

 <http://orcid.org/0000-0003-0661-4364>

Dušan Spasojević<sup>1</sup>

University of Belgrade

## Antipolitics as a Challenge to Political Parties<sup>2</sup>

**Abstract:** The contemporary crisis of democracy is often perceived as a crisis of representation, as there is a growing gap between citizens and political parties, a lack of trust in institutions, and citizens are disengaging from political processes. These trends can also be perceived as a consequence of antipolitical narratives. Antipolitics is understood as opposition to and/or distrust of traditional politics and as an attempt to end traditional ways of politics, usually from technocratic and populist positions and civil society. By observing different forms of antipolitics and their synergetic effects, this paper investigates challenges to political parties caused by antipolitical positions and actors. Established political parties respond to antipolitical challenges by changing their position to state and civil society and adapting their ideological position and organizational structures to be more responsive to citizens. These changes aim to bridge the gap between citizens and representatives, bring citizens back into institutional politics, and increase participation and trust.

**Keywords:** antipolitics, political party, representation, populism, democratic crisis

There are many debates about the contemporary crisis of democracy, regardless of whether those are focused on the decline of the quality of democracy in consolidated systems in the Western world or on the so-called backslide in still-transitional democracies (Hellmeier et al., 2021). In many of these discussions, the key problem is related to representation and representative institutions, and we often question their ability to perform assigned democratic functions. The usual

---

<sup>1</sup> **Dušan Spasojević** – Associate Professor at the Faculty of Political Sciences, University of Belgrade. His fields of interest are political parties, populism studies and post-communist transition. E-mail: [dusan.spasojevic@fpn.bg.ac.rs](mailto:dusan.spasojevic@fpn.bg.ac.rs).

<sup>2</sup> The first version of this paper was presented at the conference “Revisiting the ‘Crisis of Democracy’: The Dialectics of Politicisation and Depoliticisation”, organized as part of COST Action CA 16211 RECAST on the 8–9th of July, 2021 at Inter University Centre in Dubrovnik, Croatia.

indicators of the issue are a low level of trust in politics (both actors and institutions), as well as a lack of participation and increased distance between citizens and the political sphere (Norris, 2011), leading to strong antipolitical voices in public (Wood, 2021). There is thus a growing sentiment against politicians and politics as such. Most of these critics circle the key element of liberal democracies – the concept of representation and narrow criticism of political parties as the key actors in contemporary democracies. However, antipolitical positions often go deeper and broader than critics of a single government, leader, or political party.

In this paper, we examine the number of intersected and intertwined challenges to political parties that emerged in the wake of the 21<sup>st</sup> century that could be gathered under the label of antipolitics and antipolitical. Antipolitics is understood as a set of ideas opposing contemporary politics, based in distrust of and distance from politics (Schedler, 1997), but remaining highly politicized and engaged. Antipolitical trends in modern societies emerged through two main and completely independent processes: (1) the depoliticization process, aimed at reducing political influence on decision-making in favour of experts or independent bodies (Flinders, 2006), which generated a wider reaction through anti-political and antiparty sentiments, especially after being synergized with (2) the “populist Zeitgeist” (Mudde, 2004), a surprisingly constant wave of populist parties that emerged throughout Europe, fuelled by distrust in political institutions and anti-elitist stances. In recent years, antipolitical positions have also been used to express (3) demands for greater citizens’ participation in politics as professional politicians are not perceived as true representatives (Fiket, 2023). Therefore, contemporary antipolitics wants to reduce the power of political actors, to change the way of conducting politics and/or to make more room for citizens’ participation. It is the synergy between these three claims which makes antipolitics one of the key issues in contemporary research.

Recent studies have dedicated significant attention to antipolitics and antipolitical narratives, linking them to the state of democracy or relations between citizens and political representatives (Caramani, 2017), antipolitical ideas behind the widespread distrust (Wood, 2021), or antipolitics as a political strategy (Büscher, 2010). However, this paper focuses on the intersection between antipolitical narratives and party politics – in other words, on the effect of antipolitics on the organization and functioning of political parties. The antipolitical influence is observable through public criticism or practices and organizational models introduced by new antipolitical parties. Furthermore, the paper investigates responses by established political parties to these antipolitical challenges.

This paper provides a comprehensive overview of the challenges posed by antipolitics and the responses of political parties within this framework. It argues that there are significant intersections and reinforcement between different types of antipolitical discourses. Dealing with antipolitics necessitates

a comprehensive approach that considers all aspects of the problem and all types of antipolitics. These challenges are not fleeting trends; they are fundamentally altering the core elements of parties, including their ideologies, organizational structures, and their roles in democratic society.

Antipolitics is a valuable and important notion as it is broader than concepts often used as explanations or causes of crises (e.g., de-ideologization, populism, or lack of trust), because antipolitical ideas, due to their plural nature, challenge contemporary political parties from different angles. For example, while technocratic and depoliticizing narratives reduce the influence of elected representatives and populism narrows down disaffection to elites and politicians, antipolitical ideas are also visible among voters and civil society demanding more say in decision making processes. Therefore, the study of antipolitics encompasses both sides of the problem, including the issues of demand (citizens) and supply (politicians) (Vines, Marsh, 2018).

The first part of the paper has situated antipolitics within the broader context of the transformation of political parties and democratic crises and searches for its roots and consequences. The second part is devoted to defining the concept and boundaries between active and passive forms of antipolitics. Further parts investigate the critical dimensions of the challenge and potential change: party relations to civil society and the state, dynamics between the traditional and new parties, ideological consequences of antipolitics, and its effect on the organizational structure of political parties.

## Transformation of political parties and democratic crisis

Political parties have always experienced gradual change, sometimes due to wider social and political changes, and sometimes based on their tactics and attempts to adapt the political landscape to their interests (Katz, Mair, 1995). Political parties have been affected by voters' dealignment and crisis of established cleavage politics following the success of the welfare state, the development of plural social identities, and secularization (Dalton, 2018). These changes led to the erosion of established connections between parties and social groups. In the last quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, catch-all politics and de-ideologization of parties were enhanced due to increased economic consensus among key stakeholders and a shrunken ideological space (Kitschelt, 2004). Consensus and decreased ideological distance generated stability of party systems and reduced competition between established parties, and some scholars have recognized the threat of cartelization (Katz, Mair, 1995), described as a trend of agreement between parties to share the political market. Cartelization was specially directed at decreasing the probability of the emergence of new parties (and therefore a new

actor in sharing the spoils), which pushed those newcomers to the fringe of political space and made them more radical, provocative, and anti-systemic. However, regardless of obstacles posed by cartelization (or similar mechanisms protecting stability and political inertia), new parties have continued to emerge throughout Europe.

As the economic consensus became more challenging to tackle, these new parties exploited the increased influence and visibility of identity-based politics (Kitschelt, 2004), including post-material issues such as environmental and gender politics on one side, and growing disaffections with globalization and Europeanization on the other. Those new issues were often “owned” by new, far-left, and far-right parties, whereas the old centre-left and right parties remained focused on the economy (Kriesi, 2010). In some cases, existing parties raised these new questions (e.g., the National Front in France or Freedom Party (FPO) in Austria), increased electoral support significantly, and even became ruling parties (as the FPO did in 1995). However, the key characteristic of these new parties was not the issues they chose but the way they understood politics – through harsh criticism of established parties, the accusations of corruption and alienation, and claims that politics has been taken away from “ordinary” citizens and controlled by the political class and power centres. They rejected politics as it was practiced and promoted new ways. Most of these parties were initially perceived “just” as challengers, but they later proved to be able to govern and substantially change party systems (Albertazzi, McDonnell, 2015). They have often been labelled populist or anti-establishment parties (Schedler, 1996; Viviani, 2020).

The partial instability of the party system was fertile soil for the more general crisis of democratic order, triggered by serious crises (e.g., economic in 2008, migrants in 2014–2015), leading to a perfect storm for democracy. The crisis can be approached from different angles: as a crisis of institution and political order that lacks substance and function (Mair, 2013); as a crisis of representation and alienation and conflicts between citizens and representative institutions (Cavanaugh, 2002); or through a search for concepts that could describe the new reality. For example, Crouch (2004) used post-democracy to describe the world in which key decisions are made outside of representative institutions, under the supremacy of economic powers, and without links between social groups and political parties.

Of course, crises can be questioned – where is the line between the actual crisis and perception of it? Disaffection has become a dominant narrative when speaking about the state of democracy. However, the data shows that authoritarian tendencies are growing worldwide (Hellmeier et al., 2021). There is a gradual but significant decline of trust in political actors and institutions, which seems to be the essential characteristic of the current crisis of democracy.

Describing the antipolitical character of the current crisis, Clarke and colleagues (2016) argued that most theories of democracy assume a certain amount of critical thinking and scepticism among citizens, but antipolitical crisis shows “a level of negativity beyond such a healthy scepticism: an unhealthy cynicism. It also describes rather active negativity, often deeply felt, as opposed to the passive indifference often discussed under the heading of ‘apathy’” (Clarke et al., 2016, p. 10). Since the target of the current crisis is representation itself – the core concept of contemporary democracies – it seems that democracy is being challenged in its role as the only game in town.

## Understanding antipolitics

Thus, it is not easy to point to one cause or root of antipolitics and consequentially single out antipolitical actors or actions. Schedler (1996, pp. 3–9) points out several premises that might be a theoretical backbone(s) of antipolitical arguments: (a) Instead of collective problems, antipolitics sees a self-regulating order, which means that politics should leave society alone and let citizens regulate conflicts themselves; (b) instead of plurality they perceive uniformity, presuming that divisions in society are imposed, elite-driven and therefore “artificial”; (c) instead of contingency they state necessity, expressing doubt about one’s ability to influence the outcomes, promoting passivity and providing space for simplified explanations about complex problems, and even conspiracy theories; and (d) instead of political power they proclaim individual liberty, which means arguing for minimal state and lack of collective actions, but also lack of constraints, social order, and collective beliefs.

However, since this paper investigates challenges to political parties raised by the public or political actors themselves, the more appropriate approach is based on antipolitics as narratives. Wood (2021, p. 8) explains four specific antipolitical narratives, starting from the point that mediated representation is the key feature of contemporary democracies and the target of antipolitical critique through the proposal of alternative ways of representation. These types resemble models that have already been mentioned: (1) technocratic antipolitics (demanding experts’ rule and reducing the influence of politicians) and (2) populist antipolitics (rule of peoples’ will through populist actors), but going wider by adding (3) participatory antipolitics (demand for more intensive participation of citizens in decision making process) and (4) elite antipolitics (inspired by a Schumpeterian understanding of democracy as the rule of the elites who are chosen by otherwise passive citizens) (Wood, 2021, p. 8). These four narratives encapsulate our thesis on broad, comprehensive, plurally rooted, and reinforcing challenges that arise from antipolitical positions.

Therefore, the working definition of antipolitics is that it presumes narratives and negative sentiments toward formal politics, its institutions and main actors. We understand antipolitics as coherent sets of political attitudes and ideas containing preferences for unmediated mechanisms of democratic representation (Wood, 2021), as well as for changing the main model of political practices. Antipolitics represents active engagement for reduction of the political in decision making and for changes in the way politics operates. In contrast to the apolitical, which presumes passivity, and the unpolitical which does not want to overturn existing political order but to find other means of conflict resolution like war or conspiracy theories (Robinson, 2023), antipolitics is almost a revolutionary quest, a radical intent to conquer and change politics at its core. Finally, as antipolitics is often related to populism, the difference between the two is based in the intensity and the scope of rejection – antipolitics goes above being against contemporary parties and beyond the core populist themes (anti-elitist, the Other and popular will); furthermore, antipolitics can be rooted in a number of ideologies, and is not limited to the populist one (Kajsiu, 2024).

This also means that antipolitical ideas can be found in many parties and actors and that we can avoid a binary approach (i.e., classifying parties between antipolitical and non-antipolitical). Instead, we are using an approach developed in populism studies (Deegan-Krause, Haughton, 2009), arguing that parties and actors should not be classified as exclusively antipolitical. Rather, we should investigate and search for antipolitical elements in manifestoes or programmes of many parties.

By understanding antipolitics through these four narratives, we emphasize its broadness and ability to serve as an inclusive concept, containing a number of different positions aiming to dethrone and/or change politics. Furthermore, it allows us to differentiate between the concept's ideational level and the number of strategies or operationalizations of those concepts; for example, depoliticization could be understood as one of the antipolitical strategies, as it usually represents only one aspect of antipolitics – technocracy.

Finally, another analytical tool might be useful as an addition to Woods' narratives and that is Meta's taxonomy on antipolitical statements. Meta's (2010) starting point is the differentiation between the direction of antipolitical claims – from above or below and between whether the actor is inside or outside of the political arena. Above versus below refers to a distinction between elite/actors and citizens, while inside versus outside is based on whether someone belongs to the political arena or is challenging or influencing from the outside. For example, the most frequent case of inside antipolitics from above is an opposition politician, trying to attract unhappy voters by presenting themselves as a challenger/outsider who deserves a chance; outsider antipolitics can be recognized in different forms – from the above as expert-based communities who argue for limitation of politics and the introduction of meritocracy or other

more “independent” mechanisms of decision making, or from the below as citizens distancing themselves from politics; in the latter case, the difference can be found between the active and passive ones, where the second group shows disaffection with politics in general while keeping their distance, in contrast to the active ones who actively criticize and engage in politics.

The primary targets of this paper are insider antipolitics from above (as they represent important political actors) and active antipolitics from below (the crucial citizens’ voices that influence political parties); outsider antipolitics from above (technocratic) will be included only as a narrative adopted by political actors (e.g., when a meritocratic actor becomes a political one and runs in elections) and passive from below will receive marginal attention as it has no direct influence on political parties.

## Antipolitics and political parties

The following section discusses the critical responses from political parties to antipolitical challenges. Following the conceptual map designed by Katz and Mair (1995), there will be four primary areas of analysis: two related to external challenges to political parties (parties between civil society and state and traditional versus new parties), and two regarding internal dynamics (ideological and organizational changes). Katz and Mair’s dimension of analysis is appropriate as they describe the continuous transformation of political parties while retaining the dualisms of the leading causes – external, as changes driven by outside forces, and internal, as changes imposed by parties themselves. Besides that, the Katz and Mair framework fits Schedler’s (1997) dualism of antipolitics: dethroning politics (as the relation with outside actors) and taking control (as the way politics/parties work). The analysis primarily lists the challenges, their intersections, and possible synergetic elements without the ambition to provide clear and final answers about future developments. At the same time, we are not arguing that those challenges are purely antipolitical but that the chosen one can be related or analysed under the antipolitical framework. In a similar manner, empirical cases are chosen as outstanding and familiar examples (e.g., Donald Trump) or cases that have already been researched as cases of antipolitics (e.g., the UK or Slovenian cases).

### Parties between civil society and state institutions

Political parties are still the most important political actors in representative democracies. Although democratic systems provide significant space for other forms of representation and articulation of interests, primarily through civil



society initiatives and informal/*ad hoc* groups, the parties hold the key power in institutional politics. Therefore, starting an analysis by challenging the parties' position between the state and civil society seems appropriate.

Political parties are often targets of antipolitical criticism, and antipolitical sentiments are often articulated as antiparty reasoning. However, the two should be seen as separate (the latter being more concrete and narrower). As many scholars have observed, since the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century there has been a gradual decline in party membership and identification (Norris, 2011; Dalton, 2018), which again has initiated talks on the "end of parties" and increased the importance of other actors. The "end of parties" narrative has been quite popular in the past, sometimes driven by the perception that European politics is changing and becoming "Americanized" (Kirchheimer, 1966), which means increased personalization, decreased ideological intensity and orientation of electoral campaigns (marketization and mediatization), and sometimes an expectation that parties will cease to exist due to lack of important issues to be divided about. In a nutshell, these claims are more influenced by the transformation of parties and less by the actual change in their importance and social roles.

However, the recent revival of the "end of parties" narrative was also driven by the wave of new actors, mainly from civil society, who then entered the political arena in some form. Challenges to the dominant/hegemonic position of political parties came from different angles. In some countries, it included vibrant social movements that engaged citizens in unprecedented numbers (e.g., the Occupy movement of yellow vests); in other countries, challenges were more visible through increased focus on local and regional politics instead of the national arenas occupied by established parties or by neo-corporatist mechanisms of conflict resolution excluding parties from the process, and, as expected, through a set of international (primarily in Europe) organizations that took over the authority.

Part of these challenges to parties as the key mechanisms for articulating and representing interests has come from the institutional dimension of politics and changes in the decision-making process. Party supremacy can be challenged by informal mechanisms, such as the white ballots campaigns that are clear examples of antipolitics. Populist passion for plebiscitary democracy and referendums can be understood similarly (Viviani, 2020). However, more substantial changes have come from deliberative and participatory mechanisms, which citizens and institutions have seen as a remedy to current democratic crises and lack of legitimacy. These patterns are visible – several institutions, including the highest ones (e.g., the European Union), have initiated new decision-making processes primarily based on citizens' engagement. The most notable role model was the drafting process of the Icelandic Constitution, and similar attempts have been redesigned throughout the world. Mini-publics, participatory budgeting, and other democratic innovations have narrowed the space for political parties



in the number of municipalities and regional and national parliaments (Fiket, 2023). All these mechanisms are often driven and rationalised by references to antipolitical statements (Flinders, Wood, Corbett, 2019). They also have significant potential to reduce the role of parties as representatives, thus changing the overall relation and position between the state and civil society.

Without the ambition to evaluate the challenge from different actors, it is useful to observe what Becker and Cuperus (2002) named the party paradox: two conflicting tales on the position and strength of political parties in contemporary democracies. On one side, as Baker and Cuperus argue, parties “lost virtually all their functions to the courts, the bureaucracy, the media, or powerful social organizations”, they have decreased influence over agenda setting and policy development, and “they have become marginal institutions” (2002, p. 1). The other side of the coin, or the other tale, speaks of parties as if nothing has been changed and political parties still “runs the show” by forming a cartel, limiting the influence of the public on political agendas and serving as a channel of access to a position in public administration and possible employment. Baker and Cuperus conclude that “parties are also crucial as information thoroughfares, channels of influence” and “parties are an oligarchy of policy and decision-makers” (2002, p. 1).

## New parties versus traditional parties

The most visible political outcome of antipolitical sentiments is the emergence of new parties or party-like actors in national politics. New parties have been defined as actors who introduce new party labels and ideological standpoints, manage to attract new voters and new activists, and put up candidates and policies that are also new (Barnea, Rahat, 2010, p. 306). Of course, new parties have always emerged, but in recent years, they have been more visible and more prominent, with some being based in strong antipolitical positions. However, we should always be cautious when evaluating the long-term changes on the level of party systems (Kosowska-Gąstoł, Sobolewska-Myślik, 2017).

Understanding the role of antipolitical sentiments in the emergence of new parties requires a comprehensive approach. These sentiments can be perceived from two positions: from below, as an outcome of voters’ demand for new representatives and search for new alternatives; and from above, as the outcome of new actors who use antipolitical positions to attract support. Often, these trends are merged and intertwined, necessitating research from both perspectives for a thorough understanding (Vines, Marsh, 2018).

Let us begin with antipolitics from above, the most visible part of the trend. The emergence of several new party-like actors organized in different ways, often labelled as antiparty parties, is one of the characteristics of the current political scene. De Petris and Poguntke (2015) describe how antiparty parties do

everything to emphasize their differences compared to established parties: developing different organizational structures, using specific communication strategies, and enacting different decision-making procedures. There are various examples of antiparty parties, such as the Dutch Party for Freedom (*Partij voor de Vrijheid*) with only one member or the Italian Movimento 5 Stelle, which is perceived as an archetypical antiparty party (Viviani, 2020). Additional recent examples include Donald Trump's presidency and influence over the Republican party or the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) opposing the "politics of both Brussels and Westminster, which they see as remote, elite, bureaucratic, corrupt, and unresponsive to their concerns" (Clark et al., 2018, p. 27), although the list can be expanded significantly. However, as stated, our goal is not to determine which party is or is not antipolitical but to point out parties and their characteristics that could be related to antipolitical discourses.

The trend of new parties emerging with strong antipolitical elements is not just a contemporary one – since new parties in established democracies have to overcome higher obstacles to become relevant parties, the antipolitical was often an essential part of their ideological profiles even in the past. The first big round of these parties occurred during the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, under the premises that established parties were forming an exclusionary cartel and that "public officials are homogeneous class of lazy, incompetent, self-enriching and power-driven villains", with most notable actors including Le Pen's Front National in France, Bossi's Lega Nord in Italy, or Haider's Freedom Movement in Austria (Schedler, 1996, p. 291).

Antipolitical is not limited to old democracies; for example, post-Yugoslav space represents an example of antipolitics from above, as new actors often share antipolitical positions (Spasojević, 2019). Some are closer to populist antipolitics, with numerous examples on the far-right (including Dveri from Serbia and Croatian Domovinski pokret), and some leftist examples that are much closer to Laclau's understanding of populism (e.g., Možemo from Croatia, Green-left Front from Serbia). Technocratic antipolitics is also vital, especially with Miro Cerar's list/party in Slovenia (Johannsen, Krašovec, 2017) or the later Freedom Movement (Gibanje Svobode), as well as the Croatian party Most.

Conversely, antipolitics from below can be observed as a constant search for new actors, leaders, and parties. It can be measured by party system volatility, as the change of vote preference automatically leads to a change in the party landscape. It is almost impossible to find a European state without a new, relevant party emerging within last decade or so. Some new parties are emerging in key European states and even leading governments, such as Macron's En Marche/Renaissance party in France or Melloni's Fratelli d'Italia. Of course, we cannot argue that all these parties are antipolitical, but they certainly contribute to the perception of volatility, crises, and constant change. In some societies, there is a constant demand for "new faces: in politics. However, once new parties show

up (as with several new actors in recent years), voters begin to complain about their lack of experience and managerial skills. American voters have had a similar dilemma when choosing between anti-establishment candidates and their lack of experience in politics (Hansen, Treul, 2021).

Paradoxically, in some countries, these “new” parties and system volatility have become a consolidated trend, and massive, sudden changes in party systems are regarded as entirely normal (Haughton, Deegan-Krause, 2020). An interesting example is Slovenia, characterized by asymmetry in the stability of the right-wing side (Janša’s SLS has been stable between 20–30% since early 2000) and the extreme volatility of the liberal and left sides of the politics. The trend started in 2011 with the new party Positive Slovenia winning 28%, followed by the 2014 success of the Miro Cerar list (34%), and in 2022, the Freedom movement led by Robert Golob, who took 34% and a landslide majority of MPs. In all cases, the victors were brand new parties (or lists of candidates behind one prominent leader). In the cases of Cerar and Golob, those actors showed strong sentiments of technocratic antipolitics (Johannsen, Krašovec, 2017).

## Antipolitics and party ideology

Antipolitics has a complex relation to ideology. Schedler (1996) argues that the core of antipolitical ideas consists of beliefs that society should be self-regulated and that ideological divisions are imposed and artificial. Technocratic antipolitics is against ideologies because biased elements limit scientific or expert-based decision-making. Conversely, populist antipolitics simplifies ideological positions by introducing the key notion that society is divided between corrupted elite versus honest people (Mudde, 2004).

However, there is another ideological characteristic of contemporary antipolitical parties: instead of belonging to ideological poles as in the case of previous waves (e.g., Front Nationale, Freiheitliche Partei Österreich), the contemporary wave of antipolitics can also be understood as centrists – as Učen argues, those new parties are rooted in “primal anti-political reaction of ruled against rulers” and represent a new, centrist form of populism driven by issues of accountability and transparency where “radical ideological components have been overshadowed by pure antiestablishment ideas” (Učen, 2007, p. 50). Similarly, Pop-Eleches speaks about one group of unorthodox parties in central and eastern Europe as centrist parties who try to “sidestep the ideology by claiming to be nonideological antipolitical formations” (Pop-Eleches, 2010, p. 231); examples of this trend include Litva Liberal Union and Slovakian SMER.

Considering these potential challengers, established political parties have many responses to the ideological aspect of antipolitics. However, those can be

narrowed down to two main options: re-ideologizing the established parties or introducing antipolitical and populist elements into their ideologies.

As already mentioned, antipolitics is partly an outcome of political stability during the last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, including the narrowing of ideological distances. As this was perceived through post-ideological and even post-historical frames, one of the reactions by political actors was to expand the ideological space through re-ideologization and potential centrifugal competition. Re-ideologization, or at least an attempt at it, was notable among established left-wing parties; in some cases, those were driven by specific leaders such as Jeremy Corbyn in the UK's Labour Party, who adopted a "strategy that sought to re-frame the Labour Party as a fresh, new, anti-political, antiestablishment outsider party" (Flinders, 2018, p. 223) or influential members such as Bernie Sanders in the US Democratic Party. Both used the 2008 economic crisis to reintroduce demands for more redistribution and stronger oversight of markets. These attempts were responses to claims that politics no longer cares about the economic interests of underprivileged classes and that it is only concerned about who governs.

The other examples of (re)ideologization of political space include aforementioned new parties that are almost by rule ideologically strong, regardless of whether they are left-wing, such as Greek Syriza or Spanish Podemos, or right-wing, as in the case of Alternative für Deutschland or Spanish conservative party Vox. These parties tried to reintroduce ideology into politics, re-open some crucial and sensitive questions, and stir the stale party systems. As Katz and Mair (1995) predicted, some of these new challengers sat at the fringe of politics, but some became relevant and even ruling parties, confirming a demand for this kind of "product".

Most of these new parties are also perceived as populist as they use basic populist ideas (that society is divided between the honest people and corrupted elite), showing their adaptability (Mudde, 2004). The anti-elitist principle also fits the core of antipolitics: all politicians are corrupt. As Podemos used to argue, it is no longer about left versus right, liberal versus conservative; it is now us versus them. Right-wing populist parties focused on immigrant issues, economic consequences of integration and globalization, and protection of national values against liberal threats (often related to European institutions), and leftist populist parties opposed austerity measures and the influence of big corporations, arguing for more solidarity. Common populists' arguments were related to high-level corruption, which resonated among disaffected voters and the core antipolitical sentiments.

The introduction of new, ideologically profiled actors and issues has had a significant impact on traditional parties, even those that initially did not attempt to change their ideological positions. The pressure from new and more radical leftist parties in response to the economic crisis forced established left-wing parties

to react. Similarly, centrist and right-wing parties had to respond to a strong challenge from far-right parties by shifting their positions on security and migrant issues and introducing protective economic measures. While there is no unanimous and final trend, the re-ideologization challenge has led to centrifugal competition and polarization of the party system throughout Europe (Dalton, 2018), especially in cases with both right- and left-wing populist parties, such as Greece (Andreadis, Stavrakakis, 2019).

## Membership and identification and structure

The influence of antipolitics on party organization and leadership has been profound. It has significantly altered the relationship between the party leadership and its members and constituency, as well as the position of the party leader.

The perception of voters' alienation from parties and decreased party membership has urged parties to introduce some changes. Like the introduction of participatory and deliberative elements on the state level, traditional parties created different, more flexible channels of communication. As described by Scarrow (2015), we no longer understand a party and its voters' relation as concentric circles, with decreasing involvement and importance as we progress to the broader circles; instead, it is a network of complex relations and different groups, including formal members, voters, interest groups, multiple audiences, and public enabling different voices to be heard within the party, without requiring formal membership. In recent years, we have witnessed an increased number of different forms of primaries (e.g., the selection of the French socialist presidential candidate in 2011, the European Green party in EU elections, and the Hungarian opposition in 2019 and 2022), with similar notions behind them – reducing the gap between ruled and ruling. In a similar vein, partial limitation on the power of political parties can be found in preferential voting (voters' ability to choose candidate(s) from party lists), which has become more popular in recent years (Passarelli, 2020).

New parties have also attempted to emphasize their democratic and participatory characteristics in contrast to the oligarchic shape of the traditional ones. Movimento 5 Stelle introduced the use of online communication tools as the key form of decision-making, communicating, and eventually creating the movement and selecting its candidates (Rosa, 2013), although later stages of the process ended up with oligarchic tendencies. The Serbian party Enough is Enough used software for meritocratic candidate selection and later tried to generate an electoral manifesto through an open, deliberative, and inclusive process, but also ended up in the iron law of oligarchy. Similar to the discussed ideological changes, the introduction of new mechanisms by new parties triggers the established

ones to do the same. Challenged by Podemos and Ciudadanos, new parties who intensely used new ICT's possibilities when engaging voters, traditional parties in Spain had to follow and make similar changes (Raniolo, Tarditi, 2019).

On the other side, the role of party leaders has become one of the antipolitical paradoxes. Firstly, the antipolitical wave brought several new, very popular leaders with support among disaffected constituencies. However, some of these leaders were part of the establishment or political and business elites. Donald Trump is the most paradoxical example, although the list should not be limited to him. Regardless of class belonging, it is also paradoxical that criticism of politics and alienated politicians generated a number of authoritarian leaders and, in a minority of cases, led to an alternative (more democratic) way of conducting politics.

The other leader-related paradox that has become more important within current mediatised politics is the paradox of the democratic leader: "how to appear above us (i.e., the statesman-like image) so we trust them to govern, while also appearing "like us" (i.e., as "normal" people) so they can claim to represent us and to be authentic" (Wood, Corbett, Flinders, 2016, p. 581). During the last 20 years, the mediatisation of politics has generated political super-stars, such as Tony Blair or Barak Obama, whereas recent years have initiated reverse trends under the apparent influence of antipolitics – presenting politicians as ordinary people, as anti-celebrity politicians "in order to resonate and draw-support from the broader antipolitical social context" (Wood, Corbett, Flinders, 2016, p. 582). The pattern has included different presentations of the ordinary, from family life to participation in reality programmes (e.g., *Big Brother*, *Dancing with the Stars*) or frequent communication with ordinary people (Krstić, 2021).

## Concluding discussion

Antipolitics is a very complex phenomenon. Its boundaries are unclear and not easy to define, let alone separating it from similar and intertwined narratives. It has two primary sources: one technocratic, located outside politics; and one populist, within politics. It overlaps with several different trends, such as anti-partyism (narrowed to parties as the key actors of politics, not at politics in general) or populism, and often reinforces them. It has two directions: from above, from elites, experts, and politicians; and from below, from citizens and civil society. This paper focused on active forms of antipolitics that reinforce each other while challenging established political parties and making space for new ones. These challenges question parties' relations to the institutional landscape and parties' internal structure, and dynamics.



Political parties have been under significant pressure in recent decades. It is hard to find a democratic country that has not experienced relevant change in the party landscape; however, it does not presume an institutionalized change of the model of the party system, but most often a change of one actor or a side of the spectrum (e.g., changes in the Republican Party in the US or constant volatility in the left/liberal block in Slovenia), or the emergence of new actors disrupting the stability and established positions. New parties are booming, and some have already proved their ability to govern and stay in power, despite often being perceived as one-time-wonders or as “good for protests, but not for office”. Many of these new parties use antipolitical narratives, including both populist and technocratic antipolitics.

The change of parties under the influence of antipolitical narratives in this paper was analysed within the broader context of the crisis of democracy and representative institutions. This approach enabled us to observe changes in relations between parties and the state on one side and between parties and civil society on the other. Antipolitical positions and criticism have triggered a number of reactions from established political parties and state institutions. Those reactions include the introduction of a number of participatory mechanisms that should increase citizens’ influence (e.g., preferential voting, participatory budgeting) in state institutions and in the party’s internal decision-making process (e.g., primaries). Many political parties have also tried to be more responsive in their manifestoes and ideologies to tackle important issues for their constituencies, which produced partial re-ideologization of the established parties. These changes have aimed to bridge the gap between citizens and representatives.

The outcome of the antipolitical challenge is still unclear and includes several paradoxes noted during this analysis. These paradoxes emphasize the conflicting and contradictory nature of antipolitical narratives and the challenge to parties and contemporary democracies. To have a member of the highest elite being championed as the saviour of the lower classes. To have a party with just one member. To promise equal participation and yet to end up in classic oligarchic relations. To be perceived as a new one, although one has been a professional politician for a long time. To become accustomed to constant change, which becomes the new normal at some point. The key paradox among these is to be simultaneously concerned for the future of political parties and to speak of partitocracy, cartelization, and supremacy of political parties.

Considering all of this, it is hard to predict the future of antipolitical claims and its consequences. Antipolitics lies at the intersection of institutional and informal politics; it sometimes has the shape of civil society and political parties, and sometimes something completely different and previously unknown. However, it does have a clear and strict attitude towards contemporary politics: it should be dethroned and colonized. The lack of clear ideas and consensus on

how to do that is probably the key protection of traditional politics, at least for now.

## References

- Albertazzi, D., McDonnell, D. (2015). *Populist in Power*. London–New York: Routledge.
- Andreadis, I., Stavrakakis, Y. (2019). “Dynamics of Polarization in the Greek Case”. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 681(1), pp. 157–172. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0002716218817723>.
- Barnea, S., Rahat, G. (2011). “Out With the Old, in With the “New’: What Constitutes a New Party?”. *Party Politics*, 17(3), pp. 303–320. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354068810369148>.
- Becker, F., Cuperus, R. (2004). “The Party Paradox: Political Parties Between Irrelevance and Omnipotence. A View from the Netherlands”. *Europäische Politik*, 06, pp. 2–16.
- Büscher, B. (2010). “Anti-Politics as Political Strategy: Neoliberalism and Transfrontier Conservation in Southern Africa”. *Development and Change*, 41(1), pp. 29–51.
- Canovan, M. (2002). “Taking Politics to the People: Populism as the Ideology of Democracy”. In: Y. Mény, Y. Surel (eds.). *Democracies and the Populist Challenge*. London: Palgrave Macmillan. [https://doi.org/10.1057/9781403920072\\_2](https://doi.org/10.1057/9781403920072_2).
- Caramani, D. (2017). “Will vs. Reason: The Populist and Technocratic Forms of Political Representation and Their Critique to Party Government”. *American Political Science Review*, 111(1), pp. 54–67. doi: 10.1017/S0003055416000538.
- Clarke, N., Jennings, W., Moss, J., Stoker, G., Shuker, G. (2016). “Anti-Politic, Labor and the Left”. *Renewal: A Journal of Social Democracy*, 24(2), pp. 9–26.
- Crouch, C. (2004). *Post-democracy*. Cambridge–Oxford–Boston–New York: Polity.
- Dalton, R. (2018). *Political Realignment: Economics, Culture, and Electoral Change*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- De Petris, A., Poguntke, T. (2015). *Anti-Party Parties in Germany and Italy: Protest Movements and Parliamentary Democracy*. Rome: LUISS University Press.
- Deegan-Krause, K., Haughton, T. (2009). “Toward a More Useful Conceptualization of Populism: Types and Degrees of Populist Appeals in the Case of Slovakia”. *Politics & Policy*, 37(4), pp. 821–841. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1747-1346.2009.00200.x>.
- Fiket, I. (2023). “15 Citizens’ Assemblies at Supranational Level: Addressing the EU and Global Democratic Deficit”. In: M. Reuchamps, J. Vrydagh, Y. Welp (eds.). *De Gruyter Handbook of Citizens’ Assemblies*. Berlin–Boston: De Gruyter, pp. 197–210.
- Flinders, M. (2006). “Public/Private: The Boundaries of the State”. In: C. Hay, M. Lister, D. Marsh (eds.). *The State: Theories and Issues*. Basingstoke–New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Flinders, M. (2018). “The (Anti-)Politics of the General Election: Funnelling Frustration in a Divided Democracy”. *Parliamentary Affairs*, 71 (Supplement 1), <https://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/124607/3/Funnelling%20Frustration%20-%20Parliamentary%20Affairs%20Nov.%202017%20-%20final%20pre-proofs%20version.pdf> (accessed: 22.10.2024).

- Hansen, E.R., Treul, S.A. (2021). "Inexperienced or Anti-Establishment? Voter Preferences for Outsider Congressional Candidates". *Research & Politics*, 8(3), [https://ehansen4.sites.luc.edu/documents/Hansen\\_Treul\\_Inexperienced\\_Antiestablishment.pdf](https://ehansen4.sites.luc.edu/documents/Hansen_Treul_Inexperienced_Antiestablishment.pdf) (accessed: 22.10.2024).
- Haughton, T., Deegan-Krause, K. (2020). *The New Party Challenge: Changing Cycles of Party Birth and Death in Central Europe and Beyond*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Hellmeier, S. et al. (2021). "State of the World 2020: Autocratization Turns Viral". *Democratization*, 28(6), pp. 1053–1074. doi: 10.1080/13510347.2021.1922390.
- Johannsen, L., Krašovec, A. (2017). "Democratic Critique and Development: In Search of Responsiveness". *Teorija in praksa*, 45 (special edition), pp. 45–59.
- Kajsiu, B. (2021). "Beyond Populism: The Ideological Dimensions of Anti-Politics". *Journal of Political Ideologies*, 29(2), pp. 256–272. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13569317.2021.2017134>.
- Katz, R., Mair, P. (1995). "Changing Models of Party Organisation and Party Democracy: The Emergence of the Cartel Party". *Party Politics*, 1(5), pp. 5–28.
- Kirchheimer, O. (1966). "The Transformation of Western European Party Systems". In: J. LaPalombara, M. Weiner (eds.). *Political Parties and Political Development*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Kitschelt, H. (2004). "Diversification and Reconfiguration of Party Systems in Postindustrial Democracies". *Europäische Politik*, 3, <https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/id/02608.pdf> (accessed: 22.10.2024).
- Kosowska-Gąstoł, B., Sobolewska-Mysłik, K. (2019). "Does Novelty Necessarily Means Change? New Political Parties Within the Polish Party System". *Politics in Central Europe*, 15(1), pp. 81–113. doi: 10.2478/pce-2019-0004.
- Kriesi, H. (2010). "Restructuration of Partisan Politics and the Emergence of a New Cleavage". *West European Politics*, 33(3), pp. 673–685.
- Krstić, A. (2021). "Pogled odozgo: vizuelno predstavljanje građana Srbije na Instagram profilu predsednika Aleksandra Vučića". *Političke perspektive*, 12(1), pp. 7–33. <https://doi.org/10.20901/pp.12.1.01>.
- Mair, P. (2013). *Ruling the Void: The Hollowing of Western Democracy*. London–New York: Verso.
- Mete, V. (2010). "Four Types of Anti-Politics: Insights From the Italian Case". *Modern Italy*, 15(1), pp. 37–61. doi: 10.1080/13532940903477872.
- Mudde, C. (2004). "The Populist *Zeitgeist*". *Government and Opposition*, 39(2), pp. 541–563.
- Norris, P. (2011). *Democratic Deficit: Critical Citizens Revisited*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Passarelli, G. (2020). *Preferential Voting Systems Influence on Intra-Party Competition and Voting Behaviour*. London: Palgrave Macmillan. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-25286-1>.
- Pop-Eleches, G. (2010). "Throwing out the Bums: Protest Voting and Unorthodox Parties after Communism". *World Politics*, 62(2), pp. 221–260. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0043887110000043>.

- Raniolo, F., Tarditi, V. (2020). "Digital Revolution and Party Innovations: An Analysis of the Spanish Case". *Italian Political Science Review / Rivista Italiana di Scienza Politica*, 50(2), pp. 235–253.
- Robinson, E. (2023). "The Politics of Unpolitics". *The Political Quarterly*, 94(2), pp. 306–313. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-923X.13270>.
- Rosa, R. (2013). "The Five Stars Movement in the Italian Political Scenario: A Case for Cybercratic Centralism?". *eJournal of eDemocracy and Open Government*, 5(2), pp. 128–140.
- Scarrow, S.E. (2015). *Beyond Party Members: Changing Approaches to Partisan Mobilization*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Schedler, A. (1996). "Anti-Political-Establishment Parties". *Party Politics*, 2(3), pp. 291–312. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354068896002003001>.
- Schedler, A. (1997). "Introduction: Antipolitics – Closing and Colonizing the Public Sphere". In: A. Schedler (ed.). *The End of Politics? Explorations into Modern Antipolitics*. London: Macmillan Press, pp. 1–20.
- Spasojević, D. (2019). "Riding the Wave of Distrust and Alienation: New Parties in Serbia After 2008". *Politics in Central Europe*, 15(1), pp. 139–162.
- Vines, E., Marsh, D. (2018). "Anti-Politics: Beyond Supply-Side versus Demand-Side Explanations". *British Politics*, 13(4), pp. 433–453. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41293-017-0053-9>.
- Viviani, L. (2020). "Populist Anti-Party Parties". In: P. Blokker, M. Anselmi (eds.). *Multiple Populism: Italy as Democracy's Mirror*. London–New York: Routledge, pp. 106–123.
- Učeň, P. (2007). "Parties, Populism, and Anti-Establishment Politics in East Central Europe". *SAIS Review of International Affairs*, 27(1), pp. 49–62. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1353/sais.2007.0021>.
- Wood, M. (2021). "The Political Ideas Underpinning Political Distrust: Analysing Four Types of Anti-Politics". *Representation*, 58(1), pp. 27–48. doi: 10.1080/00344893.2021.1954076.
- Wood, M., Corbett, J., Flinders, M. (2016). "Just Like Us: Everyday Celebrity Politicians and the Pursuit of Popularity in an Age of Anti-Politics". *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, 18(3), pp. 581–598. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1369148116632182>.