



D6.2: Evaluation of the reconnection: Strategies produced by the Delphi exercises

WP6 - Strategies for reconnection: party democracy

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1 Introduction

This document presents the findings of three Delphi studies conducted with distinct expert groups who have been asked to evaluate the effectiveness of several actions which have been implemented in the past two decades with the goal of ameliorating the health of representative institutions in European democracies.

Within the REDIRECT project, democratic disconnect is defined as a weakening of the interactive linkage between citizens and the governing elites triggered by a series of changes and transformations in the political, communicative, and social environments, as well as the scale of political problems in modern societies. This disconnect comprises institutional, behavioural and affective dimensions, posing a threat to the trust in and legitimacy of the broader system of democratic representation. As defined in Deliverable 1.2, the representative system can be understood as an ecology of interconnected institutions and practices that are self-perpetuating. Following the perspective of Deliverable 1.3, this disconnect is best analysed from a dynamic viewpoint that emphasizes the potential for establishing new linkages and intermediation functions within the system. This dynamic approach elevates the significance of the democratic innovations first detailed in Deliverable 6.1 and now under evaluation in this deliverable. By incorporating expert insights into our evaluation of these innovations, we can focus our attempts at developing policy recommendations (Deliverable 6.3) to the actions which are regarded as the most promising

Deliverable 6.1 has introduced 'reconnection strategies' aimed at revitalizing the linkage between citizens, political parties, and parliaments. These strategies are conceptualized across three key areas: empowering citizens to enhance their engagement with governing elites; revitalizing political parties; and fostering more representative and trustworthy parliaments. For each of them, we have identified concrete actions that have been applied by various European social and political contexts. The original list of actions presented in D6.1 have been updated with the cooperation of all teams of the REDIRECT project: an updated list of these actions is included in the annexes of this deliverable, together with the full informative document shared with the experts.

Building upon the above-mentioned documents' discussion of the representative disconnect, this deliverable first elaborates on the key challenges by highlighting their remote causes, concrete manifestations, and expert insights. It then evaluates the effectiveness of previous actions as mechanisms for ameliorating the disconnect and exploring potential solutions.

2 An updated list of relevant reconnection strategies and related actions

In Deliverable 6.1 we have compiled a list of reconnection strategies and actions that have been updated in cooperation with all the REDIRECT partners. We define strategies as overarching plans for achieving a goal, whereas actions refer to the specific, concrete measures implemented to advance towards that objective. To keep our focus manageable, we included only those

actions that are sufficiently recent (gaining momentum in the past two decades), have been adopted across various countries, and have attracted scholarly interest.

2.1 Empowering Citizens

A significant body of research indicates that citizens are growing increasingly disenchanted with the traditional actors and institutions of representative government. In most established democracies, trust in political parties, parliaments, and the government has declined over the past few decades, with only a minority of European citizens expressing confidence in them. Furthermore, levels of conventional political participation are generally decreasing, though important variations exist across countries. (Norris, 2011; Wattenberg, 2020)

One strategy to address these signs of democratic disaffection is to empower citizens with the tools to understand politics, enhance their internal and external political efficacy, and encourage their involvement in the decision-making process. The assumption underpinning this approach is that a more politically informed citizenry can lead to numerous positive outcomes, including increased participation, greater accountability, and ultimately, a more robust civil society. These actions are primarily characterized by the innovation of Information Technologies, but they also include some traditional means to empower citizens. The actions included strategy are: Voting Advice Applications, Parliamentary Monitoring Websites, Civic education initiatives, Lowering voting age to 16 years and the adoption of E-petitions.

Voting Advice Applications (VAAs) are digital tools designed to help citizens make informed voting decisions, especially in multi-party systems (Germann et al., 2023). Typically developed by nonpartisan organizations, these platforms provide personalized information, illustrating the alignment between a user's policy views and those of various political parties or candidates. VAAs have gained significant popularity in the new millennium, with examples like over six million responses in the 2012 Dutch elections and 15.6 million uses of Wahl-O-Mat in the 2017 German federal elections. Their global deployment spans North America, Oceania, North Africa/Middle East, South America, and Asia. (Garzia & Marschall, 2019) Research on the impact of VAAs on voter turnout is varied.

Parliamentary Monitoring Organizations (PMOs) are another action in the realm of citizen participation. As civil society organizations, their aim is to promote public knowledge of parliamentary processes, with the goal of enhancing accountability and citizen involvement. The ICT revolution has led to Parliamentary Monitoring Websites becoming the primary means through which PMOs pursue their objectives. The internet drastically reduces the costs associated with collecting, elaborating, and presenting this information to the public. Through PMWs, PMOs can track diverse aspects of individual parliamentarians' conduct, such as their parliamentary attendance, voting behavior, or bill sponsorship, in addition to the work of collective bodies like parliamentary committees. Some examples across Europe can be found in the UK and Germany: WriteToThem, a platform for contacting elected officials and TheyWorkForYou, a website providing access to MPs' voting records and other data; both run by mySociety in UK; and Abgeordnetenwatch.de (Parliament Watch), a website that facilitates discussion between citizens and parliamentarians in Germany. (Mandelbaum & Swislow, 2016)

Civic education can be broadly defined as the activities to provide young citizens with learning experiences to empower them for playing an active role in society and politics at local, national and supranational levels. In Europe, civic education usually takes the form of a cross-curricular subject, as part of another subject or as a separate subject that is taught in primary and secondary schools. In the European Union, the concept and the scope of civic education has broadened, encompassing not only political knowledge but also the development of values, attitudes, and skills needed for active and responsible participation in society. This broader version of civic education takes the name of citizenship education. This trend became stronger in 2015, when the EU education ministers adopted the Paris Declaration on promoting citizenship and the common values of freedom, tolerance and non-discrimination in education. Civic (and citizenship) education has a long tradition in the USA, and in several other non-European countries. For instance, in Australia, the “Discovering Democracy Curriculum” was implemented in 1998, in a non-compulsory form (Manning & Edwards, 2013). To date, almost all European countries have some form of civic or citizenship education in school, but there is wide variation in the level of specialization of the teachers and in whether it is a compulsory subject. According to the 2017 Eurydice report¹ citizenship education is integrated into EU school systems, either as a standalone subject, part of another, or across the curriculum. France, Finland, Estonia, and Greece particularly emphasize it with dedicated, compulsory courses. However, almost half of the EU lacks defined teacher training for citizenship education.

The debate surrounding the reduction of the voting age to 16 years, which began in the early 2000s, offers a compelling avenue for exploration, particularly regarding its potential to enhance youth participation in politics. Germany saw a trend of lowering the voting age, beginning with municipal elections in some states during the mid-1990s and extending to state elections. A parallel movement started in parts of Austria around the year 2000. (Eichhorn & Bergh, 2021). The most significant development occurred in Austria, where the voting age was lowered from 18 to 16 years for all levels of elections (Zeglovits & Zandonella, 2013).

E-petitions represent one of the most widely used e-democracy tools (Wright, Scott, 2015). The e-petition system provides a platform for citizens to formally request government action on specific political issues by following a set of procedural rules, all of which can be completed online. Petitions can be considered a hybrid form of participatory practice, as formal procedures are organized top-down, while petitions on specific subjects are initiated bottom-up by citizens (Georg Aichholzer & Rose, 2020). In 2005, the German Federal Parliament (Deutscher Bundestag) initiated a two-year e-petitioning pilot scheme (Lindner & Riehm, 2011). This type of petition tool comprises the following components: submission via email attachment; examination by the petitions committee; publication on the Internet; possibilities for co-signing and discussing petitions online; processing, examination and replies to the petitioners; and publication of the decision on Internet. (Georg Aichholzer & Rose, 2020) Finland adopted the New Citizens Initiatives Act in 2012, which introduced a form of direct democracy. Studies conducted by various scholars have shown that this initiative led to increased citizen participation, engagement of youth, a learning process, and encouraged innovative policy ideas. Addition-

¹<https://eurydice.eacea.ec.europa.eu/publications/eurydice-brief-citizenship-education-school-europe-2017>

ally, it enhanced the political legitimacy of policy-making. (Lironi, 2016) In 2015, UK Parliament Group introduced e-petitions alternative to its system, becoming the world's parliamentary e-petitions system with the highest usage with over 30,000 petitions. It is also important to note the significant number of rejections of e-petitions and their relatively minor impact on driving real change (Leston-Bandeira, 2019).

2.2 Revitalising Political Parties

The crisis democracy faces today is strongly linked to the inability of political parties to connect citizens with state. As mediators, their detachment from citizens has resulted in a failure to translate social demands into policymaking (Wolkenstein, 2019). Political parties are integral to the functioning of the institutions of the state, and modern democracies can be seen as party democracies since elected representatives do as their party tells them to (Budge, 2020). The most direct evidence usually brought forward to argue that political parties are becoming weaker is the decline in party membership, on which there are incontrovertible data (Poguntke et al., 2016). There are also growing concerns about the decline of traditional parties and the fragmentation of the party systems (Mair, 2013; Poguntke & Hofmeister, 2024). More recently, the attention shifted to how parties reacted to the new challenges (Gauja & Kosiara-Pedersen, 2021) with some critical approaches to party reforms emerging (Wolkenstein, 2019). Given this challenging context where political parties' representative role is weakening and alternative methods trending, it is worth considering attempts to organize political parties in a more democratic way enhancing their "intermediary" capacity (Wolkenstein, 2019). As Poguntke et al. (2024) claim, while parties are affected by wider trends, they can be also determinative in their own fate. In this context, our aim is to evaluate several actions developed with the aim of revitalizing political parties.

This reconnection strategy covers all the actions aimed at reforming political parties to reinvigorate their role in the representative process. The objective of these actions is to promote political parties' transparency, inclusiveness and responsiveness. Here we focus on parties' internal reforms aimed at performing the functions usually associated with them in the new political and social context. The actions evaluated are reform of the candidate selection procedures, reform of the leadership selection procedures, the adoption of online participation platforms, online crowdfunding, microtargeting and new forms of party membership.

The expression "candidate selection" is employed to refer to the formal procedures and empirical processes through which political parties nominate candidates that contest an election to become members of a representative assembly. Candidate selection, a crucial step in building a parliament, is primarily an internal party matter, with limited legal oversight in most countries, except the United States. Since the 1990s, there's been a general trend towards more democratic candidate selection (Krouwel, 2013) particularly in Europe, though the pace and extent vary across countries and party types. The democratising trend was notable (although starting from different levels) for countries such as Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Spain and the UK. In most South European countries (Greece, Italy, Portugal) and the Netherlands, the candidate selection procedures have remained elite-controlled for the whole period considered,

without significant fluctuations. Considering the most recent data presented, the four above-mentioned countries remain those with the most exclusive procedures. At the other extreme, Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Ireland, Norway, Sweden and the UK have all comparatively inclusive procedures. Finally, France and Spain occupy an intermediate position. Liberal and environmental parties are more likely to use inclusive methods than Christian Democrats or Social Democrats.

The selection of party leaders is a consequential activity for democratic politics. In many countries, the possibility to become prime minister is restricted to those politicians who have served as leaders of their parties, as it is almost necessarily the case in Australia, Canada, Germany, Israel, Spain and the United Kingdom (Pilet & Cross, 2014). In addition, the increased personalization of contemporary politics, fueled by the changing media environment, vastly increased the relevance of party leaders for parties' electoral prospects. At the turn of the century, some authors identified a pressure towards a plebiscitarian democracy within parties, including the belief that party leaders should be elected directly by party members (Young & Cross, 2002). Many European parties have adopted more inclusive leadership selection processes by learning from reforms in other countries. The British Labour Party's shift towards a broader electorate in the 1980s and 1990s, when the responsibility to elect the leader was gradually moved from the exclusive hands of the parliamentary group to a broader including party members and registered and affiliated supporters, influenced other social democratic parties. Declining party membership and public trust in parties have pushed them to open leadership selection to a wider electorate (e.g., primaries in France and Italy). Scarrow (1999) reports that German parties have adopted measures including direct election of party leaders and binding policy referenda in an effort to make partisan political participation more attractive to citizens who hold a preference for direct, unconventional participation.

As an innovation of the ICT revolution, Online Political Platforms (OPPs) are dedicated sections on official party websites or independent platforms where registered members can participate in discussions and voting on different issues. These platforms aim to establish transparent and direct relationships between public figures, such as legislators, and citizens (Defacqz & Dupuy, 2021). In Germany, Pirate Party developed the Liquid Feedback software, which was then adopted by the party to allow members to facilitate transparent and collaborative contributions to the policymaking process (Korthagen et al., 2020). Following the experiment of Pirate Parties, Rousseau platform of the Italian Five Star Movement (FSM) is one of the most innovative digital tools (Tronconi & Bailo, 2024) which provides multiple areas enabling members to discuss legislation (Gerbaudo, 2021). Within Rousseau, "LEX" is the service through which members can discuss legislation. The service has features which can be initiated by MPs and local councillors of the movement to post the legislative proposals they would like to introduce, and members have 60 days to make objections or propose amendments (Gerbaudo, 2021). The online participation platform also encompasses features that facilitate bottom-up proposals by any member of the parties. In May 2016, the Five-Star Movement opened the feature called *LEX iscritti*, where party members could propose laws that, after reaching a sufficient level of support, would be taken to the Parliament. (Gerbaudo, 2021) According to Casaleggio (2017), it constitutes a bottom-up system where citizens can directly propose laws that will be taken to

Parliament. Plaza Podemos, the Spanish Podemos party's official forum, uses a combination of several tools that are specific to the different phases of the decision-making process (Korthagen et al., 2020).

Crowdfunding is defined as the activity of raising funds from the public to support certain projects including political campaigns (Kusumarani & Zo, 2019). For an initiative to be classified as a political crowdfunding, it must involve a funding project based on a political intention with a promoter, which could be a political party, association, social movements or lobbying organizations (González-Cacheda & Outeda, 2021). While the practice of collecting money from the public is not a recent fundraising strategy, online political crowdfunding represents a relatively new concept. An increasing number of political campaigns in countries such as Austria, Czechia, India, Russia, Spain, and the United Kingdom have adopted similar strategies by using online tools to collect small donations, following the model of the Democratic Party campaign during the 2008 US presidential elections. Advocates of online fundraising agree that online crowdfunding serves as a mobilization strategy reaching beyond just financial gains. According to this view, it encourages donors to commit themselves to action in addition to making donations, with a strong multiplying effect (International IDEA, 2018b). Political parties provide citizens with the option to make donations, either with a specified purpose or without. Donations can also be contributions to specific projects (International IDEA, 2018b). The logic behind political crowdfunding is that every small donation represents a vote for the political party. This may lead to further donations, party volunteer work, or convincing others in their network to support and donate to your party (International IDEA, 2018b, p. 10). Most crowdfunding platforms support various projects including political campaigns (Kusumarani & Zo, 2019, p. 168). Online crowdfunding relies on new technologies such as online platforms, mobile apps, SMS and email (International IDEA, 2018b, p. 14).

The use of data by political parties is not a new phenomenon and used commonly all over the world. However, new technologies have transformed the amount of information and the way how data is used (International IDEA, 2018a). Microtargeting can be defined as "creating customized winning messages, proof points and offers, accurately predicting their impact, and delivering them directly to individuals" (Agan, 2007). Political microtargeting enables political parties to identify voters which are most likely to convince in different ways (Zuiderveen Borgesius et al., 2018). According to a study conducted by IDEA, targeting voters is about (1) collecting data and dividing voters into segments based on characteristics such as personality traits, interests, and previous voting behavior; (2) designing personalized political content for each segment; and (3) using communication channels to reach the targeted voter segment with tailor-made messages. Microtargeting can have different deliverable forms such as social media, email, canvassing, and television. Digital microtargeting is a new kind of communication between parties and the electorate that aims to re-engage citizens with political parties. It transformed the data collection and voter segmentation processes. Voter segmentation means dividing the electorate into smaller blocks; and using different campaign methods for each segment. In the scholarly debate political microtargeting has been considered both a threat and an opportunity for democracy (Zuiderveen Borgesius et al., 2018), but it is an innovation which is likely here to stay.

Membership of political parties has been the main instrument for citizens to make their voice heard (International IDEA, 2020). Global data show that many countries have experienced decreases in political party influence in terms of declining membership (Liddiard, 2018). The decline of political parties' challenges parties' claims to be a fundamental connection mechanism between state and society (Gibson et al., 2016). In this new context, new models of membership have been developed by political parties. One of these forms is multilevel membership which offers a lower level of commitment. Adapting this kind of membership, political parties can inform individuals asking to join a mailing list as a first step, and in some cases, this process can go beyond engaging sympathizers before full membership perspective (International IDEA, 2020). For example, the Liberal Democrats in the United Kingdom and the Partido Popular (People's Party) in Spain offer the possibility of becoming a member or a supporter. Becoming a supporter differs from becoming a member in some ways. Firstly, while membership has a cost, being a supporter is free, or at a lower cost. Secondly, members have voting rights in the decision-making mechanisms, whereas supporters do not have the right to vote. In Portugal, party Iniciativa Liberal (Liberal Initiative) gives the possibility of volunteering by suggesting policies or participating in party events before officially joining the party (International IDEA, 2020). While this membership model offers greater flexibility in time and resource commitment, potentially attracting more individuals, its effectiveness lacks sufficient evidence. Another form of membership involves digitalizing party membership to increase online participation. The growth of these virtual support networks has become a focus of interest for both party and communication scholars. La République En Marche! (The Republic On the Move) in France provides a good example, demonstrating how political parties can cultivate a digital sphere for political activism. The key coordination mechanism for the party is the messaging app Telegram. Furthermore, the party has created numerous online platforms and digital activism spaces that enable members to influence its policies. According to the party, this new form of membership has facilitated mobilization beyond key electoral contests (International IDEA, 2020).

2.3 Making Parliaments More Representative and Trustworthy

Parliaments are the main institutional venues of political representation, but their ability to provide effective representation in contemporary democracies, characterized by fragmented societies and complex decisions, is disputed. One well-known problem is the lack of social representativeness of legislative assemblies. Members of disadvantaged groups are commonly underrepresented in political institutions, resulting in their interests being overshadowed by those of groups that are better represented in political assemblies (Brown, 2020). This strategy aims to address the under-representation of various social groups and their lack of descriptive representation. In an increasing number of countries, various types of quotas have been introduced to overcome this limitation. Group-based quotas have been adopted to ensure the representation of racial and ethnic minorities, young people, persons with disabilities, and other additional groups. An additional problem faced by parliaments is their public perception as detached from citizens, a problem that is partly related to the crisis of political parties and partly to the emergence of a more critical type of citizen, one having more educational and informa-

tional resources who is naturally less forgiving towards political institutions (Norris, 1999). Both factors contribute to the reputation of parliaments as scarcely transparent and responsive to citizens' demands. These new challenges have pushed parliaments to renew their practices to be more open and transparent, and to build new institutional channels to facilitate citizens' involvement in parliamentary work, activities that are often referred to as Public engagement (Leston-Bandeira & Siefken, 2023). The following actions have been included in this strategy: the adoption of gender quotas, youth quotas, regulating lobbying, actions to strengthening parliamentary transparency and communication and the adoption of parliamentary consultation and participation tools.

Women are generally underrepresented in legislative assemblies. In the seminal work of Pitkin (1967) substantive political representation is defined as acting in the interest of the represented, in a manner responsive to them. Taking this definition narrowly may produce the illusion that the demographic characteristics of the representative do not matter. However, the persistent underrepresentation of historically disadvantaged social groups in parliaments has fostered the concept that representatives should mirror the represented in politically relevant social characteristics, such as sex and race (Mansbridge, 1999). Consequently, the adoption of electoral quotas for members of disadvantaged, underrepresented groups -a form of affirmative action policy- is based on this premise. In most cases, quotas aim at increasing women's representation. Despite having the same purpose, electoral quotas can take different forms: reserved seats, party quotas and legislative gender quotas (Krook, 2020). Reserved seats are binding measures seating aside a certain proportion of parliamentary seats to women, which are the least-used quota type globally despite being increasingly used in Africa and South-East Asia². Party quotas are voluntary measures, adopted by parties (in their statutes or simply as a political commitment) that pledges to include a certain proportion of women among its candidates for legislative elections. Finally, legislative quotas are binding norms included in electoral rules or the constitution requiring parties to nominate a certain proportion of women within their lists. Gaining popularity since the 1990s, legislative quotas have emerged as the preeminent mechanism for enhancing women's representation on a global scale. According to data from Gender Quotas Database, a joint project of International IDEA, 71 countries have implemented legislative gender candidate quotas, while 29 countries have reserved seat quotas. Notably, reserved quotas are increasingly used in Africa and South-East Asia, whereas party quotas are most common in Europe, as well as among leftist parties around the world. Furthermore, legislative gender quotas are particularly dominant in Latin America, but are also present in certain contexts within Africa and Europe (Krook, 2020).

The under-representation of young people is a core factor keeping young voters from getting more involved in electoral politics, due to a lower sense of political efficacy and satisfaction with democracy (Castanho Silva, 2024). Political engagement of young individuals is crucial for representation in various spheres. In addition to ensuring the prioritization of youth issues in the political sphere, the presence of young politicians can also enhance the self-image of young people as political actors, leading to increased and more active participation (Dobbs, 2022).

²<https://aceproject.org/ace-en/topics/ge/ge2/ge22/gender-quotas-in-elections/legislated-reserved-seats>

Legal candidate quotas could be a potential tool for enhancing youth representation.

While gender quotas have been broadly discussed and, to a lesser extent, applied, the theme of youth quotas looks relatively neglected although not completely ignored by the public discussion and by the scientific literature. For instance, Bidadanure (2015, 2016) provides a detailed discussion, distinguishing the impact of youth quotas in a two-dimensional space defined – following the classic Pitkins' (1967) definition, – by “substantive representation” and “symbolic representation”. The “politics of youth presence” in democratic parliaments (and more general in the representative assemblies) is therefore spread with a number of practices and programs, most of them symbolic (parliament of students, youth parliament, MP for one day, etc.). However, youth quotas have been effectively applied in a limited number of political systems, in order to enhance the political attachment of the new generation and to increase the chances of fair youth policies.

Several countries have implemented quotas to increase youth participation, including reserved seats, legal candidate quotas, and voluntary political party quotas. Legislative candidate quotas and reserved seats are both legislated and thus apply to all parties in a political system, whereas party quotas are internally adopted measures specific to individual parties. (Belschner & de Parades, 2021). In Africa seven countries - Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda, Gabon, Morocco, Tunisia and Egypt – have implemented youth quotas (Dobbs, 2022). Also Kyrgyzstan and Sri Lanka have implemented quotas to enhance youth representation. Cyprus, Nicaragua, Zimbabwe, South Africa and Mozambique have voluntary quotas for youth.³

Lobbying can be defined as the effort to influence the policy process (Baumgartner & Leech, 1998). Regulating lobbying is crucial for parliaments to maintain their legitimacy and ensure democratic principles are upheld. The number of countries developing policies that promote transparency in politics, where regulating lobbying is one key step, is increasing. While USA, Canada and Germany have been precursors of these policies, in the 2010s it was already possible to find regulations in “Lithuania (2001), Poland (2005), Hungary (2006, repealed in 2011), European Commission (2008), Macedonia (2008), France (2010), Slovenia (2010) and Austria (2011)” (Holman & Luneburg, 2012, p. 76). A recent survey of the jurisdictions having laws regulating the interaction between lobbyists and elected representatives found that their number doubled in about one decade (Chari et al., 2019). In the EU, member states can have either mandatory requirements or soft regulations introducing incentives for lobbying transparently (Bauer et al., 2021). Common measures include public lists to which lobbyists have to register before contacting high profile public officers (including parliamentarians) and imposing a duty on politicians to disclose their meetings with representatives of special interests. The rationale for introducing such measures stays in the belief that requiring lobbyists to register and disclose their activities enhances accountability, making it easier to identify and address potential conflicts of interest. Several states have adopted the so-called “cooling-off provisions” stipulating the time period that former parliamentarians must wait before entering the lobbying industry, to prevent conflict of interests. Also, ethical codes can be applied to both parliamentarians and lobbyists.

³<https://aceproject.org/ace-en/topics/yt/yt30/youth-quotas>

Public Engagement has recently become a very popular subject in parliamentary studies. The most recent Global Parliamentary Report (IPU-UNDP, 2022) is dedicated to analysing how parliaments around the world promote public engagement, that is citizens' involvement in parliamentary activities through information, education, communication, consultation and participation. The need to create engagement is felt more acutely than ever, in a time of acute distrust for political institutions (Dalton, 2005). Public engagement can manifest in both passive and active forms (Leston-Bandeira & Walker, 2018). It is often associated with the concept of the "spectrum of engagement," which delineates various forms of public engagement corresponding to different outcomes. To enhance public engagement in parliamentary activities, two actions will be analysed. First, increased parliamentary transparency and communication aim to bridge the perceived gap between citizens and parliaments. The initiative *Indicators for Democratic Parliaments*, led by the InterParliamentary Union, identifies transparency of parliamentary processes, and parliamentary communication and outreach as fundamental indicators of the overall parliamentary transparency. Parliamentary transparency hinges on public understanding and engagement, requiring timely and accessible information about legislative and non-legislative activities. Effective parliamentary communication involves a strategic plan to inform citizens, including an up-to-date website, live broadcasts of proceedings (especially plenary sessions), accessible archives, and active social media engagement. The introduction of the Internet has increased parliaments' potential to be more transparent and accountable to the public, marking a preliminary step toward fostering greater public engagement (Coleman & Blumler, 2009). Griffith & Leston-Bandeira (2012) highlight that 'new media,' offers new ways of accessing information, communicating, and using services through ICT-based systems and internet platforms, with the primary goal of bolstering public engagement. This category includes email, websites, automatic alerting services, and webcasting. Notably, websites, while primarily one-way communication tools, contribute to legitimising the political system by providing educational resources and information about the political landscape. Email, in contrast, facilitates some level of interaction between citizens and parliaments, indicating an intention to engage interactively. Video and radio, though essentially one-way technologies without direct interactivity, offer additional channels for citizens to access information about their parliament.

The second action for Parliamentary Public Engagement involves strengthening parliamentary consultation and participation tools. These tools, which include online surveys, polls, and e-petitions (Serra-Silva, 2022) enable genuine citizen participation in the parliamentary process. It is, however, essential to recognize the deep interconnectedness of these different engagement activities. While the aforementioned communication strategies shape participation, consultation is predicated on information, which may itself foster participation. Moreover, all activities are promoted through communication (Leston-Bandeira & Siefken, 2023).

3 Delphi method

In line with the overarching aim of developing policy recommendations for reconnecting democracy (Deliverable 6.3), this deliverable was designed to assess whether a consensus view

of the effectiveness of these actions can emerge among experts. To gather expert insights and assess subjective judgments on these specific actions, we employed an interactive Delphi survey with three distinct panels.

In the social sciences, various sources of evidence and methodologies are employed. One defining feature of scientific knowledge is its unification, which entails a consensus and shared understanding of facts, laws, and beliefs. Particularly in the context of decision-making processes, if scientific evidence is to support a political stance, it must be based on broad agreement among experts. While achieving such consensus can be challenging in practice, Boumans and Martini (2014) identify three reasons why it is crucial for experts who serve as policy advisors to reach agreement: First, reason-based policymaking should be at least non-contradictory. The second reason relates to economics, where utilizing scientific knowledge is viewed as an effort to maximize resources, and consensus also implies a degree of public utility. Finally, there is an epistemic reason, as it is vital for decision-making groups, acting as collective agents, to maintain coherent ideas and beliefs. Subjective judgements, in this context, are integral to the foundation of scientific knowledge. While we acknowledge the differences and plurality among experts in the political decision-making process, achieving consensus on specific issues can provide a solid foundation for evaluating policy solutions. To this end, a Delphi method was selected to systematically assess expert consensus on the actions under evaluation.

The Delphi method constitutes a scientific approach employed to organize and structure expert discourse, with the aim of generating insights particularly on subjects for which information is scarce (Beiderbeck et al., 2021). This method was developed by RAND Corporation, for exploration of the future, based on systemic collection of expert judgements. The initial aim of Delphi, as stated by Helmer (1967), was to create a method for forecasting future projects that could inform public policy decisions. This process is based on structuring experts' opinions facilitating communication and creating the necessary conditions for them to collaborate effectively (Helmer, 1967). This interactive process involves the systematic collection of expert opinions, typically over two or more rounds, with the potential to foster consensus on a specific topic (Hult Khazaie & Khan, 2020); however, it is also pertinent to acknowledge that dissensus-based Delphi studies constitute a recognized variant (Steinert, 2009). Rowe and Wright (1999) have defined four characteristics of a Delphi study: anonymity, iteration, controlled feedback, and the statistical aggregation of group response. In a Delphi survey, the aggregated group responses are presented to participants across multiple rounds (Beiderbeck et al., 2021) and then the respondents have the possibility to change their opinion on the same issue.

Due to its time and cost-efficiency, the traditional Delphi method is increasingly being replaced by the computer-based Real-Time Delphi method (Steinert, 2009). In contrast to traditional Delphi studies, which are characterized by multi-round survey administrations, this facilitates the conduction of surveys within a unique, dynamic single round. In Real-Time Delphi, participants are able to access the platform at any time. A key feature of this methodology is the provision of immediate feedback to participants, alongside the ongoing opportunity for revision of the responses.

We can divide our Delphi study into three phases: preparation, conduction, and analysis.

3.1 Preparation

The initial phase of our research focused on defining the research objectives and corresponding methodologies. This involved establishing clear research goals, outlining the Delphi study format, and preparing the questionnaire. Our primary aim was to evaluate the efficacy of reconnection strategies implemented in European countries over the past two decades. To achieve this, we developed a Delphi statement and a comprehensive questionnaire, which was structured into three distinct sections.

The first section addressed major challenges to representative democracy, presenting four specific manifestations within each of three identified areas of disconnection. The second section explored the remote causes of this disconnect, featuring eight statements rated on a 0-10 Likert scale to assess their significance in contributing to democratic disconnection. These first two sections were common in all three Delphi panels. The subsequent section, forming the core of our Delphi study, focused on the effectiveness of reconnection actions. This section was tailored to each individual Delphi panel and presented a list of reconnection actions for expert evaluation. For each section, we included open questions for the panellists' qualitative comments.

Another step in the preparation phase was selecting the format and platform of Delphi. We chose Real-Time Delphi format mainly because of its practicality and efficiency, which saved both time and money. It also allowed us to conduct our surveys in a single, dynamic round.

The expert selection process was another crucial step. We conducted detailed research to identify individuals with expertise in the relevant fields for each Delphi round. Our partners' support was crucial during this process. We asked each team to provide a list of experts from their country seeking a balance in terms of role (including both academicians and practitioners), country of origin and gender. Our panels consisted primarily of academics, who comprised over 65% of the participants in each group. The panels also included a small number of employees and volunteers from NGOs and parliamentary officers. While experts were mainly drawn from partner countries (Italy, UK, Hungary, Poland, Belgium, Norway), we also had participants from other nations such as Germany, Netherlands, Paraguay, Portugal, Greece, Spain, France, Denmark, Turkey, Finland and Israel. Although we aimed for gender balance, the majority of respondents in each panel were male.

3.2 Conduction

The conduction phase included software selection and programming, expert identification and invitations, and the administration of the survey.

Following an evaluation and testing phase of various real-time Delphi platforms, we've agreed on Calibrium to conduct our survey due to its practical design, user friendliness, and reliable support system. To ensure the survey's efficacy before its full release, we administered test surveys to our team for internal feedback.

In parallel, expert invitations were extended, with a primary objective of ensuring diverse representation in terms of country of origin, gender, and specific expertise across all three panels.

Before the survey link was sent, all experts who agreed to participate received the List of Actions (see annex) for the evaluation.

Our study involved the administration of three Delphi surveys, each with a separate panel of experts. Each Delphi round had a distinct focus: Delphi 1 aimed at empowering citizens with evaluable actions; Delphi 2 explored revitalizing political parties; and Delphi 3 addressed making parliaments more representative and trustworthy. For each Delphi round, we established a 70% stability threshold to measure group stability (level of consensus), defined across three distinct ranges on a 0-10 numeric scale: not at all effective (0-3), neither effective nor ineffective (4-6), extremely effective (7-10). In other words, the consensus was reached only when 70% or more of the experts expressed the same judgment (not at all effective, neither effective nor ineffective, extremely effective). A parallel set of criteria was used to assess the causes and manifestations of the disconnect, with the ranges labelled as not at all significant (0-3), neither significant nor insignificant (4-6), and extremely significant (7-10).

Invitations and reminders were issued in parallel with the survey's ongoing conduct. The Calibrium platform facilitated the incorporation of new panellists into each panel as needed. Following the completion of the survey by participants, we invited them to reconsider and potentially revise their responses. This was enabled by the real-time nature of the Delphi method, which granted experts continuous access to the survey and the ability to modify their answers.

Additionally, the Calibrium platform provided aggregated ratings, allowing for a structured feedback mechanism through which panellists could review their peers' input and, if desired, modify their own judgments. We observed that experts largely revised their answers after engaging with the survey. The inclusion of the qualitative comments was also encouraged.

3.3 Analysis

The analysis phase focused on identifying the consensus (or lack thereof) among experts on a series of statements.

Panellists evaluated the significance of the main challenges and empirical manifestations of the disconnect using a 0–10 Likert scale. This scale was divided into three intervals for analysis: 0–3 (Not Significant), 4–6 (Neither Significant nor Insignificant), and 7–10 (Extremely Significant). In Delphi terminology, the Consensus Judgment is the response interval where the majority of replies fall.

The term Stability indicates the percentage of experts converging on the Consensus Judgment. We defined two thresholds to establish the level of consensus reached: when the stability level is $\geq 70\%$, we concluded that there is consensus; when it is $< 60\%$, there is dissent. A stability level in-between these thresholds was defined as near consensus.

For evaluating the effectiveness of reconnection actions, we used a more detailed analysis method that included both qualitative and quantitative analyses. The quantitative analysis included identifying the Consensus Judgment, which was similarly defined by three labels: "extremely effective," "neither effective nor ineffective," and "not at all effective." In addition to computing the stability level and Consensus Judgment, we reported the median score in the

original 0–10 scale and the Inter-Quartile-Range (IQR) of the scores received to measure experts’ polarization. We also encouraged experts to leave qualitative comments and included them in our analysis when appropriate. Experts were cited by name only if they had given explicit permission to be cited.

4 Challenges and manifestations of representative disconnect

To develop reconnection strategies that address this disconnect, we believe it's vital to identify its root causes and most worrying manifestations. Therefore, we dedicated a common section in our three Delphi surveys to explore the primary challenges contributing to this disconnect, focusing on both its remote causes and its concrete manifestations.

As evident in Table 1, there is a consensus across three Delphi studies regarding the media’s impact on polarization. According to our experts, the evolving media landscape contributes to polarization and cynicism among citizens. Our results indicate that social trends such as migration and economic inequality also influence citizens’ perceptions, leading to fear and anger. The majority of panellists viewed these causes as extremely significant, with an 80% stability rate in Delphi 1 and 60% in Delphi 2, although this decreased to 48% in Delphi 3. While Delphi 1 experts reached a consensus and Delphi 2 showed a near consensus on this point, Delphi 3 showed dissent. Overall, according to our experts these trends have a significant impact on citizens. On the other hand, the perceived lack of integrity within the political class was considered extremely significant by Delphi 2 experts (who have a specialization in parties), while the panellists of Delphi 1 and 3 did not reach a consensus. Interestingly, the influence of interest groups was neither significant nor insignificant for all groups, though with different levels of consensus.

Table 1: Remote causes of the disconnect (stability measure %)

<i>Cause*</i>	<i>Delphi 1</i>	<i>Delphi 2</i>	<i>Delphi 3</i>
<i>The media environment favours polarisations</i>	<u>Extremely significant (100%)</u>	<u>Extremely significant (93%)</u>	<u>Extremely significant (86%)</u>
<i>Mass migration and economic inequality</i>	<u>Extremely significant (80%)</u>	<u>Extremely significant (60%)</u>	<u>Extremely significant (48%)</u>
<i>Interest groups</i>	Neither significant nor insignificant (71%)	Neither significant nor insignificant (60%)	Neither significant nor insignificant (43%)
<i>Lack of integrity of the political class</i>	Neither significant nor insignificant (36%)	<u>Extremely significant (73%)</u>	Neither significant nor insignificant (38%)
<i>Crisis of the parties</i>	Neither significant nor insignificant (47%)	<u>Extremely significant (67%)</u>	<u>Extremely significant (62%)</u>

Continued on next page

Table 1 continued

<i>Cause*</i>	<i>Delphi 1</i>	<i>Delphi 2</i>	<i>Delphi 3</i>
<i>Party cartelization</i>	Neither significant nor insignificant (57%)	Extremely significant (67%)	Neither significant nor insignificant (52%)
<i>Technocracy hollowed out politics</i>	Not at all significant (50%)	Neither significant nor insignificant (47%)	Neither significant nor insignificant (43%)
<i>Governments have insufficient resources</i>	<u>Extremely significant (53%)</u>	Neither significant nor insignificant (47%)	Neither significant nor insignificant (42%)

*See the appendix for the original formulation of the questions.

It is important to note that the crisis of parties, party cartelization, and technocracy are not considered the direct causes of the disconnect. Also, the statement that governments have insufficient resources has not been supported by experts⁴. When we consider these phenomena in relation to the broader manifestations of the disconnect, it becomes clear that its root causes must be understood dynamically. This perspective moves beyond simplistic attributions, such as those focusing solely on the internal structure of political parties. This supports our view that its causes should be considered more broadly, taking into account the changing context in which institutions operate. In Table 2, we identified the experts' opinions regarding the significance of the manifestation of the representative disconnect. The consensus rate differed across various panels. The only manifestation on which our experts reached a consensus of extreme significance was the declining trust in political parties and representative institutions. Our experts' agreement on declining trust contributing to representative disconnect is particularly noteworthy, especially given how the low levels of trust are towards political institutions in most European countries. There, trust in governments, parliaments, and political parties has frequently shown downward trajectories, although differences in different contexts.

⁴Instead, experts have spontaneously identified other remote causes, including the the increase in the power of the government relative to parliament (expert: Pamela Pansardi), the 'dominant position of economic actors and organizations on the political system' (expert: Julien Vrydagh). Another factor is the lack of social and political literacy among citizens, who are 'unsure of how decisions are made and for what means.' (Expert: Andy Mycock). Pervasive corruption within political parties is also seen as a significant danger. (Expert: Annamaria Sebestyen) Also 'explicit instrumentalization of uncertainties by right-wing protest parties and their political entrepreneurs; convergence of main political actors toward a liberalist cosmopolitanism in the last twenty, thirty years, neglecting the importance of local and national embeddedness of political decision-making' is considered another cause of disconnect (expert: Simon Bein). Finally, a lack of transparency, accountability, and responsiveness are also cited as key causes by some experts.

Table 2: Manifestations of the disconnect (stability measure %)

<i>Challenge</i>	<i>Delphi 1</i>	<i>Delphi 2</i>	<i>Delphi 3</i>
Declining trust in political parties and representative institutions	<u>Extremely significant (87%)</u>	<u>Extremely significant (80%)</u>	<u>Extremely significant (91%)</u>
Oligarchic tendencies in parties	<u>Extremely significant (87%)</u>	<u>Extremely significant (50%)</u>	Neither significant nor insignificant (67%)
Organizational weakening of political parties	<u>Extremely significant (60%)</u>	<u>Extremely significant (71%)</u>	<u>Extremely significant (57%)</u>
Declining voter turnout	Neither significant nor insignificant (40%)	<u>Extremely significant (79%)</u>	<u>Extremely significant (64%)</u>
Underrepresentation of disadvantaged groups in parliaments	<u>Extremely significant (47%)</u>	<u>Extremely significant (73%)</u>	<u>Extremely significant (48%)</u>
Declining party membership and identification	<u>Extremely significant (60%)</u>	<u>Extremely significant (60%)</u>	Neither significant nor insignificant (57%)
Excessive power of the lobbies in parliament	<u>Extremely significant (67%)</u>	<u>Extremely significant (60%)</u>	Neither significant nor insignificant (48%)
Lack of citizens' interest in politics	<u>Extremely significant (53%)</u>	<u>Extremely significant (67%)</u>	<u>Extremely significant (64%)</u>
Low level of youth engagement in politics	<u>Extremely significant (53%)</u>	<u>Extremely significant (67%)</u>	<u>Extremely significant (57%)</u>
Lack of public engagement in parliamentary activities	<u>Extremely significant (53%)</u>	<u>Extremely significant (67%)</u>	<u>Extremely significant (57%)</u>
Programmatic convergence among mainstream parties	Neither significant nor insignificant (47%)	Neither significant nor insignificant (47%)	Neither significant nor insignificant (67%)
Loss of parliamentary power in legislation	<u>Extremely significant (67%)</u>	<u>Extremely significant (53%)</u>	<u>Extremely significant (57%)</u>

**In the case of one expert, a value of "0" was treated as a missing data.*

Considering Offe's perspective (1999), institutional trust requires believing that unknown actors in a political institution are acting in our best interest. In this light, a decline in trust suggests that citizens no longer feel their interests are being protected or pursued, which also increases the separation between citizens and politics. Declining voter turnout was considered extremely significant by the experts in Delphi 2, and the same statement achieved near consensus among those in Delphi 3. The experts of Delphi 1 didn't reach a consensus on this statement. This view

reflects the current debate on whether declining voter turnout is a symptom of a democratic crisis, considering that it is a country-specific phenomenon.

When examining the manifestations of disconnect within political parties Delphi 1 experts reached a high consensus on the presence of oligarchic tendencies. Meanwhile, Delphi 2 experts found the organizational weakening of political parties to be extremely significant. The growing personalization of political parties and democratic representation in general has been also mentioned as a manifestation of the disconnect⁵. Another manifestation of this disconnect was the underrepresentation of disadvantaged groups in parliament, which reached consensus among Delphi 2 experts. However, other panelists did not reach a consensus on this statement⁶. These findings suggest that the representative system functions as a dynamic ecology, not a static structure. The effectiveness of its representative institutions is therefore contingent upon their capacity to adapt to environmental changes. Drawing on the findings of our Delphi, we conclude that according to our experts the primary cause of the “disconnect” stems from the inability of political institutions to adjust to broader societal transformations. This failure to adapt makes them appear incapable of fulfilling their purpose in the eyes of the citizens they are meant to represent, leading to a feeling among citizens that their interests are not protected. This dynamic process erodes their trust in political institutions and politicians, causing them to feel disengaged from the system.

5 Evaluation of the actions

5.1 Delphi 1: citizens

Delphi 1 investigated the effectiveness of various means, including traditional approaches and those augmented by Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), in empowering citizens and fostering a stronger connection between citizens and politics. Our objective was to understand how experts assessed these “reconnection actions”.

Table 3: Evaluation of Delphi 3 actions

Action	Consensus judgement	Stability	Consensus status	Median score (0–10)	IQR
Voting Advice Application	Extremely effective	60%	Near consensus	7	2
Parliamentary Monitoring Organisations	Extremely effective	70%	Consensus	7	2
Civic Education Initiatives	Extremely effective	79%	Consensus	8	2
Lowering the voting age to 16 years	Neither effective nor ineffective	50%	Dissent	6	4
E-petitions	Extremely effective	45%	Dissent	6	3

**In the case of one expert, a value of “0” was treated as a missing data.*

⁵Experts: Marco Lisi and Pamela Pansardi.

⁶Experts also consider media narratives (expert: Bernardo Valente), the weakening of the ties between political parties and the organized civil society (Experts: Thomas Legein, Marco Lisi) as important manifestations of disconnect.

In Delphi 1 study, we identified two actions with a consensus on their effectiveness. The first is Civic Education Initiatives, which our experts considered to be extremely effective. According to our results, civic education in schools is a powerful tool for developing democratic knowledge, skills, and experiences. Our experts believe that adopting a whole-school approach to democracy and linking it with out-of-school initiatives like youth councils and volunteering is crucial. This creates civic pathways that support young people as they transition to adulthood, offering them ongoing opportunities to learn and participate in schools, communities, and online (expert: Andy Mycock). However, the effectiveness of these initiatives in addressing representative disconnect hinges on their quality. As it has been noted, civic education can either be used for indoctrination or as a tool for fostering critically engaged democratic citizens (expert: Joke Mathieu). Still, our findings demonstrate that Civic Education Initiatives enjoy a broad consensus as an important way to reconnect citizens with politics.

The second action with expert consensus is Parliamentary Monitoring Organizations (PMOs). PMOs are considered effective, largely due to their capacity to produce data that significantly improves our comprehension of democratic processes and institutions. This consensus statement demonstrates the positive influence of ICTs on policymaking processes, thereby fostering greater parliamentary accountability to citizens and strengthening citizen participation.

Voting Advice Applications (VAAs), another tool developed by ICT, are considered extremely effective, a view supported by a near-stable consensus. Our study indicates that VAAs can be effective, provided they meet several conditions. Crucially, their ability to enhance knowledge and positively impact democratic processes is paramount for their effectiveness. This aligns with our initial literature review, which found that the evidence for VAAs significantly increasing issue knowledge was more modest. However, our Delphi study also revealed that VAAs carry risks, including potentially detrimental effects (expert: Kira Kurz) and the inherent dangers of digital bias (expert: Bernardo Valente).

Lowering the voting age to 16, has not been met with a consensus. Experts are polarized, with many seeing the measure as neither effective nor ineffective. Insights from experts suggest that lowering the voting age to 16 is not a convincing solution, given the widespread distrust and disengagement from the political system. A key challenge to the effectiveness of such reforms is the absence of robust democratic socialization programs (expert: Andy Mycock). However, it is also argued that these reforms could be successful if they are integrated with comprehensive civic education initiatives (expert: Kira Kurz) and paired with enhanced political literacy curricula in schools (expert: Bernardo Valente).

Similarly, e-petitions, despite their potential to draw attention to specific issues, show dissent regarding their effectiveness. This is partly because e-petitions are only effective when directly tied to binding decision-making, which isn't typically the case for political outcomes (expert: Santiago Barrail).

5.2 Delphi 2: political parties

Recognizing their integral role in state institutions, Delphi 2 has focused on revitalizing political parties. The actions to be evaluated by experts are designed to reform these parties, to reinvigorate their representative function and enhance their transparency, inclusiveness, and responsiveness.

However, our experts failed to reach a consensus on any action, indicating significant divergence in their views. Only one action that has been implemented in the past decades has the potential to be extremely effective for a majority of Delphi 2 experts, but a significant minority did not converge on this judgement: while experimenting with new forms of “lighter” forms of party membership seems a promising or even necessary approach for most experts, also adopting novel approaches like digitalizing party membership (expert: Thomas Legein), other experts highlights that this action may have the unintended consequence of weakening the appeal of traditional membership (expert: Felix von Nostitz).

Table 4: Evaluation of Delphi 2 actions

Action	Consensus judgement	Stability	Consensus status	Median score (0–10)	IQR
Democratizing Candidate Selection Procedures	Neither effective nor ineffective	53%	Dissent	6	4
Opening Leadership Selection Procedures	Not at all effective	40%	Dissent	5	6
Online Participation Platforms	Neither effective nor ineffective	40%	Dissent	4	4
Online crowdfunding	Neither effective nor ineffective	54%	Dissent	6	2
Microtargeting	Not at all effective	50%	Dissent	3.5	7
New forms of political party membership	Extremely effective	57%	Dissent	7	3

On the topic of microtargeting, there is an extreme polarization among experts (IQR = 7). This technique that uses data to segment the electorate into smaller, more specific groups based on characteristics such as ethnicity, class, and education is viewed as a double-edged sword. While it can be successful in achieving the short-term goal of winning votes, its long-term effects on political discourse and citizen engagement are seen as negative. According to this view, although microtargeting can effectively allow parties to connect with specific groups of voters, it ultimately fails to achieve a meaningful reconnection between citizens and political parties. The process, in this view, prioritizes narrow electoral success over the broader democratic functions of fostering shared public discourse, ensuring accountability, and building a cohesive vision for governance. In this relationship, citizens remain the target, not the actors (expert: Fabio Garcia Lupato). These perspectives support the view that microtargeting is an ineffective action for fostering reconnection. On the other hand, it is considered essential for creating consensus-building (expert: anonym).

The expert panel did not reach a consensus on how much “Democratizing candidate selection”

is effective, though a majority of experts agreed that this action is “neither effective nor ineffective.” This outcome was marked by a moderate degree of polarization (IQR =4) produced by the presence of two groups of experts dissenting from the majority arguing that this action is either not effective at all or extremely effective. The prevailing lukewarm evaluation stems from the observation that democratisation of the candidate selection mechanisms is often an interesting reform for a tiny minority of highly motivated party members. Consequently, while party primaries may be a viable option, they are not, on their own, a sufficient mechanism for strengthening democracy (expert: Thomas Legein). Within the group of the more enthusiastic supporters, there has been an important qualification: party primaries are useful when open to party members, but may be detrimental if open to non-members (expert: Felix von Nostitz). Among those adopting a more negative stance, there is the idea that primaries often serve as a plebiscitary or ratification exercise, rendering them ineffective at reconnecting citizens with democratic processes (expert: Emilie van Haute).

A great level of polarization was reached over the opening of leadership selection procedures (IQR = 6). One major concern was that it could reinforce the organization's oligarchic tendencies. Experts highlighted that creating a direct link between a party leader and their electors favors the disintermediation of the organization and increases the personification of politics, which can have detrimental consequences (expert: Thomas Legein). Additionally, internal primaries that were open to non-members were viewed as a significant threat to party organization and member cohesion. This approach, according to the statement, diminishes the incentive to become a party member, as anyone can participate in the decision-making or selection process regardless of their membership status. (anonym)

Online Participation Platforms constitute another case for dissensus among experts. They were considered “only effective if the party really follows the outcomes and it is not just deliberative” (expert: Felix von Nostitz). Another expert highlights a significant disconnect between their theoretical potential and their actual impact. According to this view, while these platforms are intended to empower party members with resources, networking, and avenues for deliberation and voting, their real-world implementation is often limited. This disparity can be attributed to several factors: a digital divide among different generations of members, a lack of perceived efficacy in deliberative processes, and the increasing tendency for platforms to be controlled by party leadership (expert: Fabio Garcia Lupato).

Furthermore, there is a lack of consensus among experts regarding the effectiveness of online crowdfunding. They've highlighted its risks, noting that poor regulation can lead to corruption.

5.3 Delphi 3: parliaments

In Delphi 3, we focused on evaluating actions aimed at resolving contemporary issues such as the underrepresentation of certain groups in parliaments, improving public involvement in parliamentary activities, and managing relationships with lobbyists.

Table 5: Evaluation of Delphi 3 actions

Action	Consensus judgement	Stability	Consensus status	Median score (0–10)	IQR
Gender Quotas	Neither effective nor ineffective	40%	Dissent	6	3
Youth Quotas	Neither effective nor ineffective	53%	Dissent	6	1
Regulating lobbying	Extremely effective	79%	Consensus	7	2
Strengthening parliamentary transparency and communication	Extremely effective	65%	<i>Near consensus</i>	8	3
Strengthening parliamentary consultation and participation tools	Neither effective nor ineffective	45%	Dissent	6	4

In this study, experts reached a strong consensus regarding lobbying regulation. They largely agreed that regulating lobbying significantly enhances transparency and accountability in policymaking. Transparency is considered a crucial element for ensuring accountability, as it helps citizens understand how special interests might influence policies, potentially increasing their awareness of the impact of political apathy (experts: Eda Bektaş, Tapio Raunio, Osnat Akirav). Interestingly, it is worth remembering that Delphi 3 experts did not identify the excessive power of lobbies or a lack of integrity within the political class as major drivers of representative disconnect. However, they strongly believe that regulating lobbying is an extremely effective way to reconnect with the populace. This perspective probably arises from their belief that, given the current context of media impact and the demands of increasingly critical citizens, high levels of transparency are paramount. Apparently, this approach isn't without its risks. As an expert points out, while such regulations clearly promote a more open political system, their ultimate success in curbing the influence of powerful interest groups remains to be seen. In summary, how effective these measures are depends on their strong implementation and enforcement, along with the wider political environment in which lobbying takes place (expert: Eda Bektaş).

On the other hand, the experts reached a near-consensus that strengthening parliamentary transparency and communication serves as another effective means of reconnection. These efforts hold significant potential for fostering democratic engagement and trust, primarily through providing timely and accessible information via up-to-date websites. They also highlighted the importance of parliaments proactively engaging with citizens through their social media presence and effective interactions with journalists (Calixte Bloquet). Our results indicate that there is a strong consensus for increasing parliamentary transparency, believing that this can enhance political awareness and institutional trust, ultimately contributing to higher electoral participation and strengthening democratic legitimacy (Eda Bektaş).

Conversely, the expert consensus and judgment regarding strengthening parliamentary consultation and participation presented a notable difference: it was characterized by dissent and deemed neither effective nor ineffective.

6 Conclusion

This deliverable was dedicated to evaluate reconnection strategies and actions developed by Deliverable 6.1, with the ultimate aim of formulating policy recommendations in Deliverable 6.3. We consider this deliverable significantly important and a challenging one.

Representative democracy requires a holistic approach that considers the dynamic relationship between different mechanisms and institutions. This relationship, which is shaped by a set of norms, rules, and procedures, is in a constant state of flux due to political cooperation, struggle, and contestation. REDIRECT project labels “representative disconnect” as a complex phenomenon, having various dimensions. Generally speaking, it signifies a regression of the demos-kratos linkage, which involves institutional, behavioral, and affective components. This regression risks undermining trust in the overall system of democratic representation and threatens its legitimacy. This situation has negatively influenced both institutional trust and political legitimacy. However, as Deliverable 1.3 points out, this disconnect should not be considered in static terms as institutions within this representative ecology have the opportunity to adapt to a changing and challenging environment. This constitutes the *raison d’être* for this deliverable. On the other hand, in practical terms, this document represents a valid basis for developing recommendations informing and shaping decision-making processes. In this context, we presented the findings of an interactive expert survey on specific “reconnection actions”.

Our Delphi study findings suggest that the causes and manifestations of the disconnect should be evaluated from a broader perspective. We conclude that the weakening linkage between citizens and governing elites stems from the inefficiency of political institutions and systems in adapting to their new, challenging environment. It should be noted that the changing media environment is considered one of the most significant challenges for representative institutions. Regarding the manifestation of the disconnect, the most relevant for our experts is the decline in trust towards political parties and representative institutions.

The primary objective of this deliverable was to evaluate specific reconnection actions within the context of democratic innovations across three distinct Delphi surveys. Our findings can be summarized as follows:

- Experts reached a consensus on the effectiveness of civic education initiatives. This consensus supports the view that a lack of social and political literacy among citizens contributes to their disengagement from political life. Consequently, enhancing civic education is expected to increase active participation by fostering a more informed and engaged citizenry
- Parliamentary Monitoring Organizations are considered a significant mechanism for democratic reconnection by our experts, primarily due to their capacity to inform citizens about policymaking processes, which fosters greater parliamentary accountability and strengthens citizen participation.
- The experts in Delphi 2, which focused on revitalizing political parties, did not reach a consensus on any of the proposed actions, with several of them generating highly polar-

ized responses. Introducing new forms of party membership was supported by a slight majority, though with several caveats.

- Delphi 3 experts consider regulating lobbying to be a highly effective measure, primarily because they view it as a means to significantly enhance transparency and accountability in policymaking.

As mentioned previously, this document serves as the foundation for Deliverable 6.3, which will focus on proposing policy recommendations for democratic reconnection. Our Delphi findings will guide the development of a more comprehensive framework, demonstrating how these expert insights can be translated into best practices. In this context, our next steps will be:

- Developing concrete policy recommendations and implementation strategies for all reconnection actions that have reached a consensus
- Exploring the conditions under which it is most likely that the action is effective if there is dissensus on the effectiveness
- Elaborating on the actions suggested by experts and conducting comprehensive research on their feasibility and impact
- Collaborating with experts and stakeholders to put theory into practice

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A Appendix

A.1 List of Experts who completed the Delphi

We would like to express our gratitude to all the experts who contributed to our Delphi study; including Ann Helen Bay, Michele Vannucchi, Louise Crow, Joke Mathieu, András Bíro-Nagy, Melani Barlai, Julien Vrydagh, Andy Mycock, Tom Louwerse, Santiago Barrail, Kira Kurz, Bernardo Valente, Diego Garzia, Marius Rohde Johannessen, Alexandra Holle, Dániel Oross, Alexiadou Despina, Jaroslaw Flis, Marco Lisi, Rocco Palese, Alessia Farina, Thomas Legein, Fabio Garcia Lupato, Annamária Sebestyén, Emilie Van Haute, Enrico Calossi, Simon Bein, Felix von Nostitz, Karen Celis, David Willumsen, Andrea Pedrazzani, Beata Kosowska-Gastol, William Daniel, Alex Prior, Burtejin Zorigt, Elisabetta de Giorgi, Nicola Lupo, Henning Finseraas, Luigi Gianniti, Calixte Bloquet, Tapio Raunio, Julien Navarro, Ruxandra Serban, Eda Bektas, Osnat Akirav, Gabriella Ilonszki, Pamela Pansardi and those who preferred to remain anonymous.

B Screenshots of the Calibrum platform

On a scale of 0 to 10, how significant are the following MANIFESTATIONS of the representative disconnect to you, where 0 means not at all significant and 10 means extremely significant? Please rate each item accordingly.

	Not at all significant	Significance	Extremely significant
		Neither significant nor insignificant	
Disconnect between citizens and politics			
Declining trust in political parties and representative institutions	0	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10	
		Click to write comment	
		☐ (I don't know / I prefer not to answer)	
Lack of citizens' interest in politics	0	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10	
		Click to write comment	
		☐ (I don't know / I prefer not to answer)	

Figure 1: Respondents' visualisation of the questionnaire

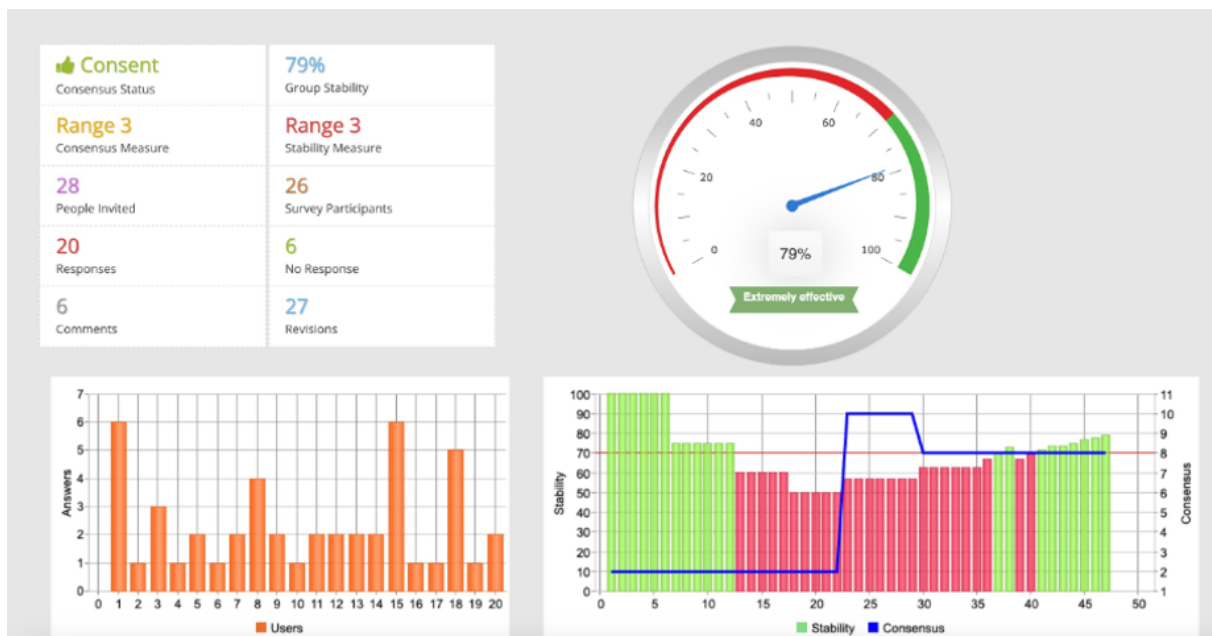


Figure 2: Consensus metrics shown to experts

C Questionnaire for Delphi 1, 2 and 3

REDIRECT DELPHI: Reconnection Strategies and Actions



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Part 1. REDIRECT Delphi Information Sheet

Part 2. Information on the processing of personal and special data

Part 3. Demographic Questions

Part 4. Issues

Part 5. Main Challenges to Representative Democracy

Part 6. Policy Recommendations

Part 7. Final Questions

PART 1. REDIRECT Delphi Information Sheet

You are invited to take part in an interactive online expert survey (Delphi) as a part of the EU-funded research study REDIRECT on the quality of representation in Europe. If there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information, feel free to ask us (using the contact information below).

Who is conducting this research study?

This study is directed by the University of Salento (the data controller) with the collaboration of the members of the REDIRECT Consortium including Exeter University (United Kingdom), Free University Brussel (Belgium), HUN-REN Centre for Social Sciences (Hungary), Jagiellonian University (Poland), University of Oslo (Norway), University of Siena (Italy).

What is the purpose of this study?

This Delphi is a part of the REDIRECT project whose focus is to study the current transformation of democratic politics in Europe, to realize whether and how their centers of gravity are shifting, and to improve our understanding of the “representative disconnect”. The Delphi study is meant to gather experts’ opinions on the threats to representative democracy and to their evaluation of some strategies that have been implemented in the past years to revitalize traditional intermediation channels between political representatives and citizens: focusing primarily on political parties and parliaments.

Do I have to take part in this study?

It is up to you to accept to take part or not. You have the right to withdraw at any time without giving a reason. If you decide to participate and later change your mind, you will not be contacted again or asked for further information.

Why have I been invited to participate in this study?

You have been invited to this study as one of the key-players of the representation circle. The knowledge we will generate from your participation will help us to portray how citizens view and evaluate representation and identify best practices to reform democracy.

What are the benefits related to participation?

Taking part to this project, you will have the chance to offer a valuable contribution to the democracy research area and to contribute to the development of new tools to improve representation and the interaction between citizens and political representatives.

What are the possible risks related to participation?

There are no anticipated disadvantages, side effects, risks, and/or discomforts of taking part in this study as you will only be asked to share your own experiences and assessments. In case of political or sensitive questions, you will have a “prefer not to answer” option or the possibility to skip the question.

Who has access to my data?

Data will be shared only within the REDIRECT research team for research purposes, in pseudonymised format. The data storage procedures are fully compliant with GDPR.

What will happen to the information that I provide?

Your answers will be combined with those of the other participants and, accordingly, will always be presented in an aggregated and anonymous format. The resulting anonymised data file that will be used for data analysis will be stored securely on a password-protected cloud server at the University of Salento.

Who reviewed the project?

The project has been reviewed and given favourable opinion by the University of Siena Ethics Committee.

Who should I contact for additional information or to make a complaint?

Professor Federico Russo, Scientific Manager of the REDIRECT Team at the Department of Human and Social Sciences, University of Salento, redirect.delphi@unisalento.it

If you wish to speak with the University of Salento Data Protection Officer, please contact:

Giuseppina Campanile

University of Salento

dpo@unisalento.it

On the basis of this information, you DECLARE

- that you have read the text above and that you understand both the information contained therein;
- that you have understood that participation in the study is completely voluntary and free;
- that you can withdraw from the study at any time, without having to give explanations;
- to have understood the nature and activities that participation in the study entails.

If you have read this screen and agree to participate, please click the Yes button. If not, click the No button.

YES, I consent to participate

NO, I do not consent to participate

PART 2 Information on the processing of personal and special data

STUDY TITLE:	REDIRECT - Delphi
RESEARCHER:	FEDERICO RUSSO

You are invited to take part in a Delphi study aimed at gathering the opinions and attitudes of experts, composed of academics, parliamentarians, and representatives of political parties on political issues. The REDIRECT project focuses on "representative disconnection" as a multidimensional phenomenon of regression of the demos-krotos bond, which involves institutional, behavioral, and affective dimensions. As part of an empirical

component, the Delphi study, a structured communication method used to collect opinions from a group of experts, aims to assess the current challenges to representative democracy and to discuss possible solutions. The main objective of the Delphi study is to evaluate the effectiveness of some democratic innovations that have been proposed and implemented in recent years to reduce the gap between citizens and their representatives.

The study is conducted by the Department of Human and Social Sciences of the University of Salento, under the responsibility of Prof. Federico Russo (Unisalento) and with the collaboration of Elif Şeyma Şişman (Unisalento) within the REDIRECT project coordinated by the University of Siena under the direction of Prof. Luca Verzichelli.

The University of Salento (hereinafter, "University"), as Data Controller, will process your personal data only to the extent that they are indispensable in relation to the objective of the study,¹ in compliance with the provisions of current legislation on the protection of personal data,² including Regulation (EU) 2016/679 (General Data Protection Regulation), Legislative Decree 30 June 2003, n. 196 as amended (Code regarding the protection of personal data) and in accordance with the security measures and any other applicable provision of the Guarantor for the protection of personal data.

DATA CONTROLLER AND DATA PROCESSOR:

Data Controller

The data controller is the University of Salento, with registered office at Piazza Tancredi 7, 73100 Lecce, represented by the Magnificent Rector, Prof. Fabio Pollice. The contact details of the data controller are: Tel. 0832/292333, e-mail: rettore@unisalento.it, PEC (certified e-mail): amministrazione.centrale@cert-unile.it

Data Processor

The data processor is Calibrium Inc. 1854 W. Stonebridge Dr, 7, St George, UT 84770, United States. Contact details are: info@calibrium.com privacy@calibrium.com.

Data Protection Officer

In accordance with Articles 37 et seq. of EU Regulation 2016/679, the University has appointed a Data Protection Officer (DPO), Dr. Giuseppina Campanie. The DPO's contact details are: Tel. 0832/292333, E-mail: dpo@unisalento.it, PEC (certified e-mail): amministrazione.centrale@cert-unile.it

Project Contact Person

Prof. Federico Russo, Associate Professor of Political Science, Department of Human and Social Sciences, University of Salento. Email: federico.russo@unisalento.it

PURPOSES AND METHODS OF PROCESSING

The personal data of the Data Subject and those belonging to special categories will be processed by authorized parties, using automated and non-automated tools, exclusively for the following purposes:

(A) Participation in the study and related operations and activities

If the Data Subject gives his/her consent to participate in the study in question, some data concerning him/her will be collected, using electronic tools; in particular, the data will be collected through the Calibrium platform. Researchers conducting the study will assign a code to identify the Data Subject.

The data collected during the study will be recorded, processed, and analyzed for the entire duration of the REDIRECT project, currently scheduled for 2027, and stored together with the code that identifies the Data Subject for an additional year after the end of the project. It is specified that only the researchers involved in the REDIRECT project and authorized parties will be able to link this code to the name. The data will be stored by the Data Controller under the responsibility of the Department of Human and Social Sciences. Once the aforementioned retention period has expired, the data will be deleted or anonymized in such a way that it is no longer possible to trace, directly or indirectly, the identity of the Data Subject.

If the Data Subject agrees to take part in this study, please be informed that - in addition to the aforementioned parties involved in the research - the data may be disclosed to the competent Regulatory Authorities and the locally competent Ethics Committee, which may examine the data collected during the study: the purpose of these checks is to verify that the research is conducted correctly and in accordance with the provisions in force. The Data Subject is not entitled to prevent such communications.

(A2) Information regarding dissemination

It is specified that the data will be disseminated in aggregate form, for example, through scientific publications, statistics, and scientific conferences.

(B) Data retention for future research activities

Considering that new discoveries may indicate unprecedented opportunities for investigation by researchers or allow further studies and research to be carried out on the special data for the study in question, the Data Subject may consent to the prolonged retention of data concerning him/her in non-anonymized form until the end of the project (2027-2028) years from the conclusion of this study, agreeing to be contacted again so that he/she may express, if he/she wishes, a new specific consent and thus authorize new research on his/her data.

If, on the other hand, the Data Subject denies consent to the processing described here, the data will be deleted or anonymized immediately upon expiry of the retention period indicated in point (A).

(C) Retention for administrative purposes

The data will also be processed for administrative/accounting purposes and kept for the time strictly necessary to pursue these purposes, without prejudice to the ten-year period to ensure compliance with tax, accounting, and administrative requirements required by law and without prejudice to any longer periods, which cannot be determined in advance, as a result of different conditions of lawfulness of the processing (for example, legal actions that make processing necessary for more than ten years).

LEGAL BASIS OF PROCESSING AND NATURE OF DATA PROVISION

The legal basis for the processing described above is found in consent, pursuant to Article 9, paragraph 2, letter a) of the Regulation. **Consent to processing for the purposes described above is freely given and optional.**

However, it should be noted that the provision of data for the purposes referred to in point (A) is not mandatory but is essential for the conduct of the study.¹ Refusal to provide them will not allow the Data Subject to participate in the study in question.

The provision of data for the purposes referred to in point (B) is optional, i.e., it does not derive from a regulatory obligation, but is necessary to allow the data to be kept for a longer period than that provided for the conclusion of this study and possibly allow the Data Controller to contact the Data Subject again so that he/she can express, if he/she wishes, a new specific consent for new research. Failure to provide data for these purposes will only result in the impossibility of carrying out what has just been described.

The provision of data for the purposes referred to in point (C) is necessary to comply with legal obligations regarding the retention of administrative and accounting documents. In this case, the legal basis can be found in Article 6, paragraph 1, letters c) and e), of Regulation (EU) 2016/679.

INTERNAL DATA RECIPIENTS

The recipients of your data are the Scientific Manager of the project and his collaborators in the research activity (researchers, technicians and administrators) who will process them with automated and non-automated tools, exclusively to allow the performance of the investigation indicated above and all the related operations and activities, including administrative ones.

DATA TRANSFER TO THIRD COUNTRIES OR INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATIONS

Upon completion of the REDIRECT project, the appropriately anonymized data, where possible, and in other cases pseudonymised and identified exclusively by a code, will be deposited in the main social science data archives, even in countries outside the European Union, only when this is in compliance with the data protection regulations. In any case, transfers to third countries will only take place in countries in respect of which there is an adequacy decision of the European Commission, and in any case in compliance with the appropriate and opportune guarantees and the provisions of Chapter V of EU Reg. 2016/679 (GDPR) relating to transfers of personal data to third countries or international organizations. For information on this, please contact the Data Controller.

RIGHTS OF THE DATA SUBJECT

Without prejudice to the limitations on the exercise of the rights of data subjects referred to in Articles 2-undecies and 2-duodecies of the Code on the protection of personal data (Legislative Decree 196/03), the Data Subject participating in this study may exercise the rights recognized to him/her pursuant to and within the limits of Articles 15-21 of Regulation (EU) 2016/679, including the right to request access to his/her personal data, their rectification or deletion, as well as the limitation of the processing of data concerning him/her, opposition to processing and data portability.

We also specify that any consent expressed by the Data Subject is freely given and may be revoked at any time without this entailing any disadvantage or prejudice and without prejudice to the lawfulness of the processing based on the consent given before the revocation.

The interested party may exercise the rights described above by contacting the Data Controller through the contact details indicated above; for the same purpose, as well as to report any violations of the rules on the processing of personal data, he or she may use the specific data breach service of the University of Salento contacting the Data Protection Officer through the contact details indicated above.

Finally, if the Data Subject believes that the processing of his/her personal data is in violation of the provisions of Regulation (EU) 2016/679 or Legislative Decree 196/03 as amended, he/she has the right to lodge a complaint with the supervisory authority, as provided for in Article 77 of the aforementioned Regulation, or to take appropriate legal action (Article 79 of the Regulation).

FURTHER INFORMATION REGARDING THE RESEARCH PROJECT

Further information regarding the research project in question can be requested from Prof. Federico Russo (federico.russo@unisalento.it) , c/o STUDIUM 2000, Ed. 5, via di Valesio, 73100, Lecce.

Consent to the processing of Personal and Special Data

STUDY TITLE	REDIRECT - Delphi
Protocol Number	ND

I DECLARE

- to have carefully read the Information Sheet
- to have carefully read the "Information on the processing of personal and special data" above and to have understood its contents and the additional information obtained from the Investigator and/or other Collaborators;

Pursuant to the provisions of Regulation (EU) 2016/679 and Legislative Decree 196/2003, I

☐ **Consent** to the processing - **NECESSARY** for the purposes of participation in the study in question and its implementation - of the personal and special data of the Data Subject for the purposes and in the manner referred to in point (A) [participation and conduct of the study]

☐ **Consent** to the transfer - **NECESSARY** for the purposes of participation in the study in question and its implementation - outside the territory of the Italian State, to a country not belonging to the European Union that does not guarantee an adequate level of protection of personal data and to the subsequent processing necessary for the purposes referred to in point (A)[participation and conduct of the study]

☐ **Consent** to the retention and further use - **NOT NECESSARY** for the purposes of participation in the study in question and its implementation - of the personal data of the Data Subject for the purposes and in the manner referred to in point (B) [data retention for future research activities]

PART 3. Demographic Questions

Q1. What is your country of origin?

1= Austria

2= Belgium

3= France

4= Germany

5= Hungary

6= Italy

7= Netherlands

8= Norway

9= Poland

10= UK

11= Other (Please specify)

Q2. Gender

1= Female

2= Male

3=Other/Prefer not to say

Q3. What is your age group?

1	18-25
2	26-35
3	36-45
4	46-54

5	55-64
6	65 or over

Q4. Which of the following best describes your current profile?

1.	Academic
2.	Employee or volunteer in a non-governmental organization
3.	Parliamentary officer/staff
4.	Party officer/member
5.	Political representative (E.g. Member of Parliament and/or other institutions)
6.	Other (Please specify)

PART 4. Issues

Q5. We would like to start by asking your views on various issues. For each issue, we would like to ask you to position yourself on a scale from 0 to 10. If your views are somewhere in between, you can choose any number that describes your position best.

Q5a. Some are “Fully opposed to redistribution of wealth from the rich to the poor”. Others, instead, are “Fully in favour of redistribution of wealth from the rich to the poor”. Where would you place yourself?

0 Fully opposed to redistribution of wealth from the rich to the poor

...

10 Fully in favour of redistribution of wealth from the rich

to the poor

Don't know / I prefer not to answer

Q5b. Some people are “Fully opposed to a restrictive policy on immigration”. Others are “Fully in favour of a restrictive policy on immigration” Where would you place yourself?

0 Fully opposed to a restrictive policy on immigration

...

10 Fully in favour of a restrictive policy on immigration

Don't know / I prefer not to answer

Q5c. Some say “European integration has gone too far”. Others say that “European integration should be pushed further”. What is your opinion?

0 European integration has already gone too far

...

10 European integration should be pushed further

Don't know / I prefer not to answer

PART 5. Main Challenges to Representative Democracy

Extensive research suggests that, in many countries, a growing disconnect exists between citizens and the traditional actors of democratic representation—political parties and elected representatives. Scholars examine various phenomena that may signal this crisis, yet opinions differ on the severity of these challenges.

In this section of the Delphi study, we invite you to identify the most significant manifestations of this disconnect and the fundamental challenges facing representative democracy. Comments may be added for each manifestation.

Q6. On a scale of 0 to 10, how significant are the following MANIFESTATIONS of the representative disconnect to you, where 0 means not at all significant and 10 means extremely significant? Please rate each item accordingly.

	CHALLENGE	SIGNIFICANCE			
1.	Disconnect between citizens and politics				
	Declining trust in political parties and representative institutions				
	Lack of citizens' interest in politics				
	Low level of youth engagement in politics				
	Declining voter turnout				
2.	Disconnect of political parties				
	Declining party membership and identification				
	Oligarchic tendencies in parties				
	Organizational weakening of political parties				
	Programmatic convergence among mainstream parties				
3.	Disconnect of parliaments				
	Underrepresentation of disadvantaged groups in parliaments				
	Loss of parliamentary power in legislation				
	Excessive power of the lobbies in parliament				
	Lack of public engagement in parliamentary activities				

Q7. What additional phenomena do you see as important MANIFESTATION of the representative disconnect?

Q8. Several overarching social, economic and political phenomena have been indicated as REMOTE CAUSES of the disconnect between citizens and their representatives. Here we provide a list of them. Comments may be added for each challenge.

On a scale of 0 to 10, how significant do you think the following challenges are for democratic disconnect, where 0 means not at all significant at all and 10 means extremely significant? Please rate each item accordingly.

	CHALLENGE	SIGNIFICANCE			
1	Governments no longer have the material resources to meet citizens' expectations.				
2	The changing media environment favours polarization and cynicism among citizens.				
3	Social trends such as mass migration and economic inequality have created a sense of fear and anger among citizens.				
4	The crisis of political parties has made them unable to provide a linkage between citizens and political institutions.				
5	Mainstream political parties have changed their nature, functioning as a cartel: they no longer represent civil society but instead aim at protecting their power and access to state resources.				
6.	The political class has become less trustworthy, primarily due to a reduced capacity to fulfill its promises and the perceived lack of integrity.				
7.	The delegation of powers to experts and non-electoral institutions has reduced the importance of politics.				

8.	Political actors and institutions are acting under the influence of specific interest groups, which in turn undermines their legitimacy.				
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Q9. What additional phenomena do you believe are REMOTE CAUSES of the disconnect between citizens and their representatives ?

PART 5. Policy Recommendations

Delphi 1. Empowering citizens

A great deal of research shows that citizens are becoming more and more disenchanted with the traditional actors and institutions of representative government: in most consolidated democracies trust in parties, parliaments and government has been declining in the last decades, and only a minority of European citizens declare to have confidence in them. Also the levels of conventional political participation is generally declining, although with important cross-country variation. One strategy to address these signs of democratic disaffection is to give citizens the instrument to understand politics, increase their (internal and external) political efficacy, and encourage their involvement in the decision-making process.

The assumption behind this strategy is that a more politically informed citizenry can produce many positive consequences such as more participation, more accountability, and eventually a more powerful civil society.

Q10. On a scale from 0 to 10, how effective do you believe the following actions are in reconnecting democracy? (0= not at all effective, 10= extremely effective) Please rate each action and provide a brief justification for your ratings

DELPHI 1	RECONNECTION ACTIONS FOR EMPOWERING CITIZENS	SCALE	EXPLANATION
1.	Voting Advice Applications <i>Voting Advice Applications (VAAs) are digital tools, including websites, online platforms, or mobile apps, specifically designed to assist citizens in making informed voting decisions. These tools are commonly developed and operated by non-partisan organisations, especially during election campaigns. The primary purpose of VAAs is to offer personalised information to voters, enabling them to comprehend the alignment between their policy views and the positions of various political parties or candidates.</i>		

DELPHI 1	RECONNECTION ACTIONS FOR EMPOWERING CITIZENS	SCALE	EXPLANATION
2.	Parliamentary Monitoring Organizations <i>Parliamentary monitoring organizations (PMOs) are civil society organizations whose aim is to promote public knowledge of parliamentary processes with the ultimate goal of improving accountability and citizen engagement. With the advent of the ICT revolution, the most common tools through which they pursue their goals are Parliamentary Monitoring Websites (PMWs): the internet greatly lowers the costs required to gather, elaborate and present this information to the public. PMOs can monitor different aspects of individual parliamentarians' behaviour such as parliamentary attendance, voting behaviour or bill sponsorship and the work of collective bodies such as parliamentary committees.</i>		
3.	Civic education initiatives <i>Civic education can be broadly defined as the activities to provide young citizens with learning experiences to empower them for playing an active role in society and politics at local, national and supranational levels. While formal curriculum activities in schools are the most widespread, alternative and innovative approaches also exist. Among them, we can mention extra-curricular activities such as simulations, role plays, radio and television programmes and educational tools utilizing information technologies.</i>		
4.	Lowering voting age to 16 years <i>The reduction of the voting age to 16 years primarily centers on extending the opportunity for young people to vote at elections at an earlier life stage than would be feasible with a voting age set at 18.</i>		
5.	E-petitions <i>E-petitions represent one of the most widely used e-democracy tools. The e-petition system provides a platform for citizens to formally request government action on specific political issues by following a set of procedural rules, all of which can be completed online. Petitions can be considered a hybrid form of participatory practice, as formal procedures are organized top-down, while petitions on specific subjects are initiated bottom-up by citizens.</i>		

Q11. What additional policy solutions have you encountered that you believe are effective? Please describe them and share your thoughts on their impact.

Delphi 2. Revitalising political parties

Political parties play a crucial role in the functioning of the institutions of the state, with modern democracies often characterized as party democracies. From the 1980s to the early 2000s, the political science literature predominantly examined the decline of European political parties. Our focus is to analyse the responses of these parties to emerging challenges within the political landscape.

This reconnection strategy covers all the actions aimed at reforming political parties to reinvigorate their role in the representative process. The objective of these actions is to promote political parties' transparency, inclusiveness, and responsiveness. Here we focus on parties' internal reforms aimed at performing the functions usually associated with them in the new political and social context. Actions belonging to this strategy regard especially their democratic life and the rights of their members and the capacity to connect with individual or organized voters.

Following reconnection actions are not novel, they have already been previously implemented across various contexts. In this section, we invite you to evaluate these actions based on your experiential insights.

Q12. On a scale from 0 to 10, how effective do you believe the following actions are in achieving “reconnection”?

(0= not at all effective, 10= extremely effective)

Please rate each action and provide a brief justification for your ratings.

DELPHI 2	RECONNECTION ACTIONS FOR REVITALISING POLITICAL PARTIES	SCALE	EXPLANATION
1.	Democratizing candidate selection procedures <i>The expression “candidate selection” is employed to refer to the formal procedures and empirical processes through which political parties nominate candidates that contest an election to become members of a representative assembly. Democratizing candidate selection involves expanding the pool of individuals who have a say in the selection process. Since the 1990s, there has been a discernible trend toward democratizing candidate selection procedures. The democratizing trend was notable, although starting from different levels, for countries such as Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Spain and the UK.</i>		

DELPHI 2	RECONNECTION ACTIONS FOR REVITALISING POLITICAL PARTIES	SCALE	EXPLANATION
2.	Opening leadership selection procedures <i>The selection of party leaders is a consequential activity for democratic politics. Declining party membership and public trust in parties have pushed them to open leadership selection to a wider electorate, for example through primaries in France and Italy. German parties have adopted measures including direct election of party leaders and binding policy referenda. The step of opening leadership selection procedures was expected to reduce the elitist tendencies of the parties by attracting more people aspiring to leadership positions.</i>		
3.	Online Participation Platforms <i>Online Political Platforms (OPPs) are dedicated sections on official party websites or independent platforms where registered members can participate in discussions and voting on different issues. These platforms aim to establish transparent and direct relationships between public figures, such as legislators, and citizens. They can also facilitate bottom-up proposals by any member of parties. Liquid Feedback in Germany and the Rousseau Platform of Italy's Five Star Movement serve as notable examples of these platforms.</i>		
4.	Online Crowdfunding <i>Crowdfunding is defined as the activity of raising funds from the public to support certain projects including political campaigns. An increasing number of political campaigns in countries such as Austria, Czechia, India, Russia, Spain, and the United Kingdom have adopted these strategies by using online tools to collect small donations, following the model of the Democratic Party campaign during the 2008 US presidential elections. It aims to encourage donors to commit themselves to action in addition to making donations, with a strong multiplying effect.</i>		
5.	Microtargeting <i>Microtargeting can be defined as "creating customized winning messages, proof points and offers, accurately predicting their impact, and delivering them directly to individuals". Digital microtargeting is a new kind of communication between parties and the electorate that aims to re-engage citizens with political parties. Microtargeting has the goal of improving connections with individuals, making voters identify more strongly with their preferred party. It aims to shape political campaigns according to the demands of different segments of society. In Europe, especially in the UK, online political microtargeting is diffusing following US practices.</i>		

DELPHI 2	RECONNECTION ACTIONS FOR REVITALISING POLITICAL PARTIES	SCALE	EXPLANATION
6.	New forms of political party membership <i>Globally, declining political party membership indicates a decrease in their influence, prompting the development of new membership models. One of these forms is multilevel membership, which offers a lower level of commitment. Political parties can invite individuals to join a mailing list as a first step and engage sympathizers before full membership. Another form involves digitalizing party membership to increase online participation by creating online coordination mechanisms and digital activism spaces.</i>		

Q13. What additional policy solutions have you encountered that you believe are effective? Please describe them and share your thoughts on their impact.

Delphi 3. Making Parliaments More Representative and Trustworthy

Parliaments are the main institutional venues of political representation, but their ability to provide effective representation in contemporary democracies, characterized by fragmented societies and complex decisions, is disputed. One well-known problem is the lack of social representativeness of legislative assemblies. In an increasing number of countries, various types of quotas have been introduced to overcome this limitation.

An additional problem faced by parliaments is their public perception as scarcely transparent and responsive to citizens' demands. These new challenges have pushed parliaments to renew their practices to be more open and transparent, and to build new institutional channels to facilitate citizens' involvement in parliamentary work, activities that are often referred to as Public engagement.

Q14. On a scale from 0 to 10, how effective do you believe the following actions are in reconnecting democracy? (0= not at all effective, 10= extremely effective) Please rate each action and provide a brief justification for your ratings.

DELPHI 3	RECONNECTION ACTIONS FOR MAKING PARLIAMENTS MORE REPRESENTATIVE AND TRUSTWORTHY	SCALE	EXPLANATION
1.	Gender quotas <i>Gaining popularity since the 1990s, gender quotas are designed to address gender imbalances in political participation and aim to promote greater inclusivity within legislative bodies. The adoption of gender quotas, which can take different forms, aims at increasing women's representation. Reserved seats are binding measures setting aside a certain proportion of parliamentary seats to women. Party quotas are voluntary measures adopted by parties that pledge to include a certain proportion of women among their candidates for legislative elections. Legislative quotas are binding norms included in electoral rules or the constitution requiring parties to nominate a certain proportion of women within their lists.</i>		
2.	Youth quotas <i>Youth quotas have been effectively applied in a limited number of political systems, to enhance the political attachment of the new generation and to increase the chances of fair youth policies. Several countries have implemented quotas to increase youth participation, including reserved seats, legal candidate quotas, and voluntary political party quotas. Legislative candidate quotas and reserved seats are both legislated and thus apply to all parties in a political system, whereas party quotas are internally adopted measures specific to individual parties.</i>		
3.	Regulating lobbying <i>Lobbying can be defined as the effort to influence the policy process. The number of countries developing policies that promote transparency in politics, where regulating lobbying is one key step, is increasing. Common measures include public lists to which lobbyists have to register before contacting high-profile public officers, including parliamentarians, and imposing a duty on politicians to disclose their meetings with representatives of special interests.</i>		
4.	Strengthening parliamentary transparency and communication <i>As a component of Parliamentary Public Engagement, parliamentary transparency hinges on public understanding and engagement, requiring timely and accessible information about legislative and non-legislative activities. Effective parliamentary communication involves a strategic plan to inform citizens, including an up-to-date website, live broadcasts of proceedings, especially plenary sessions, accessible archives, and active social media engagement.</i>		

DELPHI 3	RECONNECTION ACTIONS FOR MAKING PARLIAMENTS MORE REPRESENTATIVE AND TRUSTWORTHY	SCALE	EXPLANATION
5.	Strengthening parliamentary consultation and participation tools <i>As another component of Parliamentary Public Engagement, strengthening parliamentary consultation and participation tools includes online surveys, polls, and e-petitions that enable genuine citizen participation in parliamentary processes.</i>		

Q15. What additional policy solutions have you encountered that you believe are effective? Please describe them and share your thoughts on their impact.

Part 5. Final Questions

Q16. Would you agree to have your name included in the list of experts included in the Delphi exercise reports and articles?

YES	NO
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Q17. Would you agree to have your comments quoted in the Delphi exercise reports and articles?

YES	NO
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Thank you for participating in our Delphi survey.

D List of Reconnection Strategies and Actions: Version for the Expert Participating in the Delphi Study

REDIRECT DELPHI: Reconnection Strategies and Actions



Dear Participant,

Thank you for agreeing to take part in our Delphi study—an interactive expert survey designed to gather qualified opinions on the effectiveness of various actions implemented in recent years to address the issue of representative disconnect. The introduction summarises what we mean by representative disconnection and provides references to additional documents you may consult if you would like to seek more information on the REDIRECT theoretical framework.

The REDIRECT team has compiled a list of these actions by reviewing academic literature and reports from think tanks and research institutes. To be included, an action had to meet two criteria: it must have been adopted in multiple countries and received attention from academics and researchers.

We have categorised the actions into three main groups based on their primary objectives:

- **Empowering citizens**
- **Revitalising political parties**
- **Making parliaments more representative and trustworthy**

Each expert has been invited to evaluate only one category of actions. However, this document provides an overview of all three categories, offering brief descriptions and references to relevant literature. You may use it as a companion to the questionnaire, consulting it for clarification on the actions you are asked to assess.



REDIRECT is a project funded by the EU's Horizon Europe programme.
Call: HORIZON-CL2-DEMOCRACY-01-Democracy in flux. Grant
Number: 101095142

Introduction to the REDIRECT project

The academic and intellectual debate over the health of democracy is currently characterised by some ideas, which are not new but have recently acquired new momentum. This cultural climate can be summarised as follows: citizens in the Western world are increasingly indifferent to democratic principles, dissatisfied with the performance of democratic political systems, and lack trust in political institutions. The explicit or implicit risk is that these factors may eventually trigger democratic deconsolidation.

The REDIRECT project starts from the assumption that the European model of representative democracy has emerged in social and historical conditions which have now changed, causing instability. We introduced the concept of democratic disconnect, a weakening of the interactive linkage between citizens and the governing elites triggered by a series of changes and transformations in the political, communicative, and social environments, as well as the scale of political problems in modern societies. The disconnect has affective, behavioural and institutional dimensions, but its most visible manifestations can be captured by some simple indicators of democratic dissatisfaction such as citizens attitudes towards representative institutions and democracy, and the declining level of political participation. A preliminary analysis of those indicators in the eighth countries which are central to the REDIRECT project (Belgium, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Norway, Poland and the United Kingdom) reveals that in this historical phase an apparent overwhelming support for democratic principles and acceptable levels of satisfaction with democracy coexist with low levels of trust towards representative institutions and a sizable minority of citizens who are fascinated by illiberal forms of democracy. The preliminary theoretical framework and results of the REDIRECT project can be found on its page on the European Commission website⁷.

The REDIRECT project distinguishes between two types of remedial actions: radical innovations which provide alternatives to the classical institutional channels of representation (redirection strategies) and incremental strategies which aim to revive the linkage between citizens, parties and parliaments (reconnection strategies). Reconnection strategies are the subject of this document.

Table 1 lists three broad reconnection strategies: Empowering citizens to make them more able to connect with the governing elites; Revitalising political parties; Making Parliaments more representative and trustworthy. For each strategy, we selected a list of concrete actions which have already been implemented in European countries by various social and political actors. All these actions can be seen as remedial tools to ameliorate the representative disconnect by reviving the traditional pillars of party democracy. While it is clear that none of them is a silver bullet, the academic literature offers conflicting findings on their effectiveness, often because we lack definitive data. The goal of the Delphi study is to understand whether a consensus view can emerge from an interactive exercise involving a small group of experts.

⁷<https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/101095142/results>

Table 1. List of reconnection strategies and actions

Strategy	Typical Action
Empowering citizens	1a) Voting advice application
	1b) Parliamentary monitoring websites
	1c) Civic education initiatives
	1d) Lowering voting age to 16 years
	1e) E-petitions
Revitalizing political parties	2a) Reform of the candidate selection procedures
	2b) Reform of the leadership selection procedures
	2c) Online participation platforms
	2d) Online crowdfunding
	2e) Microtargeting
Making parliaments more representative and trustworthy	2f) New forms of party membership
	3a) Gender quotas
	3b) Youth quotas
	3c) Regulating lobbying
	3d) Strengthening parliamentary transparency and communication
	3e) Strengthening parliamentary consultation and participation tools

Strategy 1: Empowering Citizens

A great deal of research shows that citizens are becoming more and more disenchanted with the traditional actors and institutions of representative government: in most consolidated democracies trust in parties, parliaments and government has been declining in the last decades, and only a minority of European citizens declare to have confidence in them. Also the levels of conventional political participation is generally declining, although with important cross-country variation. One strategy to address these signs of democratic disaffection is to give citizens the instrument to understand politics, increase their (internal and external) political efficacy, and encourage their involvement in the decision-making process.

The assumption behind this strategy is that a more politically informed citizenry can produce many positive consequences such as more participation, more accountability, and eventually a more powerful civil society.

In the last twenty years various initiatives implemented to empower citizens are characterized by the fundamental role assigned to Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs): notable examples include voting advice applications, parliamentary monitoring websites and the adoption of e-petitions. However, there are important debates of other more traditional means to promote citizens' empowerment, such as lowering the age for voting and promoting public

initiatives of civic education.

1.a) Voting Advice Application

Voting Advice Applications are digital tools, including websites, online platforms, or mobile apps, specifically designed to assist citizens in making informed voting decisions. These tools are commonly developed and operated by nonpartisan organisations, especially during election campaigns. The primary purpose of VAAs is to offer personalised information to voters, enabling them to comprehend the alignment between their policy views and the positions of various political parties or candidates. This becomes particularly significant in multi-party systems, where voters may encounter a diverse array of political choices (Germann et al., 2023)

VAAs, as interactive tools for communicating political information, are particularly well-suited to empower and engage citizens. They efficiently educate users about their alignment with parties' positions on different political issues, helping to stimulate interest and reduce the costs of information.

In the new millennium, VAAs have experienced significant popularity, especially in multi-party systems. For example, during the 2012 Dutch elections, a combined total of over six million responses to such voting advice were generated by two competing online applications (Alvarez et al., 2014). Furthermore, in the 2017 German federal elections, Wahl-O-Mat was used more than 15.6 million times.

VAAs have been deployed globally in North America (Canada, Mexico), Oceania (Australia, New Zealand), North Africa/Middle East (Tunisia, Egypt, Morocco, Israel, Turkey), South America (Brazil, Peru, Venezuela, Ecuador), and Asia (Japan, Taiwan, South Korea) (Garzia & Marschall, 2019).

The effect of Voting Advice Applications (VAAs) on voter turnout is a significant aspect of their impact on democratic participation. There is considerable research indicating that VAA can increase turnout. (Gemenis & Rosema, 2014; Ladner & Pianzola, 2010; Marschall & Schultze, 2013). A comparative study on 12 national elections by Garzia, Trechsel, and De Angelis (Garzia et al., 2017) discovered that the use of VAAs increased users' probability of voting in elections by a range of 2 to 12 percentage points. Munzert and Ramirez-Ruiz (2021) conducted a meta-analysis of 22 studies, comprising 73,673 participants in 9 countries, finding strong evidence supporting the positive effects of VAA usage on reported turnout and the likelihood of changing vote choice. However, the evidence regarding the increase in issue knowledge through VAAs was found to be more modest. Additionally, a recent field experiment conducted with a sample of over 1,000 German citizens in the 2017 federal election campaign (Munzert & Ramirez-Ruiz, 2021), showed limited effect on voter turnout and vote choice, concluding that the overwhelming consensus of the effects of VAAs might be less robust than initially thought. Therefore, the efficacy of VAAs for political participation remains contested.

1.b) Parliamentary Monitoring Organizations

Parliamentary monitoring organizations (PMOs) are civil society organizations whose aim is to promote public knowledge of parliamentary processes with the ultimate goal of improving ac-

countability and citizen engagement. With the advent of the ICT revolution, the most common tools through which they pursue their goals are Parliamentary Monitoring Websites (PMWs): the internet greatly lowers the costs required to gather, elaborate and present this information to the public. PMOs can monitor different aspects of individual parliamentarians' behaviour such as parliamentary attendance, voting behaviour or bill sponsorship and the work of collective bodies such as parliamentary committees.

In a study conducted by Mandelbaum and Swislow (2016), it was claimed that more than 220 parliamentary monitoring organizations (PMOs) monitor more than 90 national parliaments worldwide. These organizations are dedicated to enhancing various aspects of democratic governance, such as bolstering the accountability of parliaments to the public, promoting citizen involvement in the legislative process, and facilitating access to information pertaining to parliaments and their activities.

Some examples across Europe can be found in the UK and Germany: WriteToThem, a platform for contacting elected officials and TheyWorkForYou, a website providing access to MPs' voting records and other data; both run by mySociety in UK; and Abgeordnetenwatch.de (Parliament Watch), a website that facilitates discussion between citizens and parliamentarians in Germany. This website receives 350,000 unique visits per month, and 80 percent of the more than 100,000 questions that have been asked of parliamentarians through the platform have been answered (Mandelbaum & Swislow, 2016).

The evidence suggests that Parliamentary monitoring organizations (PMOs) may play a significant role in fostering parliamentary accountability to the public, promoting citizen engagement in legislative procedures and enhancing public access to information regarding parliamentary activities (Mandelbaum & Swislow, 2016). Nonetheless, the efficacy of these platforms remains a subject of scrutiny. Notably, WriteToThem, shows high level of user satisfaction and a significant response rate from MPs; however, its user base is characterized by a disproportionately high representation of individuals who are male, educated, and affluent. This demographic bias appears to be less pronounced in the context of local councilors. Moreover, opinions among MPs regarding the impact of TheyWorkForYou are divided: experienced MPs tend to perceive minimal influence, while newer MPs -particularly women-, often report experiencing negative impacts linked to the platform. Although there is evidence that TheyWorkForYou has contributed to increased accountability, as some MPs have resigned from second jobs following media reports based on its data, establishing a consensus regarding the overall positive effects of PMOs remains challenging.

1c) Civic education initiatives

Civic education can be broadly defined as the activities to provide young citizens with learning experiences to empower them for playing an active role in society and politics at local, national and supranational levels. In Europe, civic education usually takes the form of a cross-curricular subject, as part of another subject or as a separate subject that is taught in primary and secondary schools. Its diffusion can be traced back to the last 50 years, but at the turn of the 21st century there has been an acceleration in the attempt to counter new challenges such as a declining social

capital and political participation, reduced trust in democratic institutions and lack of tolerance towards diversity.

While formal curriculum activities in schools are the most widespread, alternative and innovative approaches also exist⁸. Among them, we can mention extra-curricular activities such as simulations, role plays, radio and television programmes and educational tools utilizing information technologies. Examples from Europe include the European Parliament's "Virtual Role Play Game,"⁹ a 60-minute online simulation allowing students to influence decision-making directly from schools. Additionally, Model United Nations¹⁰ engages hundreds of thousands of students annually. These simulations provide insights into institutional functions, potentially encouraging active participation in real-life politics.

In the European Union, the concept and the scope of civic education has broadened, encompassing not only political knowledge but also the development of values, attitudes, and skills needed for active and responsible participation in society. This broader version of civic education takes the name of citizenship education. This trend became stronger in 2015, when the EU education ministers adopted the Paris Declaration on promoting citizenship and the common values of freedom, tolerance and non-discrimination in education. Civic (and citizenship) education has a long tradition in the USA, and in several other non-European countries. For instance, in Australia, the "Discovering Democracy Curriculum" was implemented in 1998, in a non-compulsory form (Manning & Edwards, 2013). To date, almost all European countries have some form of civic or citizenship education in school, but there is wide variation in the level of specialization of the teachers and in whether it is a compulsory subject. According to the 2017 Eurydice report¹¹ citizenship education is integrated into EU school systems, either as a standalone subject, part of another, or across the curriculum. France, Finland, Estonia, and Greece particularly emphasize it with dedicated, compulsory courses. However, almost half of the EU lacks defined teacher training for citizenship education.

Civic education initiatives play a crucial role in the learning process, forming knowledge and information about political life, with the potential to actively engage young individuals in political participation (Schulz, et al., 2023). The assumption behind this action is that increased knowledge leads to greater interest, and increased participation among young people (Manning & Edwards, 2013). Political scientists have shown particular interest in civic education, largely due to the ongoing debate about how electorate's political knowledge and its associated civic engagement, notably voter turnout, impact representative democracies (Campbell, 2019). Nonetheless, the effects and potential of such initiatives remain significantly under-researched in Europe.

According to a study conducted by Manning and Edwards (2013), there is limited empirical evidence to suggest that civic education has a direct impact on voter turnout. However, the research indicates some support for the potential of civic education to enhance engagement in political expression activities, such as signing petitions. The scarcity of scholarly literature

⁸https://www.civicus.org/documents/toolkits/PGX_B_Civic%20Education.pdf

⁹<https://visiting.europarl.europa.eu/en/digital-journey/the-virtual-role-play-game>

¹⁰<https://www.un.org/en/mun>

¹¹<https://eurydice.eacea.ec.europa.eu/publications/eurydice-brief-citizenship-education-school-europe-2017>

addressing the potential of civic education initiatives in empowering citizens underscores the necessity for a thorough evaluation and analysis of this action.

1d) Lowering voting age to 16 years

The debate surrounding the reduction of the voting age to 16 years, which began in the early 2000s, offers a compelling avenue for exploration, particularly regarding its potential to enhance youth participation in politics.

Germany saw a trend of lowering the voting age, beginning with municipal elections in some states during the mid-1990s and extending to state elections. A parallel movement started in parts of Austria around the year 2000. (Eichhorn & Bergh, 2021) The most significant development occurred in Austria, where the voting age was lowered from 18 to 16 years for all levels of elections (Zeglovits & Zandonella, 2013).

Empirical research indicates that the longer an individual must wait for their initial voting experience, the greater the likelihood of abstention in subsequent elections. (Bhatti & Hansen, 2012; Konzelmann et al., 2012) This underscores the inverse relationship between the age of first-time voters and the likelihood of voting at one's first elections, with older first-time voters displaying a lower probability of engaging in the electoral process. Zeglovits and Zandonella (2013) suggest that youth suffrage encourages the development of political interest at an earlier age.

Thus, experiencing the first chance to vote during adolescence appears to increase the probability of participation in one's first elections. Bearing this in mind, the reduction of the voting age to 16 years primarily centers on extending the opportunity for young people to vote at elections at an earlier life stage than would be feasible with a voting age set at 18. Each year without voting after leaving education decreases the likelihood that an individual will participate in their first election. This delay also results in a missed opportunity to cultivate a consistent voting habit over a longer period of time. (Plutzer, 2002).

Eichhorn and Bergh (2021) collected empirical data on the impact of allowing 16- and 17-year-olds to vote, focusing on their political behaviour, attitudes and their engagement. According to these studies, this age group were often more interested in politics, more likely to vote. However, the extent of these effects on young people's attitudes varied. Furthermore, understanding the effects of lowering the voting age requires a nuanced consideration of various political and social contexts including socialization and civic education.

1e) E-petitions

E-petitions represent one of the most widely used e-democracy tools (Wright, Scott, 2015). The e-petition system provides a platform for citizens to formally request government action on specific political issues by following a set of procedural rules, all of which can be completed online. Petitions can be considered a hybrid form of participatory practice, as formal procedures are organized top-down, while petitions on specific subjects are initiated bottom-up by citizens (Georg Aichholzer & Rose, 2020)

The role of e-petition system in empowering the public and conferring legitimacy to the author-

ity of the parliament is significant. These procedures serve as a means of establishing a stronger connection between representatives and those they represent. Unlike the first two actions that focus on enhancing knowledge, this action aims to encourage more active participation in the policy-making process.

In 2005, the German Federal Parliament (Deutscher Bundestag) initiated a two-year e-petitioning pilot scheme (Lindner & Riehm, 2011). This type of petition tool comprises the following components: submission via email attachment; examination by the petitions committee; publication on the Internet; possibilities for co-signing and discussing petitions online; processing, examination and replies to the petitioners; and publication of the decision on Internet. (Georg Aichholzer & Rose, 2020)

Finland adopted the New Citizens Initiatives Act in 2012, which introduced a form of direct democracy. Studies conducted by various scholars have shown that this initiative led to increased citizen participation, engagement of youth, a learning process, and encouraged innovative policy ideas. Additionally, it enhanced the political legitimacy of policy-making. (Lironi Elisa, 2016)

In 2015, UK Parliament Group introduced e-petitions alternative to its system, becoming the world's parliamentary e-petitions system with the highest usage with over 30,000 petitions. A recent study on the UK experience of e-petitions and suggested that e-petitions mainly serve as a tool for facilitating public engagement. It is also important to note the significant number of rejections of e-petitions and their relatively minor impact on driving real change (Leston-Bandeira, 2019).

Although this action fosters participation among citizens enhancing legitimacy of policymaking and raises political trust to some degree, the issues related to representativeness and sustained political disengagements are points of contention. (Georg Aichholzer & Rose, 2020)

Strategy 2: Revitalising political parties

Political parties are integral to the functioning of the institutions of the state, and modern democracies can be seen as party democracies since elected representatives do as their party tells them to (Budge, 2020). Between the 1980s and the first decade of the new millennium the political science literature on European political parties focused on their decline (Dalton & Wattenberg, 2002), while in the most recent years, the attention shifted to how parties reacted to the new challenges (Gauja & Kosiara-Pedersen, 2021). The most direct evidence usually brought forward to argue that political parties are becoming weaker is the decline in party membership, on which there are incontrovertible data (Poguntke et al., 2016) and the decline of party identification, which is evident by looking at the increased electoral volatility (Mair, 2013, p. 29). This reconnection strategy covers all the actions aimed at reforming political parties to reinvigorate their role in the representative process. The objective of these actions is to promote political parties' transparency, inclusiveness and responsiveness. We do not focus on the government regulation of political parties, on which scholars and practitioners have already formulated extensive recommendations (OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights & Council of Europe's Venice Commission, 2023). Rather, we focus on parties' internal reforms

aimed at performing the functions usually associated with them in the new political and social context. Actions belonging to this strategy regard especially their democratic life and the rights of their members (Achury et al., 2020) and the capacity to connect with individual or organized voters.

2a) Democratizing candidate selection procedures

The expression “candidate selection” is employed to refer to the formal procedures and empirical processes through which political parties nominate candidates that contest an election to become members of a representative assembly. Candidate selection, a crucial step in building a parliament, is primarily an internal party matter, with limited legal oversight in most countries, except the United States.

Once considered a private affair, candidate selection has drawn increased scholarly attention (Lisi, 2020). Early studies challenged the idea of dominant party leaders, highlighting the influence of local party branches and ordinary members. Researchers now use frameworks, like the one developed by Hazan and Rahat (2010), to analyse selection methods. This framework considers factors like candidacy requirements, participation levels, selection location, and selection rules. The degree of inclusiveness in participation is a key indicator of democratization.

Since the 1990s, there's been a general trend towards more democratic candidate selection (Krouwel, 2013) particularly in Europe, though the pace and extent vary across countries and party types. The democratising trend was notable (although starting from different levels) for countries such as Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Spain and the UK. In most South European countries (Greece, Italy, Portugal) and the Netherlands, the candidate selection procedures have remained elite-controlled for the whole period considered, without significant fluctuations. Considering the most recent data presented, the four above-mentioned countries remain those with the most exclusive procedures. At the other extreme, Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Ireland, Norway, Sweden and the UK have all comparatively inclusive procedures. Finally, France and Spain occupy an intermediate position. Liberal and environmental parties are more likely to use inclusive methods than Christian Democrats or Social Democrats.

The effects of democratizing candidate selection are not fully understood. Research suggests that it doesn't consistently change the demographics of candidates (like age or gender). There's also debate about whether it weakens party discipline. While some studies suggest that more open selection can lead to less party loyalty, others find no significant impact. The evidence remains inconclusive, and more research is needed to fully understand the consequences of these changes.

2b) Opening leadership selection procedures

The selection of party leaders is a consequential activity for democratic politics. In many countries, the possibility to become prime minister is restricted to those politicians who have served as leaders of their parties, as it is almost necessarily the case in Australia, Canada, Germany, Israel, Spain and the United Kingdom (Pilet and Cross, 2014). In addition, the increased personalization of contemporary politics, fueled by the changing media environment, vastly in-

creased the relevance of party leaders for parties' electoral prospects. At the turn of the century, some authors identified a pressure towards a plebiscitarian democracy within parties, including the belief that party leaders should be elected directly by party members (Young and Cross, 2002).

Many European parties have adopted more inclusive leadership selection processes by learning from reforms in other countries. The British Labour Party's shift towards a broader electorate in the 1980s and 1990s, when the responsibility to elect the leader was gradually moved from the exclusive hands of the parliamentary group to a broader including party members and registered and affiliated supporters, influenced other social democratic parties. Declining party membership and public trust in parties have pushed them to open leadership selection to a wider electorate (e.g., primaries in France and Italy). Scarrow (1999) reports that German parties have adopted measures including direct election of party leaders and binding policy referenda in an effort to make partisan political participation more attractive to citizens who hold a preference for direct, unconventional participation.

According to LeDuc, (2001) democratization – to open the party up to new ideas, new groups and broader participation can be an important component for the parties which have suffered an electoral setback. This step was expected to reduce the elitist tendencies of the parties by attracting more people aspiring to leadership positions. According to some authors, leadership selection procedures can be strategies for parties to rebrand themselves, particularly when the reform increases intra-party democracy (Kenig, 2008). Reforms such as open or semi-open primaries (France, Italy) have increased engagement from party members and sometimes even non-members, but may be responsible for other unwanted effects: allowing broader participation sometimes results in the selection of unconventional or populist candidates, and when non-members are included in the selectorate the influence of traditional party elites, but also grassroots members, may be excessively diluted (Sandri and Pauwels 2010).

2c) Online participation platforms

As an innovation of the ICT revolution, Online Political Platforms (OPPs) are dedicated sections on official party websites or independent platforms where registered members can participate in discussions and voting on different issues. These platforms aim to establish transparent and direct relationships between public figures, such as legislators, and citizens. (Defacqz & Dupuy, 2021)

In Germany, Pirate Party developed the Liquid Feedback software, which was then adopted by the party to allow members to facilitate transparent and collaborative contributions to the policymaking process. (Korthagen et al., 2020)

Following the experiment of Pirate Parties, Rousseau platform of the Italian Five Star Movement (FSM) is one of the most innovative digital tools (Tronconi & Bailo, 2024) which provides multiple areas enabling members to discuss legislation (Gerbaudo, 2021). Within Rousseau, "LEX" is the service through which members can discuss legislation. The service has features which can be initiated by MPs and local councillors of the movement to post the legislative proposals they would like to introduce, and members have 60 days to make objections or propose amendments.

(Gerbaudo, 2021)

Online participation platform also encompasses features that facilitate bottom-up proposals by any member of the parties. In May 2016, the Five-Star Movement opened the feature called *LEX iscritti*, where party members could propose laws that, after reaching a sufficient level of support, would be taken to the Parliament. (Gerbaudo, 2021) According to Casaleggio (2017), it constitutes a bottom-up system where citizens can directly propose laws that will be taken to Parliament. Plaza Podemos, the Spanish Podemos party's official forum, uses a combination of several tools that are specific to the different phases of the decision-making process. (Korthagen et al., 2020)

While online participation platforms represent a significant opportunity to engage party members to decision-making process, as demonstrated by Tronconi and Bailo (2024) its impact on inclusiveness and effectiveness remains limited.

However, adopting online platforms which are open to sympathetic citizens, even if they are not full members of the party, can be seen as a strategy to establish cooperation between parties and social movements (International IDEA, 2018a)

2d) Online Crowdfunding

Crowdfunding is defined as the activity of raising funds from the public to support certain projects including political campaigns. (Kusumarani & Zo, 2019) For an initiative to be classified as a political crowdfunding, it must involve a funding project based on a political intention with a promoter, which could be a political party, association, social movements or lobbying organizations. (González-Cacheda & Outeda, 2021)

While the practice of collecting money from the public is not a recent fundraising strategy, online political crowdfunding represents a relatively new concept. An increasing number of political campaigns in countries such as Austria, Czechia, India, Russia, Spain, and the United Kingdom have adopted similar strategies by using online tools to collect small donations, following the model of the Democratic Party campaign during the 2008 US presidential elections. Advocates of online fundraising agree that online crowdfunding serves as a mobilization strategy reaching beyond just financial gains. According to this view, it encourages donors to commit themselves to action in addition to making donations, with a strong multiplying effect. (International IDEA, 2018c)

Political parties provide citizens with the option to make donations, either with a specified purpose or without. Donations can also be contributions to specific projects. (International IDEA, 2018c) The logic behind political crowdfunding is that every small donation represents a vote for the political party. This may lead to further donations, party volunteer work, or convincing others in their network to support and donate to your party. (International IDEA, 2018c, p. 10)

Most crowdfunding platforms support various projects including political campaigns. (Kusumarani & Zo, 2019, p. 168) Online crowdfunding relies on new technologies such as online platforms, mobile apps, SMS and email. (International IDEA, 2018c, p. 14) Crowdpac.com

is one of the popular platforms focusing on political projects. (Kusumarani & Zo, 2019, p. 168) The Aam Aadmi Party in India developed an online crowdfunding platform ourdemocracy.in that enables individuals to donate directly.

Crowdfunding has the potential to reach much wider groups than a party's usual supporter base and to minimize time and effort for both party and donors. It can change the dynamics of party affiliation and enhance the sense of identity, creating a balance between the impact of wealthy individuals and those with relatively low financial means. (International IDEA, 2018c) Essentially, it can serve as a mechanism for creating congruence between individual citizens and political parties.

Although online crowdfunding is now commonly used by political parties as a fundraising strategy, there is still lack of evidence about its effectiveness in promoting transparency and inclusiveness within political parties.

2e) Microtargeting

The use of data by political parties is not a new phenomenon and used commonly all over the world. However, new technologies have transformed the amount of information and the way how data is used. (International IDEA, 2018b) Microtargeting can be defined as "creating customized winning messages, proof points and offers, accurately predicting their impact, and delivering them directly to individuals" (Agan, 2007, p. 2)

Political microtargeting enables political parties to identify voters which are most likely to convince in different ways. (Zuiderveen Borgesius et al., 2018) According to a study conducted by IDEA (2018b), targeting voters is about 1) collecting data and dividing voters into segments based on characteristics such as personality traits, interests, and previous voting behavior; (2) designing personalized political content for each segment; and (3) using communication channels to reach the targeted voter segment with tailor-made messages. Microtargeting can have different deliverable forms such as social media, email, canvassing, and television.

Digital microtargeting is a new kind of communication between parties and the electorate that aims to re-engage citizens with political parties. It transformed the data collection and voter segmentation processes. Voter segmentation means dividing the electorate into smaller blocks; and using different campaign methods for each segment. The potential effectiveness of digital microtargeting differs based on electoral systems (International IDEA, 2018b).

IDEA (2018b) has identified three different ways of data collection. First one is a person's voter profile, based on official records that provide aggregated information about the previous electoral behavior. Second is that political parties collect their voter data via phone or email. For example, in the UK elections of 2010, some parties constructed a voter database. Another source of data is consumer data which gives information about online behaviour. E-Canvasser, a Dutch microtargeting organization has developed software to process large datasets, such as election results and census data which shows the party's street-by-street performance.

In Europe, especially in the UK, online political microtargeting is diffusing followed by US practices. As Zuiderveen Borgesius and others (2018) emphasizes, microtargeting is a cheap, ef-

ficient and effective way of communication. It increases efficiency allowing parties to gather input from citizens. For example, texting a suitable message for each group of society can inform campaigns which topics the public care about. However, microtargeting has also potential political and legal threats. It can be expensive for the costs of external expertise and service providers. As the online privacy practices of political parties are mainly dependent upon the policies and technical standards of the social media companies (Bennett, 2013), this could give them more power to set prices and dictate the terms upon political parties. (Zuiderveen Borgesius et al., 2018) Microtargeting can also be used by negative campaigning. (International IDEA, 2018b)

Microtargeting has the potential to revitalize political parties by improving connections with individuals and being more informed about citizens' preferences. It could help to shape political campaigns according to the demands of different segments of society. According to Lavigne (2020), microtargeting causes voters, who are already inclined to support a particular party, to be less likely to change their minds during the campaign. This supports the hypothesis that microtargeting makes voters identify more strongly with their preferred party, reinforcing political affiliations. However, microtargeting is not without significant risks, and its overall efficacy remains a subject of debate.

2f) New Forms of Political Party Membership

Membership of political parties has been the main instrument for citizens to make their voice heard. (International IDEA, 2020) Global data show that many countries have experienced decreases in political party influence in terms of declining membership (Liddiard, 2018). The decline of political parties' challenges parties' claims to be a fundamental connection mechanism between state and society. (Gibson et al., 2016)

In this new context, new models of membership have been developed by political parties. One of these forms is multilevel membership which offers a lower level of commitment. Adapting this kind of membership, political parties can inform individuals asking to join a mailing list as a first step, and in some cases, this process can go beyond engaging sympathizers before full membership perspective (International IDEA, 2020).

For example, the Liberal Democrats in the United Kingdom and the Partido Popular (People's Party) in Spain offer the possibility of becoming a member or a supporter. Becoming a supporter differs from becoming a member in some ways. Firstly, while membership has a cost, being a supporter is free, or at a lower cost. Secondly, members have voting rights in the decision-making mechanisms, whereas supporters do not have the right to vote. In Portugal, party *Iniciativa Liberal* (Liberal Initiative) gives the possibility of volunteering by suggesting policies or participating in party events before officially joining the party (International IDEA, 2020). While this membership model offers greater flexibility in time and resource commitment, potentially attracting more individuals, its effectiveness lacks sufficient evidence.

Another form of membership involves digitalizing party membership to increase online participation. The growth of these virtual support networks has become a focus of interest for both party and communication scholars. *La République En Marche!* (The Republic On the Move)

in France provides a good example, demonstrating how political parties can cultivate a digital sphere for political activism. The key coordination mechanism for the party is the messaging app Telegram. Furthermore, the party has created numerous online platforms and digital activism spaces that enable members to influence its policies. According to the party, this new form of membership has facilitated mobilization beyond key electoral contests. (International IDEA, 2020).

Research analyzing digital activism among French parties has revealed that non-member digital activists exhibit a significantly stronger commitment to supporting a candidate. However, it remains debatable whether this commitment can translate into more permanent and “real-world” engagement for parties over time. (Gibson et al., 2016)

Strategy 3: Making parliaments more representative

Parliaments are the main institutional venues of political representation, but their ability to provide effective representation in contemporary democracies, characterized by fragmented societies and complex decisions, is disputed. One well-known problem is the lack of social representativeness of legislative assemblies. Members of disadvantaged groups are commonly under-represented in political institutions, resulting in their interests being overshadowed by those of the majority (Brown, 2020). This strategy aims to address the under-representation of various social groups and their lack of descriptive representation. In an increasing number of countries, various types of quotas have been introduced to overcome this limitation. Group-based quotas have been adopted to ensure the representation of racial and ethnic minorities, young people, persons with disabilities, and other additional groups.

An additional problem faced by parliaments is their public perception as detached from citizens, a problem that is partly related to the crisis of political parties and partly to the emergence of a more critical type of citizen, one having more educational and informational resources who is naturally less forgiving towards political institutions (Norris 1999). Both factors contribute to the reputation of parliaments as scarcely transparent and responsive to citizens’ demands. These new challenges have pushed parliaments to renew their practices to be more open and transparent, and to build new institutional channels to facilitate citizens’ involvement in parliamentary work, activities that are often referred to as Public engagement (Leston-Bandeira & Siefken, 2023)

3a) Gender quotas

Women are generally underrepresented in legislative assemblies. In the seminal work of Pitkin (1967) substantive political representation is defined as acting in the interest of the represented, in a manner responsive to them. Taking this definition narrowly may produce the illusion that the demographic characteristics of the representative do not matter. However, the persistent underrepresentation of historically disadvantaged social groups in parliaments has fostered the concept that representatives should mirror the represented in politically relevant social characteristics, such as sex and race (Mansbridge, 1999) Consequently, the adoption of electoral quotas for members of disadvantaged, underrepresented groups—a form of affirmative action policy—is based on this premise. In most cases, quotas aim at increasing women’s representation.

Despite having the same purpose, electoral quotas can take different forms: reserved seats, party quotas and legislative gender quotas (Krook, 2020). Reserved seats are binding measures seating aside a certain proportion of parliamentary seats to women, which are the least-used quota type globally despite being increasingly used in Africa and South-East Asia. Party quotas are voluntary measures, adopted by parties (in their statutes or simply as a political commitment) that pledges to include a certain proportion of women among its candidates for legislative elections. Finally, legislative quotas are binding norms included in electoral rules or the constitution requiring parties to nominate a certain proportion of women within their lists. Gaining popularity since the 1990s, legislative quotas have emerged as the preeminent mechanism for enhancing women's representation on a global scale. According to data from Gender Quotas Database, a joint project of International IDEA, 71 countries have implemented legislative gender candidate quotas, while 29 countries have reserved seat quotas. Notably, reserved quotas are increasingly used in Africa and South-East Asia¹², whereas party quotas are most common in Europe, as well as among leftist parties around the world. Furthermore, legislative gender quotas are particularly dominant in Latin America, but are also present in certain contexts within Africa and Europe (Krook, 2020).

While there is substantial literature discussing the advantages and disadvantages of gender quotas, the cross-national and longitudinal impact on attitudes toward effective equal political opportunities and equitable distribution of political participation remains a subject of debate. Hughes et al. (2019) theorized an effective quota as a single variable measuring the presence of a gender quota with features designed to influence numeric representation within legislative bodies. According to Schwindt (2009), the design of quota laws significantly influences the election of women to political office. Specifically, more robust quotas—those with placement mandates and varying levels of enforcement—are associated with higher representation of women in political positions compared to weaker quotas. Regardless, the implementation of gender quotas, particularly at the local level as a tool for “political training,” has been seen as a positive signal for disseminating gender equality policies, thereby promoting a “politics of presence” (Phillips, 1998). Variations of this message can be found in public regulations governing the electoral arena (i.e., norms concerning candidacies) or even parliamentary composition (i.e., norms concerning the minimum number of seats allocated to female candidates).

When examining substantive representation, it is crucial to analyse how gender quotas influence the relationship between women's numerical presence, their advocacy for women's interests, and policy efficacy. According to Franceschet and Piscopo (2008), these quotas present both opportunities and challenges in this regard. While quotas can create a “mandate effect,” where female legislators feel obligated to advocate for women, they may also create a “label effect.” This “label effect” can lead women elected under quotas to avoid pursuing women's interests to counteract the stigma associated with their election method and cultivate an image of serious politicians. Consequently, the efficacy of gender quotas for representation continues to be a subject of scholarly debate and scrutiny.

¹²<https://aceproject.org/ace-en/topics/ge/ge2/ge22/gender-quotas-in-elections/legislated-reserved-seats>

3b) Youth quotas

The under-representation of young people is a core factor keeping young voters from getting more involved in electoral politics, due to a lower sense of political efficacy and satisfaction with democracy. (Castanho Silva, 2024) Political engagement of young individuals is crucial for representation in various spheres. In addition to ensuring the prioritization of youth issues in the political sphere, the presence of young politicians can also enhance the self-image of young people as political actors, leading to increased and more active participation. (Dobbs, 2022) *Legal candidate quotas could be a potential tool for enhancing youth representation.*

While gender quotas have been broadly discussed and, to a lesser extent, applied, the theme of youth quotas looks relatively neglected although not completely ignored by the public discussion and by the scientific literature.

For instance, Bidadanure (2015, 2016) provides a detailed discussion, distinguishing the impact of youth quotas in a two-dimensional space defined – following the classic Pitkins' (1967) definition, – by “substantive representation” and “symbolic representation”. The “politics of youth presence” in democratic parliaments (and more general in the representative assemblies) is therefore spread with a number of practices and programs, most of them symbolic (parliament of students, youth parliament, MP for one day, etc.).

However, youth quotas have been effectively applied in a limited number of political systems, in order to enhance the political attachment of the new generation and to increase the chances of fair youth policies.

Several countries have implemented quotas to increase youth participation, including reserved seats, legal candidate quotas, and voluntary political party quotas. Legislative candidate quotas and reserved seats are both legislated and thus apply to all parties in a political system, whereas party quotas are internally adopted measures specific to individual parties. (Belschner & de Parades, 2021). In Africa seven countries - Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda, Gabon, Morocco, Tunisia and Egypt – have implemented youth quotas (Dobbs, 2022). Also Kyrgyzstan and Sri Lanka have implemented quotas to enhance youth representation. Cyprus, Nicaragua, Zimbabwe, South Africa and Mozambique have voluntary quotas for youth¹³.

A few attempts to evaluate all these measures have been produced (for example Karnein, 2016) According to Gélis and Chassé, (2024) certain reservations might be necessary as political parties tend to place young candidates, and candidates from minority groups in districts where they have little or no chance of winning. Furthermore, youth quotas may be viewed as insignificant by the larger youth population in society, while being regarded as advantageous by the “elite youth”. (Dobbs, 2022)

3c) Regulating the relationship with lobbyists

Lobbying can be defined as the effort to influence the policy process (Baumgartner and Leech, 1998) . Regulating lobbying is crucial for parliaments to maintain their legitimacy and ensure democratic principles are upheld. The number of countries developing policies that promote transparency in politics, where regulating lobbying is one key step, is increasing. While USA,

¹³<https://aceproject.org/ace-en/topics/yt/yt30/youth-quotas>

Canada and Germany have been precursor of these policies, in the 2010s it was already possible to find regulations in “Lithuania (2001), Poland (2005), Hungary (2006, repealed in 2011), European Commission (2008), Macedonia (2008), France (2010), Slovenia (2010) and Austria (2011)” (Holman & Luneburg, 2012, p. 76). A recent survey of the jurisdictions having laws regulating the interaction between lobbyists and elected representatives found that their number doubled in about one decade (Chari et al., 2019). In the EU, member states can have either mandatory requirements or soft regulations introducing incentives for lobbying transparently (Bauer et al., 2021).

Common measures include public lists to which lobbyists have to register before contacting high profile public officers (including parliamentarians) and imposing a duty on politicians to disclose their meetings with representatives of special interests. The rationale for introducing such measures stays in the belief that requiring lobbyists to register and disclose their activities enhances accountability, making it easier to identify and address potential conflicts of interest.

Several states have adopted the so-called “cooling-off provisions” stipulating the time period that former parliamentarians must wait before entering the lobbying industry, to prevent conflict of interests. Also, ethical codes can be applied to both parliamentarians and lobbyists.

3d) Strengthening parliamentary transparency and communication

Public Engagement has recently become a very popular subject in parliamentary studies. The most recent Global Parliamentary Report (IPU & UNDP, 2022) is dedicated to analysing how parliaments around the world promote public engagement, that is citizens’ involvement in parliamentary activities through information, education, communication, consultation and participation. The need to create engagement is felt more acutely than ever, in a time of acute distrust for political institutions (Dalton, 2005). Public engagement can manifest in both passive and active forms (Leston-Bandeira & Walker, 2018). It is often associated with the concept of the “spectrum of engagement,” which delineates various forms of public engagement corresponding to different outcomes.

To enhance public engagement in parliamentary activities, two actions will be analyzed. First, increased parliamentary transparency and communication aim to bridge the perceived gap between citizens and parliaments. The initiative *Indicators for Democratic Parliaments*, led by the InterParliamentary Union, identifies transparency of parliamentary processes, and parliamentary communication and outreach as fundamental indicators of the overall parliamentary transparency. Parliamentary transparency hinges on public understanding and engagement, requiring timely and accessible information about legislative and non-legislative activities. Effective parliamentary communication involves a strategic plan to inform citizens, including an up-to-date website, live broadcasts of proceedings (especially plenary sessions), accessible archives, and active social media engagement.

The introduction of the Internet has increased parliaments’ potential to be more transparent and accountable to the public, marking a preliminary step toward fostering greater public engagement (Coleman & Blumler, 2009). Griffith & Leston-Bandeira (2012) highlight that ‘new

media,' offers new ways of accessing information, communicating, and using services through ICT-based systems and internet platforms, with the primary goal of bolstering public engagement. This category includes email, websites, automatic alerting services, and webcasting. Notably, websites, while primarily one-way communication tools, contribute to legitimising the political system by providing educational resources and information about the political landscape. Email, in contrast, facilitates some level of interaction between citizens and parliaments, indicating an intention to engage interactively. Video and radio, though essentially one-way technologies without direct interactivity, offer additional channels for citizens to access information about their parliament.

According to the research conducted by Serra-Silva (2021), focusing on countries covered by both this research and the REDIRECT project (Germany, UK, Hungary, Italy, Belgium, France, in descending order), communication and multimedia scores were generally high.

There have not been many studies on the effectiveness of communication strategies. Arguably, communication activities seem to be rather immune from side effects. However, the degree to which public engagement enhances trust in parliaments and strengthens democracy remains undetermined. (Leston-Bandeira and Siefken, 2023).

3e) Strengthening parliamentary consultation and participation tools

The second action for Parliamentary Public Engagement involves strengthening parliamentary consultation and participation tools. These tools, which include online surveys, polls, and e-petitions (Serra-Silva, 2021) enable genuine citizen participation in the parliamentary process. It is, however, essential to recognize the deep interconnectedness of these different engagement activities. While the aforementioned communication strategies shape participation, consultation is predicated on information, which may itself foster participation. Moreover, all activities are promoted through communication (Leston-Bandeira and Siefken, 2023).

Serra-Silva's (2021) research indicates a stark disparity in consultation and participation across the countries covered by both this research and the REDIRECT project (Germany, the UK, Hungary, Italy, Belgium, and France). Only the UK Parliament offered extensive tools and procedures. France, Italy, and Germany had limited initiatives, while Hungary and Belgium had none.

Despite limited research on the effectiveness of participation and consultation, these tools may be a double-edged sword. As Leston-Bandeira and Siefken (2023) argue, public engagement can generate significant expectations among citizens, but if those expectations are not met public trust in institutions may erode. Therefore, it is essential to manage expectations by ensuring that people understand their input contributes to decision-making but does not guarantee specific outcomes. When expectations are set too high without a clear follow-up process, public engagement may be perceived as merely symbolic or superficial. In such cases, engagement efforts risk becoming symbolic rather than substantive. Another challenge is unequal participation, where engagement disproportionately benefits already well-represented groups instead of promoting inclusivity.

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