
12. Authors' calculations, based on the biographies of the commissioners of the Juncker Commission, retrieved from the website of the European Commission: http://ec.europa.eu/commission/2014-2019_en.
13. See Aberbach et al. 1981; Cotta & Best 2000: 508.
14. See Aberbach et al. 1981; Cotta & Best 2007: 17.
15. See Dogan 2003; Costa & Kerrouche 2009: 340–1.
16. See Aberbach et al. 1981: 67–8.
17. In comparative research, it is important to keep in mind that varying features of the political system also influence the structure of opportunities in the political marketplace, affecting the selection of political executives.
18. Compare Blondel & Thiebault 1991; Kavenagh & Richards 2003; Norris & Lovenduski 1997.
19. See Blondel & Thiebault 1991; Dowding & Dumont 2009.
20. See Bull 2012; Kwiatkowski 2012.

Part III

Consequences

8

The Consequences of Diploma Democracy

Why Bother about Diploma Democracy?

Why bother about the rise of diploma democracy? What is so terrible about highly educated citizens having a disproportionate amount of political influence? Is it not reassuring to know that our representatives and leaders have such a solid academic grounding? Are we not much better off with a diploma democracy?

Plato certainly thought so. In his *Republic*, he argued that only the most intelligent and well-balanced citizens were to be permitted to govern the state. He developed an extensive system of tests designed to select children on the basis of courage, intellect, and insight. The chosen, the youths with a 'golden' nature, were subsequently required to study for many years before they qualified for admission to governmental positions. The second choice, the 'silver' souls who were brave but not as brilliant, were allowed to become soldiers and policemen. The 'bronze' masses, the ignorant souls who were mainly driven by their emotions, were to be kept far away from state administration and were required to confine themselves to trade and agriculture. Plato was convinced that brilliance was hereditary and consequently developed an ingenious system of mandatory mating festivals to ensure that gold only paired with gold.

Michael Young's quasi-scientific equation, 'IQ + effort = MERIT', was vintage Plato. After all, intelligence and perseverance are precisely the characteristics for which Plato held that the philosopher-kings were to be selected. In his quasi-historic report, Young described the progression of Britain to a radical meritocracy in the period 1870–2033, thanks to a combination of drastic education reforms, a system of annual IQ tests, and the emergence of genetic testing. These make it possible to select promising children at an extremely early age and to school them for the top positions in society. In the United Kingdom of 2033, just as in Plato's *Republic*, IQ and education wholly determine one's place in society.

Ultimately, the meritocracy comes to grief in both Plato and Young. The meritocracy proves to be an unstable form of government. In Plato's *Republic*, this is because the elite fails to maintain a rigorous selection, as a result of which weaker characters are able to come to power. Young was critical about the rise of meritocracy, too. In line with the spirit of the times, *The Rise of the Meritocracy* was revealed as a dystopia. The essay warns that selection by intelligence facilitates the formation of a new hereditary class. Revolts break out in 2033 and 2034—in which the author of the report is killed (!)—because the masses, driven by rage and resentment, are no longer content with their inferior social position.

This sums up the uneasy relationship between meritocracy and democracy in a nutshell. Is a meritocracy compatible with democracy? Is it fair that the well-educated wield much more political power than the less educated 'masses'? Is a diploma democracy ultimately an unstable form of government that is doomed to end in anarchy and revolt? We will investigate various forms of uneasiness that are created by the rise of an educational meritocracy in the context of advanced Western democracies. We will discuss the consequences of diploma democracy for each of the elements of democracy—representation, responsiveness, accountability, and legitimacy—that we distinguished in Chapter 3.

Representation: Descriptive Representation Matters

Description: Relative and Absolute Deficits

To start with, there is the issue of *who* is to be represented. The descriptive ideal is that citizens and their interests should be represented in political arenas in proportion to their numbers in the polity. With regard to their educational background, politicians and policymakers in contemporary western European democracies are not at all a representative sample of the population.

But hasn't this always been the case? Hasn't the percentage of university educated MPs always been disproportionate to the electorate? Even in the gilded era of the mid-twentieth century, when parliaments still had high numbers of less well-educated representatives, an inordinate percentage of members were university graduates, compared to the electorate. It could in fact be argued that, in relative terms, the educational gap has decreased—after all, the number of university graduates among the general population has risen sharply, thanks to the educational expansion of the late twentieth century.

Did the descriptive gap decrease in relative terms? The available research shows mixed outcomes for some of the countries in our sample. In Belgium, Michael van Droogenbroeck and Stef Adriaenssens (2004) controlled for the

improvement in educational qualifications of the electorate, in order to gain a better view of the educational representativeness of federal MPs between 1936 and 2003. They concluded that the relative gap has increased, because the rise in educational levels amongst MPs has been much stronger than in the electorate, resulting in ‘a dramatic decline in the representation of the low educated’ (2004: 53). In 2003, 45 per cent of the electorate in Belgium had primary education only, against zero per cent of the MPs; and a mere 8 per cent of the electorate had received a university education, against 80 per cent of the MPs. This increasing discrepancy between electorate and MPs could be observed in all three party families in Belgium: the liberals, Christian-democrats, and social democrats.

Looking at elite transformation between 1932 and 1999 in Denmark, Peter Christiansen and Lise Togeby (2007: 47) came to an opposite conclusion. The MPs in Denmark are significantly better educated than the electorate, ‘but the distance between the people and the political elite was reduced over the course of the twentieth century.’ In 1999, the educational level of the Danish population had risen far more than that of the MPs. However, as we saw in Chapter 7, the educational level of the Folketinget has risen sharply since 1999. After the 2011 elections, almost 75 per cent of the Folketinget was well educated, compared to less than 24 per cent of the general population (Folketinget 2012: 3).

For the Netherlands, we have collected data for the period 1980–2012 (Bovens & Wille 2016). During this time, the relative gap became smaller, because the percentage of the general population that was well educated has increased more than among MPs. This is partly due to a ceiling effect—the percentage of well-educated MPs was already very high (80 per cent in 1981; 91 per cent in 2012) and could therefore not rise much further. Josje den Ridder (2014: 230) shows that for the more traditional parties, such as the liberal-conservatives and the social democrats, the educational congruence between MPs and electorate has decreased since the nineties, because the representatives have become much better educated than their electorates.

What matters most for representation, however, is the absolute gap. In all the parliaments in our sample, the absolute descriptive gap has increased enormously. This is because parliaments have a fixed number of members. Even though most parliaments were enlarged in the course of the twentieth century, the extra number of seats did not compensate for the upsurge of the well-educated. Over the course of the past decades, the low- and medium-educated have more or less disappeared from parliament, from cabinets, and from many other political arenas, even though they still constitute a large majority in the electorate.

As we saw in Chapter 3, there are strong limits to mimetic notions of political representation, given the restricted number of representatives in any given polity and the large variety of sociodemographic differences

in society. Nevertheless, descriptive educational representation matters for a number of reasons.

Symbolic Deficits: 'Unfit to Govern'

Firstly, descriptive representation matters because of the symbolic significance of who is present and who is not. In the *Politics of Presence* (1995), Anne Philips argues that the composition of elected bodies is a legitimate matter of democratic concern. The fair representation of large social groups requires their presence in elected assemblies. Philips focused on the underrepresentation of women, social classes, and ethnic minorities, but her analyses are also applicable to educational groups. After all, as we saw in Chapter 4, educational background is an important marker for social stratification and social segregation in contemporary Western European societies. The well-educated and the less well-educated live in different social worlds and do not mingle. They differ in health, in life expectancies, in wealth, and in income. Well-educated and less-educated citizens have different interests and preferences on a number of salient political issues. Why, then, do we worry about gender or ethnic inequalities in political representation, but not about educational inequalities?

The consequent exclusion of certain groups in political arenas may presume the inferiority of the excluded group and it signifies that 'certain kinds of people are less suited to govern than the rest' (Philips 1995: 40). In symbolic terms, therefore, the complete absence of the majority of low and medium educated citizens in many political venues constitutes a serious deficit. When political decision-makers and representatives are predominantly drawn from the ranks of the highly educated, this relegates the rest to the category of political minors. Philips (1995: 39) alleges that 'they remain like children, to be cared for by who know best. However public-spirited their mentors may be, this infantilization of large segments of the citizenry is hardly compatible with modern-day democracy'. Therefore, descriptive representation matters first of all for symbolic reasons, because of 'what it conveys to us about who does and who does not count as a full member of society' (Philips 2012: 517).

Democratic Deficits: The Like Prefer the Like

Secondly, there is an emerging literature that shows that descriptive representation matters for heuristic and democratic reasons.¹ As the British political scientist Oliver Heath (2015: 176) pointed out: 'all else being equal, people with a given social characteristic prefer candidates or leaders who share that characteristic: women are more likely than men to vote for female candidates, and black people are more likely than white people to vote for black candidates'. According to him, voters use the social background of politicians as a

heuristic shortcut to estimating a candidate's policy preferences. Likewise, Nicholas Allen and Katja Sarmiento-Mirwaldt (2015: 2) argued that when voters evaluate a politician, they make inferences, often unconsciously, about his or her policy positions based on the politician's race, gender, religion, and so on. According to them 'there is good evidence, from Britain and elsewhere, that citizens generally want representatives who are "like them," either in appearance or thought, who are local, and who have experienced what they have experienced.' This implies that the over-representation of university graduates in parliament is simply not in line with the preferences of large parts of the electorate.

Experimental research has indeed confirmed that a university background in political representatives is not attractive to many voters. Rosie Campbell and Philip Cowley (2014) conducted a poll in the UK in which respondents were given descriptions (cues) of two candidates and asked to choose between them. They found particularly large effects when they varied the educational status of the candidates. In the original cue, candidate George had gone to university. Telling respondents in the next wave that George had left school at eighteen changed the popularity of the candidates: 'The less educated version of George was seen as less experienced . . . but in every other way he was seen as a better candidate than the university-educated version' (Campbell and Cowley 2014: 754). In a later wave, they told respondents that George had left school at the age of sixteen. This version of George was considered less suitable than the eighteen-year-old school leaver, but even this lesser educated candidate was preferred to one who had obtained a PhD. The researchers were surprised by their outcomes, as they candidly remarked (2014: 755): 'Perhaps because we spend our lives working in universities, the finding that respondents seemed noticeably to prefer a candidate who had *not* been to university surprised (and depressed) us somewhat.'

Their findings are confirmed by other research. Nicholas Carnes and Noam Lupu (2016a) concluded, on the basis of comparable experiments in surveys in Britain, the US, and Argentina, that hypothetical candidates from the working class are considered as equally qualified, and just as likely to get votes, as affluent and well-educated candidates. In descriptive terms, therefore, the over-representation of the well educated in political office is indeed not in line with the preferences of many voters.² This also has serious implications for how people from different educational backgrounds relate to politics. Sarah Birch (2014: 99) puts it as follows:

Our representative institutions are thus populated by sets of people who are rather different from those they represent. Whether they are, in consequence, less able to perform their representative role is moot; suffice it to say, it is not surprising that when ordinary people . . . observe the political elite, they see a group of people with whom they believe they have little in common.

But Aren't University Graduates Better Politicians?

For those who, just as Burke, Mill, and Schumpeter, are sceptical about the ability of ordinary citizens to reflect upon complicated policy issues, the rise of diploma democracy is a blessing in disguise. At long last, Western democracies are governed by the best and the brightest. We may lose a bit in terms of descriptive quality, but this is more than compensated by the gains in professional quality. Surely, people with a university education are better political leaders. This remains to be seen, however. It is not by any means clear that academic training enhances political efficacy and integrity.

Many scholars take for granted that education is a proxy for leadership quality—after all, this is their *raison d'être* as university teachers. Few have tested this assumption, however. Among the first to have done so are the aforementioned American political scientists Nicholas Carnes and Noam Lupu (2016b). They used three different large data sets to examine whether college-educated political officials performed better on a range of political outcomes. Firstly, they examined cross-national data on leadership transitions in a range of countries and found that college-educated leaders performed about the same as or worse than leaders with less formal education: 'Scholars and citizens routinely assume that educated leaders produce better economies and better countries. In reality, whether the national executive has a college degree does not seem to predict how a country will perform' (2016b: 42). They then looked at how members of the US Congress performed and found that members with college degrees 'do not tend to stay in office longer, pass more bills, or win re-election more often' (2016b: 44). In line with the outcomes of the experiments of Campbell and Cowley, they even found that college-educated members of Congress performed slightly worse at the polls. Thirdly, they analysed a large Brazilian data set on corruption in municipalities. Again, they found no evidence that college-educated mayors were less corrupt than mayors who had not studied at university.

Their outcomes falsify the Platonic conjecture, which is implicit in many discussions on education and political leadership: 'Politicians with college degrees do not tend to govern over more prosperous nations, are not more productive legislators, do not perform better at the polls, and are no less likely to be corrupt' (2016b: 36).

Decoupled Representation: The Rise of Unelected Professionals

These descriptive democratic deficits are reinforced by the rise of unelected bodies and professional civil society organizations. In recent years, most West European democracies have seen a striking expansion in the number of professional bodies that exercise official authority. Most of these are only loosely

tied to the elected institutions of democracy. Examples are central banks and the increasing number of independent regulatory agencies, such as competition and antitrust authorities, utility regulatory agencies, financial market supervisors, pharmaceutical regulators, healthcare authorities, and environmental commissions.³ A second important category are supranational bodies and international committees, such as the myriad of comitology committees in the European Union.⁴ This ‘rise of the unelected’, as Frank Vibert (2007) called it, means that professional bodies play a much larger role in the life of democratic regimes than in previous periods.

A common feature of these bodies is that they operate in technically sophisticated areas and on the basis of highly specialised expertise. Also, they are run by well-educated professionals—lawyers, engineers, economists, and doctors. These unelected bodies make many of the detailed decisions that affect people’s lives and may have, in practice, greater impact on society than the activities of elected politicians: ‘The words of an independent bank governor may carry more weight in financial markets than the words of a finance minister’ (Vibert, 2007: 6). The ‘outsourcing’ of government functions to these unelected bodies has reinforced the descriptive deficiencies. It has decoupled political representation from the way public policies are made and implemented.

Similar trends of decoupled representation are observable in organized civil society, as we saw in chapter six. Interest groups, civic associations and social movements are increasingly integrated in the policy processes. They produce policy papers, attend expert meetings, and play a central role in implementing policies. Many of these groups no longer try to influence policy via the mobilization of large numbers of members, but through the deployment of expertise (Crenson and Ginsberg 2002). As a consequence, these groups have become increasingly professionalized (Saurugger 2007: 397–8). Beginning in the 1970s, civic groups lost ground among many less educated citizens. Seeking and servicing members became less of a necessity, as funding by governmental bodies permitted interest groups to focus wholly on professional activities. Consequentially, members of these groups became less connected, and the less educated disappeared both from their ranks and their files.

The professionalization of electoral politics, as described in Chapter 7, has reinforced this decoupling between representatives and represented. The high levels of educational attainment of political representatives, policymakers, and activists have made the political class more homogeneous and more parochial. Selection of representatives has made politics a sphere of its own, only very loosely coupled to churches, unions, small businesses, and grassroots civil society. Changes in the social make-up of parliaments, notably the disappearance of blue-collar workers, the low- and the medium-educated, have made representation more indirect. Meritocratization has increased the

social distance between the legislative and the executive branches on the one hand, and large parts of the general public on the other (Gaxie & Godmer 2007: 131).

Responsiveness: Biased Political Agendas

Different Policy Preferences: Cosmopolitans versus Nationalists

Then there is the question of *what* is represented. The fact that political officials do not match their constituents on important demographic characteristics does not necessarily imply that they are unresponsive to the needs and interests of their constituents. Well-educated MPs can act as active spokesmen for the least educated, who are less able to devote time to political debate and advocacy. Accordingly, protestant ministers, teachers, 'Red Barons', and an army of university graduates, such as Tony Blair or Ed Miliband, have defended the interests of the working class in parliament throughout the past century. Likewise, many NGOs and independent regulatory authorities, although populated by highly educated policy professionals, claim to speak and act for consumer interests and absent citizens (Van Veen 2014). Similarly, the different activity levels between educational groups need not be a problem if the activists and non-activists share the same preferences on salient issues.

Responsiveness becomes more problematic, however, in the case of a substantial gap in political attitudes between active and inactive citizens, or between political officials and large parts of the electorate. The voice of those who do participate may be different from the voice of those who abstain. Participation may then fail to represent the preferences of all citizens equally with regard to salient political issues. This misrepresentation arises from what Berinsky (2004) termed an 'exclusion bias': the exclusion of the preferences of a sometimes sizeable portion of the public. This raises the question of to what extent the higher educated activists and representatives differ in their *policy preferences* from the politically passive less well-educated groups.

To answer this question, we first need to establish whether educational groups differ in terms of political concerns and preferences. We saw in Chapter 4 that there are some differences in left-right orientation between low and more highly educated individuals in Western European countries. Also, the well-educated tend to be less egalitarian with regard to income redistribution than those with less education, but the differences are not that large in Western Europe. Much larger differences can be observed regarding the new cultural conflict dimension that emerged in Western Europe at the end of the twentieth century.

The educational gap in preferences is particularly strong regarding some very salient sociocultural issues such as immigration, ethnic diversity, and

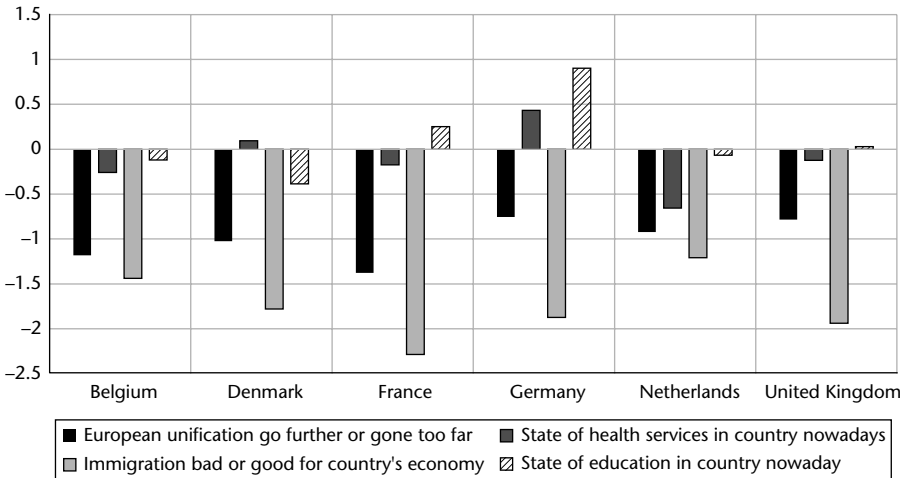


Figure 8.1. Education and political preferences (differences in mean scores lower and higher educated groups, ESS 2014)

European unification.⁵ The well-educated, by and large, can be qualified as cosmopolitans, who endorse open borders and value pluralism, and are in favour of the European Union. The low- and medium-educated, on the other hand, tend to be nationalists, who are more in favour of monoculturalism, limits on immigration, and an exit from the European Union.⁶

The data displayed in Figure 8.1 show that this clearly applies in respect of the six Western European countries in our sample. The gap scores in Figure 8.1 can range from +1.5 to -2.5. A positive score indicates that the lower educated have on average a stronger preference or a more positive evaluation than the higher educated. A negative score indicates the reverse. A larger score indicates that the difference in average preferences and evaluations between the lower and higher educated is relatively large. A zero score or a score close to zero means that the difference in the averages of these two groups is relatively small. In most countries, policy incongruence between those with a high and those with a low level of education was relatively low regarding the state of education and health services. It was highest regarding the admittance of immigrants. Those with lesser levels of education much stronger agree with the statement that immigration is bad for the economy than the highly educated.

Figure 8.1 also confirms that the European Union is an important topic of contestation between educational groups in Western Europe. Both in the ESS and the Eurobarometer surveys, the less educated consistently show less support for EU membership. They think European unification has gone too

far, they have less trust in the European Union and its institutions, and they are far less positive about the benefits of the EU than university graduates. For example, in the Eurobarometer surveys on 'Europeans in 2014', much more highly educated respondents were inclined to trust (39 per cent) the European Union than less educated groups (19 per cent). Also, they were nearly twice as likely to answer that the European Union has a positive image. Similar differences apply with regard to the euro: 60 per cent or more of the respondents who finished their education at the age of twenty or above, or are still studying, were in favour of the euro, compared with less than 40 per cent of those who finished school by the age of fifteen. The former group was also much more optimistic about the future of the EU than the latter. And only 28 per cent of the well-educated defined themselves solely by their nationality and not as European citizens, compared with 58 per cent of the less educated.⁷

Research by Dutch political scientist Armèn Hakhverdian and his colleagues (2013) shows that this gap in levels of Euroscepticism between well and lesser educated has increased considerably in the period between 1973 and 2010 in western and southern European member states. After the Maastricht Treaty was signed in 1992, both the level of Euroscepticism and the educational divide increased. This trend intensified after 2000, when the euro was introduced. The widening of the educational divide is almost entirely due to the mounting levels of Euroscepticism among the low- and medium-educated from the early nineties onwards. By contrast, the percentage of Eurosceptics among the well-educated is low, and, on average, fairly stable. All six of the Western European countries in our sample were included in their research and show significant educational divides (see Figure 8.2). The educational gap is the highest in the UK and Denmark, and its increase has been the largest in the Netherlands and Denmark.

The Activists Are More Cosmopolitan

To assess whether active and inactive citizens differ in politically relevant ways, it is necessary to compare the concerns and preferences of political activists with the concerns and preferences of those who take no part in politics (Schlozman et al. 2012: 118–19). It is conceivable, at least in theory, that the political activists act as trustees for the more passive citizens and espouse the same preferences. In that case, the over-representation of the well educated in all political venues would not be a problem in terms of responsiveness.

We therefore compared the political participation rates of highly educated groups with those of groups with less education and combined them with the responses on one of the immigration questions in the ESS 2002–2012 data, to

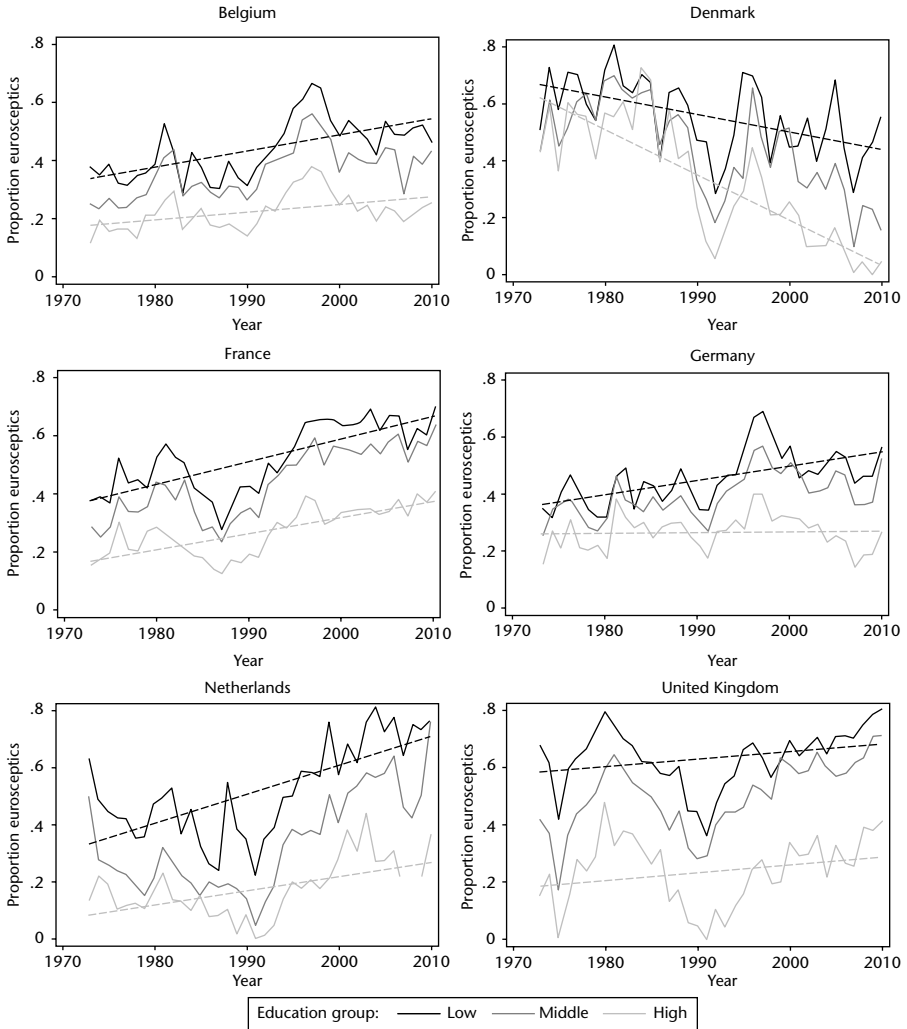


Figure 8.2. Education and Euroscepticism 1973–2010 (Eurobarometer, based on Hakhverdian et al. 2013: Figure A1 & A2)

examine whether the groups advocating specific positions exhibited equal levels of participation. As was to be expected, the highly educated segments out-participated the less well-educated groups, and this pattern was consistently repeated in all six countries (see Figure 8.3). More importantly, the higher educated respondents were not only much more active politically, they also took a more cosmopolitan position on immigrant issues than the politically inactive, less well-educated group. It is highly likely, therefore, that public opinion is biased towards the preferences of the well-educated.

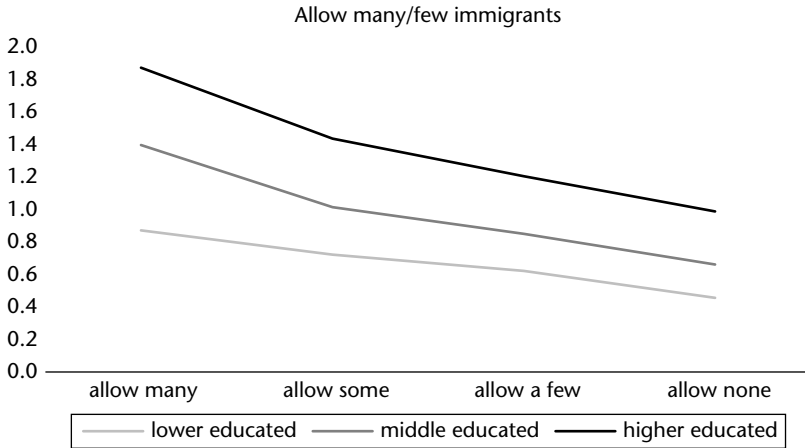


Figure 8.3. Education, level of political activity, and policy position on immigration issue (means; N = 47,955; all six countries; ESS 2002–2012)

Reduced Responsiveness: Incongruences between Political Elites and Electorates

The next question is whether these educational gaps in preferences and levels of activity result in reduced policy responsiveness. Is the political agenda biased towards well-educated citizens? Are there evident incongruences between the preferences of the well-educated Members of Parliament and those parts of the electorate with a low or medium level of education? We do not have empirical material for all six countries, but several studies from the Netherlands and Belgium are available that provide some insight into policy congruence between political elites and electorates.

Focusing on the Netherlands, Rudy Andeweg (2011) reached a positive conclusion about political responsiveness in general. He argued that what matters most for democracy is whether policy preferences of parliament as a whole reflect those of the electorate as a whole. He analysed policy congruence at the aggregate level between parliament and the electorate, using elite and mass surveys. The quality of representation appears to have increased substantially from 55 to 60 per cent in the 1970s to 89 per cent in 2006.^{8,9}

This optimistic conclusion about the health of policy responsiveness in the Netherlands, however, is not one shared by everyone. Armèn Hakhverdian looked beyond collective congruence and disaggregated the electorate in subgroups based on education, upon which a striking pattern emerged, both at the local and the national level:

The preferences of Dutch local representatives on multicultural issues exhibit a much closer match with the preferences of higher educated citizens compared

to lower educated citizens. We find comparable ‘congruence gaps’ of about 20 percentage points with regard to other sociocultural attitudes. In contrast, we find no evidence for unequal representation on redistributive attitudes. (Hakhverdian 2015: 4)

At the national level, these incongruences are even larger. Using the same item to tap attitudes towards multiculturalism, congruence between national representatives and the well-educated is as high as 94 per cent. However, congruence between parliamentarians and less well-educated citizens was only 59 per cent. His conclusions were quite straightforward:

For all intents and purposes, Dutch parliamentarians and higher educated citizens hold identical views towards multiculturalism, at least in 2006 when these data were gathered. . . . Even in one of the most proportional democracies in the world, political representation remains biased in favor of the upper echelons of society. (Hakhverdian 2015: 4)¹⁰

Loes Aaldering (2016) has come to similar conclusions. Her analysis of data of the Dutch Parliamentary Election Studies 1994–2010 shows that the preferences of the least educated citizens are poorly represented compared to the preferences of higher educated citizens. She finds this unequal representation on ethical, socio-economic, and cultural issues. Interestingly, her study shows that successful nationalist populist parties enhanced the substantive representation of the least educated in certain policy areas. We will discuss the effects of the rise of nationalist parties in Chapter 9.

In Belgium, Christophe Lesschaeve (2016) studied policy congruence between highly educated and less educated voters, based on a data set that contained voters and party positions on fifty policy statements, gathered in the run-up to the 2009 regional election in Flanders. His findings more or less resemble the outcomes for the Netherlands. At the aggregate level, the differences in policy congruence between highly and less well-educated voters are significant, but relatively small. However, in specific policy domains, such as immigration, transportation, culture and media, tax, budgetary and economic policy, there are much larger representational biases in favour of the highly educated. This indicates that political representation is biased towards those with the highest level of education.

Diverging Ideas about Democratic Representation

Elected officials have incentives to represent more than their own narrow selfish interests—at least if they wish to remain in office. Therefore, the *how* of representation is relevant too. As we saw in Chapter 3, representational style comes in two basic flavours. Representatives can act on the basis of public demands, often referred to as the delegate or mandate model, or on the basis of

their own perception of what is best for their constituents, which is referred to as a trustee or independence model.

The modernization of democracy has inspired new ideas about the operation of representative democracies. Representative institutions are increasingly expected to be responsive to the public and to take into account the interest of citizens in the process of policymaking. Individual representatives are expected to act as delegates, responsive to the needs of their voters rather than as trustees or party loyalists (Zittel 2007: 224). A substantial body of literature finds considerable differences between educational groups regarding representational styles.¹¹ Across Western Europe, the well-educated are more inclined to endorse trustee relationships with MPs, whereas the less educated prefer mandate relationships. Christopher Carman (2006: 110) concludes, based on his research in the UK, that: 'the more highly educated one is, the better one may understand the inherent complexities in the parliamentary process and, therefore, endorse a trustee relationship with one's MP. Less educated individuals, on the other hand, may not feel as secure with the abstract relationship necessary with an independence model.' Other studies report comparable findings about different perspectives of groups with less, and groups with more, education as regards the way they perceive the relationship between themselves and the representatives they elect, and in particular the roles they are expected to play.¹²

How do parliamentarians perceive their roles as representatives and how does this compare to these citizen expectations? Surveying MPs in different countries, Agnieszka Dudzińska and her colleagues (Dudzińska et al. 2014: 26) concluded that the party delegate model is dominant among MPs in Western Europe (see Figure 8.4).

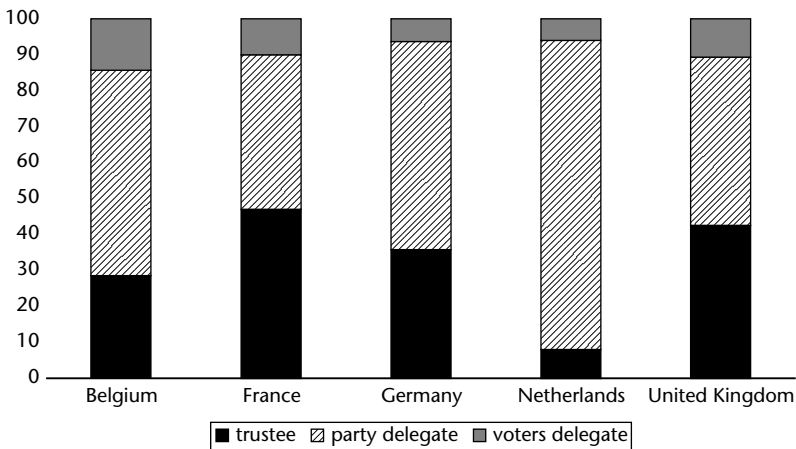


Figure 8.4. The popularity of representational styles among MPs (% based on Dudzińska et al. 2014: 26, Table 2.2)

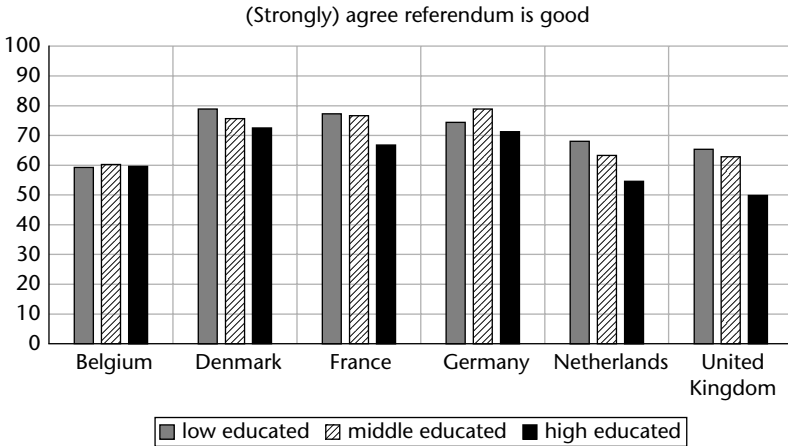


Figure 8.5. Education and preference for referendums (% , ISSP 2014)

Hence in this respect, too, we find substantial incongruences in the responsiveness of MPs. Their role perceptions match much better with the preferences of the well-educated than with the less well-educated parts of the electorate.

Similar educational differences can be observed with regard to alternative notions of democracy. Hilde Coffé and Ank Michels (2014) found that, when asked about their support for different types of democracy processes, less well-educated citizens were more likely to support stealth, and, in particular, direct democracy, compared with more highly educated citizens. These notions of democracy offer an alternative to representative democracy for those who feel dissatisfied and inefficacious. This can also be observed in Figure 8.5. In five of the six countries in our sample, the lesser educated are more in favour of referendums than the higher educated.

These findings are supported by the analyses of Besir Ceka and Pedro Magalhães (2014; 2016), who examined attitudes toward democracy in twenty-nine countries using European Social Survey. Their results show that the extent to which individuals emphasize one or the other conception of democracy is structured by the social status they enjoy in their societies: ‘high status individuals—both in terms of income and relative education—are more likely to espouse conceptions that are consistent with the political status quo in their countries and to eschew conceptions of democracy that may constitute a challenge to that status quo’ (2014: 2). For example, ‘in countries where direct democracy institutions are less institutionalised or non-existent, higher status individuals turn out to be less prone than lower status ones to understand democracy as something that should include referendums and initiatives’ (2014: 3).

The overall picture regarding responsiveness is that educational background is not politically neutral. Different levels of education may sometimes lead to diverging political opinions. In the past decades, the preferences of the low- and medium-educated regarding some of the most salient issues of our time have been less well represented than the preferences of the well-educated. Because the higher educated are over-represented among political participants and politicians, the political agenda tends to be biased towards their priorities and preferences.

Accountability: Biased Judgement

The consequences of diploma democracy also make themselves felt at the end stages of the policy cycle, when policies are evaluated and politicians are held to account. Democracy is more than merely a complex of institutions and procedures, designed to ensure that citizens are able to influence the policy process. It must also provide them with opportunities for evaluating the outcomes and the justification behind the policy decisions, for sanctioning and, eventually, for 'throwing the rascals out'. Another consequence of diploma democracy may be that it privileges the perspectives of more highly educated groups in the operation of accountability mechanisms.

Firstly, accountability forums, too, may suffer from descriptive deficits and decoupling. The absence of low- and medium-educated citizens in parliaments, professional bodies, and interest groups also implies that they play no part in processes of policy evaluation and accountability. Parliaments are pivotal forums for political accountability; independent regulatory agencies have become central forums for professional accountability; and civil society organizations play an important role in social forms of accountability. Oligarchic tendencies in parties and civil society organizations imply that the executives or boards who run such organizations are more likely to be in a position to exercise autonomy in developing their policies and strategies without having to consult with members and broader sets of stakeholders.¹³

Secondly, what are the standards used by these accountability forums to hold the political elites to account? In a diploma democracy, educational inequalities in the composition of accountability forums may bias accountability processes in favour of the preferences and interests of the well-educated and this may also lead to biased judgement. Efforts to hold political officials and civil society organization leaders to account may be biased by the standards and judgements of the more educated stakeholders and board members.

British political scientists Nicholas Allen and Sarah Birch have conducted various experiments to investigate how citizens evaluate the ethical behaviour of political leaders.¹⁴ Their findings indicate that in some respects, citizens from

different educational levels place different demands on the political process and on politicians, and come to judge them differently. For example, they show that citizens who report reading 'quality newspapers', such as *The Guardian* or *The Times*, are more concerned with conflicts of interest among politicians than with legality, while those who do not report reading 'quality newspapers' predominantly focus on issues of legality (Birch & Allen 2015: 54). When voters and politicians talk about standards in public life, they mean different things: 'what many politicians take for granted as "normal politics", many citizens will think about in terms of right and wrong' (Allen & Birch 2015: 6). Citizens use a broader set of standards to judge public officials, and also take into account 'the words that politicians use, the promises they make and break' (2015: 7). They conducted a number of open focus group discussions to explore the standards that citizens use. One of the most interesting findings to emerge from these focus groups was 'a tendency for people to understand political ethics in a way that varies considerably from the views that seem to inform elite groups, including, it must be said political scientists' (2015: 65). This implies that there can be discrepancies between the standards the general public applies and the more sophisticated elite-level classifications of good public behaviour (2015: 64). Another finding was that those who exhibit greater levels of political sophistication 'are less critical of political elites than others and less prone to seeing wrong-doing as a pervasive aspect of British politics' (2015: 142).

Educational differences in the evaluation and appreciation of political accountability are also visible in the survey findings of the yearly Audits of the Hansard Society in the UK. The British public is not very positive about Parliament when it comes to holding the government to account. However, those with university degrees are more inclined to reflect favourably than those with lower level or no qualifications (Hansard 2016: 26).

Research in the Netherlands by Claartje Brons (2014: 96) has yielded similar findings. Ordinary citizens set high moral standards for politicians. They want a reliable and verifiable political class, and they want to ensure the necessary checks and balances are in place to curb a political culture of self-interest and nepotism. Political officials should behave decently and communicate openly and honestly. Brons concluded, on base of longitudinal survey research and in-depth interviews, that politically dissatisfied citizens have a desire for empathetic, reliable political authorities who stick to virtues in politics.

Legitimacy: Distrust and Resentment

Disaffection and Distrust

The legitimacy of a political meritocracy is based primarily on *outputs*. Government by experts offers the best guarantee for sound policies and

hence the best chance of prosperity for as many voters as possible. The legitimacy of a democracy, however, is based on more than the sum of a series of outputs. Democracy is also about *inputs*. Citizens must have the feeling that they count, that their voices are heard and they are able to impact policy. In a diploma democracy, the well-educated voices resonate much more strongly in the ballot box; in deliberative sessions and expert meetings; in parliaments and cabinets. It is impossible to gainsay the effects of this on democratic legitimacy. One may expect to find serious gaps in political trust and confidence between educational groups. Could the permanent absence of the low- and medium-educated in parliaments and in cabinets even lead to a crisis of confidence, as predicted by Michael Young? Will large segments of the population with primary and secondary levels of educational attainment no longer identify with the well-educated governing political elites and hence become cynical and indifferent towards politics? This is termed the *disaffection hypothesis* in the survey literature on trust.¹⁵ It suggests that citizens with lower education levels will have a low amount of trust in government and politics, because they feel excluded from meaningful political and social participation.

We do find indications that confirm this hypothesis. For example, Figure 8.6 shows that the various educational groups differ quite strongly in their evaluations of government and politicians. In all countries, a majority of the less educated (strongly) agrees with the statement: ‘government does not care what people like me think’. Also, the less educated are far more likely to agree with the statement that ‘they have no influence on what the government does’, compared to the well-educated. And nearly half of the less well-educated groups agree that most politicians are in politics only for what they can get out of it personally—reflecting a cynical view of politicians.

Likewise, there is a strong, and positive relation between education and political trust. More highly educated citizens exhibit higher levels of general political trust than the less educated.¹⁶ This positive relationship between years of schooling and political trust is strongest in the established, meritocratic Western and Northern European democracies. In the new democracies in eastern Europe, with their high levels of corruption, the trust figures are much lower, with the highest educated sometimes being less trustful than the less educated.¹⁷ In the Netherlands, for example, level of education is by far the most important explanatory factor for differences in political trust: the more educated the citizens are, the more satisfied they are with politics.¹⁸ As a matter of fact, the most remarkable finding is the effect of a university education. Even after all other factors are included, a graduate education makes the most difference when it comes to political confidence and satisfaction—even to the extent that the largest divide is between university graduates and the rest of the educational strata (Dekker et al. 2016: 164).

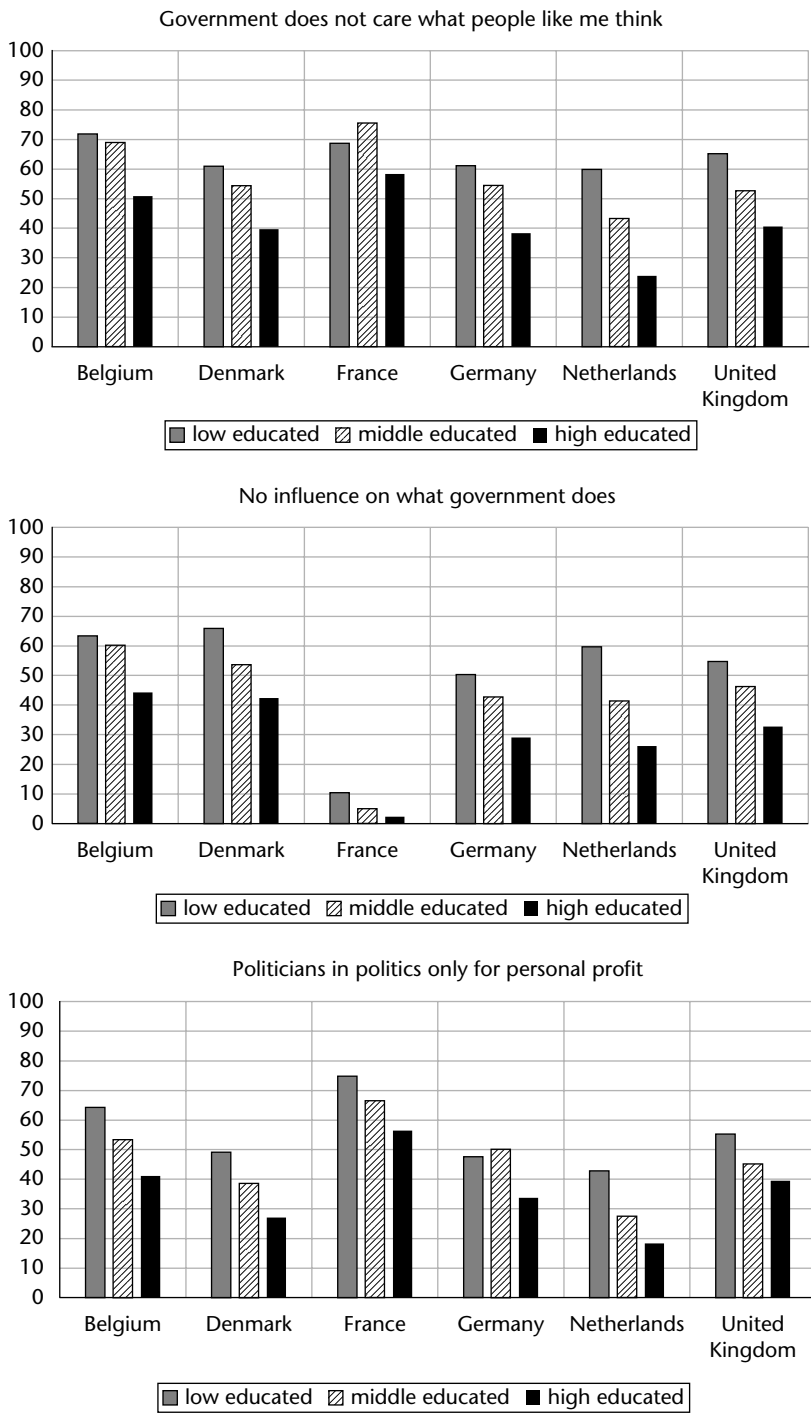


Figure 8.6. Education and evaluation of government and politicians (% (strongly) agreeing, ISSP 2014)

These educational gaps in political trust can also be observed in Figure 8.7, which is based on our ESS data. In all six countries, well-educated citizens show much higher levels of political trust in parliaments, politicians, and parties than citizens with low or medium qualifications.

These differences in political trust are also confirmed by more qualitative research. A study by Margit Wessels (2014) reveals how the less well-educated groups that she interviewed in the Netherlands, relate their personal experiences with social security, care, police, crime, and immigrants to a government that is seen as unresponsive. She points out that ‘the respondents complain about political leaders’ lack of accountability to the public. They “do what they want,” but it rarely becomes clear why a certain decision had to be taken, how a decision relates to “what you have voted for,” or how a decision would be in the public interest’ (2014: 772).

In the UK, research by Mary Holmes and Nathan Manning (2013), who focus on the white working class, shows similar patterns. The participants in their qualitative study felt that political officials paid scant attention to their daily struggles, and they felt that politics had been corrupted. ‘No one listens to us ordinary people’, ‘they are too busy lining their own pockets up there’, or ‘them that runs the country don’t know what they’re doing’ (Holmes & Manning 2013: 494) are the stereotypical cynical views expressing a lack of political trust and a feeling of social exclusion. These authors argue that the decline of class as an organizing framework for politics has left ‘ordinary’ people with a feeling that they are unrepresented by political elites:

Our respondents were still looking for politicians to connect with them and relate to ‘ordinary’ people. The evidence from our participants is that politicians overwhelmingly fall short of their expectations. They are unlikely to connect with politicians from elite backgrounds whose attempts at communication are read as disingenuous, condescending and obfuscatory. (Manning and Holmes 2013: 488)

Distrust and the New Political Divide

In West European societies, this education gap in political trust coincides with the new sociocultural conflict dimension in politics that has emerged in the past three decades and was described in Chapter 4. There is a strong connection between attitudes towards immigration and the EU, and levels of political confidence and cynicism. Citizens who have positive attitudes towards migrants and the EU also are politically confident. Those who have strong concerns about immigration and European unification feel powerless and show high levels of political mistrust.¹⁹ The well-educated, cosmopolitan citizens and activists are socially and politically confident. They express trust in the national and European political institutions and they feel included in

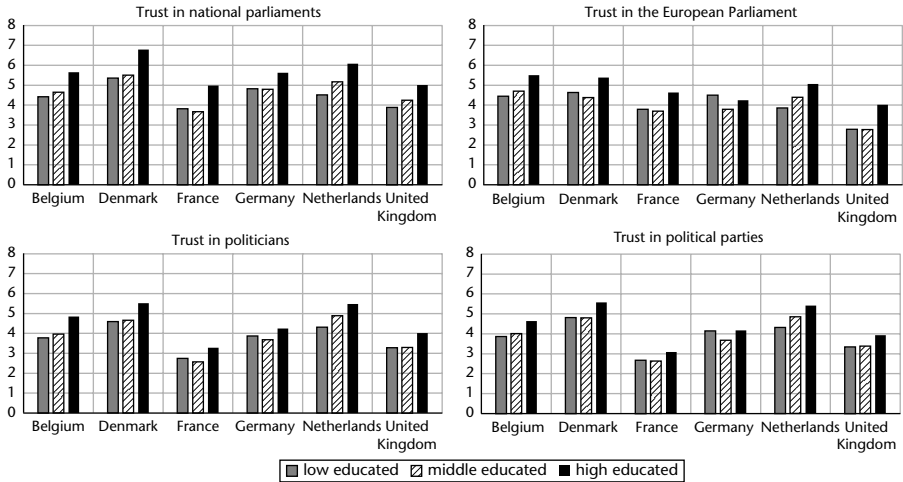


Figure 8.7. Education and political trust (mean scores, ESS 2014)

the political process. They take for granted that they are listened to and that their interests are taken care of, and they see globalization and EU unification, not as threats, but as opportunities. The less well-educated nationalist citizens, on the other hand, show high levels of social distrust and political cynicism. They think MPs and parties are uninterested in their opinions. They feel they are not being listened to by politicians and that politics today ignores the opinions of the common person. Given the composition of present day political parties, parliaments and cabinets, these feelings of distrust and alienation should not come as a surprise.

Social Exclusion: The Winners Take All

Over-representation of well-educated citizens in the political system is particularly problematic if diplomas confer benefits in other social spheres as well. Plato resolved this by prohibiting philosopher-kings from owning personal goods and property. Nor were they allowed to know who their children were, in order to prevent nepotism. The meritocracy of Michael Young, by contrast, was a typical ‘winner-takes-all society’. Those with the highest levels of education had the best jobs, owned the most property, and wielded the greatest amount of political power. Because this social capital was largely transferable via heritage and upbringing, Young foresaw a closed society in which social mobility would die out within a few generations. Power and wealth was concentrated among a self-satisfied intellectual elite, and the vast poverty-stricken and cynical underclass had little to lose by rebelling. In the book, the meritocracy perishes as a result of revolts, which were ignited by

government proposals to institute a hereditary meritocracy and to reserve the right to education for the children of the elite; who, in a full-fledged meritocracy, would, on average, be the most intelligent children.

A diploma democracy may not remain stable if large parts of the population feel they are no longer represented politically, and if they have no hope of being able to improve their social position. Social cohesion and democracy both may come under pressure in the case of overlapping cleavages, wherever educational stratification, economic inequality, social divides, and political tensions systematically co-occur. In Chapter 4, we outlined the emergence of education as a cleavage in Western Europe. Nowadays, the amount of education received is strongly correlated with a person's chances in the labour market and in life. Levels of education are important drivers of differences in income levels and we also see strong levels of educational homogeneity, particularly among the well-educated, which is indicative of the sort of social closure that Lipset and Rokkan had in mind.

The Belgian sociologist Mark Elchardus and his co-researchers at the Free University in Brussels have pointed out that that this chasm could lead to structural feelings of dissatisfaction and to the rejection of fundamental democratic principles by those who find themselves systematically excluded.²⁰ This may be particularly the case in highly developed meritocratic societies, such as Belgium, the Netherlands, the UK, and the Scandinavian countries (De Keere & Elchardus 2012: 298). In those countries, the less well-educated have a much more negative evaluation of the way society is developing than the well-educated. Less well-educated people are often vulnerable and long for more equality; and the stronger the longing for equality is, the more likely they are to opt for nationalist positions on the new cultural dimension (Elchardus & Spruyt 2012). They feel the egalitarian society is in decline and this decline is blamed on the established parties, intellectuals, and elites (Elchardus & Spruyt 2016: 125–6).

Bram Spruyt, the successor of Elchardus in Brussels, states that contemporary support for populism by the less educated is partly embedded in their perception of an educational conflict in society. Populism is attractive for those who hold that the well-educated have too much, and the less educated too little, influence (Spruyt 2014: 124). In their support for populist appeals, the less educated vent their feelings of economic, cultural, and political vulnerability:

our results indicate that populist attitudes are grounded in a deep discontent, not only with politics but also with societal life in general. Besides, people characterized by a strong feeling of lack of political efficacy, people who believe that they live in a world that is unfair and where they do not get what they deserve, or people for whom the world changes too fast so that they lose track, all support populism. (Spruyt et al. 2016: 8)

It is worth noting that a lack of external political efficacy was by far the single most important predictor for populist support, accounting for about half of the total explained variance (Spruyt et al. 2016: 10). The rise of nationalist parties and populist politicians in the first decade of the twenty-first century can be interpreted, at least in part, as a manifestation of the resentment against the rise of a social and political meritocracy.

The Tension between Meritocracy and Democracy

The ‘educational revolution’ of the 1960s and 1970s, which led to a significant expansion of higher education, constituted a new ‘critical juncture’ for the rise of new political differences and conflicts. The ‘participatory revolution’ of the 1980s and 1990s changed the political opportunity structure in modern democracies, in much the same way as the educational revolution changed the structure of social opportunities. This book examined the ensuing rise of a political meritocracy and the political disparities that come with it. We limited our analyses to six mature Western European democracies, but we are quite confident similar patterns and disparities can be found in other mature democracies, such as the Scandinavian countries, Canada, or the United States.²¹

Why should we bother about diploma democracy? Are we not better off with political meritocracy? Meritocracy has a place in education, in science, and in professional sports. In these arenas, position and status should be based solely on ability and achievement. We are also better off with meritocracy in the executive branch, at the ministries, the municipalities, and at all the professional organizations charged with implementing policy. However, when it comes to arenas where the political agenda is set and policy is determined, such as in the corridors of power, deliberative hearings, and in parliament, the situation is different. Here, the familiar argument against the ship-of-state metaphor still holds up.

In his *Republic*, Plato compared the state to a ship—the navigation of which, surely, should not be left to the ignorant and untrained, to the passengers. To safely steer the ship through stormy seas, a knowledge of navigation, of technology, and of water currents is essential. The shipping industry is quite rightly therefore not a democracy but a meritocracy. Specific qualifications and considerable experience are required to become a helmsman. According to Plato, the same should apply with respect to navigating the ship of state. Yet what he failed to note is that there is a difference between making policy and implementing it, between determining the object of the voyage and setting the course. In a democracy, the laymen, the passengers are the ones who, as equal partners, determine the destination. It is subsequently the task of the steersmen and the crew—the cabinet and the civil servants—to sail the ship there safely.

The problem with diploma democracy is that the voice of the more highly educated passengers prevails over the rest. They sometimes have preferences for alternative destinations and are more successful in getting their way. They dominate the pilothouse and lounge on the upper deck, while the less well-educated passengers watch with distrust and cynicism from below deck. And where Plato saw meritocracy as the solution to Athenian populism, today's diploma democracy, by contrast, is a source of populism. A further meritocratization of our society may well, in time, constitute a serious threat to our political and social stability. A revolt of the unqualified masses, as described by Michael Young, may not even be that fictional.

Diploma democracy is a flawed form of democracy, as ultimately it excludes a sizeable proportion of the population from meaningful political participation. Citizens with low or medium educational qualification levels currently make up a large majority of the electorate, yet they are extremely under-represented on nearly all rungs of the participation ladder. The situation is not that different from the late nineteenth century, when formal diplomas sometimes determined whether or not a citizen was entitled to vote. Modern democracies all have full and universal suffrage. Every adult citizen is entitled to participate on an equal basis. In practice, however, the educational inequalities operate as a hidden census, a *cens caché*, as the French political scientist Daniel Gaxie (1978) has called it. Almost a century after the introduction of universal suffrage, some advanced Western democracies are, practically speaking, back to where they started. How, then, can we mitigate, or even remedy, the effects of diploma democracy?

Notes

1. Compare Carnes & Lupu 2015; Carnes & Sadin 2015; Allen & Sarmiento-Mirwaldt 2015; Heath 2015.
2. The Pew Research Center finds for the US that clear majorities of those with only some college experience (55 percent) and those with no more than a high school diploma (58 percent) say ordinary Americans would do a better job solving the country's problems than elected officials. Those with postgraduate degrees are more skeptical: 49 per cent think that ordinary Americans would not do a better job than politicians (2015: 101).
3. Compare Gilardi 2008; Magetti 2010; Van Veen 2014.
4. Compare Brandsma 2013.
5. Van der Waal & De Koster (2015: 334–5) argue that the opposition to trade and economic openness, which is predominantly interpreted in economic terms as driven by the self-interest of the economically weak, can also be explained from their opposition to cultural diversity.

6. Compare Kalmijn & Kraaykamp 2007; Elchardus & Spruyt 2012; Kriesi et al. 2012; Den Ridder et al. 2014; Elsässer & Schäfer 2016: 16.
7. European Commission 2014: 54, 57, 61, 78, 106.
8. Lindeboom (2012), too, investigated the correspondence of issue priorities in the Netherlands between 1971 and 2008 and concluded that, despite recent concerns about the manifestation of a gap between citizens and political elites, the priority issues of the government would seem to move hand in hand with public priorities.
9. Andeweg (2011: 50) also shows that the general rise of policy congruence had no impact on legitimacy, however, and that the percentage of citizens agreeing that politicians promise too much has increased.
10. See also Schakel & Hakhverdian 2015: 15.
11. Compare Carman 2006; 2007; Barker & Carman 2012; Bengtsson & Wass 2011: 159–60.
12. Carman 2007; Barker & Carman 2012; Bengtsson & Wass 2011: 159–60.
13. Compare Katz & Mair 1995; Mair 2013; Schlozman et al. 2015.
14. See Birch & Allen 2015; Allen & Birch 2015.
15. See Nye et al. 1997; Norris 1999; Phar & Putnam 2000.
16. Compare Bovens & Wille 2010; Borgonovi 2012; Hooghe, Marien, & Vroome 2012; Hakhverdian & Mayne 2012; Elchardus & De Keere 2013; Andeweg 2014.
17. See Hakhverdian & Mayne 2012; Van der Meer & Hakhverdian 2016.
18. Compare Dekker & Van der Meer 2009; Bovens & Wille 2011; Den Ridder et al. 2014; Dekker et al. 2016.
19. See McLaren 2012: 230; Den Ridder et al. 2014; Dekker et al. 2016.
20. See Elchardus 2002; Elchardus & Smits 2002; Elchardus & De Keere 2010, 2013.
21. Compare for the latter Schlozman et al. 2012; Murray 2012; Putnam 2015.

9

Remedying Diploma Democracy

No to the Euro-Academics

In the days preceding the referendum on the European Convention in the Netherlands, in June 2005, a lone picketer could be seen demonstrating in the market square in Leiden carrying a sign that read: 'NATIONAL POLITICIANS BEFORE EURO-ACADEMICS'. That sign was a succinct reflection of the predominantly negative sentiments regarding the EU. More than a decade later, in June 2016, it resonated in a triumphant speech of Nigel Farage, the leader of the UK Independence Party. When it became clear that more than half of the nearly 33 million referendum voters in the UK had cast their ballots to leave the EU, he declared it a 'victory for real people, a victory for ordinary people, a victory for decent people.'¹ The project of European unity may have made substantial advances over the past sixty years, at least in the view of its supporters, but somewhere along the way, the EU quite evidently has left many of the ordinary citizens behind.

One of the more notable aspects of both referendums was that those backing the European Convention and the Remain option, and those opposing it, were not divided along the traditional left-right cleavage, but rather according to educational background. In the Netherlands in 2005, a small majority of the well-educated voted in favour of the convention; among those with a lower and medium level of education, at least two-thirds voted against.² Likewise, in the 2016 EU Referendum in the UK, strong educational differences could be observed. With the exception of Scotland, the Leave vote was much higher in those regions of Britain populated by citizens with low educational qualifications, and much lower in those regions with a larger number of university graduates.³ According to Matthew Goodwin and Oliver Heath (2016: 1-2): 'fifteen of the 20 "least educated" areas voted to leave the EU while every single one of the 20 "most educated" areas voted to remain.'

The European referendums laid bare the educational chasm in the Netherlands, the UK, and the rest of Western Europe, which was described in Chapter 8. The supporters of the process of Europeanization can be found mainly amongst university educated citizens. This group is politically self-confident, internationally oriented, and has ample access to the relevant political arenas and social elites. The group of opponents, by contrast, is predominantly comprised of less well-educated population groups, who are socially less active, who feel excluded, and for whom the pace of internationalization is simply too high.

The anti-EU vote of the less educated during the Dutch and the UK referendums was not an irrational, populist flare-up. The EU in general, and the European Convention in particular, are projects masterminded by legal scholars and other well-educated technocrats, who, far away in the corridors and cubicles of Brussels, make decisions without consulting the 'ordinary' people to whom these decisions relate. For many people with a lower or medium level of education, the process of European unification has not been an unequivocal blessing. It brought an end to strong national symbols, such as national currencies, industries, and airlines. The common market provided ample opportunities for the creative class, but brought insecurity and, in some instances, massive unemployment for the unskilled. The referendums offered the latter an opportunity to say 'no' to all these Euro-academics.

The example of European unification illustrates how in a diploma democracy the 'educated' opinions are *included* and the 'non-educated' opinions are sometimes *excluded* from the participatory and representative arenas. However, the EU referendums also point to a possible way to stem the rise of diploma democracy: by introducing more direct forms of democracy. We will discuss a variety of remedies, some instrumental, others more structural, which may help to mitigate the dominance of the well-educated in a diploma democracy. The remedies focus on institutional reforms of existing procedures, but also contain suggestions to bring about changes in the behaviour of different actors. They aim to make the political voice more representative and politics more responsive, accountable, and legitimate.

We will group these remedies loosely, according to the various layers of the participation pyramid that was presented in Chapter 5. We will start with remedies that address differences in political skills and knowledge, and then examine remedies that may enhance non-electoral activities and participation in civil society and politics. This is followed by a discussion of merging deliberative and more direct forms of democracy. The chapter ends with the peak of the pyramid, the political elite. But first we will discuss whether institutional remedies are necessary at all.

The Rise of Populist Parties: An Increasing Political Visibility of the Less Educated

Democratic Populism

Upon closer inspection, the Brexit and the Dutch rejection of the European Convention raise the question of whether the political systems in Western Europe are in need of remedies at all. It may well be that the mature Western European democracies are resilient enough to mitigate, or even accommodate, the rise of political meritocracy. We saw that the education gap manifested itself mainly with regard to sociocultural issues, such as the admittance of asylum seekers, cultural integration of immigrants, and EU unification. Regarding these issues, differences in the level of formal education will lead to very divergent political opinions. As a consequence, the over-representation of the well-educated may lead to serious distortions of the political agenda.

Against this background, the rise of populist and nationalist parties in Western Europe need not necessarily be the political catastrophe which it is often perceived to be. In the long run, the emergence of nationalist parties in parliament, such as the N-VA in Flanders, Dansk Folkeparti in Denmark, Front National in France, AfD in Germany, LPF and PVV in the Netherlands, or UKIP in Britain, could be a blessing in disguise.⁴ One could argue that it has made the less educated more visible in the European political landscape. New Eurosceptic and nationalist parties, with a populist style, have successfully campaigned on a platform that addresses the issues and preferences of the low- and medium-educated segments of the electorate.

Loes Aaldering (2016: 11–15) has shown how, in the Netherlands, the substantive representation of the least educated on cultural issues improved in the decade after 2002, when successful nationalist populist parties, such as the LPF, TON, and the PVV, entered parliament and, for brief periods, were even part of government coalitions. Congruence between the opinions of the less educated and the position of the government increased on issues such as law enforcement and integration of immigrants. In fact, on integration, the views of the less educated gained enough ground as to draw level, as far as representation by government was concerned, with those of the other educational groups.

This indicates that in mature democracies, the political system may be open and flexible enough to remedy some of the substantive deficits that are caused by the rise of political meritocracy. Campaigning on more nationalistic platforms, political entrepreneurs have successfully been able to mobilize the neglected parts of the electorate, i.e., those with a low to medium level of education. Some of these political entrepreneurs were even very highly educated. For example, Bart de Wever, the leader of the N-VA in Flanders, was a

PhD student in history and made it to the final of the TV quiz *De slimste mens ter wereld* ('The smartest person in the world'). Pim Fortuyn, the charismatic leader of the LPF in the Netherlands, was a part-time professor in sociology at one point in his career. And Boris Johnson, the flamboyant leader of the Brexit campaign in the Conservative Party, studied classics at Balliol College in Oxford. Despite their 'booksmart' backgrounds and dandyish behaviour, they struck a chord with many less well-educated voters.

These nationalist parliamentary parties and entrepreneurs have operated as a mouthpiece for the low and medium educated and they have forced the traditional, mainstream political parties to pay more attention to the negative effects of immigration, globalization, and European unification. Nationalist and populist parties thus can operate as safety valves in a democracy which is dominated by the well-educated. They can be a parliamentary outlet for the feelings of discontent and resentment against the political elites of large numbers of citizens. Nationalist parties can thus support inclusionary politics that expand democratic representation to previously marginalized groups—provided they operate within the limits of the democratic constitutional state.

The Flemish writer David van Reybrouck (2008: 64) has even argued in favour of a 'democratic populism', a populism that pits itself against the establishment and the elites, but which operates within the framework of parliamentary democracy:

No one has to be afraid of absurd policy proposals and sweeping statements. Populism can be as anti-elitist and anti-establishment as it wishes to be, provided it is not anti-parliamentary and anti-democratic. It is an enrichment to society if the least educated can find democratic parties within the political spectrum to which they can relate.

According to Van Reybrouck, such a democratic populism is part and parcel of democracy; it helps to stir political conflict and debate, which is the essence of democratic politics. He looks forward to the rise of an enlightened populism, a populism 'which does not shout, but speaks'; a populism which acknowledges the needs of the least educated, but goes beyond simplistic solutions; a populism that takes seriously the new chasm between highly educated and less well-educated citizens and that can reconcile globalization with the need for a sense of belonging.

The effect of the rise of nationalist parties may very well be that the less educated will become a more politically visible group, on a par with other emancipatory social movements, such as immigrants, women, or gays and lesbians, with a clear shared interest, demanding equal rights or an improved position. Consequently, educational background will no longer be seen as a 'usual', but rather as a 'prime' suspect in political research.

Spectator Politics: Edifying the Lesser Educated

More Education?

Many will find it risky to stake all on the horse of parliamentary populism. After all, a bleaker scenario is possible, too, in which populist parties and their supporters turn against parliamentary democracy out of resentment over the advent of political meritocracy. In this scenario, many low- and medium-educated citizens will come to see parliamentary democracy as rigged and illegitimate—a bunch of elitist profiteers—and turn instead to autocratic, charismatic leaders. It is high time, therefore, to examine the institutional ways to stem the rise of diploma democracy. We start with spectator politics, the more rudimentary forms of political engagement.

The sophists, Plato's intellectual adversaries in ancient Athens, had a straightforward answer to the rise of meritocracy: democratize diplomas. They provided training in academic and rhetorical skills to any citizen who could afford their fees. In contemporary democracies, too, this could be a powerful remedy. If education is the universal solvent for the puzzle of political participation, why not increase the education levels of as many citizens as possible? After all, education, for all its overlap with other status indicators, such as class, occupation, and income, does have an independent impact on political behaviour (Lewis-Beck et al. 2008). This is because the educational experience is a main source of political information for most citizens. In school, we learn political facts and how to think and talk about them. More extensive education provides citizens with relevant knowledge and skills, plus the attitudes and dispositions of effective citizenship. The first possible venue for remedying diploma democracy would thus be to provide more extensive education to all citizens. The more highly educated citizens are, the better.

However, raising the general level of education is not a catch-all solution to fill the gap between the less and the well-educated in political engagement. First of all, there is the risk of educational inflation. Education, by its very nature, is meritocratic. The gap between the well-educated and the less well-educated may very well remain, but at a higher level. The well-educated may start to acquire extra qualifications, beyond college, such as graduate degrees and international diplomas. Moreover, education is a positional good, and raising the general level of education will not help to open up political office to the least educated—quite the contrary, as we saw in Chapter 7. As long as the number of positions in the political networks and in the representative arenas remains more or less constant, the educational environment will become increasingly competitive. As a result, an ever-increasing amount of education will be required to qualify for political office.⁵ The least educated—soon to be those citizens with secondary qualifications only—will simply be crowded out by the increasing number of peers with graduate or even postgraduate qualifications.

Secondly, there is the broader issue, discussed in Chapter 5, of whether education is a cause or only a proxy. If education is a direct cause of different levels of participation, then it makes sense to search for educational remedies, such as extending compulsory education. However, it may well be that, in many respects, education is only a proxy. Advocates of this theory assert that pre-adult characteristics, such as family background, in fact affect participation levels (Persson 2015).⁶ Education is left with no independent effect, once these factors are taken into account (Kam & Palmer 2008; Persson 2014b).

More Intensive Civic Education

As we said, the jury is still out on the cause or proxy debate. Meanwhile, introducing civic education into the secondary school curriculum would appear to be another sensible option. Civic education as such is not a positional good, and introducing more intensive civic education programmes across the board would raise the levels of civic engagement and civic skills of all segments of the population. This would not alter the dominance of the well-educated in political office, as the crowding-out effects would still be seen. However, it may provide less well-educated citizens with more of a stimulus for engagement, as well as the skills to operate in the expanding variety of participatory and deliberative arenas. Also, better information and education about politics may reduce some of the negativity about politics.⁷

There is, indeed, empirical evidence that well-designed, school-based courses in civic education can have a positive effect on the civic dispositions of students. It can increase their levels of political tolerance and can equip them with the civic knowledge and the participatory skills necessary for informed and effective citizenship. Kay Schlozman and her colleagues (2012: 569), reviewing evaluations of civic education in the US, point out that civic education has the potential to reduce political equality, but that the conditions that make such programmes effective are numerous and not easily met. Also, a comprehensive, cross-national study into the effects of citizenship education on adult participation in a diverse set of twenty-eight countries showed that civic education programmes had an effect on democratic norms, political participation, and political values, although the influences varied considerably across countries (Torney-Purta et al. 2001).

Positive effects of citizenship education have also been reported in some of the countries in our sample. Karin Wittebrood (1995), for example, has shown how civic education at secondary schools in the Netherlands contributes to political involvement. Students who followed an intensive course in civic education showed an increased interest in political issues, higher political efficacy, and a greater readiness to participate in politics. Paul Whiteley (2014) reports similar effects for Britain, where compulsory lessons on citizenship

were introduced in secondary schools in 2002 following the recommendations of an advisory group chaired by the late Bernard Crick. He found that the citizenship education programme had ‘a significant impact on three key indicators of civic engagement, namely, efficacy, participation and knowledge.’ (2014: 530). Unfortunately, in 2014, Michael Gove, the Minister of Education in the Cameron cabinet, put an end to compulsory citizenship education, in an attempt to trim the national curriculum.

For teenagers, learning by doing has a more positive effect on political engagement than learning by listening. In England, Avril Keating and Jan Janmaat (2016: 419–22) found that school-based political activities at the formative age of fifteen or sixteen can continue to influence political behaviour at a later age. Moreover, they concluded that it was an even ‘more potent driver of political participation than formal citizenship education.’ Teenagers who participated in school councils, mock elections, and debating teams, were more likely to vote, to sign a petition, or to contact an MP or local councillor, even after leaving school. This was independent of their family background and latent political interest. These positive outcomes notwithstanding, Keating and Janmaat end their paper on a sobering note: ‘Schools play a role in political socialisation, but often a relatively small one . . . families, the media, political parties and other mobilisation agents also play important roles’ (2016: 425). Civic education is relevant, but it is not the universal solvent for differences in political knowledge, skills, and engagement.

Participation: Adjusting the Arenas

Mini Publics

The next layers of the participation pyramid are voting, non-electoral activities, and membership of civil society organizations and political parties. We will start with the latter two. There is little chance of returning to the mass political parties that dominated much of the twentieth century. The changing educational stratification of modern democracies is here to stay, so it seems, and so are the cadre parties and the advocacy groups. As political parties become increasingly footloose, deliberative forms of policymaking may become important venues in legitimizing policy proposals. Is it possible to adjust these new political arenas to tone down the inordinate amount of influence wielded by highly educated citizens?

Experiments with urban democracy suggest that it is possible to involve the least educated in deliberative policymaking. However, to do so will require specific reforms, such as decentralization, to enable deliberations to focus on specific, practical issues; the selection and training of participants; and an active involvement of street-level professionals (Fung 2004). Also, recent

decades have been marked by an upsurge of so-called *mini publics*.⁸ These are relatively small deliberative forums that not only involve self-selected activists and professional experts, but also lay citizens and non-partisans. In these mini publics, the representativeness of the public at large is enhanced through random selection, stratified sampling, or quality seats. Examples are the consensus conferences in Denmark and the Citizen's Assembly on electoral reform which was organized in British Columbia in 2004 (Goodin & Dryzek 2006: 5–6).

Deliberative Polling and Citizen Juries

Another way to gauge the feelings of the not-so-vocal, less well-educated majority of citizens is the deliberative poll, a method originally designed and applied by James Fishkin (1995: 134–76). Fishkin's initial case involved a random and representative sample of several hundred citizens from the British electorate. These citizens were gathered together for a weekend and divided into smaller groups, in which a number of important social themes were intensively discussed. They were provided with carefully balanced informational materials and could consult with experts, lobbyists, and politicians holding a wide range of views. After a number of days of intensive, face-to-face discussions, their opinions on the issues discussed were polled. In this major UK example, the result was a combination of *Big Brother*, *Question Time*, and *Adventure Island* rolled into one, as the deliberations and polls were held and recorded in the studios of Channel 4 and subsequently extensively aired on television. Similar experiments have been conducted in British Columbia and Ontario in Canada, in Iceland, Ireland, the Netherlands, Belgium, and even at the level of the European Union.⁹ In most of these experiments, the over-representation of the well-educated was reduced to some extent, because the participants were chosen on the basis of random, representative sampling, instead of by self-selection. Specific measures were taken to accommodate less well-educated participants during the deliberations, for example, through providing them with briefing documents that were tested for 'understandability', and with the help of trained moderators (Isernia & Fishkin 2014: 316–17). Nevertheless, the less educated remain hesitant to participate in these experiments. In the EuroPolis deliberative poll, for example, less than 10 per cent of the participants had a low level of education, compared to 31 per cent of the European general population (Isernia & Fishkin 2014: 321).

Whoever may find deliberative polls a bit too taxing—after all, not everyone wants to participate in lengthy discussions in television studios—could also consider the possibility of randomly composed *citizens' juries* (Goodin & Dryzek 2006: 5). These are relatively small groups of ordinary citizens, either

selected at random by lot or by stratified sampling, who receive information, can hear evidence and cross-examine witnesses, and, after deliberating a proposal, can cast a vote. The outcomes can be used by an agency or by a municipal council in weighing the advisability of the proposal at hand. While not a full-fledged alternative to party politics, they do offer a certain equality check on deliberative decision-making (Huitema et al. 2005).

Participation Ceilings for Lobby Groups

The problem with these new deliberative arenas and consultative settings is not just the under-representation of the less educated. As important is the dominance of professional advocacy groups, interest organizations, and lobbyists, which we discussed in Chapter 6. Resources such as skills, money, and time make it possible for these highly professionalized organizations to be much more active than ordinary citizens. Placing constraints on the use of resources can therefore serve to regulate the inequalities of political voice in a diploma democracy.¹⁰ Lobbying influence can be controlled under strict rules, with restrictions on the amount of lobbying that is permitted to be undertaken. Transparency registers provide citizens with a direct source of information about who is engaged in lobby activities, which interests are being pursued, and what level of resources are invested in these activities. Also, political reforms in the area of political party and candidate finance can make political party registration, candidate nomination, or funding for political parties more transparent and open to scrutiny.

A More Realistic Citizenship Model

Many proposals for democratic reform contain an implicit bias towards the skills and the preferences of the well-educated. The over-representation of highly educated people in politics—and in political science—has led to a biased model of what citizenship entails. Many proposals for democratic innovation and renewal are based, implicitly or explicitly, on a very demanding model of competent citizenship. An important assumption in this model is that citizens are knowledgeable about politics, understand their own interests as individuals and groups, develop thoughtful political opinions, and put these forward by means of political participation. They are expected to be able to read voluminous dossiers, attend lengthy meetings, and to intervene at the right moment and in the right tone of voice. It is only a mild exaggeration to say that at least a bachelor's degree in political science or public administration is needed to be able to live up to these expectations. Many political reforms are designed by political scientists for political scientists.

This implicit ideal of the informed, competent, and committed citizen can be observed in the internet consultations regarding national legislation, the deliberative policy projects organized by regional authorities, and in the neighbourhood management projects organized by local councils. It is a political citizenship model that fits many well-educated citizens like a glove. However, it is too demanding for many ordinary citizens, and it overestimates the amount of time and effort they wish to spend on politics. To their dismay, policymakers have discovered that their assumption that citizens, when facilitated in the right way, are able and willing to participate in large numbers, is incorrect. In reality, for many citizens, citizenship and politics tend to be sporadic and occasional matters.¹¹

The search for ways to strengthen democracy, therefore, should be grounded on a more realistic idea of citizenship. Alternative notions, such as 'monitory democracy' (Keane 2009), 'audience democracy' (Manin 1997), and 'stealth democracy' (Hibbing & Theiss-Morse 2002) are more realistic. They proceed on the assumption that most citizens are at the most occasionally, rather than continuously, active. Most citizens are reasonably accurate in monitoring what happens politically and socially, but given an opportunity for participation, they will choose to do so only sporadically, if deemed really necessary. This brings us to another set of potential remedies.

Bringing the Ballot Back In

Deliberation in the Shadow of Direct Democracy

The example of the EU referendums suggests another important way to involve the less educated, one that is less time consuming and more egalitarian than deliberative policymaking. Bringing the ballot box back in will have a mitigating effect on diploma democracy, as ballots are a tried and tested means to redress the incommensurate influence of participatory elites. After all, in a ballot, every voice, whether loud or soft, eloquent or brusque, well-educated or not, is equally important. For this reason, deliberative processes should, where possible, be concluded by ballots. In that way, the minority of dexterous and verbally skilled citizens can be prevented from pushing through their preferences against the wishes of the more silent, rhetorically less skilled majority. In a ballot, the ground rule is: one person, one vote. This guarantees that, when the final decision is made, the voice of a truck driver counts just as much as that of a political science graduate. By limiting the ballots to the final phase of decision-making, sufficient room remains to mobilize expertise and creativity during the conceptual and planning stages. This could be thought of as *deliberating in the shadow of direct democracy*.

Corrective Referendums

Such ballots can take the form of corrective referendums. These allow enough room for professionals, advocacy groups, and expert citizens to provide professional input, to map out scenarios, and to draft policy proposals. At the same time, citizens who lack the desire, time, or courage to participate in the deliberations, thus have at least the opportunity to express their opinion about the final plans on equal terms. Corrective referendums provide less of a solution for the tilted agenda-setting problem, discussed in Chapter 4, but at least they provide an egalitarian check on expert decision-making. The British Columbia Citizen's Assembly recommendations were put to a referendum in just this way.

We saw in Chapter 8 that less well-educated citizens are more likely to support direct forms of democracy, compared with more highly educated citizens. For those who are cynical about traditional party-based politics, referendums provide an opportunity to have a more unfiltered say regarding a particular policy issue (Schuck & De Vreese 2015: 156). Issues that political elites do not wish to address can be brought into the political arena, forcing them to be more sensitive to the preferences of less well-organized and represented groups. For instance, the EU referendum in the UK, and the French, Dutch and Irish rejections of the European Convention and the Lisbon Treaty have had serious consequences for the EU integration project. All these EU referendum outcomes were part of a bigger picture of discontent, showing European political elites that they have apparently been unable to secure a popular endorsement of European unification.

Hence, referendum democracy may foster a wider distribution of power through the system, while referendums can be integrated into consociational frameworks for deliberation and bargaining.¹² Referendums can 'open up the political process to groups emerging from civil society rather than from the established party system' (Mendelsohn & Parkin 2001: 18). Referendums can politicize topics and can engage citizen and make them more knowledgeable of certain issues. In the US, participation in direct democracy enhances the voters' general awareness. Moreover, it constitutes an incentive for political elites to provide more information about the issue in question. Empirical studies show that citizens are politically better informed when they have more extended political participation rights (Kriesi 2005: 90).

But what about the risk of referendums being hijacked by firebrands? Plato, for one, would have detested the introduction of referendums. He feared that direct forms of democracy would pave the way for demagogues. Joseph Schumpeter too, was afraid that direct democracy would lead to radical and substandard outcomes. The example of Switzerland shows that this need not

be the case in more mature democracies. Switzerland is the world capital of referendums and, at the same time, a very stable democracy (Trechsel & Kriesi 1996). At the national level, referendums are regularly held, about four times a year; on cantonal and local levels, they are even more frequent. Every law passed by parliament that affects the constitution is 'mandatory' to go to a referendum. But is also possible to demand an 'optional referendum', or to launch an initiative. A large variety of issues can be submitted to the popular vote: the advancement of footpaths, social security measures, the price of bread, or the construction of minarets. According to Swiss political scientist Hanspeter Kriesi (2005) referendums have a tempering rather than a radicalizing influence. They lead to a negotiation or consensus democracy, that forces compromises at the bargaining table (Trechsel & Kriesi 1996: 192). The referendum 'hangs like a sword of Damocles' over the parliamentary process. It generates 'slow but inclusive' decision-making and it also limits the role of parties. Referendums can thus be valuable instruments to complement the traditional forms of indirect democracy (Dalton et al. 2003b: 261). However, the example of Switzerland also shows that referendum democracy requires a careful institutional design and a mature civic culture.

The case of the Hamburg *Bildungskampf* shows, moreover, that the referendum instrument in itself does not guarantee an equal voice of all citizens. The problem of lower turnout at the polling booth remains (Schäfer & Streeck 2013). An expanded use of referendums and the information demands they make on citizens may even reinforce the education gap in participation, as was the case in Hamburg. This limits the use of referendums and other ballots as a specific remedy for diploma democracy. Is there anything that can be done about the problem of low turnout?

Compulsory Voting

Arend Lijphart (1997) has suggested reintroducing *compulsory voting* to remedy the unequal influence at elections. Making voting a legal obligation would draw groups with low education qualifications back to the polling booths—whether, once there, they would actually cast a ballot is something else entirely (Dekker & Hooghe 2003: 159). For example, after the Netherlands abolished compulsory voting in 1970, turn-out levels dropped by over 20 per cent, in particular among the low and middle educated electorates (Irwin 1974). Compulsory voting also would provide incentives for alienated citizens to become more informed about politics (Engelen 2007: 31). But even if this is not the case, compulsory voting surely gives political parties an electoral motive to continue to devote attention to the interests of the least educated voters. They are no longer a *quantité négligable*, as they are in countries where

voting is no longer compulsory and where large numbers of the least educated can be expected not to turn up at the polling booth.

The evidence on the effects of compulsory voting on educational gaps in turnout is mixed. Cross country comparisons suggest that compulsory voting does raise the *general* turnout substantially, by up to ten or fifteen per cent (Engelen 2007: 26). Ellen Quintelier and her colleagues from Leuven (2011) also find, in a study of thirty-six countries participating in the 2004 International Social Survey Programme (ISSP), that compulsory voting is associated with higher overall turnout rates. However, they did not find any effects on the *educational* gap. According to them, compulsory voting raises the turnout level equally across all educational groups (2011: 406). Armin Schäfer (2011: 8–9), on the other hand, is more positive about the effects of compulsory voting on the educational gap. His analysis, also on the basis of ISSP data, this time collected from twenty-two countries, reveals that the differences in electoral participation are smaller if the overall participation rate is higher. The inequality gap (based on education and income) is particularly large in countries with low turnout rates and almost disappears in high-turnout countries. This suggests that if compulsory voting helps to raise the level of overall turnout, it may indirectly contribute to reducing educational differences in electoral participation. Aina Gallego (2010: 246), looking at twenty-eight advanced democracies, comes to a similar conclusion: ‘Logically, when almost everyone votes, little room is allowed for inequalities to emerge; thus, raising overall turnout rates is an effective way of reducing inequalities in voter participation.’

An alternative to full-scale compulsory voting is the option of making voting compulsory for selected categories of people. Sarah Birch and Guy Lodge (2015) have suggested, for example, that all voters be required to vote in the first election in which they are eligible to do so. This socializes these new electors into making the trip to the polling booth. Aside from compulsion, turnout can be raised by making voting more attractive. Gaps in the turnout rates of different groups can be reduced by making the electoral procedure easier (Gallego 2010: 346). This can be done with the help of initiatives that affect the way votes are cast, such as postal voting or e-voting, or with other facilities that make voting easier, such as providing a choice of points for voting, increasing the number of places where it is possible to cast one’s vote, allowing people to vote in places like at a bus or railway station, at the workplace, at shopping centres, or during the weekends. These are often perceived as sensible measures to increase turnout. The costs and benefits of such innovations are yet unclear, as is it difficult to assess how many more people it would motivate to vote. Whether these additional measures would raise turnout levels among the least educated groups is even more uncertain.

More Inclusive Political Elites

Party Renewal

We now turn to the upper layers of the participation pyramid, those which involve holding political positions. Political gatekeepers, such as political parties, play an important role in the under-representation of the lesser educated in political office (Carnes 2016a). One way to bring citizens with primary and secondary qualifications back in touch with political elites is by increasing their role inside political parties. We saw in Chapter 7 that the university-educated cadres in political parties, wittingly or unwittingly, select candidates that resemble themselves. The nearly universal decline of party membership (van Biezen et al. 2012), has been a motive for parties to become more internally democratic. A wide variety of reforms in party structures and practices is suggested to provide for more direct member involvement in the choice of candidates for public office, the selection of the leader of the party, and the formulation or approval of party programmes (Cross & Katz 2013: 2).

Party primaries that give rank and file party members the right to decide on the composition of the parliamentary list for the elections are a way to democratize candidate selection (Rahat & Hazan 2007: 57–8). However, a more open selection of candidates will not help if people with a low or medium level of education do not stand for office. Nicholas Carnes (2016b; 2016c), who has extensively studied the under-representation of the working class in the US, argues that actively recruiting politically capable candidates is important. In areas where unions actively recruit and train their members to run for political office, workers hold many more seats in local councils and state legislatures. According to him ‘these efforts take many forms, but their basic features are similar. In most cases, labor groups identify talented workers, encourage them to run for office, train them, and then provide grassroots support during their campaigns’ (2016c: 4). This is in line with our findings for Denmark, which, until recently, had high numbers of low- and medium-educated Members of Parliament, due to the strong connection between unions and political parties.

More Descriptive Representation

A more radical step would be to resort to affirmative action. Just as with gender, age, or ethnic background, political parties could strive for more educational balance when selecting their candidates for parliament and other representative bodies.¹³ This may imply preferential treatment, reserved seats, or even quotas for the less educated in order to remedy some of the representative deficits discussed in Chapter 8. Many parties have reserved seats for women, candidates from ethnic minorities or from peripheral regions.

Why not do the same for the low- and medium-educated in order to increase their numbers in parliament?

When groups in society are systematically excluded from the political process, striving for more descriptive representation can compensate for these representational distortions. In particular, group mistrust and low legitimacy by disadvantaged groups can be good reasons for more descriptive representation, argues Jane Mansbridge (1999). In these circumstances, descriptive representation enables 'enhanced communication'. Shared societal characteristics between representatives and constituents may make people more prepared to trust their representatives (1999: 641). Descriptive representation denotes not only visible characteristics, but also shared experiences. 'Being one of us' is assumed to promote loyalty to the interests of the group. Moreover, in cases where interests and preferences are not fully formed, it can help to have representatives whose characteristics match those of their constituents. This can result in what she calls 'introspective representation' (1999: 646–7), enabling representatives to act on the basis of what they believe their core voters would wish.

Descriptive representation as a practice is highly contested among political scientists.¹⁴ Similarity says very little about what a representative does and about the interests that will be promoted, simply because 'being' does not equal 'doing'. Low- and medium-educated MPs do not necessarily share and further the preferences of the low- and medium-educated electorate—just as some very well-educated politicians, such as Bart de Wever, Pim Fortuyn, or Boris Johnson, have campaigned on platforms that many of their fellow university graduates abhorred. Next, there is the problem of 'essentialism'. For example, the notion that 'only women can understand women's issues' (Mansbridge 1999: 637); or the problem of where and on what basis one selects the group that needs to be represented, and where to draw the line. Finally, carried to extremes, descriptive representation may actually perpetuate the very problems it seeks to address. That is, by typecasting representatives—women only representing women, blacks only representing blacks, the low-skilled only the less educated—one reinforces societal stereotypes and divisions (Mansbridge 1999: 639).

That said, some degree of representative description can help to remedy some of the pitfalls of diploma democracy, such as the feelings of distrust and distaste the least educated nowadays harbour towards politicians (Farrell & Scully 2007: 48–9). A number of contemporary democracies have, therefore, introduced measures to safeguard a more even representation of different groups in a variety of social and political arenas. These measures have included the use of quotas in the selection of 'minority' candidates (Krook & O'Brien 2010). The evidence on the effects of these is mixed. Some researchers find that the increased presence of women and minorities appears to have little or

no impact on the political engagement of these constituents. Others show that having a mimetic representative can have positive effects on a range of behaviours and attitudes among women and ethnic minorities.¹⁵ Some note the positive effect of offering a role model, or they argue that the inclusion of ‘minorities’ in political office sends important signals that lead them to become more politically involved, or at least, to feel more satisfied with the decision-making process.¹⁶

Sortition: A ‘House of Lots’

We have already discussed the role of lot in the composition of deliberative conventions. A more radical application is to select members of legislative bodies and other political officials by lot instead of by elections. In Plato’s Athens, there were various institutions in place to guard against a meritocratization of public life—to Plato’s great displeasure, it should be noted. After the reforms of Cleisthenes, for example, nearly all administrative positions were fulfilled by citizens chosen by lot. This was meant to restrain the formation of a governing elite.

Over the past decades, there has been a burgeoning literature on ‘sortition’—the use of lot in democratic politics.¹⁷ A variety of reforms have been proposed to select one of the representative bodies in a bicameral system, either the House of Representatives, the Senate, or the House of Lords, by lot instead of by direct or indirect elections, or even heritage. The German political philosopher Hubertus Buchstein (2009) has even proposed applying sortition to the European Union. He has suggested adding a second chamber to the European Parliament, consisting of 200 citizens proportionally chosen by lot from the electorate in the member states. He called this second chamber the ‘House of Lots’. It would have serious veto powers, a right of initiative, and its members would be provided with extensive support by experts.

Most of these proposals do not replace the electoral representation entirely. Rather they introduce a mixed system, which provides for a more egalitarian check on the increasingly professionalized and elitist system of recruitment of the legislative through political parties and elections. However, some go even further, suggesting that the entire legislative process be based on multi-body sortition—on a series of checks and balances, all based on allotment instead of elections.¹⁸

Introducing Plebiscitary Elements

In a knowledge society, choosing aldermen, mayors, or ministers by lot is a rather radical solution. It is one thing to randomly select the legislative, in order to limit descriptive deficits and disparate issue agendas, but selecting the

executive by lot is something else again. Meritocracy has a welcome place in the executive branch. After all, high levels of skills and expertise are very relevant for the effective and efficient execution of policies. Direct elections for governing officials, preferably in combination with compulsory voting, could be an alternative. The vote of those with a low level of education would thus have an impact equal to that of those with a high level of educational attainment, forcing political parties and candidates to take their interests into account—instead of the present situation in which extremely well-educated party elites select the candidates, as we saw in Chapter 7.

Introducing some plebiscitary elements into the representative democracy would not only allow the voice of groups with a low level of education to be more clearly heard during the process of recruiting the political elite, they can also bring more variety to the political style and expertise. Electing government administrators could, for example, lead to more room for the symbolic and emotive dimensions of politics. Next to formal qualifications, in the form of titles and diplomas, informal competences such as charisma and persuasiveness are also relevant. In this way, a bridge can be laid between the daily life, the *Lebenswelt*, of the less educated and the policy world of the academic elites. It may help to increase the degree of identification with the political system and promote trust in the political leaders.

Combating Status Monopolies

The rise of political meritocracy is closely connected to the increasing meritocratic nature of Western European societies. We concluded in Chapter 8 that over-representation of well-educated citizens in the political system is particularly problematic if diplomas confer benefits in other social spheres as well. This could threaten social coherency and democracy, as the systematic exclusion of the low- and medium-educated will lead to structural feelings of dissatisfaction on their part.

David Miller (1996: 300), following Michael Walzer (1983), has therefore argued that a meritocracy is not only more stable but also socially more just, the greater the variety of socially valued merit available: 'Economic contribution would be one kind of merit, education and scholarship another, artistic achievement a third, public service yet another, and so forth.' If each of these dimensions comes with its own status ladders from which citizens may derive self-respect, the risk of status monopolies declines markedly. If becoming a minister, a professor, or a top executive is not in the cards, a person can always become a TV presenter, professional football player, Britain's Got Talent finalist, or Volunteer of the Year, and earn a hefty salary, achieve high social status, or considerable social recognition.

This means, in the first place, that sufficient channels should remain open in society to foster social mobility and stratification that is not associated with formal qualifications. It also means that the value of all the diplomas and tests, which, as a proxy for merit, have become such an important factor in our society, should be put into perspective. The tyranny of the diplomas will have to be challenged, and competences acquired other than through formal education will also have to be recognized (Elchardus 2002: 270). This is especially so when they lead to *bottlenecks* in the opportunity structure, as James Fishkin (2014: 1) calls them: ‘narrow places through which people must pass if they hope to reach a wide range of opportunities that fan out on the other side’. To ameliorate this he advocates *opportunity pluralism* ‘to increase the range of opportunities open to people in all stages in life to pursue different paths that lead to forms of human flourishing’.

Most importantly, it means that access to essential social goods and services, such as healthcare, social security, and education, should not be yoked to an individual’s formal qualifications or social position: ‘Merit of any sort should only be allowed to govern the distribution of a certain range of goods and services, and in particular not those goods and services which people regard as necessities’ (Miller 1996: 300). There are huge disparities in disposition and talents between people, and there will always be large groups of citizens lacking the formal or informal competences in demand on the job market. For these groups, too, it should be possible to have a decent and meaningful existence.

A Wake-Up Call for Modern-Day Platonists

Resolving the pitfalls of diploma democracies will not depend on the introduction of one single innovation or even on the introduction of a set of reforms. As political scientists, we teach our students time and again that political reforms are hard to realize, given the complexity of political processes. Innovations seldom work out as planned and often produce results that are unexpected. It is one thing to plan new initiatives and to change political arrangements—implementing them is another thing entirely.

Enlightened populist parties, civic education, compulsory voting, corrective referenda, and other ballots, will not in themselves restore the low- and medium-educated to all of the rungs of the participation ladder. Democracy will continue to be dominated by the better educated, the rhetorically and intellectually skilled, as it has been since its beginnings in ancient Athens. However, as in the Athenian democracy, so despised by Plato, they do give the least educated important veto powers. The EU referendums, for example, have been a wake-up call for the Euro-academics who have been so busy in governing *for* the people instead of *with* the people.

Enlightened populist parties, referenda, compulsory voting, deliberative polls, sortition, and plebiscites force the political elites to take into account the perspectives of the less well-educated, for whom Europe is a threat rather than an opportunity. At the very least, they force the Euro-academics to contemplate further how they can get to a 'yes'.

Notes

1. Paul Armstong, 'Nigel Farage: Arch-eurosceptic and Brexit "puppet master"', CNN, 15 July 2016, retrieved from <http://edition.cnn.com/2016/06/24/europe/eu-referendum-nigel-farage> (24 June 2016).
2. According to the Dutch Parliamentary Election Study 2006, 48 per cent of the well-educated voted in favour of the Convention and 47 per cent against. Among the middle educated, this was 37 per cent versus 61 per cent and for the less educated, 36 per cent versus 62 per cent. Exit polls (www.peil.nl, 7 July 2005) suggested higher numbers of opponents, but similar proportions: 51 per cent of the well-educated, 72 per cent of the middle educated, and 82 per cent of the less educated said they had voted against the convention.
3. Compare Goodwin & Heath 2016; Pattie 2016; <http://blogs.ft.com/ftdata/2016/06/24/brexit-demographic-divide-eu-referendum-results/>.
4. Mudde & Kaltwasser (2012: 16) for example, argue that populism 'can be both a corrective and a threat to democracy' depending on two main contextual factors: the degree of democratic consolidation and whether populists sit in opposition or in government. In consolidated democracies, populism in opposition is expected to have a small positive impact on the quality of democracy, whereas populism in government should have a moderate effect on democracy, either positive or negative.
5. Compare Nie et al. 1996: 131–2.
6. See Nie et al. 1996; Kam & Palmer 2008; Berinsky & Lenz 2011.
7. See Flinders 2012; Stoker and Hay 2016; Seyd 2016: 342.
8. See Goodin & Dryzek 2006; Grönlund et al. 2014.
9. See Van Reybrouck 2013: 109–21; Isernia & Fishkin 2014; Meijer et al. 2017.
10. See Schlozman et al. 2012: 544–57 for some proposals.
11. Compare also Wille 1994; Schudson 1998; Fiorina 1999.
12. See Papadopoulos 2005: 461; LeDuc 2015.
13. See, in general, Krook & O'Brien 2010; Michon 2013.
14. Compare Farrell & Scully 2007: 48; Dovi 2008.
15. Merolla et al. 2013; Fowler et al. 2014.
16. See Hayes & Hibbing 2016.
17. Compare Callenbach & Philips 1985; Sutherland 2008; Barnett & Carty 2008; Dowlen 2008; Buchstein 2009; Dowlen & Delannoi 2010; Bouricius 2013; Van Reybrouck 2013: 121–50.
18. Bouricius 2013; Van Reybrouck 2013: 128–38.

Appendix

Sample: Countries Selected

We focus in Part II and III on the six countries that were selected in Chapter 4: Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, the Netherlands, and the UK. We are aware that these countries differ with regard to important elements of the political system, namely in terms of the territorial organization of the state (two federal states, Belgium and Germany; a rather decentralized and regionalized country, the UK; and unitary and quite centralized states such as France, and to a lesser extent the Netherlands and Denmark) and political system (majoritarian electoral system in the UK, versus more proportional representation in the others; presidential system in France, versus parliamentary in the others).

The Data on Political Participation and Civil Society (Chapters 4, 5, 6, 8)

We have benefited from several survey data sources. The European Social Survey (ESS) was used for most empirical analyses in Chapters 5 and 8. The European Social Survey is a biannual multi-country survey, collecting data since 2002, that covers topics such as public opinion and political engagement. We also used data from the International Social Survey Programme (ISSP) that annually conducts a major comparative survey in a number of countries, including the countries in our sample. In addition, we have used data from the Eurobarometer (EB), and from the Audit of Political Engagement, an annual public opinion poll produced by the Hansard Society in the UK. The data on the tertiary level educational attainment in European countries in 2006 and 2015, shown in chapter 4, are available on the website of Eurostat: <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat>.

Robustness Checks

To determine the validity of the main findings, various robustness checks were performed, to test the persistence of the differences in political participation between educational groups. We particularly used the ESS1-6 cumulative data file, the EES 2014 (round 7) data, and the ISSP 2014 data to test the robustness of the findings. In all these data, we checked whether we could find parallel patterns. Based on these tests, we conclude that the educational differences are observable in a variety of indicators of political participation across different surveys.

ESS Data

In most of the analysis for Chapters 4, 5, and 8 we used the ESS-7 2014, which covers twenty-two countries. All information on the data is available at <http://www.europeansocialsurvey.org/>. In addition, we used the ESS1-6 cumulative data file, including six rounds over the years 2002–2012. The data include the following editions of the integrated ESS data files:

1. ESS1 edition 6.4 (release date 26.11.14): 2002
2. ESS2 edition 3.4 (release date 26.11.14): 2004
3. ESS3 edition 3.5 (release date 26.11.14): 2006
4. ESS4 edition 4.3 (release date 26.11.14): 2008
5. ESS5 edition 3.2 (release date 26.11.14): 2010
6. ESS6 edition 2.1 (release date 26.11.14): 2012

Analytical Sample

In the analysis of the ESS data, we used an analytical sample that was limited to individuals between seventeen and seventy-one years old at the time of the survey. By limiting the age range, the educational variation is more limited than if the full age range were analysed. On the other hand, this limited the effect of age on our findings.

Weighting

Design and population weights for the ESS data were applied to allow for valid inference from the combined samples to the population.

International Social Survey Programme: Citizenship II—ISSP 2014

In Chapter 5, 6, and 8 we also used the ISSP 2014 data, retrieved from the GESIS Data Archive. This wave covers information of a sample from persons aged eighteen years and older from thirty-four international countries. We selected data for six countries: Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, the Netherlands, United Kingdom. Information on the data is available at <http://zocat.gesis.org/webview/index.jsp?object=http://zocat.gesis.org/obj/fStudy/ZA6670>.

Eurobarometer

In Chapters 5 and 6 we also used political participation data that come from the Flash Eurobarometer 373 that surveyed Europeans' engagement in participatory democracy. The Eurobarometer survey was carried out in the twenty-seven member states of the European Union in February 2013. Some 25,551 respondents were interviewed. We retrieved the data from the GESIS Data Archive. More information on these Eurobarometer data is available at: <http://zocat.gesis.org/webview/index.jsp?object=http://zocat.gesis.org/obj/fStudy/ZA6670>.

Hansard Society

In Chapter 5 we used political participation data from the Audit of Political Engagement 2015, which is the annual poll measuring public opinion about politics and the political process in the UK since 2004. More information is available at: <https://www.hansardsociety.org.uk/projects/audit-of-political-engagement>.

The Data on Political Elites (Chapter 7)

For our analyses in Chapter 7, we used a mix of primary and secondary sources to collect data on the education background of ministers and Members of Parliament in Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, the Netherlands, and the UK. Information on the educational records was collected from biographies issued by the parliaments and government websites in the six countries. Additional information was used to complete the cases descriptions.

- For *Belgium*, Nic de Leu (University of Gent) has provided his data on ministerial profiles in Belgium which were coded according to the SEDEPE codebook. For the information on parliamentarians we used Van Droogenbroeck and Adriaenssens (2004), and data kindly provided by Frederik Verleden (2014).
- For *Denmark*, we used data from Gaxie & Godmer (2007), Jensen (2004), and the Folketinget (2012) for the educational background of the Danish MPs. Biographical data for the Rasmussen II cabinet were collected from the website of the Danish government at http://stm.dk/_a_2819.html.
- For *France*, we have used data from Behr and Michon (2013) and Dogan (2003) for the government. The chapter on France from Best and Gaxie (2000) was the base for a first exploratory summary of the French parliament.
- For *Germany*, the information on the composition of the latest German parliaments was retrieved from www.bundestag.de and we used the information of Wessels (1997) on the composition of German parliament till 1994. Educational background information of current German ministers was collected from <http://www.bundesregierung.de>.
- For the *Netherlands*: we used the long-term data of the Dutch MPs collected by Van den Berg (2007) and Van den Berg & Van den Braak (2004). Earlier data on the careers and background of Dutch ministers originate from Secker's (1991) study. The career data on ministers who were members of the cabinets in the period 1990–2012 and MPs since 2004 were collected by the authors of this book. The biographic material was taken from the website 'Parlement & Politiek' (www.parlement.com).
- For the *UK*, data were retrieved from the House of Commons on www.parliament.uk and www.gov.uk. Most of the historical data were taken from Butler and Butler (2011) and from the Sutton Trust reports.
- For the *European Union*, we have used the information from the study of Beauvallet-Haddad et al. (2016) for the background of the members of the European Parliament. The data on the European commissioners were based on MacMullen (2000) and collected during a previous project (Wille 2013). The biographies of commissioners of the Juncker Commission were retrieved from the website of the European Commission: http://ec.europa.eu/index_en.htm.

Moreover, we used international comparative data about MPs which were collected by Best & Cotta (2000) and Cotta and Best (2007). We particularly relied on the data analysis from Gaxie and Godmer (2007). The empirical base for their research is the DATACUBE, a collection of data concerning the characteristics of national legislators in

European countries. Data from the Blondel and Thiébaud (1991) study on ministers were retrieved from the SEDEPE (Selection and Deselection of Political Elites) website.

Measuring Education

Education in the ESS data

The ESS data, that we used in Chapters 4, 5, 6, and 8, contain detailed information about educational attainment. The ESS data have implemented a harmonized education variable for a large subset of the countries (developed by Schneider 2010), which is valid in a comparative education study. The harmonized measures attempt to accommodate for future changes in the ISCED standard. Different variables were used in the different rounds for measuring the highest level of education.

Highest level of education, EDULVLA:

(Based on ISCED-97; categories 0–1 and 5–6 are collapsed)

Coding frame

0—Not possible to harmonize into 5-level ISCED

1—Less than lower secondary education (ISCED 0-1)

2—Lower secondary education completed (ISCED 2)

3—Upper secondary education completed (ISCED 3)

4—Post-secondary non-tertiary education completed (ISCED 4)

5—Tertiary education completed (ISCED 5–6)

55—Other

Highest level of education, EISCED:

(European survey version of ISCED-97, ES-ISCED)

Coding frame

0—Not possible to harmonize into ES-ISCED

1—ES-ISCED I, less than lower secondary

2—ES-ISCED II, lower secondary

3—ES-ISCED IIIb, upper secondary, vocational or no access V1

4—ES-ISCED IIIa, upper secondary, general and/or access to V1

5—ES-ISCED IV, advanced vocational, sub-degree

6—ES-ISCED V1, lower tertiary education, BA level

7—ES-ISCED V2, higher tertiary education, >= MA level

55—Other

Three Levels of Education

The educational variable in the ESS data sets is recoded into three categories:

1 = Lower education (lower secondary or less) includes ISCED level 0 Not completed primary education, 1 Primary or first stage of basic, and 2 Lower secondary or Second stage of basic education. Also short vocational programs (less than three years) taken after primary school.

2 = Medium education (higher secondary and post-secondary, non-tertiary) includes ISCED level 3 Upper secondary (A, B, C) and 4 post-secondary, non-tertiary.

- 3 = Higher education (post-secondary) includes ISCED level 5 and higher, i.e. any stage of tertiary education (e.g. BA, BSc, MA, PhD), including vocational ISCED 5B programmes which have different names in different countries.

Our education classification (of low, medium, high educated) in Chapter 2 is based on the revised ISCED 11, which classifies education along nine levels. Since the official ISCED 2011 mappings were not available at the time of the ESS surveys, ISCED-97 mappings were used as a starting point for these surveys.

Education in the ISSP

The ISSP makes use of the following categories to measure the highest level of educational attainment:

1. No formal education
2. Primary school (elementary education)
3. Lower secondary (secondary completed does not allow entry to university: obligatory school)
4. Upper secondary (programmes that allows entry to university)
5. Post-secondary, non-tertiary (other upper secondary programmes toward labour market or technical formation)
6. Lower level tertiary, first stage (also technical schools at a tertiary level)
7. Upper level tertiary (Master, Doctor)

The education variable in the ISSP data set is recoded to three categories:

- 1 = No formal education, primary school (elementary education), Lower secondary (secondary completed does not allow entry to university: obligatory school)
- 2 = Upper secondary (programmes that allows entry to university), Post-secondary, non-tertiary (other upper secondary programmes toward labour market or technical formation)
- 3 = Lower level tertiary, first stage (also technical schools at a tertiary level); Upper level tertiary (Master, Doctor)

Education in the Eurobarometer

When using the data from the Eurobarometer, we have defined the levels of education as follows: high educated are those who finished their education aged twenty or over; the middle educated are those who finished their education aged sixteen to nineteen; the low educated finished their education aged fifteen or under.

Measuring Political Participation

Measuring Political Participation in the ESS (Chapter 5)

The ESS study uses the following questions to measure political participation:

- Voting is measured by asking whether or not respondents voted in the latest national election: 'Some people don't vote nowadays for one reason or another. Did you vote in the last [country] national election in [month/year]?'

- Vote choice: 'Which party did you vote for in that election?'
- Political party membership is measured using the following question: 'Are you a member of any political party?'

Participation Index (Chapter 5)

The political participation index used in Chapter 5 is constructed on the base of data from the ESS survey. The index measures the number of political activities the respondents took part in, in the past year: contacted a politician, government, or local government official; worked in a political party or action group; worked in another organization or association; wore or displayed a campaign badge/sticker; signed a petition; took part in lawful public demonstration; and boycotted certain products (0–7).

Spectator Activity (Chapter 5)

The ESS study uses the following questions to measure spectator activities:

- 'On an average weekday, how much of your time watching television is spent watching news or programmes about politics and current affairs? [No time at all–More than 3 hours].'
- 'How much of this time is spent reading about politics and current affairs? [No time at all–More than 3 hours].'

Participation in the ISSP (Chapter 5)

Different forms of political participation are measured on the base of the following question:

'Here are some different forms of political and social action that people can take. Please indicate if you have:

1. Signed a petition
2. Boycotted, or deliberately bought, certain products for political, ethical, or environmental reasons
3. Taken part in a demonstration
4. Attended a political meeting or rally
5. Contacted, or attempted to contact, a politician or a civil servant to express your views
6. Donated money or raised funds for a social or political activity
7. Joined an internet political forum or discussion group.'

Participation in the Hansard Society 2015 (Chapter 5)

To measure political engagement, the Hansard Society uses the following questions:

'In the last 12 months have you done any of the following to influence decisions, laws or policies?

- Contacted a local councillor or MP
- Contacted a local councillor/MP
- Contacted the media
- Taken an active part in a campaign
- Created or signed a paper petition

- Created or signed an e-petition
- Donated money or paid a membership fee to a charity or campaigning organization
- Boycotted certain products for political, ethical or environmental reasons
- Attended political meetings
- Donated money or paid a membership fee to a political party
- Taken part in a demonstration, picket, or march
- Voted in an election
- Contributed to a discussion or campaign online or on social media
- Taken part in a public consultation.'

Measuring Participation in Civil Society Organizations (Chapter 6)

The *Flash EB 373, 2013* measures participation by the following question:

'Are you a member of any of the following types of non-governmental organizations or associations?

- an organization with a specific economic, social, environmental, cultural, or sporting interest
- a Trade Union
- a professional association.'

The ISSP-2014 measures civil society participation by the following question:

'People sometimes belong to different kinds of groups or associations. For each type of group, please indicate whether you; belong and actively participate, belong but don't actively participate, used to belong but do not any more, or have never belonged to it.

- A church or other religious organization
- A sports, leisure, or cultural group.'

The *ESS-1 2002* measures participation in voluntary organizations:

'For each of the voluntary organizations I will now mention, please use this card to tell me whether any of these things apply to you now or in the last 12 months, and, if so, which:

- a sports club or club for outdoor activities?
- an organization for cultural or hobby activities?
- a trade union?
- a business, professional, or farmers' organization?
- a consumer or automobile organization?
- an organization for humanitarian aid, human rights, minorities, or immigrants?
- an organization for environmental protection, peace, or animal rights?
- a religious or church organization?
- a political party?
- an organization for science, education, or teachers and parents?
- a social club, club for the young, the retired/elderly, women, or friendly societies?
- any other voluntary organization such as the ones I've just mentioned?'

Measuring Political Trust, Interest, and Efficacy (Chapters 5 and 8)

ESS7-2014 measures political trust by the following questions:

- ‘Using this card, please tell me on a score of 0–10 how much you personally trust each of the institutions I read out. 0 means you do not trust an institution at all, and 10 means you have complete trust.
 1. Parliament
 2. Politicians
 3. Political parties
 4. European Parliament.’
- ‘How much would you say the political system in [country] allows people like you to have a say in what the government does? [00 = not at all, 10 = completely].’
- ‘And how much would you say that the political system in [country] allows people like you to have an influence on politics? [00 = not at all, 10 = completely].’
- ‘How much would you say that politicians care what people like you think?’ [00 = not at all, 10 = completely].’
- ‘How interested would you say you are in politics? [very interested, 1–not at all interested 4]’

ISSP-2014 measures political efficacy as follows:

- ‘To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements? [Strongly Agree (1), Strongly Disagree (5)]
- People like me don’t have any say about what the government does
- I don’t think the government cares much what people like me think
- Most of the time we can trust people in government to do what is right
- Most politicians are in politics only for what they can get out of it personally’

‘When you get together with your friends, relatives, or fellow workers, how often do you discuss politics? [Often (1)–Never (4)]’

Measuring Political Preferences (Chapters 4 and 8)

ESS7-2014 measures political preferences as follows:

- ‘Now, using this card, please say what you think overall about the state of education in [country] nowadays? [0 = Extremely bad, 10 = extremely good]
- Still using this card, please say what you think overall about the state of health services in [country] nowadays? [0 = Extremely bad, 10 = extremely good]
- The government should take measures to reduce differences in income levels. [1 = agree strongly, 5 = disagree strongly]
- Now thinking about the European Union, some say European unification should go further. Others say it has already gone too far. Using this card, what number on the scale best describes your position? [0 = unification has gone too far, 10 = unification should go further]
- Would you say it is generally bad or good for [country]’s economy that people come to live here from other countries? [0 = bad for the economy, 10 = good for the economy]

Diploma Democracy

- And, using this card, would you say that [country]'s cultural life is generally undermined or enriched by people coming to live here from other countries? [0 = cultural life undermined, 10 = cultural life enriched]
- Is [country] made a worse or a better place to live by people coming to live here from other countries? [0 = worse place to live, 10 = better place to live]
- In politics people sometimes talk of 'left' and 'right'. Using this card, where would you place yourself on this scale, where 0 means the left and 10 means the right?
- Now, using this card, to what extent do you think [country] should allow people of the same race or ethnic group as most [country]'s people to come and live here [1 = allow many to come and live here, 4 = allow none].'

Measuring Income by the ESS-7 2014 (Chapter 4)

'This card, please tell me which letter describes your household's total income, after tax and compulsory deductions, from all sources? If you don't know the exact figure, please give an estimate.'

Supplementary Tables and Figures

Table A.7.1. Educational level of Belgium federal cabinet ministers 1999–2014 (abs.; junior ministers excluded)

Government	Years	Low education	Medium education	High Education: master or equivalent	High Education: doctoral or equivalent	N =
Verhofstadt I	1999–03		1	10	2	14*
Verhofstadt II	2003–07			15	2	17
Verhofstadt III	2007–08			12	3	15
Leterme I	2008–08		1	13	1	15
Van Rompuy I	2008–09	1		16	1	18
Leterme II	2009–11	1	1	13	1	16
Di Rupo I	2011–14			12	4	16
Michel	2014–			13	2	15
Total		2	3	104	16	126*

Source: Own calculations; * information on 1 minister was missing

Table A.7.2. Educational background of French ministers, 1986–2012 (%)

Government	Year	Ecole Nationale d'Administration (ENA)	Science Po Paris	Prominent major school	Major school (<i>Grand école</i>)
Chirac	1986–88	32	34	46	48
Rocard	1988–91	17	20	37	42
Cresson	1991–92	22	30	46	50
Bérégoovoy	1992–93	19	32	51	53
Balladur	1993–95	25	34	41	44
Juppé	1995–97	19	30	36	38
Jospin	1997–2002	29	42	50	54
Raffarin	2002–05	17	36	39	46
de Villepin	2005–07	24	39	42	55
Fillon	2007–12	15	27	32	44
Ayrault	2012–14	15	25	18	40

Source: Behr and Michon (2013: 337)

Table A.7.3. Education level of cabinet ministers in the Netherlands 1848–2017 (% , junior ministers excluded)

Years	Primary	Secondary	College	Graduate	Unknown	Total	(N)
1848-1888	3	13	15	58	11	100%	118
1888-18	–	7	35	58	–	100%	72
1918-40	–	–	31	69	–	100%	61
1940-46	–	3	14	83	–	100%	29
1946-67	1	3	12	84	–	100%	68
1967-94	–	7	8	85	–	100%	89
1994-2017	–	5	11	84	–	100%	112

Source: Secker (1991: 84) added with own calculations from Parlement & Politiek (www.parlement.com)

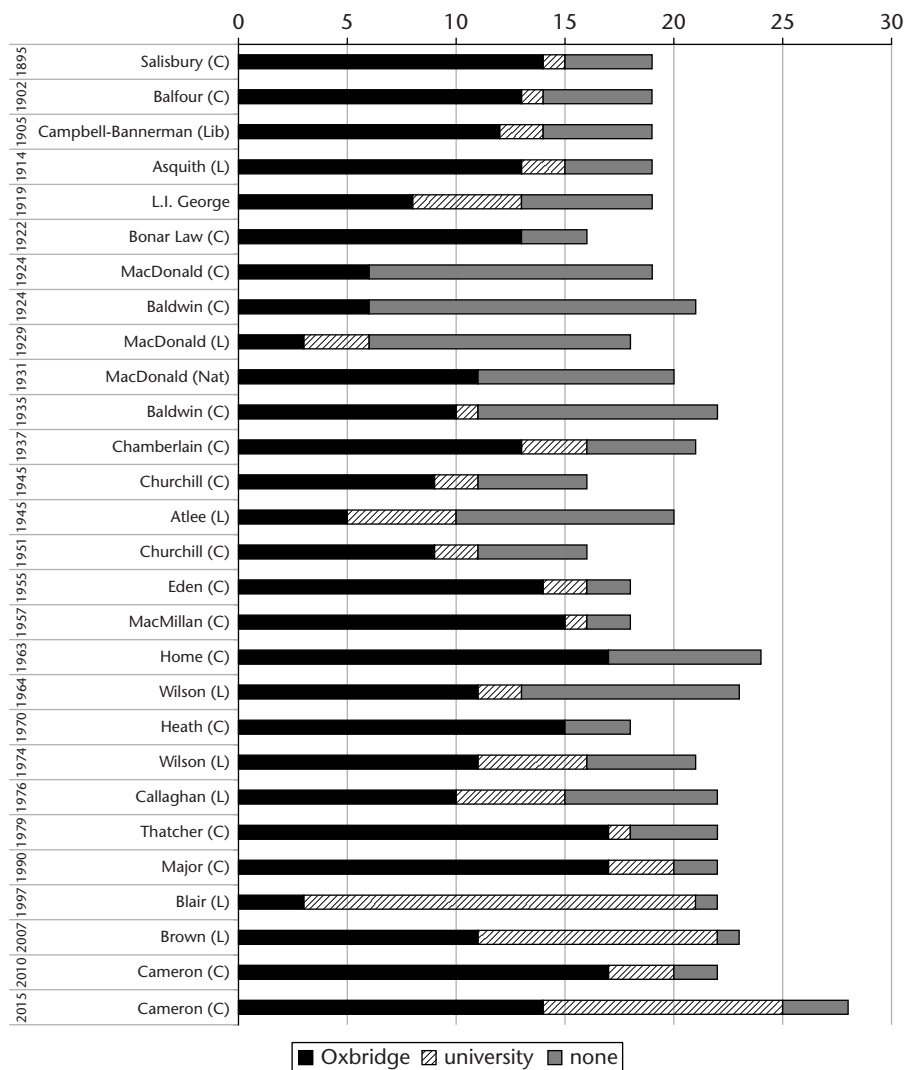


Figure A.7.1. Educational composition of British cabinets 1885–2015 (abs., sources: Butler and Butler 2011; Sutton Trust 2015)

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