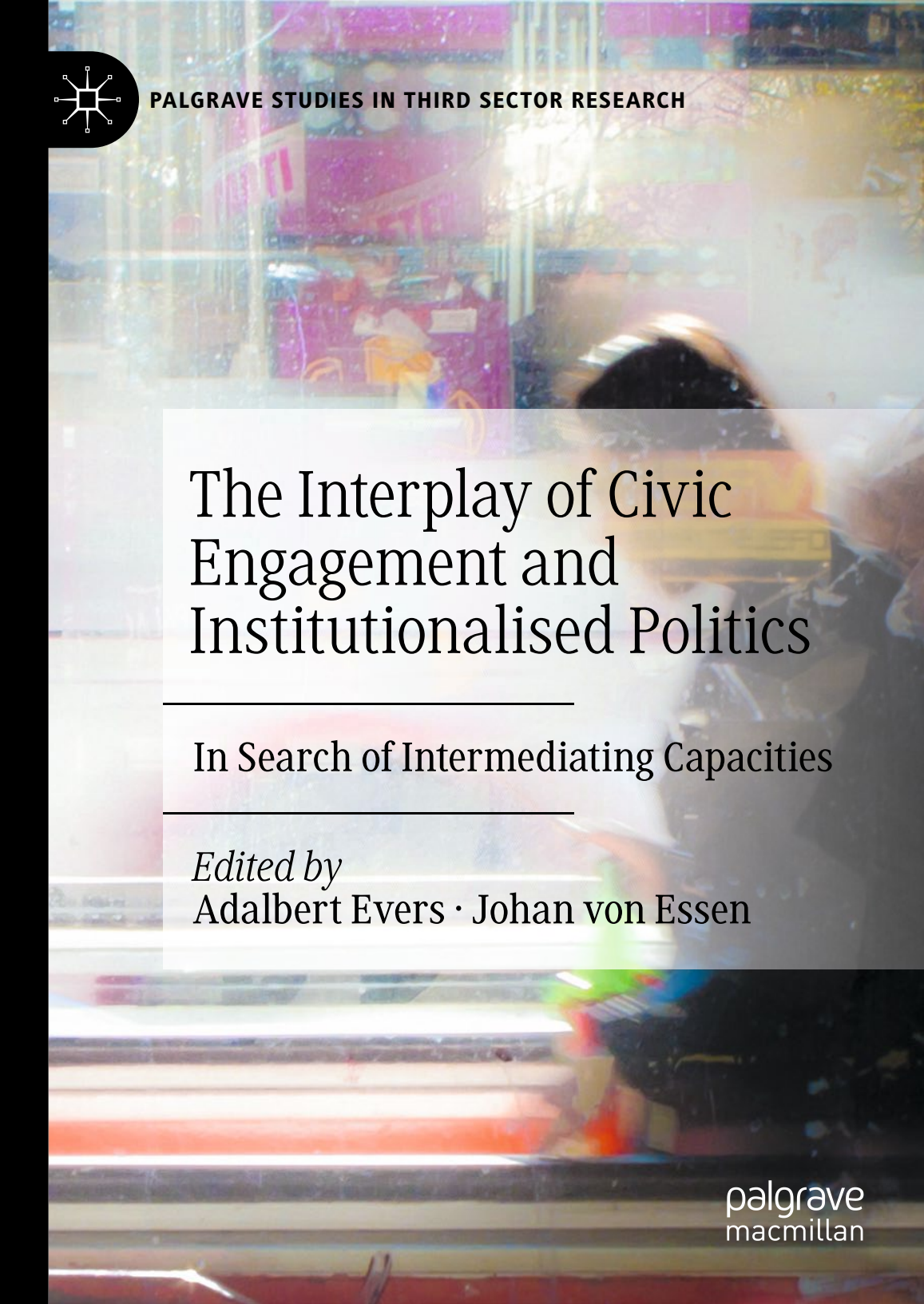

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# The Interplay of Civic Engagement and Institutionalised Politics

## In Search of Intermediating Capacities

*Edited by*
Adalbert Evers · Johan von Essen

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Adalbert Evers • Johan von Essen
Editors

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CHAPTER 1

# In Search of Intermediating Capacities: The Interplay of Civic Engagement and Institutionalised Politics

*Adalbert Evers and Johan von Essen*

## 1 The Problem

It is time to question the ability of the liberal-democratic political system in contemporary societies to both handle urgent crises and represent the political will of citizens. Obviously, every era has its anxieties, and the prospects for democracy have been discussed before. However, the current erosion of *intermediate capabilities and procedures* in society is of urgent importance as it affects the interplay of civic engagement and

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institutionalised politics, undermining the vitality of the political system and the legitimacy of democracy. The aim of this volume is to contribute to the discussion of the state of intermediation in contemporary societies by studying the interplay of civic engagement and institutionalised politics in European countries.

Usually, scholars draw attention to the discontent and loss of trust among citizens as voters and its effect on how they relate to and interact with political parties and politicians in the government. There is also a vital discussion about the profound changes in the public sphere caused by the increasing impact of the new social media and how they fracture and globalise spheres of opinion-building. The focus of the present volume will however primarily be on a third factor: the significance of civic engagement for democracy.

Conflictual topics such as climate change, sociopolitical and cultural conflicts about identity, race and gender, and the increasing impact of populism make it urgent to explore the relationship between demands articulated by engaged citizens and the practical realities of institutionalised politics, a relationship that inevitably creates tensions that have the potential to undermine democracy. The impact of both populist and environmentalist movements shows that various forms of civic engagement crucially affect democracy and the political system since they not only are preoccupied with specific problems and policy fields but also influence voting behaviour and public opinion in general (cf. Lafont, 2020, p. 27).

The problem is that in contemporary societies, democracy runs the risk of being undermined by a 'bipolar' antagonism between civic engagement and institutionalised politics. If intermediating arenas and practices that allow for a dynamic relation between civic engagement and institutionalised politics are lacking, there is no path towards cooperation or productive tensions, but instead towards increasing alienation or even antagonism. This is the political situation in practice; therefore it should draw more attention in theory and scholarly research.

### *1.1 Civic Engagement: Friend or Foe?*

By default, civic engagement is considered crucial for democracy and a hallmark of a vital society. Thus, the academic debate on civic engagement and democracy is extensive (Putnam et al., 1992; Schudson, 2006; Skocpol & Fiorina, 1999; Verba et al., 1995, to mention a few). According to citizenship theory and similar traditions in normative political thought, civic

engagement is expected to deepen democracy as it offers citizens opportunities to participate in political processes beyond general elections, formal rules and political institutions (e.g. Galston, 1991; Habermas, 1992). Furthermore, engaged citizens are expected to intermediate between state and society by bringing forth citizens' political demands and legitimising political decisions.

However, recurrent alarming reports in media and academia arguing that public institutions, the political order and even democracy are challenged by populist movements demonstrate that civic engagement can just as well be problematic (Greven, 2016; Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018). Dramatic political events like the Brexit referendum and the US presidential election in 2016 were orchestrated and legitimised as a conflict between 'the people' and the political establishment. The conflict between 'ordinary people' and the elite has also been used in other countries, as, for example, the rise of the Orbán regime in Hungary and the emergence of illiberal politics in Poland. Also, popular movements such as *Les Gilets Jeune* in France and the Tea Party movement in the United States express populistic antagonism towards the establishment, provoking social unrest and political turmoil (Cramer, 2016; Skocpol, 2020). Thus, civic engagement is Janus-faced as it has the capacity to both improve and threaten democracy.

In line with this duality, civic engagement is here defined as individuals' coordinated action to improve some aspect of common life in society, in accordance with how participants imagine society (Lichterman & Eliasoph, 2014). As the 'good society' is shaped according to the perspective of the engaged citizen, civil society is not monolithic, exclusively consisting of democratic organisations and opinions; it is rather an arena of conflict encompassing a normative pluralism where citizens organise to argue and struggle for their particular beliefs (see Domaradzka's chapter).

Some scholars have suggested criteria to distinguish between civic engagement as a resource for democracy that makes the political system accessible and as a risk insofar as it challenges democracy (Mouffe, 2018; Müller, 2016). This is a crucial distinction, but, in the end, whether civic engagement is perceived as a resource or a risk may depend on the normative political perspective of the engaged citizen. Nevertheless, by doing no more than labelling civic engagement either as a sign of a vital democracy or as populism undermining democracy, we cannot unfold and comprehend the dynamic shaping the interplay between administrative and political power—or 'institutionalised politics' as we call it—and civic engagement. Therefore, the chapters in the present volume explore and

discuss the interplay of institutionalised politics and civic engagement in order to identify the mechanisms that shape the roles of civic engagement, producing a societal dynamic that either deepens or challenges democracy.

Depending on the political situation, civic engagement can be a resource for democracy in two ways: defence or improvement. When democracy is threatened, civic engagement may take the form of popular protests and civil disobedience to *defend* constitutional basics, the 'skeleton of democracy', institutions and processes necessary for democracy to function (see Domaradzka's and Hien & Szabó's chapters). When democracy is functioning reasonably, civic engagement may *improve* democracy by intermediating between the political system and citizens, for example, using citizen councils or cross-sector collaboration to give citizens access to political decisions and policy-making (see Grubb's and Kirby & Leggewie's chapters). Thus, in the present volume some chapters discuss the role of civic engagement when defending democracy; others discuss how civic engagement may improve democracy. However, there are also chapters examining civic engagement performed by civil society elites running the risk of undermining the legitimacy of democracy (see Ewert's and Johansson's chapters).

The interplay between state power and citizens serves to legitimise the asymmetric power relations between citizens and political institutions. At the heart of this capacity is the potential for civic engagement not only to articulate political demands but also to intermediate between state power and society. We use the term 'interplay' as a generic term not to obscure any of the many forms of interrelationship between civic engagement and institutionalised politics. However, we are particularly interested in the intermediary capacity of various forms of interplay of political power and citizens. The meaning of intermediation seems to be overlooked—perhaps it is taken for granted—but this concept is much more complex and ambiguous than just reconciling and balancing state power and the will of the citizens. Therefore, we will visit the territory of intermediation and discuss its various meanings and functions for society.

### *1.2 Visiting the Territory of Intermediation*

Intermediation occurs in many different contexts. Here we are interested in intermediation between citizens and institutionalised politics. All forms of interaction between civic engagement and institutionalised politics have an intermediating potential, but all forms of interplay are not always

intermediating. Hence, to discern intermediation among the various forms of interplay in society, we must discuss and specify what we mean by 'intermediation'.

A capacious understanding of the notion 'intermediation' may refer to practices aiming to connect institutionalised politics and citizens in order to resolve political matters. That would include, for example, when representatives for organisations in civil society present citizens' opinions and demands to influence policy decisions or when they seek to legitimise political decisions among citizens. However, since it does not presuppose interaction with a mutual impact on the actors involved, such a capacious understanding also includes static relations, for instance, when governments ignore or oppress civic demands (see Hien & Szabó's and Tudzarovska's chapters) or when civic engagement dismisses or overthrows a government. As we seek democratic repair that takes us beyond a 'bipolar' antagonism between civic engagement and institutionalised politics, we are interested in the dynamic character of intermediation, practices allowing for mutual influence between political power and citizens.

There are various forms of such intermediary practices. Some interactions are institutionalised and regulated, as in the corporatist model (see Ewert's and Johansson's chapters), while others may be spontaneous and improvised, as when authorities and civic organisations interact to deal with unexpected and urgent problems. Furthermore, intermediation may be peaceful and orderly as in organised deliberation (see Ewert's and Kirby & Leggewie's chapters), but it may also be an agonistic alternative to political unrest (see Domaradzka's chapter).

Contextual factors determine how intermediation is framed and enacted. History matters (see Enjolras' and Tudzarovska's chapters), as do the constitution and the legal system (see Hien & Szabó's chapter). Furthermore, by using the civic action framework (Lichterman & Eliasoph, 2014) in their chapter in this volume, Waerniers and Hustinx demonstrate that the immediate social context frames how non-citizens enact their political voice in 'scene styles'. Also, organisational factors may limit the civic space where citizens interact with public authorities (see Grubb's chapter). Finally, technical solutions such as public opinion polls and professionalisation of civic organisations have the potential to both limit and extend the interplay between citizens and institutionalised politics (see Dekker's, Meyer et al.'s and Johansson's chapters).

Depending on contextual factors intermediation may imply interaction between civic engagement and institutionalised politics which affects both. Obviously, policies and political decisions may be influenced or even changed through bargaining and compromise, but civic organisations may also be co-opted and become more loyal to political power than to the citizens and members they represent. However, how we assess the roles, limits and significance of intermediation is not only context dependent; it also reflects theoretical standpoints and normative ideals. For this reason, in the second part of this introductory chapter, we relate the discussion on intermediation to three strands of theorising regarding the interplay of civic engagement and institutionalised politics.

'Intermediation', as the term is used in the present volume, is something other than the binary relation between institutionalised politics and individual voters reflected in general elections where individual citizens can vote for a political party or a candidate. Instead, intermediation presupposes collective action as civic engagement, regardless of whether it appears in civil society organisations, political parties or within public authorities (cf. Lichterman & Eliasoph, 2014).

General elections ensure political equality, as all citizens are entitled to suffrage, but they cannot respond to political alienation and the voices of non-citizens (see Waerniers & Hustinx's chapter). To counteract political alienation and make political decisions legitimate, an ongoing alignment is necessary between the policies to which citizens are subjects and the processes of political opinion-formation in which they can participate (Lafont, 2020, p. 23). As intermediation is a dynamic relation, it offers venues and practices to keep the possibility open for citizens and non-citizens to influence the substance of politics and political processes in between general elections.

The need for intermediation is a consequence of political inequality that results from the asymmetrical interaction between politicians in power and citizens subjected to political power. Intermediation then may involve an ongoing interpretation and implementation of laws and policies but also the process of giving them legitimacy and avoiding political apathy and social unrest (Kirby & Leggewie's chapter). Thus, intermediation can give citizens a voice so that not only they may influence political decisions but also they can contribute to policy processes with knowledge and sensitivity about local opinions and to the production of welfare in cross-sector co-production (see Grubb's chapter).

When organisations in civil society intermediate between institutionalised politics and citizens, they act as bridges. To fulfil this function, they must be capable of acting effectively towards institutionalised politics, which demands professionalisation. At the same time, they must represent citizens' opinions, which demands loyalty to members' involvement and opinions. These dual roles demand that organisations manage the balance between representation and efficiency (Albareda, 2018). To increase efficiency members of civic organisations often are represented by elected or professional elites (see Johansson's and Meyer et al.'s chapters). As long as members or the population accept and trust elites representing them, they are legitimate, but if the trust is undermined by elites being too distanced from the members and/or co-opted by state power, they lose their legitimacy and intermediary capacity (see Waerniers & Hustinx's chapter).

Cleavages, new identities and a new media landscape have made society more polycentric, which has made political representation more challenging (see Enjolras' and Dekker's chapters). Furthermore, as the corporatist structures that formed in many countries in the twentieth century have fallen apart, elites in dominant civic organisations that once represented citizens when collaborating with the state have lost legitimacy. Such processes have opened gaps in society and given way to protests and political positions challenging the establishment in the name of 'the people' (see Tudzarovska's chapter). As established intermediary arenas and actors have dissolved, it seems as if intermediation must be reinvented to gain legitimacy in contemporary societies.

### *1.3 A History of Instability and Renegotiation*

Climate change, increased migration streams and conflicts over identities and religious symbols have made the political situation more unpredictable and increased polarisation in European societies. In addition, new communicative technologies such as social media have changed the conditions for political activism (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013). Although we argue that many European countries are characterised by a dramatic and unstable political situation, this is not a novel or unique situation. The relations between state power and citizens have been renegotiated before in times of political instability.

The asymmetric power relation between the political system and its subjects has always needed some kind of legitimisation to be accepted and durable (cf. Habermas, 2006). While the religious cosmology prevailed,

religious institutions were intermediaries that made the king or the emperor legitimate as expressions of the divine order. Along with secularisation and the emergence of political modernity, state power become legitimate by representing the will of 'the people', which made popular movements and civic organisations crucial as intermediaries between the political system and citizens (Terrier & Wagner, 2006).

Civic engagement and civic organisations contributed to the gradual development of democracy in the mid-nineteenth century by constituting an organisational infrastructure for political processes (e.g. Selle et al., 2019). When democracy was formally realised, these organisations became both counterparts to and a support structure for political institutions. This corporatist order was established after World War II, in *Les trente glorieuses*, when organised capitalism cooperated with social democratic and social liberal parties to rebuild Western Europe and establish systems of public welfare (Calhoun et al., 2022).

However, dominant popular movements gradually lost their credibility and support among wide parts of the population, causing gaps in the social fabric and fragmenting society. The discontent with established popular movement organisations—perceived to be too centralised, top-down managed and closely related to state power—became visible in the political activism of the late 1960s (Calhoun et al., 2022).

Like the political turmoil in 1968, the situation since the turn of the millennium is a reaction to the corporatist order which allowed established and powerful civic organisations to claim the role as intermediaries between the political establishment and citizens. As traditional organisations often still rely on class-based logics for representation, they exclude those who do not identify themselves according to class. In addition, since the organisations are more and more professionalised, citizens may feel that their involvement is limited or of limited use. But unlike the student revolts in 1968, civic engagement is not necessarily expressing opinions from the left side of the political spectrum. Instead, the political dynamic is more polarised between opinions on the political left and right. Furthermore, civic engagement does not always reflect bottom-up reactions by grassroots movements; it can also be used by the political establishment as a token of the will of 'the people' (see Domaradzka's and Hien & Szabó's chapters). Thus, the political significance of civic engagement is much more unpredictable than before.

No institutional system legitimising state power and upholding a societal structure lasts forever, and the current instability will probably lead to

new intermediary organisations and practices. Perhaps managerialism and professionalisation of organisations in civil society will increase (see Meyer et al.'s chapter), or the use of technocrats and polls will reshape intermediary practices and arenas (see Dekker's and Tudzarovska's chapters). If this comes to pass, being a legitimate intermediating actor in civil society will no longer demand a broad member stock representing 'the people', but managerial skills and professional elites.

### *1.4 The Ambiguity of Democracy*

It is argued that democracy is challenged and even threatened, and consequently there is a vital and often anxious scholarly discussion on the prospects of democracy (e.g. Calhoun et al., 2022; Lafont, 2020; Skocpol & Tervo, 2020; Urbinati, 2014). The present volume is meant to contribute to this academic discussion as it explores the interplay of civic engagement and institutionalised politics and its significance for democracy. The chapters limit their scope to European countries, but obviously this interplay needs to be explored also in other contexts, characterised by other traditions and political trajectories.

The meaning of democracy is often taken for granted; therefore, it can be seen as a 'floating' concept (Brown, 2011). Intuitively the term's meaning seems to be straightforward, namely that political power emanates from the people. However, throughout history, democracy has been understood and put into practice in different ways. As the concept of democracy has an indefinite, and progressive, nature, Charles Taylor argues that it should be understood as a 'telic' concept (Calhoun et al., 2022). Treating democracy as a telic concept may be both frustrating, as the meaning of democracy is indefinite, and worrying, as it indicates that democracy is fragile. However, it also implies an optimistic perspective in that democracy can be improved, deepened and widened.

Bearing in mind the ambiguity of the concept, this volume is above all about the role of civic engagement in one specific version of democracy, namely liberal democracy. This is worth mentioning since 'liberal democracy' is also often taken for granted as the only possible or at least most sophisticated form of democracy. However, other forms of democracy exist, among them majoritarianism, meaning that only the will of the majority determines all political decisions (Rosenblum, 2008). In contrast, in liberal democracy, the political will of the majority is regulated and limited by the constitution so that the judicial system and constitutional

law can maintain the political system, protect the rights of individuals and minorities and guarantee open political dissent.

As the political will of the majority is limited in liberal democracy by lawyers and experts, it comes as no surprise that they may be perceived as undemocratic elites. Sometimes this creates a gap between institutionalised politics and citizens, which places added pressure on the intermediary capacities of civic engagement. The tensions between the majority of the people and the (juridical) expertise limiting the will of the majority are fertile soil for populism and authoritarian disfigurements. An 'illiberal democracy', as Hungary's ruling politicians call their alternative, claims that there are no elites standing between the people and the political system so that the majority of the people, at least formally, have unlimited power to determine political decisions (see Hien & Szabó's chapter).

When representatives of civic organisations mediate between institutionalised politics and citizens they can be perceived as an elite representing other elites and as having an overly close relation with the government. Consequently, populistic movements can be hostile towards established forms of civic engagement and participation. Sometimes illiberal governments try to (re)establish social cohesion by making shortcuts between political leaders and the people. When there is mistrust towards established organisations and movements in civil society, governments can establish a more direct link between politics and 'the people' by creating or supporting popular movements friendly to the government (see Domaradzka's and Hien & Szabó's chapters). Another form of shortcut is to rely on technocrats and opinion polls rather than deliberations for public opinion-building (see Tudzarovska's and Dekker's chapters). In both versions, intermediation is bypassed and made superfluous.

The normative power that legitimises shortcuts between leaders and the population becomes visible in the ambiguous notion of the term 'people'. The people can denote the entire population of a nation (*ethnos*). However, it can also denote the people (*demos*) as something other than or opposed to elites, as in the expression 'ordinary people' (Calhoun et al., 2022). This latter meaning of 'people' lends popular movements political significance and makes them normatively privileged. The gradual realisation of democracy in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was to some extent a product of the popular movements' struggles against established elites to give ordinary people political rights. Considering this historical background, it is ironic that populist movements today are challenging liberal democracy by referring to the will of 'ordinary people'.

The former meaning of 'people' (*ethnos*) may seem less normative and more descriptive and inclusive than 'people' as *demos*. However, by referring to the 'real' people, unwanted groups in society can be excluded, labelled as undeserving or alien. The sometime antagonistic separation between the people (*ethnos*) and foreigners is the flipside of a national identity, engendering both social cohesion in society and exclusion from society. However, there is also a legal separation between the people (*ethnos*) as citizens and other groups living in society but lacking citizen status. This is obviously of interest when exploring the interplay of civic engagement and institutionalised politics, as immigrants need to organise themselves as a political subject to be able to interact with institutionalised politics. Being non-citizens lacking political rights creates various alternative styles of political action (see Waerniers & Hustinx's chapter).

### *1.5 Two Dimensions of Governance*

The present volume is devoted to the capability of civic engagement to intermediate between citizens and the political system to keep democracy vital and accessible. However, the accessibility of democracy is dependent not only on the political system, or the input side of politics, but also on the output side of politics, which is the public administrative system implementing political decisions and providing services to citizens. A democratic society thus needs to balance the political system with public opinion and at the same time a centralised public administration with citizens' preferences. Thus, civic engagement can play an intermediating role between citizens and institutionalised politics, as well as between citizens' preferences and public administration. However, in research and academic debate, the political perspective and the economic/administrative perspective on the capacity to engage and include citizens in a pluralistic society are rarely examined together (Wagner, 2012). These two perspectives on society have been studied and discussed separately, the former by scholars in normative political thought and the latter by scholars in economics or public administration.

Much scholarly interest, not least in civil society research, has been directed towards the economic/administrative perspective on intermediation. Some scholars have studied how nonprofit or voluntary organisations make public administration accessible and offer alternatives to collective provision of welfare services by public administration and individualised welfare services in the marketplace (Wagner, 2012). This

research has been conducted parallel to, seldom in dialogue with, research on the roles and capacities of civic organisations to intermediate between the political representative system and citizens. Although the present volume gravitates towards the input side of politics, we argue that the two perspectives should not be separated by demonstrating that also intermediating positions on the output side of politics have political significance (see Grubb's and Ewert's chapters).

The two opposites, individual–collective (output side) and public–private (input side), must not be treated as two independent pairs of opposites. Instead, to make a nuanced study of the interplay between civic engagement and institutionalised politics possible, the relations between the opposites should be understood as two tension lines. By keeping these two dimensions of governance together, the artificial boundary separating what is deemed as political from apolitical phenomena in society can be transgressed (Evers & von Essen, 2019). Processes and actions should be understood from a relational perspective so that they may be more or less politically significant depending on the actual context. Since we keep the political and administrative perspectives together, we can include processes and actions on both the input and output side of politics. Furthermore, this implies that we include politicians with formal positions in the representative political system alongside officials in governmental administration in what we call 'institutionalised politics'.

We use an extended understanding of the notion of politics as a process that emerges when citizens come together to discuss and make decisions concerning public concerns. Due to this broad notion, we must differentiate between the formal political system exercising power and political phenomena in society. Therefore, we use the term 'institutionalised politics' to refer to politicians with formal positions in the representative political system and officials in governmental administration. By differentiating between 'institutionalised politics' and 'the political' (see Mouffe, 2005), we can attribute processes and actions outside the representative political system political significance without doing away with the formal boundaries between state and society, and without dissolving the conceptual divide between civic engagement and institutionalised politics.

## 2 The Plurality of Intermediation: Three Strands of Theory About the Interplay of Civic Engagement and Institutionalised Politics

In the first part of this introductory chapter, we concentrated on intermediation during periods when democracy gets disfigured or damaged in nation-states with a long democratic tradition. The key goals were to define roughly what we mean by civic engagement and institutionalised politics and how we understand intermediation as a special dimension of their interplay that is not a given but always contentious and fragile.

In this second part, the focus is on different ways of rethinking and innovating the intermediary capacities of democratic systems. As stated earlier, this challenge can be approached from different theoretical standpoints and normative ideals. In order to reflect this variety, we deliberately chose to invite colleagues from various schools and disciplines. Thus, the reader will notice that three different strands of social science theory-building and debate—political and democratic theory, civil society and recent governance models—can be found in these contributions. Each of these strands of thinking, which structure the respective chapters, has its own merits as well as limits. We thought it useful to bring these approaches together because in various ways they can be seen as complementary rather than mutually exclusive.

### *2.1 Intermediation Between Citizens and Political Representatives: Theories of Democracy*

By tradition, institutionalised politics is discussed in the democracy theory strand with a focus on key elements such as representation, political parties and the respective pillars of democratic constituencies such as freedom of association, independence of media from government control and the autonomy of the judiciary.

Civic engagement is taken up in democratic theory mainly as a matter of individual citizens, exercising their political rights as voters and expressing their opinions through choices about rivalling parties, their leaders, programmes and promises. The interplay of both sides, the political representative system and the citizen-voters, depends on the extent to which the party system is able to reflect the intentions of the majority and to take them up. In pluralist democracies, this includes meeting the challenge of giving space and respect to minorities, contrary opinions and particular

interests. This then is what distinguishes pluralist democracy from majoritarianism, which entails 'bowing the decision of the half plus one as if it were the decision of the whole' (Rosenblum, 2008, p. 50; see Domaradzka's and Hien & Szabó's chapters as especially telling examples of this tendency).

Given this background, in the debates on democratic policy-making, three major problems with intermediation stand at the centre of debates on democratic politics.

First is the impact of the ways digitalisation and the power of big international private companies have profoundly restructured the public sphere (Habermas, 2023). Since the 2010s, the internet has widened the possibilities for people to make their voices heard (Uldam & Vestergaard, 2015), but it has also revealed the dangers and shortcomings of a system that merely amasses individual opinions and represents fairly closed subcultures rather than debates.

Secondly, there are concerns about an increasingly individualistic culture among people who are less willing to commit themselves as members. As Enjolras' contribution to this volume argues, new themes and attitudes have emerged, but waves of protest and anger have not been translated into stable commitments and forms of participation in politics. Membership and civic engagement as (political) partisanship do not really seem to pay off or change anything. This affects as well the role of political parties as prime intermediaries.

Thirdly, there are various facets of populism, with their quests for strong leadership and the turn from a culture of conflict to a culture of exclusion and battling enemies.

A major problem becomes immediately evident: the analysis of intermediation gets reduced to a debate limited to four elements—the party system, the media, the individual voter, and populist movements—omitting civic engagement with its plurality and diversity, the many forms of movements and associations and their roles (as highlighted in Domaradzka's and Hien & Szabó's chapters). Take, for example, a study such as *Democracy Rules* by Jan-Werner Müller (2021). Though his debate about populism includes a chapter on intermediary institutions, what he actually discusses there is solely the interplay of political parties and the media, old and new. In the chapter on 'critical infrastructure' and intermediation, Müller gets caught up in a scenario on populist movements on the one hand and the party and media system on the other. Populist movements get strictly isolated from the civil society. Its plurality of voices and

dimensions of intermediation, and the degree to which they succeed or fail in staving off the shortcuts of 'technopopulism' (Bickerton & Accetti, 2021), discussed in this volume by Tudzarovska, are absent in that approach.

Similarly, Urbinati (2014) concentrates in her groundbreaking study of democracy as a 'diarchy' of representative organisations' will and the plurality of peoples' opinions on the 'disfigurements' in the interplay of these two elements. She deals with the gaps resulting from elitism and the shortcuts taken by plebiscitarian and populist tendencies. However, as Sintomer (2015) has rightly criticised, her reflections have little to offer when it comes to bridging the gap between these two sides through, for example, various forms of collective action, old and new forms of civic engagement, or direct and participatory democracy.

Such a neglect of intermediary elements that might 'pluralise' democratic legitimacy (Rosanvallon, 2011) mirrors the oft-occurring neglect of the various intermediation formats, such as referendums and firmly institutionalised forms of corporatism, as they developed over time in many democratic systems. It is no wonder that historical devices by which the once central class conflicts ought to be mediated by establishing a 'social partnership' have lost impact and efficiency. But likewise, there is not much to be found in this strand of research on the challenges of establishing new institutions for a better interplay between institutionalised politics and civic engagement as we deal with the key conflicts of today, such as environmentalism and migration.

In sum: democratic theory, while often successful in pinpointing and criticising various forms of polarisation and alienation between institutionalised politics and the ways civic engagement and concern are articulated today, has little to say when it comes to finding and evaluating formats of interplay where civic engagement is enacted in forms other than voting or commenting.

Yet some debates in democratic theory offer good examples for thinking of intermediation in innovative ways. Among those featured in this book, two deserve special attention.

The first derives from the still but vital debate on a political theory of parties as intermediary institutions and on partisanship as a special form of civic engagement (see here esp. Rosenblum, 2008; Herman, 2017; Wolkenstein, 2019). The contributions to this debate have an approach in common that sees the turn to state-reliant 'cartel parties' (Katz & Mair, 1995), focused on maximising voter support at all costs not as a natural

state, but as something that might be challenged and reversed. What about the intermediary role of political parties beyond offering attractive packages of projects to people as voters? And moreover, what about partisanship as a special kind of action and membership usually excluded in debates on civic engagement and its manifold organisational forms? A key element of this viewpoint is the expectation that partisanship may still count, bridging party strategies and expectations in society. Given the general background of shifting norms of participation to more direct and deliberative forms, engagement in associations or movements and within political parties might be thought of as complementary. 'The objective should be a reciprocal relation between civil society groups and parties; and the right mix is contextual and variable' (Rosenblum, 2008, p. 272).

The second innovative way of thinking about intermediation sees it as a kind of participation in politics that strengthens deliberative dimensions. In fact, elements of participative democracy complementing representative institutions and professional politics are widespread. Besides referendums, one finds participative bodies that institutionalise forms of advocacy and of stakeholder participation, as well as advisory boards and forums intended to deal with the modes and details of public policy, making diverse concerns and particular interests more compatible with notions of the public good. Here the currently much-discussed citizen councils can be seen as democratic innovations. Features of nationwide forums or local 'mini-publics' (Smith & Setälä, 2018) may serve as tools of a more 'deliberative democracy' (Lafont, 2017). Public issues and projects are brought up by selected individuals as citizens rather than as representatives of special interests. Instead of seeking merely to negotiate a compromise between inflexibly rival interests, they aim at opinion-*building*, questioning and possibly changing the viewpoints of the respective sides. To the degree they have a sustainable impact on public opinion, such kinds of councils and forums could be an antidote to the shortcomings of various forms of participation such as lobbyism. In this volume, especially Kirby and Leggewie's and Dekker's chapters discuss the opportunities and difficulties of establishing such kinds of innovative intermediary forums.

### *2.2 More Than a Third Sector of Organisations: Intermediation in the Framework of the Civil Society Debate*

Civil society can operate as a major intermediary force. However, the degree to which the guiding values and practices of this semi-autonomous