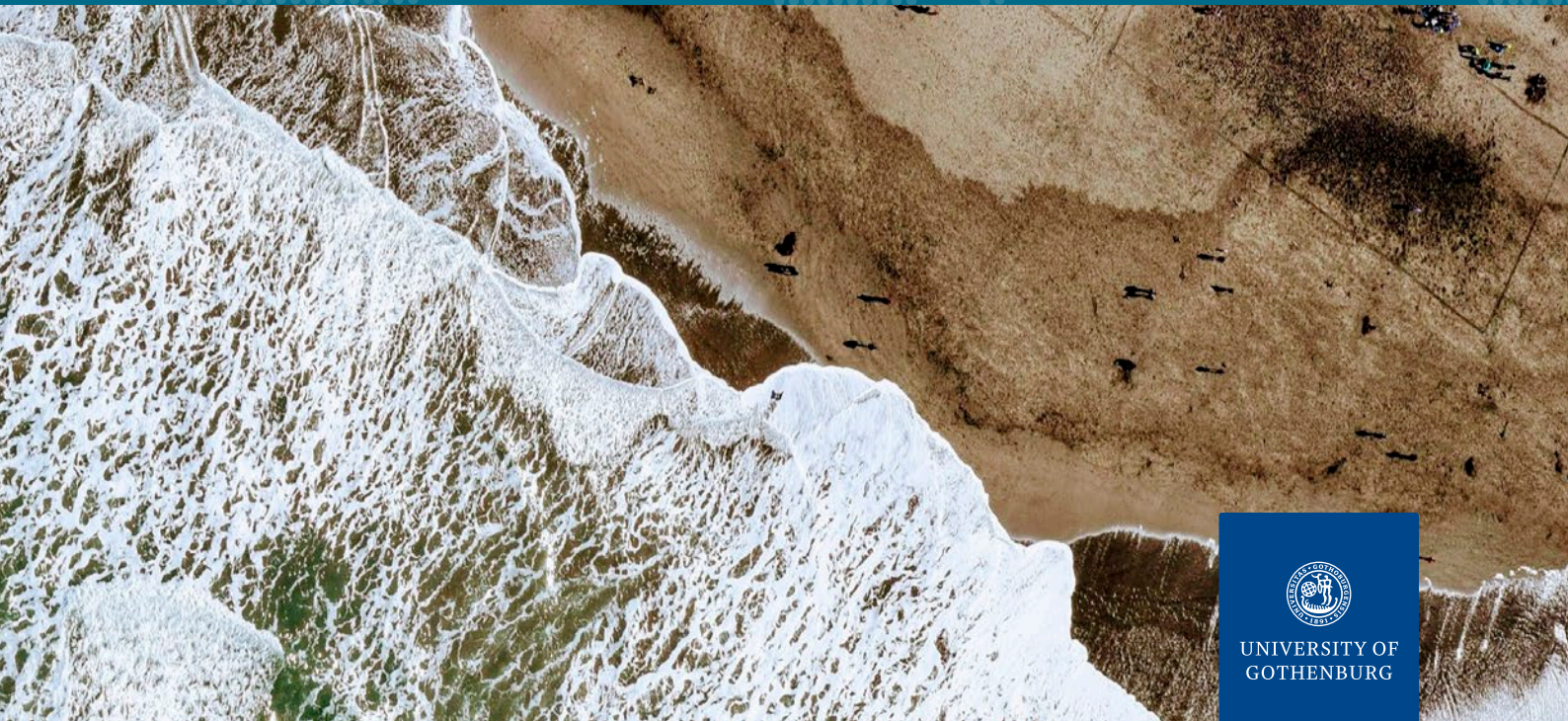


Defending Democracy against Illiberal Challengers

A RESOURCE GUIDE



UNIVERSITY OF
GOTHENBURG

The V-Dem Institute is an independent research organization hosted by the Department of Political Science at the University of Gothenburg in Sweden.

The V-Dem Institute manages the V-Dem Project, which produces the world's largest dataset on democracy. The Institute further coordinates several large research programs such as the Failing and Successful Sequences of Democratization (FASDEM), the Varieties of Autocracy and Autocratization Project (V-Aut), the V-Forecast Project (PART) that assesses the risk of adverse regime transitions, as well as the Pandemic Backsliding Project (PanDem) that tracks effects of state responses to the Covid-19 pandemic. Outreach and collaboration with society, policy-makers, and practitioners is a high priority for the Institute.

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Preface

Across the world, illiberals and authoritarians are putting democracy at risk. The 2020 Democracy Report records the erosion of democratic norms in 26 countries.¹ One third of the world’s population now lives in countries that are undergoing autocratization – the decline of democratic regime traits. Even in seven European countries – Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania and Serbia – illiberals have succeeded in weakening liberal democratic institutions substantially. Moreover, illiberal and authoritarian-leaning parties are on the rise in almost all European countries, threatening democratic institutions and norms.

That is the bad news. The good news is that the vast majority of citizens – politicians, voters, activists, civil servants, journalists and bloggers – firmly believe in democracy and liberalism and want to defend these values. This resource guide is for you.

The resource guide provides an overview of cutting-edge research and innovative ideas for addressing the illiberal challenge. It is unfortunately a complex problem to which there is no single ‘silver bullet’. A multitude of strategies are required at all levels. In this resource guide, you can find some ideas that you and your organization can enact as your contribution.

Contemporary autocratization starts – and ends – at the ballot box. Therefore, we need to think about how to reduce public support for illiberal actors. We focus on political parties, civic education and public spaces, because this is a space where everyone has a role to play. At the same time, we acknowledge that formal state institutions have an important role to play as well – such as courts, parliaments and security forces – but due to resource constraints we only address them here marginally.

Democratic actors face dilemmas every day. Politicians have to consider if they can reach the voters of illiberal parties best by demonizing or engaging with these parties. Activists have to think about whether their contentious action mobilizes necessary resistance or inadvertently fuels the polarizing discourse that populist parties want. For journalists, it is difficult to assess whether reporting about illiberal parties gives greater credence to their issues or provides a good platform for critical debate.

We do not claim to have any easy answers. But systematically thinking about these dilemmas – based on the available research evidence – will help you to decide what are the best strategies you can pursue in your everyday work.

This resource guide focuses on what democrats can do before illiberal actors monopolize political power. Once they are in power, a different resource guide is needed. Additionally, the illiberal actors we are concerned with seek to reach power via elections. We do not address the danger of military coups or other unconstitutional ways of taking power. This danger has noticeably declined in recent years.²

In short, our aim is to provide guidance for everyday decisions that democratic actors are faced with and suggestions for immediate responses to illiberal challenges.

We do not claim to have remedies for structural conditions and policies that may have contributed to the rise of illiberal parties – economic inequalities, welfare and immigration, dissatisfaction with specific democratic institutions, globalization, and so on. While these factors remain important for the long-term, we know from prior research that even under the most dire structural conditions, short-term choices of political actors matter for the fate of democracy.³

For instance, in the Interwar period, many countries such as Belgium, Finland and Czechoslovakia faced similar challenges to Germany and Italy, but only in the latter two did illiberal forces come to power. Many observers argue that the weakness of conservative political actors and their decisions to collaborate with the fascists in Italy and Germany contributed to the failure of democracy in these countries.⁴ The prominent scholar Nancy Bermeo (2019) recently re-emphasized that democratic breakdown happens when democratic actors fail to mobilize resistance.⁵

1 Lüthmann et al. (2020).

2 Bermeo (2016).

3 See for example: Capoccia (2005), Linz and Stepan (1978), Linz (1978).

With this perspective we adhere to an actor-oriented approach. Other scholars emphasize the role of structural conditions more (e.g. Przeworski (1995)).

4 Capoccia (2005), Ziblatt (2017).

5 Bermeo (2019).



Closing panel of the Berlin Democracy Conference with Gesine Schwan (Humboldt-Viadrina), Daniel Ziblatt (Harvard) and Anna Lührmann (V-Dem) at the WZB Berlin Social Science Center (10 November 2019).

In November 2019, the V-Dem Institute – in collaboration with the Open Society Foundations and the WZB Berlin Social Science Center – hosted a conference on “Making Europe Resilient against Illiberal and Authoritarian Challenges”. This resource guide builds on the discussions at that conference and an intensive literature review that we conducted in order to prepare for the conference.

While doing so, we were surprised and concerned by how little we know about the question of how we enhance democratic resilience. Kaltwasser’s verdict from 2017 still holds: “there is almost no research on the question of how to respond to populist forces.”⁶ Even the many prominent books that have been published on the rising threats to democracy convey little in the way of policy implications. Maybe for good reasons, because – as Norris and Inglehart put it – “[the rise of authoritarian populism] reflects pervasive economic and cultural changes, for which there are no easy answers.”⁷

Nevertheless, democratic actors are confronted with choices in how to deal with illiberal challengers every day. For you, this resource guide provides a collection of ideas and scholarly resources for inspiration and further reading.

The production of this resource guide has been a truly collaborative effort. It would not have been possible without the participants who attended the Berlin Democracy Conference (11 and 12 November 2019), who discussed the initial ideas for this resource guide and provided invaluable input. We are particularly grateful to the Open Society Foundations for funding the conference and the drafting of this resource guide. Part 1 builds on a piece published on [OpenDemocracy.net](https://www.opendemocracy.net) and [section 1.1](#) draws heavily on a working paper published with the support of the Heinrich Böll Foundation.⁸

6 Kaltwasser (2017, 489).

7 Norris and Inglehart (2019, 265).

8 <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/can-europe-make-it/key-democratic-resilience-unmask-authoritarian-challengers-without-fuelling-polarization/> (retrieved on April 4, 2020); Lührmann and Hellmeier (2020).

Executive Summary

Understanding the Challenge: How Illiberalism Threatens Democracy

Illiberalism challenges the stability of democracies because it undermines civil liberties and liberal institutions and fuels toxic polarization.

Without liberal rights and institutions democracy is not meaningful and unlikely to endure. Elections become an empty shell. Such rights and institutions include the rule of law, minority rights, and horizontal accountability through parliaments and courts. Fundamentally challenging these rights and institutions – as illiberals do – threatens the persistence of democracy (Section 1.1.1).

Illiberals use **populist rhetoric** to claim that they are, in fact, democratic. This makes their presence even more threatening. Self-proclaimed authoritarians are typically unable to gain power in a democracy (Section 1.1.2).

The words and deeds of illiberals fuel **toxic polarization** in society that aid their rise. Polarization shields their supporters from information that challenges their views and opinions (Section 1.1.3).

An illiberal actor – a political leader, political party, civil society group, or citizen – is not fully committed to the institutions and norms that make a democracy meaningful and enduring such as civil liberties, the rule of law, and horizontal accountability.

Critical Engagement Debunks Illiberalism without Fueling Polarization

In order to stop illiberalism, democrats need to counter both toxic polarization and illiberals' attempts to claim democratic legitimacy.

- **Militant response strategies** – such as party bans, comprehensive exclusion, and demonization - are important to keep the most radical illiberals at bay, but risk fueling polarization if they are applied to less radical illiberals (Section 1.2.1).
- Reducing polarization with the help of **tolerant response strategies** – such as coalitions with illiberal parties, reporting about them uncritically, ignoring illiberal provocations - gives illiberals something they desperately want: to appear as “normal”, democratic actors (Section 1.2.2).
- **Critical engagement** avoids the pitfalls of both militant and tolerant strategies by both firmly excluding extreme illiberals while reaching out to more moderate sympathizers and “fence-sitters” who are not firmly rooted in the illiberal camp (Section 1.3.1).
- Critical engagement has **different implications** for various democratic actors. The strategic aim should be to keep channels of communication with moderate illiberals open and use those channels to spread democratic ideas and values. This includes politicians confronting illiberal ideas, civil society organizations deliberating in particular with the more moderate illiberals, and journalists contextualizing illiberal words and deeds (Section 1.4).

Confront Illiberalism and be Strategic

In most countries, illiberals are in a minority. But once these groups grow larger and become more influential, they are difficult to stop. Therefore, democrats need to prioritize building up a resistance early and being more strategic about what they do.

- The main target group should not be the illiberal politicians themselves, but their *moderate, weakly affiliated, and potential supporters*. Targeting them separately from the radical core is key to a successful response (Section 1.3.2).
- The aim ought to be to *drive a wedge* between the radical and moderate illiberals, because divisions within illiberal groups weaken them considerably (Section 1.3.2).
- Current responses mainly focus on mobilizing democrats for resistance. While this is important, *activities directly targeting the attitudes and behaviors of (potential) illiberals* need to be stepped up as they are at the heart of the problem (Section 1.3.2).

Re-frame Conversations with and about Illiberals

Illiberals use framing strategically and systematically to amplify fear and to gain votes. At the same time, they use a vague and symbolic rhetoric that is typically void of concrete solutions to policy issues. It is time for democrats to become more skillful in their verbal responses.

- *Argumentation training* helps democrats to expose illiberals' rhetorical tricks as well as deeper values, and to find suitable responses when red lines are crossed (Section 2.1).
- *Moral reframing* can be an effective means to persuade illiberals based on the target audience's moral values (Section 2.1).
- At the same time, democrats should avoid *repeating the rhetorical frames* of illiberals and instead force illiberals to discuss concrete policies and engage in logical arguments (Section 2.1).

Re-claim Social Media for Democratic Discourses

Three social media phenomena are often linked to the spread and amplification of illiberalism and authoritarianism: filter bubbles, disinformation, and hate speech.

- It is important to raise awareness that most online information is selected by self-created social spheres. Multiple tools for exposure to a diverse range of information can mitigate such *filter bubbles*. Examples include "Diskutier Mit Mir" – an app which offers daily chats with people from other political viewpoints – and the Google Chrome add-on *Rbutr*, which finds articles with pluralistic views (Section 2.2.1).
- In order to counter *disinformation*, democrats should promote easy-to-use tools for fact-checking and push social media providers to implement them (Section 2.2.2).
- Democrats should spread information about websites that allow users to report *hate speech*, and that offer psychological support (Section 2.2.3).

Media: Unmask Illiberals without Amplifying Them

Instead of ignoring or demonizing illiberals, democratic journalists should use their channels to contextualize illiberal ideas and debunk radical illiberal world views.

- Journalists should use every opportunity, including new media formats, to **clarify** how illiberals' statements challenge democratic norms and values (Section 2.3.1).
- Reporting on illiberals should be balanced, transparent and non-partisan without **overreporting** on illiberals' provocations (Section 2.3.1).
- **Fact-checking** based on transparent criteria is a good strategy to expose disinformation spread by illiberals – for instance via online tools such as “Fullfact” (Section 2.3.1).

Civil Society: Resist Radicals and Reach Out to Moderates

Civil society groups should deliberate with moderately illiberal members, and in a civilized manner mobilize against radical illiberals.

- **Within civil society organizations**, it is important to engage in a constructive dialogue with moderate illiberals, but radicals should be excluded as they may abuse the organization for recruitment and mobilization purposes (Section 2.3.2).
- **Violence is never a good option.** Aggression and violence may actually strengthen illiberals (Section 2.3.2).
- **Hate speech** should neither be ignored nor normalized, but countered vehemently and reported to law enforcement agencies (Section 2.2).

More Civic Education for Resilient Democracies

Citizens who understand how democracy works, and who feel they can make a difference by engaging in a legitimate way, are less likely to support illiberal ideologies and parties. Citizens who lack trust in their fellow citizens and in the political process are more likely to support policies that challenge democratic rules and the institutions that guarantee an impartial and fair political contest.

- Civic education needs **greater emphasis** inside and outside schools. It fosters the resilience of democracy by spreading democratic values, norms, and knowledge about how to get involved in the democratic process (Section 3.2).
- When democratic norms are under attack, **teachers do not have to be neutral.** On the contrary, they have the right and duty to promote democratic values and processes (Section 3.1). In doing so, simulating democratic processes and procedures in games has proven to be particularly effective (Section 3.2).
- Democrats should invest more in spreading the word about the benefits of democracy and liberalism – **in particular among those citizens susceptible to illiberal agitation.** Civic education should target such groups with innovative ideas for out-of-school civic education - for example with activities in football clubs and on social media (Section 3.3).

Democratic Political Parties and Politicians: Confront Illiberal Parties and Do not Try to Copy Them

The emergence of illiberal challenger parties puts democratic politicians in a dilemma: Integrating them into the party system can endanger democracy by legitimizing their politics while total exclusion risks alienating voters of democratic parties who sympathize with some of the illiberal parties' rhetoric. There are no easy, empirically tested solutions for navigating this dilemma.

- Illiberal parties should **not be treated the same way** as other parties since they endanger democracy. Thus, forming a coalition with them should be off the table for all democrats (Section 4.1.2).
- At the same time, mere exclusion is not likely to work – particularly if illiberals have gained momentum. Rather, they need to be **confronted** and challenged. This includes criticizing policy ideas and pointing out why these parties are harmful for democracy (Section 4.1.3).
- Our research shows that far-right populist parties in Europe – a subtype of illiberal parties – have lost momentum in recent years mainly due to **internal fights, splits, and scandals**. Democratic actors can facilitate such self-destructive processes by putting pressure on illiberal parties to moderate their positions in ways that make them exclude radicals within their ranks (Section 4.2).

Recommended further reading:

The Center for a New American Security (CNAS) released a toolkit for liberal democratic actors that offers recommendations for combating populism. It equips democratic actors with better strategies to contextualize and articulate their ideas and policies in the competition with illiberal actors.

<https://www.cnas.org/publications/reports/combating-populism>

Das Progressive Zentrum, a German think tank, published a handbook on countering populism in public spaces. It provides guidance in promoting a democratic culture of debate, in particular guidance on how NGOs can handle illiberal actors at public discussion events.

https://www.progressives-zentrum.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Das-Progressive-Zentrum_Countering-Populism-in-Public-Space_NGOs_EN.pdf

The Amadeu Antonio Foundation provides a handbook that focuses on the far-right populist party AfD in Germany. It describes the strategies of illiberal actors and gives recommendations for countering these strategies for teachers, politicians and actors in cultural spheres.

https://www.amadeu-antonio-stiftung.de/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/AFD_Handreichung_web.pdf (DE)

In an essay published by the **Shorenstein Center on Media, Politics and Public Policy**, Claes de Vreese (University of Amsterdam) provides ten guidelines for how journalists should report on populist actors.

<https://shorensteincenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/Political-Journalism-in-a-Populist-Age.pdf>



PART 1: INTRODUCTION

Illiberal Challenges and the Principles Guiding a Democratic Response

Anna Lührmann

The purpose of this resource guide is to provide hands-on inspiration for those seeking to defend democracy. Illiberals and authoritarians are putting democracy at risk using two general strategies to gain support. First, they claim to be democratically legitimate. Second, they polarize societies to create a false, binary choice. In order to stop them, democrats need to understand these mechanisms and develop smart strategies to counter both.

Therefore, this part of the resource guide provides answers to key foundational questions:

- **Who are the main challengers to democracy and what strategies do they use (1.1)?**
- **What strategic dilemmas do democratic actors face when responding (1.2)?**
- **What are good guidelines for democratic responses (1.3)?**
- **How can specific democratic actors better target their responses (1.4)?**

The last part of the introduction also outlines the plan for the rest of the resource guide.

1.1 Illiberalism as a Challenge for Democracy

What are the characteristics of political leaders that erode democracy once in power? How can we recognize them before they become too powerful?

First, illiberals typically do not initially profess an authoritarian ideology or run on a platform of abolishing democracy. They claim to be democrats and often even promise to reform and improve democracy. For instance, the former Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez portrayed himself as a fighter for “revolutionary democracy” and human rights.¹ Evo Morales called himself

the “democratic voice of Bolivia”.² The former Peruvian President Alberto Fujimori described himself as the “architect of modern democracy”.³ In 2017, decades after his autogolpe in 1992, he justified his move to dissolve parliament as a step to “safeguard democracy”, adding that “in order to make tortillas you have to break eggs”.⁴

For many of them, democracy is often exclusively about the rule of the majority along the lines of this narrative: “Doing what the majority wants is democratic; therefore, I am democratic.” At the vanguard of this movement is the Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, who declared he wants to transform his country into an “illiberal democracy”.⁵ There are also prominent liberals who employ the term “illiberal democracy”, such as Fareed Zakaria, whose 1997 essay on “The Rise of Illiberal Democracy” sparked a debate on this issue among political scientists. In his view, an illiberal democracy is a system of government that holds multiparty elections but does not protect basic liberties. But can illiberalism be democratic? In other words, is democracy – the rule of the people – possible without liberalism? This question is the focus of sub-section 1.1.1 of this resource guide. The subsequent sections show how illiberal actors use democratic legitimacy (1.1.2) and polarization (1.1.3) in their favor.

1 <https://www.telesurtv.net/news/Las-frases-que-inmortalizaron-a-Hugo-Chavez-20160305-0013.html> (retrieved on March 5, 2020).

2 <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/feb/22/bolivia-evo-morales-president-national-referendum-fourth-term> (retrieved on February 20, 2020).

3 <https://peru21.pe/politica/alberto-fujimori-25-anos-autogolpe-arquitecto-democracia-moderna-71652-noticia/> (retrieved on April 5, 2020).

4 <https://elcomercio.pe/politica/actualidad/fujimori-desperdicio-opportunidad-consolidar-democracia-421175> (retrieved on April 14, 2020).

5 Orbán in July 2014 as quoted by Plattner (2019, 9).

1.1.1 Why is Illiberalism not Compatible with Democracy?

Two different dimensions of liberalism are important for democracy:

1 CIVIL LIBERTIES, and 2 THE RULE OF LAW.⁶

1 CIVIL LIBERTIES enable pluralist perspectives on political problems to emerge. Besides providing the individual with the rights to life, liberty, and economic activity, civil liberties also assure citizens the opportunity to express themselves, associate with others, assemble, protest, and be informed. The famous democratic theorist Robert Dahl (and others) rightly emphasized that for citizens to be able to make a democratic choice in elections, they need to be exposed to a plurality of information and opinions and be able to choose between a variety of alternatives.⁷

Civil liberties are fundamental prerequisites for, and therefore interconnected with, democracy. If citizens are unable to express themselves, others cannot learn about their preferences. Even if their preferences are known, where citizens are not allowed to form organizations and parties, their preferences are not aggregated and amplified at the societal level. Even if a variety of associations is permitted, where the media is either not willing or not permitted to report on them, citizens are not presented with the existing plurality of political options.⁸ Thus, without civil liberties, citizens do not have a real choice on election day, and we do not know if their vote – or opinion expressed in opinion polls – reflects their actual preferences.

A system in which the people's preferences are not known, cannot be described as being 'ruled by the people' and hence is not democratic. Thus, without civil liberties pluralism cannot emerge and no meaningful democracy can exist.

2 THE RULE OF LAW AND INSTITUTIONS OF HORIZONTAL ACCOUNTABILITY protect the rights of citizens – and in particular minorities – from arbitrary violation by the state and the “tyranny of the majority.”⁹ Such protections are not only ends in themselves, since they help to guarantee fundamental freedoms and are also a necessary means to ensure that democracy persists. Liberal institutions protect democratic norms and institutions from two different threats: abuse by the executive arm of government, or by the majority.

The former mechanism – institutions constraining the executive arm of government – is a well-established notion in the scholarly literature. Horizontal accountability pertains to “the capacity of state institutions such as legislatures and the judiciary to oversee the government by demanding information, questioning officials and punishing improper behavior.”¹⁰ This includes independent courts and strong parliaments that uphold the rule of law and constrain the executive.¹¹

The second idea – that liberal institutions prevent abuse by the majority – is more contentious. The famous theorist Karl Popper pointed out in his work on the paradox of freedom, that if freedom is unlimited, citizens would have the right to abolish freedom and democracy.¹² And such actions would prohibit citizens from exercising democratic rights in the future.

Therefore, we must include a temporal dimension to our understanding of democracy. Institutions and decisions are democratic only if they ensure the same democratic processes and freedoms that made them possible in the first place. In other words, democracy needs to be sustainable and self-perpetuating.¹³

In this regard, Przeworski et al. raise one important point: Democracies last only if they “absorb and effectively regulate all major conflicts [and where] rules are changed only according to the rules.”¹⁴ Similarly, Dahl points out that stable democracies need to create an “internal system of mutual security”¹⁵ whereby all societal groups can be confident that whoever wins an election will not repress them. In the same vein, for Popper the very essence of democracy is that “we can get rid [of governments] without bloodshed.”¹⁶

Liberal institutions that uphold the rule of law are critical for internal peace. Losers are more likely to concede to electoral defeat if they know they have a chance at a life in dignity and freedom outside of government and that they or their political allies have a realistic chance to win back power again in the future. This is the magic of democracy. Undermining the rule of law and liberal institutions means playing with fire and risking igniting civil conflict.

Without liberal institutions to uphold the rule of law and horizontal accountability, democracy is at risk and not likely to endure.

Illiberal actors lack full commitment to civil liberties – such as freedom of speech, of the press, and of association – and therefore typically seek to undermine the rule of law and the institutions

6 See for example Zakaria (1997, 22-23): “marked not only by free and fair elections, but also by the rule of law, a separation of powers, and the protection of basic liberties of speech, assembly, religion, and property.” For an excellent discussion of the topic, see Plattner (1998).

7 Dahl (1989).

8 In many countries that are currently ruled by populists, this is not the case anymore. In those countries where Freedom of Expression is honored disinformation and filter bubbles are a challenge (see Section 2.2).

9 e.g. Dahl (1956), Hamilton, Madison, and Jay (1787/2009), Coppedge et al. (2017, 26).

10 Lüthmann (2017, 2).

11 Merkel (2004), O’Donnell (2004).

12 Popper (1945/2003, 130).

13 For instance, Przeworski et al. (Przeworski (1995, 11) have defined democratic institutions as sustainable if they “work” and “last”. Their understanding of sustainable democracy is quite comprehensive as it also includes performance in terms of their economic or even environmental output. For conceptual clarity, we do not think that the output of democratic institutions should be conflated with the very notion of what democracy is. Thus, we focus here on democracy as being sustainable if it endures.

14 Ibid.

15 Dahl (1971, 40).

16 Popper (1945/2003, 132).

guaranteeing these liberties. Illiberal actors do not see a risk in the executive abusing power. They want executive power in order to abuse it, often claiming to act on behalf of the people. Consequently, illiberal democracy is an oxymoron that democrats should not include in their vocabulary.¹⁷ In Plattner's words liberalism and democracy are 'married'.¹⁸

This does not imply that any criticism of the way specific liberal institutions function – for instance supreme courts – is undemocratic. To the contrary, critique of how effective such institutions are in protecting liberalism in a given historical and local circumstance is necessary. Some of them might need an update in order to be effective in today's interconnected and digital world.

But the very existence of the rule of law and liberal institutions constitute non-negotiable foundations for a democratic society. Thus, illiberalism is incompatible with the aspirations and norms of democracy. We should not allow illiberal actors to claim democratic legitimacy for eroding democratic norms and institutions.

1.1.2 How Illiberals Use Populism to Claim Democratic Legitimacy

When illiberal actors try to claim democratic legitimacy, they often use populist rhetoric, claiming that they are the legitimate representatives of 'the people' and that 'the elites' are not to be trusted.¹⁹ Populist rhetoric as such is not a problem for democracy. After all, democracy is about representing the will of the people – and citizens are often rightly critical of the elites. Therefore, this resource guide does not put populism center-stage. The actors challenging democracy are often both populist *and* illiberal. While illiberalism in all its variants is a challenge to democracy, populism as such is not.

However, populist rhetoric helps illiberals gain electoral support. The use of populist rhetoric in that context is problematic for two reasons.

First, populist illiberals exploit a fatal misunderstanding. Many citizens hold a perhaps too idealistic view, thinking that democracy simply means the majority should get what they want. But democratically elected policymakers have to deal with the complex financial, international, and political constraints of reality. In the end, democracy is fundamentally about compromise between a plurality of views.²⁰ As Adam Przeworski points out that "It is within the nature of democracy that no one's interests can be guaranteed [...] What is possible are institutional agreements, that is, compromises about the institutions that shape prior probabilities of realization of group-specific interests."²¹ Yet compromises often leave many if not all groups unsatisfied.²² Populist illiberals exploit the discontent growing out of the gap between an ideal vision of democracy and the more dire reality of democratic compromises, by claiming that they represent 'true' democracy by suggesting policies that 'the people want'.²³

Second, populist rhetoric helps illiberals to conceal how dangerous their ideas are for democracy. They claim they want to reform and strengthen 'true democracy', while in reality their illiberal actions will undermine it. To a limited extent, the totalitarian movements of the last century shared this trait. As Hannah Arendt noted, both fascists and communists "use[d] and abuse democratic freedoms in order to abolish them."²⁴ In order to achieve this goal, they have often used populist rhetoric, for instance Mussolini in his early years.²⁵ Democracy's enemies were also somewhat difficult to identify in the early 20th century because of their pseudo-legal appeal.²⁶

What is different today is that democracy's illiberal challengers do not espouse an explicit ideological alternative (e.g. communism, fascism). They do not seek power with an outspoken agenda to abolish democracy in the name of an alternative order. They erode democracy simply in order to stay in power as far as we can tell. They – and their supporters – just do not have a commitment to liberal democracy and do not prioritize its norms over personal or policy goals.²⁷ This applies for instance to Donald Trump in the United States and Viktor Orbán in Hungary. Notably, there are

An illiberal actor – a political leader, political party, civil society group, or citizen – is not fully committed to the institutions and norms that make a democracy meaningful and enduring such as civil liberties, the rule of law, and horizontal accountability.

17 For a proponent of "illiberal democracy" see Zakaria (1997). For him, an illiberal democracy is a system with multiparty elections but without the protection of freedoms.

18 Plattner (1998).

19 Populism as such is a contested concept. Some scholars explicitly define populists as being anti-pluralist (e.g. Müller 2016). In that sense, populism and illiberalism as we define it here could be used interchangeably. However, in the public and scholarly debate, many people use populism in rather a narrow sense – as being anti-elite and citizens-centric. Therefore, populism as a term is not suitable for gauging the full extent of the challenge that such actors pose to democracy.

20 Zen (2006).

21 Przeworski (1997, 130–131).

22 Plattner (2010).

23 Müller (2016).

24 Arendt (1951, 312).

25 Cavazza (2012).

26 Linz (1978).

27 For a similar argument, see Svobik (2019).

some exceptions where labels such as ‘fascist’ seem appropriate, for example the AfD politician Bernd Höcke in Germany, where even courts have ruled that he may be called a fascist.

Ideologically extreme labels such as ‘fascist’, ‘totalitarian’ or ‘communist’ do not allow us to identify the bulk of democracy’s enemies today. Such labels do not correctly identify many of the current challengers to democracy.

Most actors challenging democracy today avoid expressing aims to install a non-democratic regime. If we label them ‘authoritarian’, we risk stretching the term. This is problematic for three reasons. First, it robs us of the appropriate terminology to differentiate between actors posing an alternative order as an explicit threat to democracy and others that put democracy at risk by undermining it from within. If we cry wolf all the time, nobody will listen when he is actually here. Second, calling actors ‘authoritarian’ who are not unmistakably so makes it easy for them to claim unfair treatment and undermine pro-democratic efforts. Third, citizens who are relatively close to the democratic spectrum but leaning towards supporting illiberal leaders can be pushed away towards the authoritarian end if labelled ‘authoritarian’ as sort of a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Therefore, we label actors who are neither clearly democratic nor fully authoritarian as illiberal as in Figure 1. Democratic actors unequivocally support the liberal norms necessary to sustain democracy. Authoritarian actors outright reject or explicitly challenge them. Most illiberals are undemocratic as well, because they are not fully committed to the norms needed to sustain democracy. However, they challenge liberal norms only to some extent and do not explicitly espouse non-democracy as an alternative. Instead, they position themselves in the murky water between unequivocally supporting the liberal norms necessary to sustain democracy and calling outright for an alternative, authoritarian order. At the same time, authoritarians are radically illiberal.

Illiberal actors are a risk to democracy, but not definitely perilous to it. For groups, the categorization is more complex. For instance, contemporary political parties rarely have a clearly authoritarian

profile but if they tolerate or encourage authoritarian positions and behavior within their ranks, they qualify as illiberal. Such parties also often try to conceal illiberal and authoritarian values behind democratic rhetoric.

Some illiberal actors are only moderately illiberal. For instance, they might occasionally harass journalists, but do not systematically and repeatedly challenge fundamental democratic norms. They may still be placed in the democratic spectrum (amber color to the left of the vertical line in Figure 1).

In sub-section 1.3.2 below, we discuss in detail how to recognize illiberal actors and parties despite their democratic masquerade.

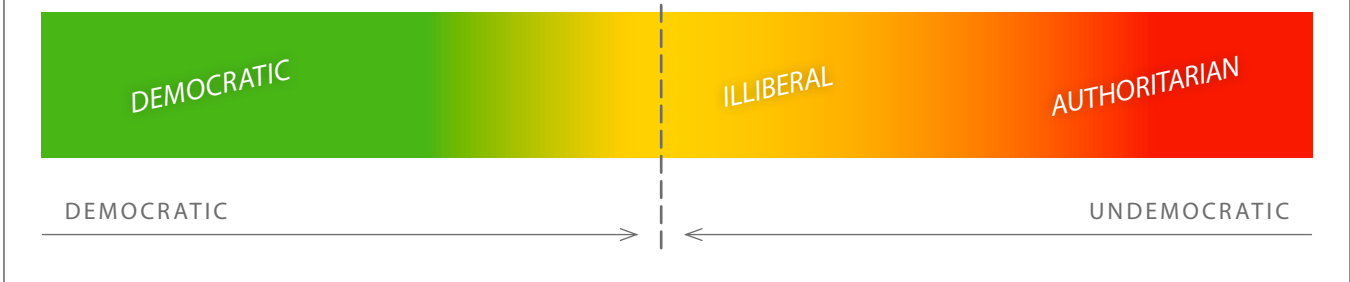
1.1.3 Toxic Polarization Fuels Illiberal and Authoritarian Actors

Illiberal actors – in particular populist ones – often use a stark rhetoric separating a society into a ‘society’ that is them, and its enemies. In response, liberal actors are often tempted to mount vigorous counterattacks and a vicious circle of polarization ensues. At the end of it, “society is split into mutually distrustful ‘us vs. them’ camps”²⁸ Such ‘toxic polarization’ excludes healthy, controversial debates about policy preferences and impedes trustful interactions of citizens with different points of views.²⁹ It then becomes increasingly difficult to reach supporters of illiberal political leaders, because they do not trust information that comes from a non-partisan or opposing source and communicate less with people with opposing views. Arendt observed similar processes when studying the supporters of totalitarian movements.³⁰ The infamous ‘filter bubbles’ of today’s social media aggravate the problem.

Toxic polarization helps illiberal actors to gain and consolidate support.³¹ For instance, Svoboda has shown that in polarized societies, voters are more likely to care about getting their preferences fulfilled than about democratic norms.³²

Toxic polarization also creates several dilemmas for the established parties. In parliamentary democracies with proportional electoral systems, toxic polarization makes government formation more

FIGURE 1: ILLIBERALS BETWEEN DEMOCRATS AND AUTHORITARIANS



²⁸ McCoy and Somer (2019, 234).

²⁹ Lüthmann et al. (2019).

³⁰ Members of a totalitarian movement are “well-protected against the reality of the non-totalitarian world” (Arendt 1951, 367).

³¹ See for example McCoy and Somer (2019).

³² Svoboda (2018).

difficult when the more extreme parties cannot be included. Very heterogeneous parties around the center end up having to form coalitions, leading to policy compromises that further feed discontent with the established parties.³³ A key challenge for established parties is thus to be able to explain this to their voters.

Toxic polarization can also make parties between the center and the extremes ('border parties') 'king-makers' between a coalition of established parties or one with the illiberal actors. If their main strategic goal is vote maximization, they are likely to 'follow their voters' and move more towards the extreme.³⁴ A key task for pro-democratic actors is therefore to convince leaders of border parties to choose the long-term defense of liberal democratic norms over short-term vote maximization.

Toxic polarization can lead to a situation where all the main established parties are forced to form a coalition. The resulting policies are likely to be quite centrist and thus not attractive to the voters on the margins of the established political parties. This might reduce these parties' vote share even further and decrease the appetite for such democratic parties to govern. As Juan Linz has pointed out, democratic breakdown happens when parties "lose the will to govern" in the presence of anti-system parties.³⁵

1.1.4 How Illiberals Use Populism to Claim Democratic Legitimacy

In summary, the main contemporary challengers to democracy are illiberals, who undermine the civil liberties and liberal institutions that guarantee the rule of law and horizontal accountability. Without such institutions, democracy is not meaningful and not likely to last. At the same time, illiberals use populist rhetoric to claim that they are democratic. The words and deeds of illiberals fuel toxic polarization in society, which in turn helps them to muster support.

1.2 The Strategic Dilemma Between Delegitimization and Depolarization

When pro-democratic actors are confronted with illiberal enemies to democracy, their strategic options to respond are often reduced to two extremes. On the one hand, they need to signal clearly that democracy's enemies are not playing by the rules. This aim suggests a strategy of *delegitimization* and confrontational measures, in other words to 'fight fire with fire'.³⁶ On the other hand, such delegitimization may fuel the vicious circle of toxic polarization – the separation of society into antagonistic camps leading to further radicalization. Actors aiming to prevent this from happening often call for a more tolerant approach and focus

on *depolarization*, such as Michelle Obama when she famously suggested that "when they go low, we go high."³⁷ What is the best course of action? We suggest that both have merits but need to be carefully calibrated and implemented with the correct timing.

1.2.1 "Fighting Fire with Fire" – Delegitimization and Exclusion

After World War II, lawmakers and scholars sought to learn a lesson. The German Nazi party skillfully abused instruments of liberalism – elections, mass mobilization, political parties – to come to power.³⁸ The idea that illiberal actors should be delegitimized and suppressed before they become too powerful gained prominence. Karl Popper famously formulated the "paradox of tolerance": If a tolerant society tolerates the intolerant, the latter will

"We should not always suppress the utterance of intolerant philosophies; as long as we can counter them by rational argument and keep them in check by public opinion (...). But we should claim the right to suppress them if necessary even by force; for it may well easily turn out that they are not prepared to meet us on the level of the rational argument, but begin by denouncing all argument; they may forbid their followers to listen to rational argument, (...) and teach them to answer arguments by the use of their fists or pistols. We should therefore claim, in the name of tolerance, the right not to tolerate the intolerant. We should claim that any movement preaching intolerance places itself outside of the law, and we should consider incitement to intolerance and persecution as criminal."

Karl Popper (1945/2003, 293).

³³ Capoccia (2005, 17, based on Sartori).

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Linz (1978, 27).

³⁶ Kaltwasser (2017, 489–503) has also used this expression in the context of strategy.

³⁷ <https://www.latimes.com/politics/la-na-pol-michelle-speech-20160725-snap-story.html> (retrieved on March 28, 2020).

³⁸ Even the Nazi's propaganda minister, Joseph Goebbels, recognized this contradiction by stating that "It will always remain one of the best jokes of democracy that it provided its mortal enemies itself with the means through which it was annihilated." (as quoted by Müller 2012, 1253).

eventually undermine the foundations of tolerance.³⁹ His thinking builds on Plato’s discussion of the “paradox of freedom”, who pointed out that a (majoritarian) democracy empowers the majority to abolish it.⁴⁰ A “militant democracy” is designed to prevent this from happening by “[adopting] pre-emptive, prima facie illiberal measures to prevent those aiming at subverting democracy with democratic means from destroying the democratic regime.”⁴¹ In effect, the constitutions of many democracies – most conspicuously Germany – include measures allowing for subduing of actors and behavior that would undermine the liberal order, for instance banning extremist parties.

Critiques of such drastic measures fear that governments will use them not to defend democracy, but to subvert it.⁴² Even in Popper’s own view, only those intolerant statements that cannot be contained by “rational argument” should be prohibited. For John Rawls, this point carried even more weight. He argues that the “freedom [of intolerant groups] should be restricted only when the tolerant sincerely and with reason believe that their own security and that of the institutions of liberty are in danger.”⁴³ Both philosophers raise an important point: Pro-democratic actors should only engage in measures that suppress illiberal actors if there is reason to believe that they threaten the liberal order. Thus, many countries – for instance the United States – have not adopted legislation in support of a ‘militant democracy’. This is an important insight guiding the selection of strategies today. We will get back to that point later.

1.2.2 “When they go LOW, we go HIGH” – Depolarization and Integration

We know very little about how vicious circles of polarization can be stopped. McCoy and Somer – authors of a prominent edited volume on the subject – claim that confrontational delegitimization strategies and mass protests against illiberal actors in the streets might aggravate the problem of toxic polarization.⁴⁴ For depolarization, they instead stress the importance of various cleavages in society being represented in the political system and suggest that pro-democratic electoral mobilization can be helpful.⁴⁵ Similarly, Kaltwasser argues that the fierce response by internal and external opposition in Venezuela led to the focus on the antagonism between “Chavistas” and the others, which fueled polarization.⁴⁶

“The absence of visible violence allows manipulation to present itself as the freedom it eliminates.”

Friedrich Hacker

Engaging in an “honest dialogue”⁴⁷ seems to be a common intuition for how to depolarize societies. Norris and Inglehart stress that “[polarization] calls above all for leaders who can help to bridge divisions – and not exacerbate them.”⁴⁸ McCoy and Somer applaud parliamentary leaders who collaborate across the aisles, but say that the effects of such collaboration needs to be studied more.⁴⁹ Most prominently, Michelle Obama in 2016 claimed that “when they go low, we go high” should guide the Democrats’ response to Trump.⁵⁰ This suggests that liberal actors’ strategies should not mirror the exclusionary tactics used by illiberal actors.

There are not only normative, but also practical arguments for a more tolerant approach. For instance, Juan Linz argues that exclusionary measures might push those who are not full supporters of illiberal actors more into the arms of their illiberal group.⁵¹ He suggests that such “semi-loyal” actors should be integrated as much as possible.⁵² At the same time he supports more militant notions by stating that curtailing civil liberties can be a “legitimate defense measure” of democracies.⁵³

Depolarizing strategies do not equal a “do nothing” approach to illiberal political actors. However, it means that the tool box is limited to the regular instruments of political interaction such as to discuss, criticize, challenge and mobilize.

39 Popper (1945/2003, 293).

40 Ibid., p. 130–131.

41 Müller (2012, 1253).

42 For a fine discussion of this controversy, see Müller (2012).

43 Rawls (1971, 220).

44 McCoy and Somer (2019, 267). Others argue that mass mobilization might help. For instance, in Central and Eastern Europe, mass protest has contributed to electoral defeats of illiberals in 2019 (see: Barber, Tony (2019); <https://www.ft.com/content/a2dc15b8-bc2e-11e9-b350-db00d509634e> (retrieved on February 21, 2020)).

45 McCoy and Somer (2019).

46 Kaltwasser (2017, 502).

47 Ibid., p. 501.

48 Norris and Inglehart (2019, 265).

49 McCoy and Somer (2019).

50 This has also been contested (Hayes 2018).

51 Linz (1978).

52 Ibid., p. 34.

53 Ibid., p. 30.

1.3 Guidelines for Democratic Responses

Response strategies that focus only on delegitimization risk enhancing polarization. Tactics relying solely on depolarization threaten further acceptance of illiberals and thus play into their hands. Thus, effective responses to illiberal enemies of democracy do not necessitate a choice between the extremes of repression or normalization, but rather a balance to achieve both strategic aims of delegitimization and depolarization. There is no one-size-fits-all solution to illiberal challengers, regardless of context. What is an appropriate balance depends in particular on:

- 1 How threatening the illiberal challenger is to democracy; and
- 2 Who is the target of a particular response?

1.3.1 How Threatening is the Illiberal Challenger to Democracy?

The type of illiberal actor is a principal basis for choosing an appropriate response strategy. Confrontational strategies for fighting illiberal actors are only justifiable if the illiberal actor can reasonably be established to pose an imminent threat to the liberal, democratic order.⁵⁴

How do we establish that an illiberal actor poses an “imminent threat” to democracy before this actor is actually in power? Two traits are suggested in the literature for determining the answer to this question: what the mobilizational strength of the actor is and how illiberal the actor is.

An actor who mobilizes only a small fraction of society is obviously a lesser threat than an actor with a larger group of supporters.⁵⁵ This suggests that confrontational tactics should be reserved for democracy’s enemies when they have grown strong. Yet it is evidently more efficient to fight challengers before they muster a lot of support and banning a party with many followers risks causing a greater upheaval and counter-reaction than banning one that is

not even yet represented in democratic institutions. At the same time, robust actions against minimally or ambiguously illiberal groups might not be justifiable on normative grounds, and could be used by illiberals to garner greater support.

An actor who is explicitly authoritarian or radically illiberal – e.g. advocates for the abolishment of minority rights and multiparty elections – is a greater threat to democracy than an actor who shows only minimal signs of illiberalism (e.g. by occasionally harassing journalists).

Therefore, as a basic guideline, we suggest prioritizing confrontational strategies mainly vis-à-vis authoritarian actors and tolerant strategies mainly vis-à-vis minimally illiberal actors – regardless of how strong they are (Figure 2). For illiberal actors in the middle of the spectrum, a strategy of “Critical Engagement” needs to be developed, which carefully balances measures contributing to the depolarization of society and to the delegitimization of the authoritarian and illiberal actor.

Contemporary challengers to democracy are often found in the middle ground between democratic and authoritarian and it is difficult to unambiguously identify them.

Illiberal actors are not likely to advertise ‘vote for me and I will make sure that you will never have the chance to vote again’. Juan Linz points out that anti-democratic political parties are typically more explicit as long as they are not influential.⁵⁶ Once their appeal expands to a broader audience, they are likely to “convey equivocal messages in order to maintain their radical opposition to the system while claiming to aim at a legal access to power.”⁵⁷ Thus, we should expect democracy’s enemies to profess increasingly vague illiberal tendencies until they accede to power and then embark on a path of democratic erosion.⁵⁸ Contemporary challengers to democracy are more ambiguous than ever. Therefore, it is important to be vigilant even if some actors display only a mild tendency towards illiberalism. It should be stressed that this can affect established political parties as well, and turn them into parties that undermine democracy, especially after a

FIGURE 2: RESPONSE STRATEGIES FOR DEMOCRATIC ACTORS BASED ON THE IDENTITY OF THE CHALLENGER



⁵⁴ Popper (1945/2003), Müller (2012).

⁵⁵ Capoccia (2005) gauges the strength of anti-democratic challengers by measuring the percentage of seats held by antisystem parties in the lower chamber of parliament.

⁵⁶ Linz (1978).

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

⁵⁸ Levitsky and Ziblatt (2018).

new leadership takes over. In fact, this seems to quite common in the contemporary world. Russia, Turkey, the Philippines, Brazil, and the USA are cases in point.

Thus, one of the main challenges is to identify behaviors that qualify actors as illiberal. Popper simply argues that government should “tolerate[s] all who are prepared to reciprocate, i.e. who are tolerant”⁵⁹ but does not provide any detailed guidance of how we know when an actor is tolerant. Levitsky and Ziblatt argue that one can identify challengers to democracy by examining

their public statements before they come to office.⁶⁰ Building on Linz’s famous “litmus test”⁶¹ of what characterizes political actors loyal to the democratic system, they provide a list of four indicators (see Table 1):

- 1 Weak commitment to democratic rules of the game;
- 2 The denial of the legitimacy of political opponents;
- 3 The toleration of violence; and
- 4 A readiness to curtail civil liberties.

TABLE 1: INDICATORS OF CHALLENGERS TO DEMOCRACY

| LEVITSKY AND ZIBLATT (2018) BASED ON LINZ (1978) | | MÜLLER (2012) |
|--|--|--|
| 1 Rejection or (weak commitment to) democratic rules of the game. | Expresses willingness/need to violate the constitution. Expresses sympathy for non-constitutional means of accessing power. Attempts to undermine the legitimacy of elections. | Exclusion of groups of citizens. |
| 2 Denial of the legitimacy of political opponents. | Describes rivals as subversive, criminal or foreign agents. Claims that rivals constitute existential threat . | Denial of the “dignity” of groups of citizens. |
| 3 Toleration or encouragement of violence. | Has ties to armed gangs or militias. Sponsors or encourages mob attacks on opponents. Endorses or praises political violence. | Positive identification with past “ethnic cleansing or genocide”. |
| 4 Readiness to curtail civil liberties of opponents, including media. | Supports laws or policies restricting civil liberties. Threatens to take legal action against critics. Praises repression. | Denial of pluralist society by claiming to “speak in the name of the people as a whole”. |

Source: Levitsky/Ziblatt (2018, 23–24; shortened/edited by authors) and Müller (2012, 1287).

Similarly, Müller suggests that each of the following four political positions individually constitutes an attack on “core democratic principles” and thus constitutes a threat to democracy:

- 1 Exclusion of groups of citizens;
- 2 Denial of the “dignity” of groups of citizens;
- 3 Positive identification with past “ethnic cleansing or genocide”; and
- 4 Denial of pluralist society by claiming to “speak in the name of the people as a whole”.⁶²

His four items map well onto the ones identified by Levitsky/Ziblatt and Linz, but are more narrowly focused. For instance, praising or relativizing past atrocities is only one of several tools that a politician can use to signal support for political violence. The populist claim of representing ‘the people’ is not always a clear indication of a denial of pluralism since all politicians signal that they represent citizens in a democracy.

1.3.2 Who and What is the Specific Target of a Particular Response?

Illiberal groups are typically not homogenous. They often assemble authoritarian as well as minimally illiberal members within their purview, especially when they grow larger. This is what makes them so dangerous. On their own, the “pure” authoritarians would not be able to take power in a democracy. They need the support or at least toleration by more moderate citizens and groups.⁶³ Authoritarians are unlikely to be affected by non-confrontational liberal responses but more moderate supporters of illiberal parties may be susceptible to liberal persuasion.

Thus, targeting radicals differently than more moderate followers is the key to a successful liberal response.

Such a strategy needs to make it more attractive for relatively moderate followers of illiberal groups to turn towards liberal alternatives than to stay with the illiberals. Thus, it needs to combine both elements of deterrence (sticks) and of persuasion (carrots). Deterrence includes targeted sanctions against radical illiberals

59 Popper (1945/2003, 293).

60 Levitsky and Ziblatt (2018).

61 Linz (1978, 29).

62 Müller (2012, 1267–1268).

63 See for example Bermeo (2003).

such as policing, exclusion and other tools of delegitimization. Persuasion aims at convincing moderately illiberal citizens and fence-sitters that liberal and democratic values and institutions work for them. In order to achieve this, it is important to differentiate between what is legitimate opposition within a democratic system and what is undemocratic and thus illegitimate.⁶⁴ Moderate illiberals and fence-sitters need to understand that their short-term and long-term interests and goals can better be achieved within a democratic setting.

In order to achieve these goals, two tactics are key. First, responders need to *differentiate between the threat posed by groups and individuals*. As Müller points out, the state should nearly always respect the freedom of speech of individuals (apart from what is already regulated in criminal law), but may restrict freedom of association.⁶⁵ Or as the comedian Sascha Baron Cohen recently put it: “Freedom of speech is not freedom of reach.”⁶⁶

Karl Popper makes a similar argument with his famous statement “the right not to tolerate the intolerant.”⁶⁷ He states that the mere “utterance of intolerant philosophies” should not be repressed, but rather the “incitement to intolerance and persecution” by a movement.⁶⁸ Arguably, the threat level posed by an organized group is higher than the danger posed by individual citizens. Thus, while illiberal groups and group activities could be the subject of confrontational measures, societies might need to be more tolerant towards individual citizens with similarly illiberal traits.

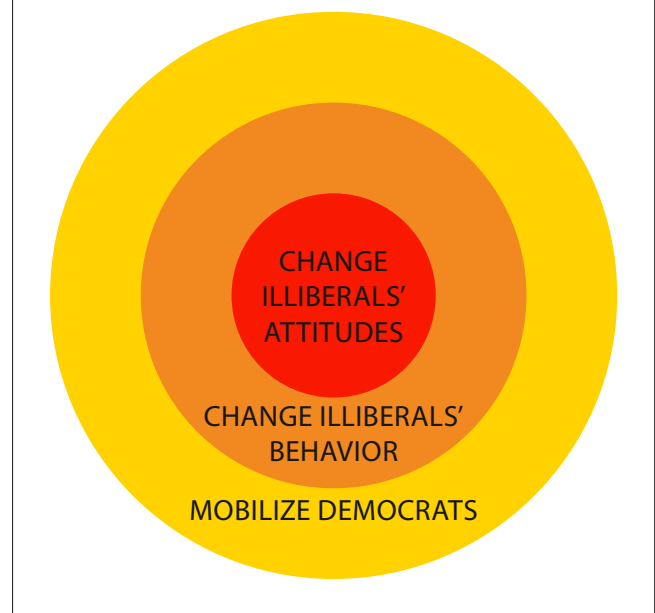
Therefore, the second tactic is key: responders should understand and utilize the heterogeneity of illiberal groups better. Within any group, a range of actors can be found: leaders and followers; radicals and more moderates. *The aim must be to drive a wedge between the radicals and moderately illiberals*. That way, the authoritarian radicals can be targeted by more confrontational sanctions and the moderates (re-)integrated into the democratic society. Furthermore, the ‘fence-sitters’ – those people in society who have not yet made up their mind about which way to swing – need to be deterred from joining illiberal or even authoritarian groups and convinced by liberal ideas instead.

In order to do that, we have to be clear and decide on the specific tactical aim of every response measure. Messaging and other tactical choices need to reflect whether the aim of the activity is to:

- 1 change illiberals’ attitudes and civic competence;
- 2 change illiberals’ behavior; or
- 3 mobilize democrats (Fig. 3).

CHANGING ILLIBERALS’ ATTITUDES towards democracy and liberalism is at the core of what democrats should aim to achieve. This includes demonstrating in particular to those ‘fence-sitters’

FIGURE 3: TARGETS OF ANTI-ILLIBERAL RESPONSE STRATEGIES



mentioned above why illiberal actors and attitudes are dangerous and democracy virtuous. To this end, everyday conversations, campaigns and online and offline public statements can be used. Activities should not only aim to foster democratic values and norms, but also at building civic competence. Citizens who know how democracy works and why are less likely to support illiberal ideologies and parties. They help to stabilize democracies. However, enlarging this group is a long-term project.⁶⁹ Research shows that most attitudes are formed when people are young.⁷⁰ Thus, civic education needs to have greater prominence in school curricula.

CHANGING ILLIBERALS’ BEHAVIOR is a good intermediary and more short-term step. This ranges from deterring citizens from voting for illiberal parties and joining illiberal manifestations to activities aimed at reducing illiberal mobilization, policing hate crimes, and banning clearly authoritarian associations and parties.

MOBILIZING DEMOCRATS to stand up for democratic norms and values is another important part of the response strategy.⁷¹ Mass mobilization shows those who are weakly illiberal and fence-sitters that the democratic side of the spectrum is strong. It can also help to educate citizens about liberal messages and values and create spaces for democrats to meet and collaborate (e.g. democratic youth centers in Eastern German villages). It is particularly important to bring out the vote in favor of clearly pro-democratic parties.

64 Linz (1978).

65 Müller (2016).

66 <https://twitter.com/SachaBaronCohen/status/1197610636773072899> (retrieved on March 25, 2020).

67 Popper (1945/2003, 293).

68 Ibid.

69 Capoccia (2005).

70 Easton, Dennis, and Easton (1969).

71 Norris and Inglehart (2019), Bermeo (2019).

Current response strategies mainly seem to focus on the third aim – mobilizing liberals. While this is important, activities directly targeting illiberals need to be stepped up as they are at the heart of the problem.

Recognizing the difference between tactics to mobilize democrats and to change illiberals’ behavior is particularly important since messages that work to bring out democrats to protest and vote are not likely to change illiberal-leaning citizens’ behavior, or their attitudes to democratic norms and values. In order to reach them, we need specific messaging combining both normative and utilitarian arguments.

A strategy of critical engagement contributes to both: The depolarization of society and the delegitimization of illiberal actors and ideologies.

Normative arguments need to convince them of the value of protecting fundamental rights and liberties, and of the rule of law. Utilitarian arguments convey the message that a liberal, democratic consensus serves their interests better.⁷²

As important as the message is the messenger. Ideologically proximate messengers might be best suited and most credible. Thus, vis-à-vis far-right illiberal challengers – which is the bulk of the threat in Europe at the moment – conservative, right-wing parties need to take on the responsibility of defending democracy.

1.4 Strategic Implications for Different Democratic Actors

Much of the literature on liberal responses to illiberal challengers focuses on the state as the actor that responds.⁷³ However, liberal actors are confronted with illiberal challengers in political parties, civil society and the media, but also citizens in their everyday interactions with neighbors, colleagues, and family. They all face strategic choices and their actions (or inaction) can help to address the challenge, or contribute to the polarization of society and the legitimization of illiberal actors.

It is important to note that some actors need to justify their own actions according to higher standards than others. While citizens have the right to privately choose – without the need for much justification – if they want to talk to their neighbor who is a member in an illiberal party, a government institution in a liberal democracy needs to stand on normative and legally secure ground.

Table 2 illustrates the choices democratic actors face. The ‘official’ responses of the state to internal illiberal threats range between repressive and accommodating strategies.⁷⁴ Repressive strategies include ‘hard’ responses by the legislatures (party bans),

TABLE 2: STRATEGIC CHOICES FOR DEMOCRATIC ACTORS VIS-À-VIS ILLIBERALS

| ACTOR | OUTCOME | TOLERANT | CRITICAL ENGAGEMENT | MILITANT |
|-----------------------------|----------|-------------------------------|--|-------------------------------|
| | | LEGITIMATION & DEPOLARIZATION | DELEGITIMATION & DEPOLARIZATION | DELEGITIMATION & POLARIZATION |
| State | Internal | Accommodate broadly | Repress extremes Accommodate moderates Civic education | Repress broadly |
| | External | Support | Aid conditionally | Cut ties |
| Political Parties | | Integrate | Confront | Exclude |
| Civil Society Organizations | Internal | Include | Deliberate | Exclude |
| | External | Ignore | Mobilize | Antagonize |
| Media | | Normalize | Contextualize | Demonize |
| Citizens | | Abstain | Engage | Attack |

72 This will not be an easy endeavor. Democracy is based on the idea that losers think they could win a majority again; for older, conservative people who support illiberal parties, this perspective might be diminishing.

73 e.g. Capoccia (2005), Müller (2012).

74 Capoccia (2005).

courts (prosecution), and police (surveillance), but also ‘softer’ strategies such as state officials excluding illiberal organizations and teachers.⁷⁵

Accommodative strategies include the short-term “incorporation”⁷⁶ of illiberal actors for instance in coalition governments. However, the accommodation of all parts of the illiberal opposition risks enhancing their legitimacy and weakening the state. Thus, as Capoccia rightly points out, accommodation should only target “parts of the extremist opposition, thereby simultaneously weakening the extremist camp and increasing the legitimacy of the regime and support for it.”⁷⁷ Thus, for achieving delegitimization and depolarization, state actors should accommodate moderate parts of the illiberal opposition, but repress authoritarian ones. Furthermore, civic education may strengthen liberal values and actors in the mid- and long-term.

In addition to internal threats, state actors have perhaps a special role in responding to external illiberal actors.⁷⁸ The challenge becomes more pronounced once an illiberal leader assumes power in a foreign state. A drastic response would be to cut diplomatic and aid ties, which risks further fostering polarization in the international system. However, continuing with the status quo and supporting illiberal governments abroad risks legitimizing these norms and ideas. A middle path is to make aid and financial support conditional on democratic norms and to support non-state actors. For example, the EU should not continue with business as usual with its increasingly authoritarian Member State Hungary.⁷⁹

POLITICAL PARTIES face the choice of excluding illiberal parties – dismissing them as pariah parties – or embracing them by for instance including them in coalitions.⁸⁰ The former risks contributing to polarization and the latter to the legitimization of illiberal parties and their ideas. A more effective strategy might be to confront such parties on policy issues. This would allow democrats to try to persuade the less radical supporters of illiberal parties while at the same time maintaining their policy identity. This issue is the focus of [Part 4](#).

CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS (CSOs) ranging from trade unions to sports associations and fan clubs have to prepare responses to illiberal members. They face the dilemma of contributing to polarization by excluding illiberal members or legitimizing illiberal ideologies by allowing them a platform. A way out of this dilemma could be to deliberate with such members and try to convince and integrate the less radical ones while maintaining

a firm stance against radicals. Externally – towards other actors – CSOs need to decide how to engage with illiberal threats. They can choose to ignore them, which may enhance their legitimacy or antagonize them aggressively or even violently. A strategy aimed at minimizing both risks would be to mobilize against illiberal threats, but in a civilized manner, for instance to organize demonstrations while at the same time ensuring that they are non-violent. Sub-section [2.3.2](#) provides more ideas on this topic.

FOR THE MEDIA, the dilemma is similar. Journalists can either report on illiberal actors as they would on any other political actor, but then risk normalizing them or trying to delegitimize them by demonizing them. More helpful is perhaps a strategy of contextualizing illiberal words and actions. That means to not simply report on illiberals but instead to clearly put them into the perspective of the words and actions that illiberals imply for democracy. Sub-section [2.3.1](#) provides more insights into how this could work.

ORDINARY CITIZENS can choose to tolerate illiberal neighbors, family members, and colleagues and continue engaging with them at the risk of legitimizing their ideologies. The opposite tactic is to fight and attack illiberal actors in the private context, which might further polarize society. Engagement with such individuals might be more fruitful – at least if they are not firmly rooted in the illiberal spectrum. [Section 2.1](#) summarizes great resources on what arguments and rhetorical strategies might work to this end.

In summary, this resource guide aims to provide some inspiration for all democratic actors in their daily struggle to address illiberal challengers – with a focus on non-state actors. [Part 2](#) therefore discusses issues that matter for everyone in the public space: How to find the right words ([2.1](#)) and tools for online interaction ([2.2](#)). [Section 2.3](#) provides inspiration for the media and civil society organizations. [Part 3](#) introduces tools for civic education and thus discusses how we can teach democratic behavior inside ([3.2](#)) and outside ([3.3](#)) of schools. [Part 4](#) tackles a particularly challenging issue: response options for democratic politicians and political parties.

The multitude of ideas and strategies summarized in this resource guide clearly show that we can all do our part in defending democracy against the illiberal challenge. While no ‘silver bullet’ exists, democratic actors have many options to choose from. Giving up and surrendering public space to the illiberals is not one of them.

75 Müller (2016).

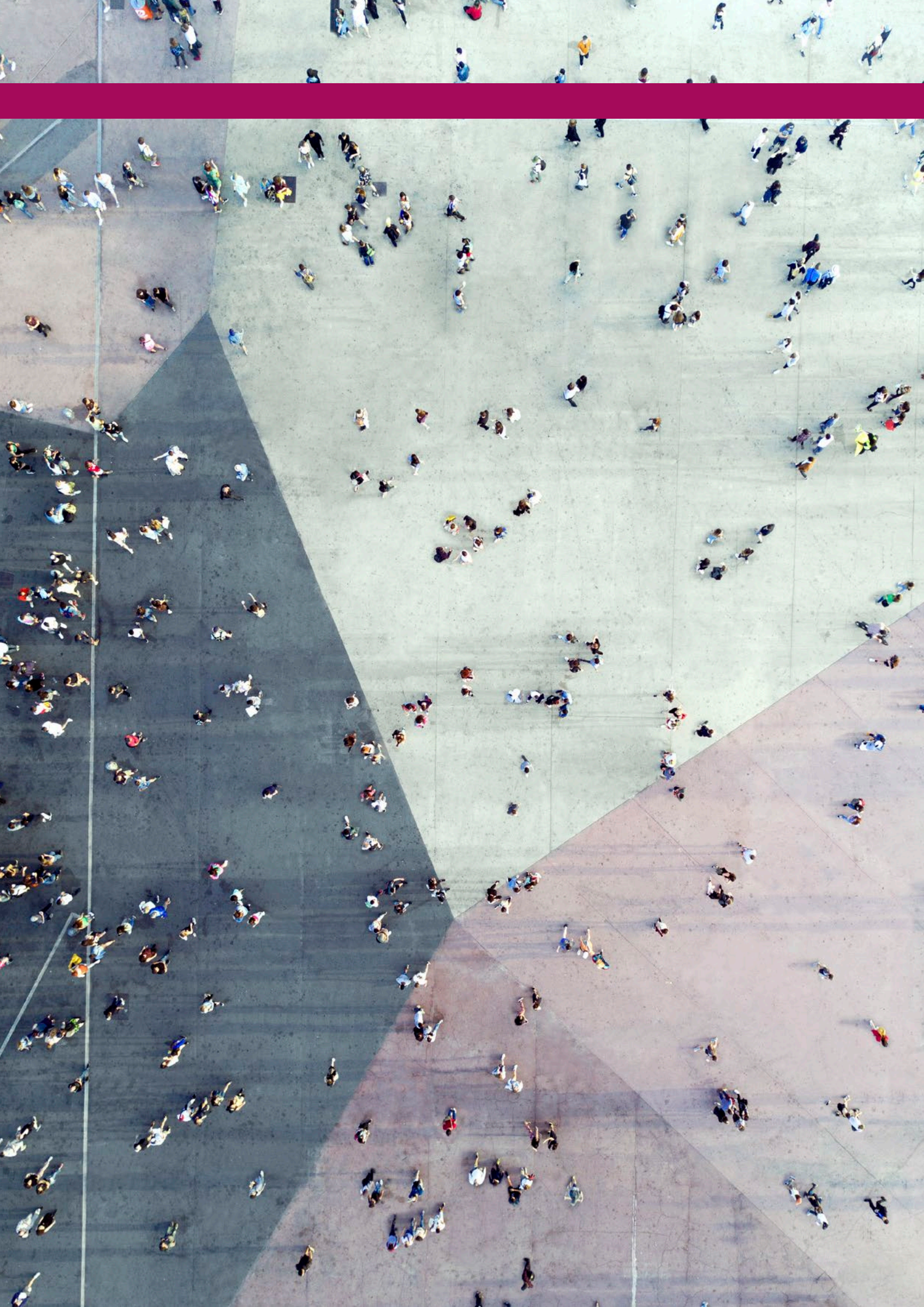
76 Capoccia (2005, 49).

77 Ibid.

78 Kaltwasser (2017).

79 On the rise of authoritarianism in Hungary see: Lührmann et al. (2020), Bogaards (2018).

80 Heinze (2018), Downs (2001).



PART 2:

Resources for Democrats in the Public and Civic Space

In recent years, illiberal actors have occupied an increasing amount of public and civic space – online and offline – benefitting from trends such as polarization, growing acceptance of hate speech, and the decline of traditional media. This part of the resource guide provides some tools that democrats can use to address these challenges.

We start at the heart of communication, *language* itself. Section 2.1 offers a hands-on approach, introducing several techniques that have been proposed as useful when talking to, and about illiberals. Since a lot of our daily communication takes place on social media platforms, Section 2.2 presents tools for *online interactions with illiberals*, paying special attention to filter bubbles, the spread of disinformation, and hate speech.

Section 2.3 addresses the role of civil society and the media. How should they deal with illiberal actors and their provocative claims? Sub-section 2.3.1 discusses strategic choices for the *media* regarding how much and how to report about illiberal actors. *Civil society organizations* (CSOs) have a range of opportunities to address the illiberal challenge such as mobilizing, deliberating, and taking action. We discuss and present their options in the last sub-section (2.3.2).

In summary, the second part of this toolkit provides a variety of tools for politicians, policymakers, journalists, and members of the civil society alike.

2.1 Finding the Right Words when Talking with and about Illiberals

Dominik Hirndorf, Lydia Finzel, Seraphine F. Maerz

Introduction

The rise of illiberalism in Western democracies poses challenges to rhetoric. There is a growing strand of literature in the field of political communication that studies the language styles of illiberal actors. It analyzes how they try to influence public discourses and (ab)use social media to undermine liberal democracy. Maerz¹, for example, shows that most illiberal speakers make use of a vague and symbolic rhetoric, void of concrete solutions for policy problems. Other studies illustrate how populists systematically also use fear to manipulate public opinion and voting in elections.²

So how can we adequately respond to these kinds of rhetoric strategies? How should we talk with illiberal actors? This section follows a hands-on approach and introduces several techniques that have been proposed and tested and found to be useful in such situations. By doing so, we provide tools for political actors, policymakers, and members of civil society alike.

How Should We Talk with Illiberal Actors?

Part 1 concluded by suggesting that it is the “yellow/orange zone” of illiberal actors with which we should critically engage. But *how* can we do this with words? The existing literature proposes several techniques and guidelines. Table 3 gives an overview of the selected rhetoric strategies.

TABLE 3: SELECTED STRATEGIES FOR RHETORICALLY ENGAGING WITH ILLIBERAL ACTORS

| STRATEGY | DESCRIPTION |
|--|--|
| Argumentation training | Raise awareness of different perspectives and talk about positive values behind populist statements. |
| Counter polarization | Highlight inclusive identities such as the European Union – stress the inclusive principle of right-wing terms (e.g. ‘the people’ or the nation). |
| Moral reframing | Effective arguments to persuade illiberals are based on the target audience’s moral values. |
| Guidelines for debate framing | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Be quick: the first frame gains an advantage (preemptive framing). 2) Avoid repetition of prevalent lies. 3) Use moral framing with your own emotional language. 4) Strengthen a frame through repetition. |
| Guidelines for rhetorical reactions | Do not respond to illiberals’ provocations. Do not focus primarily on any kind of right-wing ideology; instead talk about issues and force illiberals to make clear statements. |
| Logic as a rhetorical style | The illiberal actor’s way of reasoning is dogmatic and consequently their strategies can be revealed by logic and reason. |

¹ Maerz (2019).

² Scheller (2019).

Argumentation Training

Argumentation training is a useful tool in civic education.³ It is based on the conviction that arguing about politics is a requirement for a lively and well-functioning democracy. The aim is to train people in raising awareness of different perspectives. The training can also build capacity in being able to identify values in populist statements and being prepared to discuss how to balance two contradictory positive values (e.g. protection from crime vs. freedom from police oversight). Argumentation training also includes a guide for situations in which ‘red lines’ are crossed (e.g. somebody denying the holocaust in a public situation).

Counter Polarization

The different styles, ideas, and tactics of illiberals make it difficult for liberal actors to respond to them. The rhetoric style of illiberals often divides the society into two groups – an in-group vs. an out-group – that reduces complex issues to dichotomies while simultaneously increasing polarization. The distinction between ‘the people’ and the elite is perhaps the most frequently used.⁴ Finally, illiberals’ rhetoric often is dependent on the projection of a crisis.⁵ Exposing such rhetorical tricks is useful.

FRAMING refers to the contextualization of an issue by defining its image in the eyes of the public in a way that gives it a certain meaning and connotation.⁶

Moral Reframing

Frames shape our thinking and connect political issues with individuals’ political views⁷ and belief systems⁸. Frames and metaphors are cognitive structures that help organize our knowledge of the world, making abstract political issues more relatable to individuals. In the context of US politics, Matthew Feinberg and Robb Willer developed a technique of moral reframing for “effective and persuasive communication across political divides.”⁹ The idea is that framing an argument to fit an individual’s moral values increases that person’s willingness to accept it, but also promotes increased mutual understanding.¹⁰ Naturally, moral reframing has to be tailored to each illiberal target group. As an example, Feinberg and Willer conducted a study in which conservative participants were presented with passages that supported legalizing same-sex marriage. Participants were more convinced by the argument that “same-sex couples are proud and patriotic

Americans ... [who] contribute to the American economy and society” than by an argument based on equality and fairness.¹¹ This strategy is about building effective arguments when talking to illiberals by framing your own arguments with your target audience’s moral values.

Guidelines for Debate Framing

Illiberal rhetoric typically seeks to change people’s perceptions by using popular metaphors for political issues, which can undermine your framing. To be effective, frames should therefore follow certain rules:¹²

- 1 There is a first-mover advantage so try to be the first to frame an issue (preemptive framing).
- 2 The frame should avoid articulating prevalent lies.
- 3 Use moral framing as discussed above.
- 4 Strengthen the frame through repetition.

Illiberal actors such as President Trump know how to do this. Thus, it is important that liberals make use of even stronger debate framing. The success of a debate frame depends on people’s immediate understanding, and therefore it is vital to use a framing style that illiberals can easily relate to their personal situations, values, or ideologies. Framing techniques can appear complex. Verbal reactions may be more straightforward.

Guidelines for Verbal Reactions

How should we react to illiberal statements in general? It is easy to be trapped in a “language game” dominated by the far-right.¹³ Illiberal actors provoke with statements such as “Islam is not a religion, but a warlike ideology,” provoking outrage. If liberals treat the provocateur as a perpetrator and deny the claims, the illiberal actor can assume the role of a marginalized victim. This helped Donald Trump win office. His voters voted for him in part because of the reactions by his opponents.

Hence, liberals should avoid precisely such reactions. Only then can we end the game for which illiberals have set the rules and instead enforce a new game, which forces illiberal actors to make clear statements and be unambiguous.

3 Boeser-Schnebel, Hufer, Schnebel, and Wenzel (2016); Chung and Susen (2009); Hufer (2001). See e.g.: <https://www.argumentationstraining-gegen-stammtischparolen.de> (retrieved on March 18, 2020, DE).

4 Mudde (2004).

5 Taggart (2000).

6 Scheufele and Tewksbury (2007).

7 Brugman, Burgers, and Steen (2017); Lakoff and Johnson (1980).

8 Entman (1993).

9 Feinberg and Willer (2019).

10 Based on Entman’s theoretical approach.

11 Interview with Robb Willer in Stanford News (2015) (see: <https://news.stanford.edu/2015/10/12/framing-persuasive-messages-101215/>, retrieved on March 25, 2020).

12 Lakoff (2004).

13 Leo, Steinbeis, and Zorn (2017).

Verbal reactions should engage with illiberals without fear and speak openly about refugees, resistance, the people, freedom of speech, inequality, Islam and even about National Socialism. For these difficult situations, a few 'golden rules' can help:¹⁴

- 1 Differentiate between person and speech.
- 2 Respect your opponent.
- 3 Do not let them provoke you.
- 4 Mistrust your moral reflexes.
- 5 Consider that the other person could be right.
- 6 Talk to people who think differently than you.
- 7 Avoid talking to people who like having enemies.
- 8 A discussion without a laugh is a bad discussion.

The Use of Logic as a Rhetorical Style

Strict use of logic can be a useful tool. Illiberal actors' way of reasoning is often dogmatic and the content is formulated as vaguely as possible so that it can be connected to broad layers. This can be pulled apart with logic and reason.¹⁵ By arguing using concrete logic, those who are potentially attracted by illiberal ideas are more likely to realize that extreme or simple solutions rarely deliver what they promise.

RECOMMENDATION: When talking to illiberal actors, choose one of the techniques discussed above. Most importantly, while arguing with illiberals, it is important to talk about the issue, potential problems, political arguments and the values behind them, not the person per se.

Ideas for additional communicative strategies are listed in Table 4. They include initiatives such as *radikale Höflichkeit*¹⁶ or *Diskutier Mit Mir*¹⁷ to increase the exposure to opinion heterogeneity and discussing political topics in a deliberative manner.

TABLE 4: BEST-PRACTICE INITIATIVES TO STRENGTHEN ARGUMENTATION AGAINST ONLINE HARASSMENT, DISCRIMINATION AND RACISM

| PROJECT | DESCRIPTION | WEBPAGE | LANGUAGE |
|--------------------------------------|--|---|----------|
| Arguments Against Aggression project | Offers training in communication and argumentation skills for social media and real-life interactions to better cope with aggressive, racist or xenophobic messages, inequalities and gender violence. | http://contra-aggression.eu | EN |
| AUFSTEHEN gegen Hass im Netz | Feminist perspective on online hate speech . | https://www.aufstehen-gegen-hass-im-netz.de | DE |
| Debate//de:hate | The aim of the project is to educate citizens towards digital citizenship with a strong focus on the prevention of online radicalization, hate and discrimination. | https://www.amadeu-antonio-stiftung.de/projekte/debate-dehate/ | EN/DE |
| Demokratielaborew | Offers workshops about digitalization, technology and civic engagement against hate speech and populism for young people between the ages of 12 and 21. | https://demokratielabore.de | DE |
| JASS | Offers information and educational workshops against online hate speech, radicalization and extremism. | https://www.jass-mit.ch/jass-gegen-hass | DE |
| Radikale Höflichkeit | Project which offers argumentation against discrimination, racism, populism and hate speech. | https://radikalehoeflichkeit.de | DE |
| React | Initiative, capacity building and campaigning against hate speech and discrimination | http://www.reactnohate.eu | EN |

¹⁴ Leo et al. (2017, 14–15).

¹⁵ Zorn (2019).

¹⁶ For more information, see: <https://radikalehoeflichkeit.de> (retrieved on March 23, 2020, DE)

¹⁷ More information available at: <https://www.diskutiermitmir.de> (retrieved on March 24, 2020, DE)

2.2 Tools for Online Interactions with Illiberals

Lydia Finzel

Twitter, Facebook, Instagram – a large proportion of day-to-day political communication takes place on social media platforms. The online world is not a mirror of the offline reality but that does not mean that online and offline spheres are isolated from each other.

Three social media phenomena are often linked to the spread of illiberalism and authoritarianism, namely filter bubbles, disinformation and hate speech.

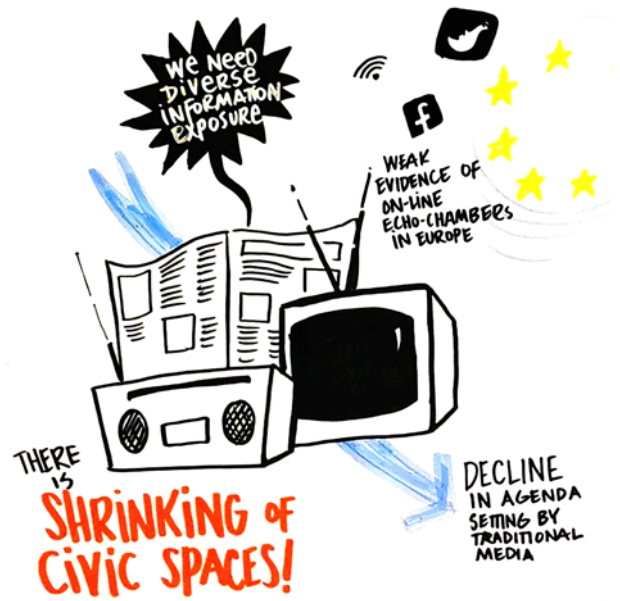
Online discussions often take place in segregated social spheres, or *filter bubbles*. Thus, individuals online often encounter opinions congruent with their own due to identification¹⁸, echo chambers¹⁹, and the individual's confirmation bias²⁰.

Hate speech and *disinformation* are more frequently found on social media than in traditional media and face-to-face interactions. Social media often offer populist actors an unfiltered access to an audience²¹ and marginal voices or arguments²² can be perceived as representing the majority. Thus, online information exchange can magnify toxic polarization and the illiberal rhetoric of an in-group vs. an out-group (e.g. anti-establishment, 'will of the people', ordinary citizens against the corrupt elite, 'us' vs. 'them' thinking).²³

Online discussions tend to be emotional and moralizing.²⁴ Conversely, democratic deliberation is based on the idea of a respectful, open and broad discourse on a variety of political attitudes and factually based opinions. Deliberation aims to overcome the tensions of conflicting views by offering rational criticism and dialogue based on reasonable arguments.²⁵

It is therefore important to foster initiatives to maintain deliberational standards while commenting online.

In the following, we summarize the three challenges for democratic deliberation online and provide recommendations and propose best-practice ideas to reduce the spread of illiberal and authoritarian ideas.



2.2.1 Social Media Phenomenon 1 – Filter Bubbles

Filter bubbles, generated by self-selection through existing (online) preferences²⁶ and amplified by algorithms²⁷, create the perception that there is a homogeneous and shared opinion by all social media users. They generate responses with similar political views between the sender and receiver of a post, tweet or comment.

Challenges

- Algorithms and unconscious self-selection processes, such as likes or visited webpages, influence what content is prevalent online.²⁸
- Mostly, users do not act in a pluralized online environment and are exposed to a biased world view. Users often assume that an opinion they experience as dominant online is shared by the majority.²⁹
- Blocking populist or extremist content is a possible solution, but risks further strengthening filter bubbles.

Responses

It is important to raise awareness that most online information is selected by self-created social spheres. Strengthening exposure to diverse information can lead to a reduction in social media

18 Blassnig and Wirz (2019).

19 S. Walter, Brüggemann, and Engesser (2018).

20 Blassnig, Engesser, Ernst, and Esser (2019).

21 Schaub and Morisi (2019).

22 Lewis (2012).

23 Blassnig et al. (2019).

24 Brady, Wills, Jost, Tucker, and Van Bavel (2017).

25 Sanders (1997).

26 Spohr (2017).

27 Flaxman, Goel, and Rao (2016).

28 Bozdag and van den Hoven (2015).

29 Noelle-Neumann (1984).

biases. Political discussions that use evidence-based arguments with people who have another political opinion contribute to positive democratic outcomes and tolerance.³⁰

For example, the initiatives “My Country Talks” and “Diskutier Mit Mir” offer daily chats with people from other political viewpoints. Bozdag and van den Hoven³¹ propose various possible methods for bursting the filter bubble. Users could enhance their knowledge about news bias with tools such as Balancer. Furthermore, they propose deliberative online tools like the predecessor of CAFE or Rbutr (see Table 5).

2.2.2 Social Media Phenomenon 2 – The Spread of Disinformation

Disinformation is the spread of false and intentionally misleading information aiming to influence and manipulate someone else’s opinion or to mobilize others.³² It often occurs together with other negative and low-evidence content such as rumors, alternative facts, conspiracy theories and political scandals.³³

Challenges

- Disinformation campaigns do not change individuals’ minds but rather reinforce existing fears and conflicts.
- Individuals are more likely to accept false or distorted information when it fits with their preexisting views.³⁴
- Disinformation is increasingly being used in programmed propaganda campaigns by political actors and states³⁵ and occurring more frequently around elections.³⁶
- False information spreads quickly, and often seems like facts to the reader. Hence, disinformed individuals consider themselves to be well-informed.³⁷
- The degree of fact-checking by the individual and their digital literacy is dependent on factors such as their political ideology³⁸, age, and education.³⁹
- Correcting disinformation by responding with evidence is often ineffective.⁴⁰

TABLE 5: BEST-PRACTICE INITIATIVES TO BREAK OUT OF THE PERSONAL FILTER BUBBLE

| PROJECT | DESCRIPTION | WEBPAGE | LANGUAGE |
|-------------------------|---|---|----------|
| Balancer | Browser add-on to display news biases on a liberal-conservative dimension. | http://balancestudy.org/balancer/ | EN |
| CAFE | Participatory platform for public policy ideas, exchange and feedback by the University of California, Berkeley. | https://citris-uc.org/connected-communities/project/the-collaborative-assessment-and-feedback-engine-cafe/ | EN |
| Rbutr | Google Chrome add-on to find rebutting articles with counter-arguments to burst one’s own filter bubble and to combat disinformation. | http://rbutr.com/ | EN |
| Das NETZ | Network of NGOs and projects that are engaged in combatting hate speech, disinformation and working for respectful online dialogues. | https://www.das-netz.de/initiativen-gegen-hass-im-netz-wer-engagiert-sich-wie | DE |
| Democratic Meme Factory | Creative workshops with the focus on using memes to work against hate speech, discrimination and disinformation. | https://la-red.eu/portfolio/democratic-meme-factory | DE |
| My Country Talks | One-on-one discussions between people with different viewpoints to strengthen political debate organized by national newspapers. | https://www.mycountrytalks.org/ | EN |
| Diskutier Mit Mir | App which offers daily chats with people from other political viewpoints. | https://www.diskutiermitmir.de | DE |
| The Commons | The Commons identifies the likelihood that social media users are at risk of polarization, and engages them in facilitated conversations to promote constructive debates and respect. | https://howtobuildup.org/digital-conflict/ | EN |

30 Himelboim, Lariscy, Tinkham, and Sweetser (2012).

31 Bozdag and van den Hoven (2015).

32 Bennett and Livingston (2018); Jowett and O’donnell (2018); Lazer et al. (2018).

33 Flynn, Nyhan, and Reifler (2017); Uscinski and Parent (2014); Warner, McGowen, and Hawthorne (2012).

34 N. Walter, Cohen, Holbert, and Morag (2019).

35 Woolley and Howard (2017).

36 N. Walter et al. (2019).

37 Flynn et al. (2017).

38 Nyhan and Reifler (2017).

39 Guess, Nagler, and Tucker (2019); Roozenbeek and van der Linden (2019).

40 Nyhan and Reifler (2015).

Responses

Raise awareness of the importance of fact-checking, especially for highly polarizing topics. Help build easy-to-use tools for fact-checking. Put pressure on social media providers to take fact-checking seriously.

Seek allies among actors closer to the target audience since corrections are more persuasive when they come from ideologically sympathetic sources.⁴¹ Use graphical corrections if possible since they are perceived as more successful than textual ones.⁴² Report problematic content to platform providers and public authorities and build alliances that can work systematically to have disinformation removed.

2.2.3 Social Media Phenomenon 3 – Hate Speech

Hate speech, sometimes also called online harassment or online hostility, is public discriminatory and hostile comments, tweets, posts and statements against individuals or groups.⁴³

**DISAGREEMENT
IS NOT ENOUGH!**

Challenges

- Hate speech is often based on over-simplified and generalized stereotypes, discrimination and structural racism. Many different users engage in hostile messaging.⁴⁴
- It is easy for some to forget that the people they interact with on social media are real people with emotions and dignity.
- Extreme hate speech can influence public discourse,⁴⁵ intimidate social media users, and spread fear.
- Hate speech breeds frustration. Emotional appeals – especially those involving disgust and hate – tend to increase online popularity and success in reaching an audience.

Responses

Know where to report hate speech to public authorities and service providers. Regulations on this issue differ from country to country. In Germany, INACH, HateAid or saferinternet.de offer such a service.

Support users suffering from psychological and physiological harm. HateAid offers support for victims of hate speech (for more links, see Table 7).

Forcing users to only use their real names online is contested.⁴⁶ A better option for policing hate crimes might be to increase access to identifying information for single case investigations.

Similar to disinformation, solutions to counter hate speech also include the re-contextualization of, and ironic responses to, such content to weaken future hostile messaging.

TABLE 6: BEST PRACTICE INITIATIVES FOR RESPONDING TO DISINFORMATION CAMPAIGNS AND TARGETED MISINFORMATION

| PROJECT | DESCRIPTION | WEBPAGE | LANGUAGE |
|---------------------|--|---|----------|
| Bad News | Disinformation game. | https://getbadnews.com | EN |
| Fakten gegen Rechts | Website that offers arguments against right-wing argumentation and phrases. | http://fakten-gegen-rechts.de | DE |
| Gegen Fake News | Information about and analysis of disinformation. | https://gegen-fake-news.de/ | DE |
| HOGESATZBAU | Satirical analysis and correction of the use of incorrect grammar and false content by political actors. | https://www.hogesatzbau.de | DE |
| iCivics | NewsFeed defender game to raise awareness of disinformation and online content. | https://www.icivics.org/games/newsfeed-defenders | EN |
| The Current | Project and think tank against the spread of disinformation by detecting image manipulations and working with deepfake detection research. | https://jigsaw.google.com/the-current/disinformation/dataviz/ | EN |

⁴¹ Berinsky (2017).

⁴² Nyhan and Reifler (2019).

⁴³ Meibauer (2013); Scharloth (2017); Spieß (2019).

⁴⁴ Blassnig et al. (2019).

⁴⁵ Noelle-Neumann (1984).

⁴⁶ People targeted by hate speech online report that this often comes from accounts with real names that are traceable to actual human beings. An enforcement of a real name (or legal name) policy might harm informational self-determination as well as individual freedoms such as freedom of speech, of the press or of religion for individuals, especially for minority groups and in countries with limited political freedoms.

2.3 Unmasking Illiberals – Tools for Media and Civil Society Organizations

Sebastian Hellmeier

Introduction

Liberal democracy is more than elections, parliamentary hearings and decision-making by political actors in state institutions. Most importantly, liberal democracy relies on active citizens who express their interests and opinions, and who hold politicians to account for their actions.

To help citizens form preferences and make them heard by decision-makers, two groups of intermediary actors are crucial. First, the *media* informs citizens about ongoing debates and political processes. Media organizations also communicate the most pressing social issues to politicians. The media is not a neutral transmitter of information. Journalists can (and have to) choose which topics they want to cover, how they frame ongoing debates, and whose voices they represent.

Second, *civil society groups* organize and educate fellow citizens on topics they deem important and mobilize support for (or against) specific policies. Thereby, they not only affect the broader political agenda, but also how citizens interact with each other on a day-to-day basis.

How much space should journalists give to illiberals? How should civil society groups engage with them? We highlight different strategic options and their likely intended and unintended consequences. Drawing on existing research in the social sciences and current efforts to contain illiberal actors and ideas, we attempt to establish a middle ground between extreme strategies.

2.3.1 The Role of the Media

The media is an important intermediary between elites and citizens in a democracy. Its ideal/typical role in a functioning democracy consists of exposing the misuse of power and informing citizens about ongoing political processes. While some doubt that the media is able to live up to these expectations,⁴⁷ arguably it has an important role in dealing with illiberal actors. We know that people with populist attitudes have less trust in the media,⁴⁸ which emphasizes the need for journalists to reach those that have not yet crossed the line to illiberalism. We focus on two vital aspects of media activities: the quantity of reporting on illiberal actors, and the content of that reporting.

We encourage contextual coverage of illiberal actors and stress the dangers posed by extreme strategies like demonizing illiberals or ignoring them completely.

Strategic choices

Media outlets find themselves faced with two extreme options: Ignore illiberals – sometimes described as *cordon sanitaire (médiatique)* – in an effort to limit the public space for illiberals; or give them too much space given their actual importance (overreporting).

Both extremes have potential side-effects that can either normalize illiberal actors or deepen polarization in society. Ignoring them leaves citizens dependent on the content produced by illiberals themselves and can easily lead to the rise of a censorship narrative that helps illiberals to mobilize support.

Overreporting makes illiberals look more powerful than they actually are and gives them too much scope to spread their ideas. As an example, even negative coverage helped populist parties in Sweden and Switzerland.⁴⁹

TABLE 7: REPORT AND SUPPORT PAGES FOR VICTIMS AND OBSERVERS OF HATE SPEECH

| PROJECT | DESCRIPTION | WEBPAGE | LANGUAGE |
|--|---|---|----------|
| No Hate Speech Youth Campaign | Movement, campaigns and reporting on hate speech. | https://www.coe.int/en/web/no-hate-campaign | EN |
| HateAid | Support page for victims of hate speech. | https://hateaid.org | DE |
| INACH | Report online hate speech. | http://www.inach.net/ | EN |
| Respect! – Die Meldestelle für Hetze im Netz | Report online hate speech and hostile messages. | https://demokratiezentrum-bw.de/angebote/respect-die-meldestelle-fuer-hetze-im-netz/ | DE |
| saferinternet.de | Report online hate speech and other harmful online content. | https://www.saferinternet.de/ | DE |

47 Graber (2003).

48 Hameleers et al. (2018).

49 Esser, Stępińska, and Hopmann (2017).

We believe that *informing* the public about illiberal actors' agendas and *contextualizing* their claims as well as their strategies is a more promising option than ignoring or demonizing them.

BALANCED REPORTING: Illiberal actors typically stand out for their drastic views, their repeated violations of democratic norms, and an aggressive communication style, sometimes increasing their “newsworthiness”. Analyses show that they receive far more coverage than their actual popularity would merit.⁵⁰ Journalists could think about whether coverage of the actions of such actors is adequate and part of a balanced reporting strategy. Election results and opinion polls can give journalists some indication of the amount of attention a given political actor deserves.

TRANSPARENT JOURNALISTIC PRACTICES: Illiberal actors often accuse the media of biased reporting and characterize media outlets as state-dependent. Media outlets have to select newsworthy stories given a limited amount of space in a print edition or TV program. Instead of claiming full neutrality, media outlets could communicate how they select news, make their selection process as transparent as possible, and justify their selection. Transparency is seen as a good journalistic practice by audiences.⁵¹

NON-PARTISAN REPORTING: Strong partisan reporting reduces the pool of potential readers/viewers to those who share the same opinions. Citizens with divergent views will reject a medium that has built a partisan reputation, while others only use sources that confirm their previous beliefs. The latter especially applies to politically engaged citizens.⁵² However, news consumers have to be exposed to different views, which is why we encourage media outlets to publish divergent opinions. Op-eds by authors with diverse viewpoints are one way to achieve this.

(INDEPENDENT) FACT-CHECKING. One strategy of illiberal actors is to spread factually untrue information (fake news/disinformation). These ‘alternative facts’ are often persistent and

hard to debunk. Fact-checking can help to reduce the impact of disinformation. Research shows that the confirmation of an election candidate's statements via a fact-checking site leads to a better evaluation of his/her performance.⁵³ When media outlets engage in fact-checking, they should be transparent about how they select the facts to be checked and which criteria they apply when deciding that a given claim is true or false.

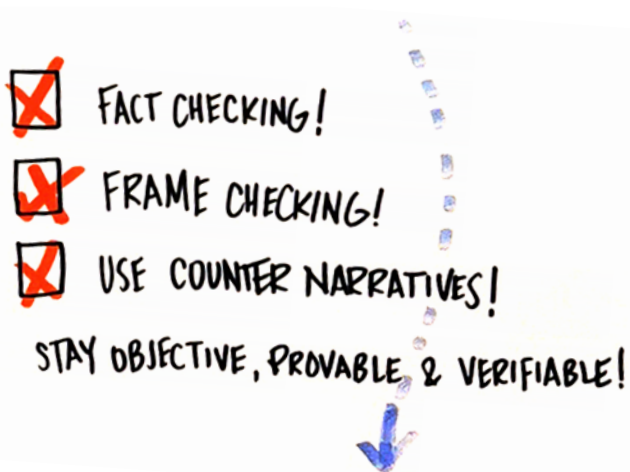
ENGAGEMENT WITH NEW MEDIA: Illiberal actors increasingly rely on social media offering far-reaching communication channels at low cost without external review. Traditional media outlets should reflect on how to engage in these new media arenas for several reasons. First, traditional media lose their agenda-setting power in new journalistic formats such as blogs.⁵⁴ Second, consumers of these new media formats perceive them as highly credible; sometimes even more credible than traditional sources.⁵⁵ If democratic media institutions do not engage in new media formats, they lose ground to illiberal actors who can fully leverage the benefits of the online sphere to disseminate their ideas. The British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) shows that traditional publishing houses can be successful in the online sphere. The BBC News account reaches more than 12 million followers on Instagram, most of them between the ages of 18 and 34.⁵⁶

CRITICAL ENGAGEMENT WITH ILLIBERAL ACTORS' POLICY SUGGESTIONS. From a democratic standpoint, it is important that the policy agenda of illiberal actors is scrutinized in public to make their illiberal nature known. Systematic exclusion of certain politicians or actors feeds the narrative of censorship and corrupt elites leading to increased polarization. Critical engagement is a more promising strategy than exclusion. However, this engagement needs to be critical in the sense that journalists contextualize illiberals' statements, for example, by clarifying how their agendas challenge democratic norms and values.

NON-ENGAGEMENT WITH ILLIBERAL WORLD VIEWS: While engagement with illiberals' policy proposals is important, this does not apply to world views that are fundamentally undemocratic and degrade others such as xenophobia, racism, and sexism. Fundamental democratic values concerning human dignity are not up for debate and media outlets should state their commitment to upholding these values. Standardized procedures can help internal and external communication and justification for not giving air to illiberal views.

Summary

We encourage journalists to think about ways to inform citizens about the policy agendas of illiberals, to cover their actions in a balanced way, and to contextualize their claims and demands. Sticking to the facts and making research practices transparent may help to counter illiberals' negative narratives about the free



⁵⁰ Pickard (2016).

⁵¹ Van Der Wurff and Schoenbach (2014).

⁵² Prior (2013).

⁵³ Wintersieck (2017).

⁵⁴ Meraz (2011).

⁵⁵ Johnson and Kaye (2004).

⁵⁶ <https://www.facebook.com/journalismproject/bbc-news-instagram> (retrieved on April 10, 2020).

press. Independent fact-checking providers can help to increase the credibility of traditional media sources. Traditional media may want to consider expanding their activities to include new media formats and communication channels. At the same time, we emphasize that the media should not be complicit in disseminating illiberal world views and thus give them additional legitimacy. Table 8 lists projects and resources that may inspire journalistic practices in times of rising illiberalism.

2.3.2 The Role of Civil Society Organizations⁵⁷

Civil society organizations (CSOs) are important actors outside the formalized decision-making processes, shaping the public agenda and organizing citizens around pressing social issues. Beyond politics, CSOs can bring citizens together and foster dialogue and deliberation.⁵⁸

Civil society can help prevent the rise of illiberalism in at least three ways. Civil society can mobilize citizens when illiberals curtail civil liberties or disregard the principle of the rule of law. Civil society can facilitate *deliberation* between different groups with opposing interests in order to prevent divisions in society. Last but not least, civil society has the task of offering a democratic and inclusive *vision of the future* to counter the often backward-looking and exclusive agendas of illiberals.

Strategic choices

Like journalists, political parties and the media, CSOs have different strategic options when dealing with illiberals. At the extremes, they can exclude and ignore them or confront and antagonize

illiberals. In order not to legitimize illiberals and not to inflame polarization, we suggest a middle road between radical strategies. We offer the following thoughts on how this middle ground can be found.

INCLUSION OF, AND DELIBERATION WITH, MODERATE

ILLIBERALS: Once illiberals gain traction, it is likely that some members of civil society organizations will come to share their views. CSOs have to decide how to interact with these members. One option is to exclude them. Such drastic steps should be reserved for extreme illiberals. Research shows that populism, for instance, attracts people who feel excluded from society.⁵⁹ An exclusionary strategy towards moderates could further alienate them and drive them into the arms of more extreme illiberal actors. Keep up the dialogue with moderate illiberals in order to avoid societal polarization.

EXCLUSION OF RADICAL ILLIBERALS FROM CSOS:

When confronted with radical illiberals who threaten the democratic foundations of the CSO, e.g., by acting against members of minority groups, these members must be excluded in order to protect the values of the organization and to avoid the radicals mobilizing support within the ranks of the organization.

MOBILIZATION AGAINST ILLIBERAL ACTORS.

CSOs can mobilize against illiberals in social actions, for example, by organizing or joining public demonstrations. Visible demonstrations question the legitimacy of illiberal actors as well as their policies. Politicians are responsive to mass mobilizations, and this helps to limit the impact of illiberals in the political arena. Second, demonstrations can be a sign of solidarity with those who have been targeted by illiberals.

TABLE 8: RESOURCES AND PROJECTS ON HOW TO DEAL WITH ILLIBERALISM IN THE PUBLIC SPHERE

| PROJECT | DESCRIPTION | WEBPAGE | LANGUAGE |
|-------------------------------------|---|---|----------|
| Countering Populism in Public Space | Materials and guidelines on how to deal with non-democratic populism in public spaces. | https://www.progressives-zentrum.org/countering-populism-in-public-space/ | EN/DE |
| Transparency map | Provides a tool to assess the transparency of news reports based on references to sources and additional links, etc.. | https://www.transparentjournalism.org/reader/ | ES/EN |
| Der Volksverpetzer | Blog and podcast that exposes fake news spread by far-right actors and offers counter-framings. | https://www.volksverpetzer.de | DE |
| Fullfact | Independent charity based in the UK that builds tools for automated fact-checking. | https://fullfact.org | EN |
| chequeado | Independent fact-checking platform that aims to verify public debates. | https://chequeado.com/acerca-de-chequeado/ | ES |
| Newtral | Startup that offers fact-checking and journalistic investigation based on artificial intelligence. | https://www.newtral.es | ES |
| Meedan | Non-profit organization that builds software to support digital journalism and improve information quality. | https://meedan.com/about | EN |

⁵⁷ Parts of this section draw heavily on Lührmann and Hellmeier (2020).

⁵⁸ Of course, there are also extremist civil society organizations that do not fulfill these purposes and that have adverse effects on society.

⁵⁹ Gidron and Hall (2019).

NON-VIOLENT MOBILIZATION TACTICS: The way CSOs engage with illiberals matters. Violence facilitates future illiberal mobilization as emotions are important motivators for protest.⁶⁰ Rival protests strengthen group identities and emphasize the salience of differences between groups. CSOs should not use aggressive and violent tactics against illiberals. Violent attacks on protesters, for instance, can backfire, and strengthen illiberals.⁶¹

PROMOTING INCLUSIVE VISIONS OF THE FUTURE: CSOs should aim to build alternative and inclusive visions of the future to counter the views expressed by illiberals. They should not leave it to illiberals to shape the discourse on who is part of the nation or the people. CSOs should advocate for their own vision of society that is in line with democratic values such as equality.



Summary

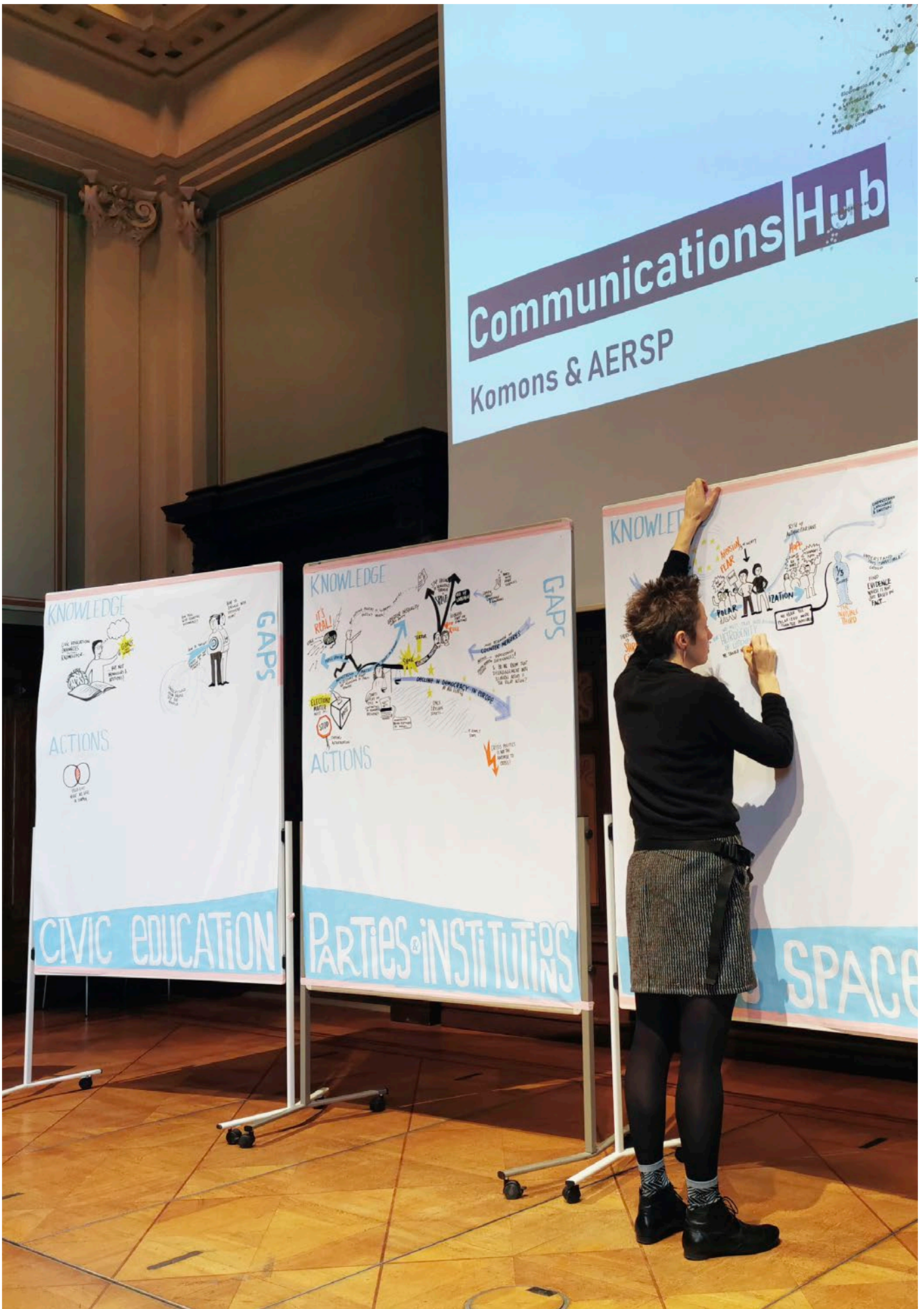
In our view, civil society is crucial in defending democracy against illiberal actors. They face difficult strategic decisions when interacting with illiberal actors, within their own ranks and in society at large. We encourage CSOs to find a middle ground between ignoring illiberals and radically excluding them. Constructive ways of engagement are deliberation and dialogue with moderate illiberals. The following table lists additional projects and resources that could be interesting for those interested in the role of civil society in the struggle against illiberalism.

TABLE 9: CIVIL SOCIETY PROJECTS THAT ARE COUNTERING ILLIBERALISM

| PROJECT | DESCRIPTION | WEBPAGE | LANGUAGE |
|---|---|---|----------|
| Social Science Works | Social enterprise that conducts workshops to deliberate on common principles such as democracy, tolerance, freedom, gender equality or homosexuality. | https://socialscienceworks.org/deliberation/ | DE/EN |
| More in common | Non-profit organization that aims to strengthen civil society. | https://www.moreincommon.com | EN/FR/DE |
| Agenzia di Promozione Integrata per i Cittadini in Europa | Italian youth NGO aiming to promote a common European culture and the fundamental values of the EU. | http://www.apiceue.net/category/news/ | IT |
| Initiative Offene Gesellschaft | Platform that brings together people with ideas on how to build an open society. | https://www.die-offene-gesellschaft.de/ | DE |

⁶⁰ Snow (2013).

⁶¹ <https://www.maz-online.de/Lokales/Potsdam/Pegida-Anhaenger-muessen-tatenlos-abziehen> (retrieved on April 10, 2020, DE)



Esther Blodau produced graphical recordings of the discussions during the Berlin Democracy Conference. A selection of the result can be found throughout this Resource Guide.



PART 3:

Resources for Civic Education

Dominik Hirndorf

Civic education is a key part of addressing illiberal challenges to democracy. While not a silver bullet, civic education can promote attitudes such as tolerance, social and institutional trust, and political efficacy.¹

Civic education can help citizens to better understand how political decisions are formed, how they can influence the process themselves, and why illiberals' answers do not solve their problems. Civic education in schools, in civil society groups and other social networks, can also reach 'fence-sitters' and moderately illiberal citizens.² Since political socialization in early life is vital,³ civic education in schools plays a particularly important role in the long term goal of educating democratic citizens.

*Civic education (also known as citizen education or democracy education) is the provision of information and learning experiences to equip and empower citizens with the capacities to participate in democratic processes.*⁴

Section 3.1 presents some general guidelines on civic education. Section 3.2 focuses on civic education in schools, while Section 3.3 provides ideas for civic education outside of schools.

3.1 Guidelines

With the rise of populist parties, teaching civics has become more contentious. Teachers may feel uncertain about the extent to which they are allowed to express a critical opinion about illiberal actors such as Donald Trump, parties like the AfD (Germany) or the Sweden Democrats. These guidelines offer some help regarding this challenge.

FIRST OBSTACLE: How should civic education treat illiberal parties and actors that while not formally illegal, still challenge democratic institutions and norms such as civil liberties, the rule of law, and the separation of powers? Do educators need to stay neutral?

In 2018, the German far-right party *Alternative für Deutschland (AfD)* asked students to report teachers who were "not neutral" about the AfD in the classroom.⁵ A heated debate ensued. But the Beutelsbach Consensus has been the official guide in Germany since 1976. The two most important principles are the *controversy rule* and the *no overwhelming the pupil rule* (see Figure 4).⁶ The first of these asks teachers to talk about (political) topics from different perspectives, including controversial perspectives. The second rule makes it clear that by doing so, teachers are not allowed to push students in a certain direction.

The idea behind these principles is not a rule of neutrality.⁷ Rather, students should develop and strengthen their ability to analyze their own interests and to form opinions on their own. Thus, teachers are encouraged to present criticism towards questionable illiberal actors and ideas as long as they also present the other side. Furthermore, during active discussions based on previous introductory lessons, teachers can express their own opinions – as long as they contextualize them. The biggest challenge is to keep the balance between total exclusion and integration of far-right populist ideas and actors. While exclusion is polarizing and reinforces victimization, the strategy of integration carries the risk of normalizing and thereby strengthening illiberal positions. If a contested political statement or a discussion on illiberal parties and policies arise, it will be helpful for teachers to steer the discussion by:

- Clarifying and discussing key democratic principles and the rule of law (e.g. freedom of expression, role of the parties, voting decisions, etc.)
- Mentioning different sources of critical evaluations of illiberal actors (e.g., court decisions about leading politicians of the party, reference points such as human dignity)
- Asking students to prepare a discussion on hotly debated policy (Section 3.2 gives more detailed instructions).

1 Dalton (1994); Rose, Mishler, and Haerpfer (1998).

2 Finkel (2003).

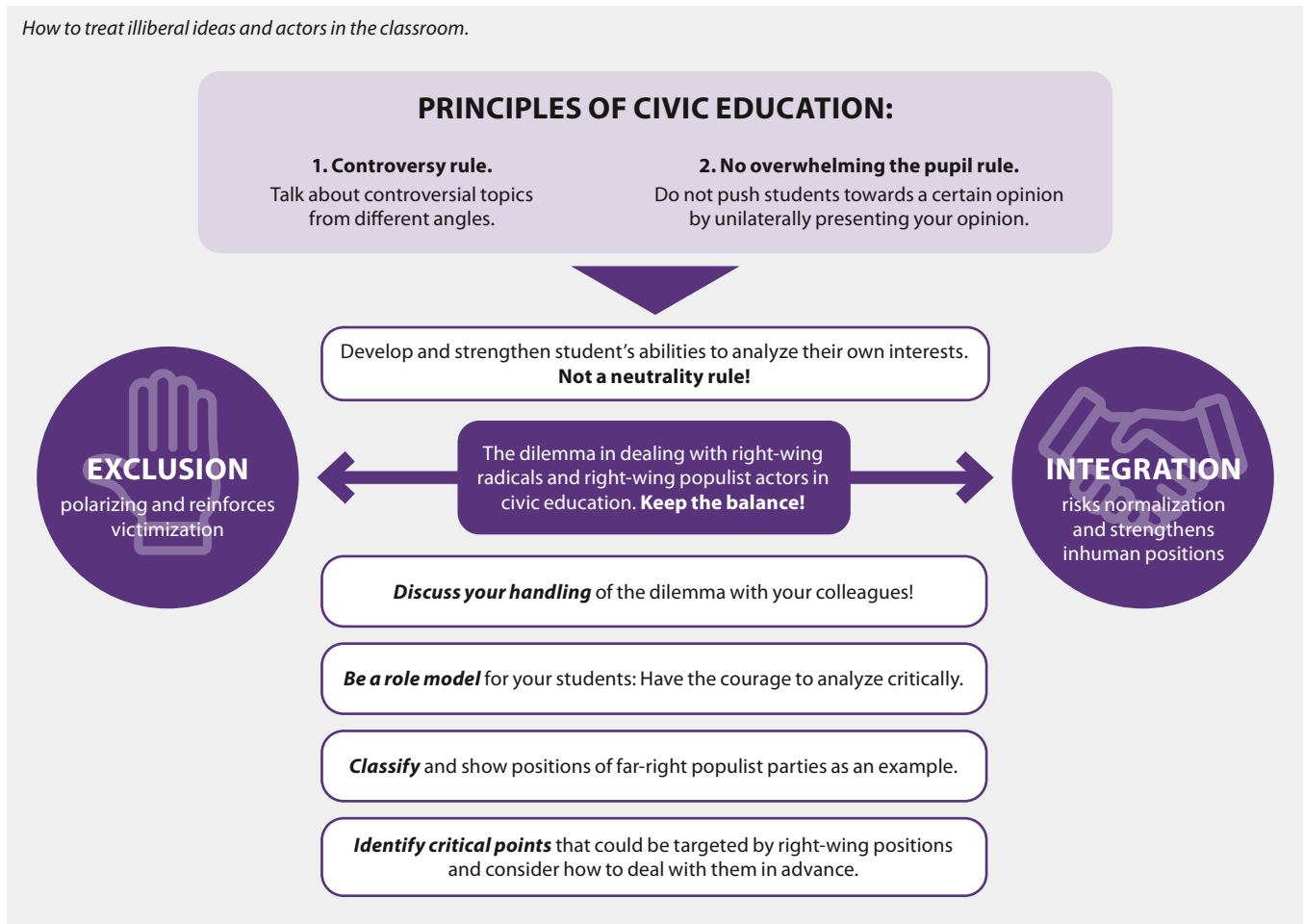
3 Easton, Dennis, and Easton (1969).

4 Crittenden and Levine (2007).

5 <https://www.zeit.de/gesellschaft/schule/2018-10/afd-lehrerpranger-url-afd-lehrerpranger-online-denunziation-eltern-schueler> (retrieved on April 15, 2020).

6 Frech (2017).

7 Ahlheim (2018).

FIGURE 4: GUIDELINES FOR EDUCATORS WHEN DEALING WITH ILLIBERAL IDEAS AND ACTORS.⁸

SECOND OBSTACLE: How Can Civic Education Address 'Hard to Reach' Groups?

Outside of mandatory educational institutions, it is challenging for state actors and civil initiatives to reach all groups in society. 'Hard-to-reach' groups – those "who are poor in terms of power, economic resources, recognition, moral and ethical resources"⁹ – are less likely to participate in civic education programs. A project study from Germany found four characteristics of hard-to-reach students. Besides a socially disadvantaged family background and residential segregation, they emphasized a migrant background as a factor which is highly correlated with low socioeconomic background and feelings of exclusion.¹⁰

Reaching people with such clear disadvantages is a challenge for successful civic education. This becomes even more important when these groups overlap with groups that are more likely to vote for far-right (populist) parties: research shows that voters

for populist parties tend to have lower levels of education,¹¹ weak material standing¹² and low levels of perceived political efficacy.¹³ In order to cover the whole society, it is important to develop targeted approaches to specific areas in civic education for such groups.¹⁴

**CIVIC
EDUCATION
IS NOT
NEUTRAL
BUT SHOULD BE
NON-PARTISAN!**

⁸ Adapted from https://www.amadeu-antonio-stiftung.de/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/AFD_Handreichung_web.pdf, p. 61.

⁹ Remache (2016).

¹⁰ Ahmadi, Behrendt, and Müller-Hofstede (2016).

¹¹ Arzheimer and Carter (2009); Brähler and Decker (2018); Norris and Inglehart (2019).

¹² Antonucci, Horvath, Kutysiński, and Krouwel (2017); Bornschieer and Kriesi (2013); Oesch (2008).

¹³ Rooduijn (2018); Spruyt, Keppens, and Droogenbroeck (2016).

¹⁴ Kakos, Müller-Hofstede, and Ross (2016).



The evaluation of the project Dialogue at School (sample of 30 schools with more than 2,000 students) shows how hard-to-reach students can be included. By employing young (migrant) academics as dialogue facilitators over a two year period, pupils with the characteristics mentioned above could be reached through a close, trustful relationship between the facilitators and students. The program successfully helped to foster a sense of democratic citizenship.¹⁵ In terms of hard-to-reach groups, this program might offer guidance also for those trying to reach the (potential) supporters of illiberal parties with civic education outside of the school setting.

We must recognize that providers of civic education in society face a situation where people with higher education and/or an interest in politics are more likely to take part in citizenship learning programs.¹⁶ But those programs should address people who are poor in terms of economic resources, education or family socialization with regard to politics as well as civics (hard to reach) and they should focus on intercultural knowledge, cultural identities, political knowledge and interest as well as political efficacy (as characteristics of far-right voters that can be influenced positively by civic education).

In addressing citizens at risk of supporting illiberals, the following approaches and recommendations are helpful:

- Two-step approach: Use existing social networks within civil society e.g. sports clubs or student-parent programs at school, to reach these groups, and offer civic education through these institutions.
- Peer educators as models of political efficacy and involvement with whom participants can identify should be integrated into civic education. This helps peers to feel more self-confident and encouraged to participate in politics or civil society themselves.¹⁷
- Individual needs (including emotional and psychosocial needs) and the thematic interests of the target group (including apolitical needs) have to be explored, considered, and then engaged with.
- Use accessible language.

Civic education tends to be underfunded despite its importance for fostering democracy, and has weak institutional bases in most European countries.¹⁸ Although civic education offers a solution in times when voters lack political knowledge, interest, efficacy or media literacy, democratic actors and state institutions are often neglecting civic education as a short- and long-term tool.¹⁹

In what follows, we show why this has to change. We provide a variety of ideas that we link to existing concepts, projects and materials – in and outside of schools.

3.2 Civic Education in Schools

| CHALLENGE | EFFECTIVE RESPONSE ²⁰ |
|---|---|
| 1. Lack of political knowledge | Provide instruction in government, history, law, and democracy. |
| 2. Lack of political interest | Incorporate discussion of current local, national, and international issues and events in the classroom, particularly those that young people view as important to their lives. |
| 3. Lack of democratic practice | Encourage students' participation in simulations of democratic processes and procedures. |
| 4. Lack of civic experience | Design, offer and link extracurricular activities and programs that provide opportunities for students to apply civic skills and get involved in their schools or communities. |
| 5. Social media changes communication and news consumption | Complement civic education with digital education in the sense of news media literacy e.g. learning to recognize fake news/propaganda. |

¹⁵ Ahmadi et al. (2016).

¹⁶ Hufer and Lange (2016).

¹⁷ Beaumont (2010).

¹⁸ European Association for the Education of Adults (2019).

¹⁹ Barrett and Pachi (2019).

²⁰ Adapted from: "Six proven practices for effective civic learning" (<http://www.ecs.org/clearinghouse/01/10/48/11048.pdf>).

3.2.1 Challenge: Lack of Political Knowledge

Why is political knowledge important?

- People who think of themselves as less informed are more likely to vote for far-right populism.²¹
- Political knowledge increases the capacity to connect personal/group interests with public policies and candidates.²² For example, Kids Voting USA enhances students' knowledge of politics, reduces gaps in knowledge between the most and least knowledgeable students, and increases consistency between students' opinions on issues and their own potential voting behaviors.²³

- Citizens with greater knowledge about civic matters are less likely to perceive immigrants as a threat for their own country.²⁴
- Political knowledge strengthens citizens' support for democratic values e.g. tolerance²⁵ and this makes them less likely to support authoritarian values promoted by right-wing parties.
- Political knowledge is an important precondition for civic participation.²⁶ Young people who know more about government are more likely to vote, discuss politics, contact the government, and take part in other civic activities than their less knowledgeable counterparts.²⁷
- Learning about the political system by including a realistic view of system responsiveness can avoid political discontentment.²⁸

RESPONSE TO THE CHALLENGE: Provide instruction in government, history, law, and democracy.

HOW TO DO THAT?

TABLE 10: IDEAS ON HOW TO PROVIDE INSTRUCTION IN INTERACTIVE WAYS

| PROJECT | DESCRIPTION | WEBSITE |
|-----------------------------------|--|---|
| We The People | The program promotes responsibility and civic competence through interactive strategies (e.g. a simulated hearing in Congress). | http://new.civiced.org/programs/wtp |
| Project Citizen | US program on how middle school students can identify, research, draft, and present solutions to local problems. | https://www.civiced.org/programs/project-citizen |
| New Shores – a Game for Democracy | “A multiplayer online game with a strong emphasis on active engagement and direct communication between players. It is addressed mostly to middle and secondary school pupils and students of higher education.” ²⁹ | https://newshores.crs.org.pl/#game |
| Learning games | The platform <i>icivics</i> offers a variety of online learning games that can be combined with factual learning. | https://www.icivics.org/teachers |

3.2.2 Challenge: Lack of Political Interest

Why is political interest important?

- Political interest is a key predictor of political (non-)participation.³⁰
- Planned, moderated discussions of controversial issues teach essential democratic skills and encourage student interest in current affairs.³¹

- Recent research on the effects of the school-based Student Voices curriculum³² found that deliberative discussions in the classroom (along with community projects and use of the internet for informational purposes) have a positive effect on political knowledge and interest.³³
- Peer-critical discussion is valuable for fostering political mobilization among young people such as participation in elections.³⁴

21 Hambauer and Mays (2018).

22 Delli Carpini and Keeter (1996).

23 Meirick and Wackman (2004).

24 Popkin and Dimock (2000).

25 Galston (2001); H. Nie, Junn, and Stehlik-Barry (1997).

26 Milner (2008).

27 Delli Carpini and Keeter (1996).

28 Beaumont (2010).

29 <https://newshores.crs.org.pl> (retrieved on April 19, 2020).

30 Galston (2001) Lupia and Philpot (2005); Popkin and Dimock (1999).

31 J. W. Torney-Purta, Britt S. (2009).

32 For more information on the Student Voices curriculum, visit <http://www.annenbergpublicpolicycenter.org/political-communication/student-voices/> (retrieved on April 19, 2020).

33 Feldman, Pasek, Romer, and Jamieson (2007).

34 McDevitt (2009).

RESPONSE TO THE CHALLENGE: Incorporate discussion of current local, national, and international affairs and events into the classroom, particularly those that young people view as important to their lives.

HOW TO DO THAT?

Address difficult issues of local, national, and international interest – involve students in the selection of topics and let them prepare the discussions.

Adapt the curriculum to fit with what is happening in and around the local community and invite local politicians to speak or participate.

TABLE 11: IDEAS ON HOW TO CREATE AND FOSTER DELIBERATIVE DISCUSSIONS IN CLASSROOMS

| PROJECT | DESCRIPTION | WEBSITE |
|-----------------------------|---|---|
| Deliberating in a Democracy | The program promotes the teaching and learning of democratic principles. Students learn civic skills of deliberation by discussing controversial public issues. | http://www.deliberating.org |
| The Deliberative Classroom | The project supports teachers in leading knowledge-based debates. The website offers a general guidance booklet, best-practice short films and debate resource packs. | https://www.teachingcitizenship.org.uk/deliberative-classroom-topical-debating-resources-and-teacher-guidance |

3.2.3 Challenge: Lack of Democratic Practice

Why is democratic practice important?

- In simulations, students learn important skills for civic action such as teamwork, public speaking, close reading, analytical thinking, and the ability to argue for different sides.³⁵ In other words, the kinds of skills that are vital for civic engagement and are linked to democratic values e.g. tolerance, acceptance of contrary opinions.

- Recent evidence indicates that simulations of voting, trials, legislative deliberation, and diplomacy in schools can lead to heightened political knowledge and interest.³⁶

RESPONSE TO THE CHALLENGE: Encourage students' participation in simulations of democratic processes and procedures.

HOW TO DO THAT?

TABLE 12: DIFFERENT APPROACHES TO INTEGRATING DEMOCRATIC PRACTICE INTO SCHOOLS

| APPROACH | PROJECT | DESCRIPTION | WEBSITE |
|-------------------------|--|---|---|
| Mock elections | U18 Election; Kids Voting USA | Combines classroom activities, family dialogue, and an authentic voting experience with respect to federal/national elections. | https://www.u18.org/en/u18-whats-that https://www.kidsvotingusa.org |
| Deliberative settings | Model United Nations (MUN) or Politics and International Security (Pol&Is) | Simulation games in which students learn about international politics and diplomacy by representing a country and its interests. They involve critical thinking, teamwork, and leadership abilities in addition to speaking, debating and writing skills. ³⁷ | https://www.nmun.org/about-nmun/mission-and-history.html https://www.baks.bund.de/sites/baks010/files/broschuere_polis.pdf (DE) |
| Policy simulation games | Planpolitik | Offers online and offline simulation games for different target groups in different formats on various themes e.g. the European Union. | www.planpolitik.de/english/ For Germany see also: https://www.bpb.de/lernen/formate/planspiele/65585/planspiel-datenbank |

³⁵ Gould, Jamieson, Levine, McConnell, and Smith (2011).

³⁶ Oberle and Leunig (2018).

³⁷ <https://www.nmun.org/about-nmun/mission-and-history.html> (retrieved on April 19, 2020).

3.2.4 Challenge: Lack of Civic Experience

Why is civic experience important?

- Classroom-based civic learning has a greater impact on students' commitments to civic participation than neighborhood and family-based activities, and compensates for inequalities in family socialization regarding political engagement.³⁸
- Feelings of low political efficacy are linked to a higher probability of voting for a far-right populist opposition party.³⁹ Building the feeling of being politically efficacious through participation in the community reduces the risk of populist voting.

- Related to Putnam's arguments about social capital,⁴⁰ positive experiences of working together in a peer group where people can rely on each other, give and receive support or discuss previous actual and prospective political participation foster the individual's political efficacy.⁴¹

RESPONSE TO THE CHALLENGE: Design, offer and connect with extracurricular activities and programs that provide opportunities for students to apply civic skills and get involved in their schools or communities.

HOW TO DO THAT?

TABLE 13: APPROACHES THAT FACILITATE CIVIC EXPERIENCE IN STUDENT ACTIVITIES IN SCHOOLS

| APPROACH | DESCRIPTION | WEBSITE |
|---|---|---|
| Output-oriented project-based learning (PBL) | The approach promotes the teaching and learning of democratic principles. Students learn the civic skill of deliberation by discussing controversial public issues. Examples of project themes could include sustainability, food and nutrition (e.g. planting and managing a garden, cooking, ...) bullying, migration, and voluntary work. | https://www.pblworks.org/what-is-pbl |
| School parliament, student councils | Involve students in democratically sharing their ideas, interests and concerns in the decision-making process at school. | https://www.parliament.act.gov.au/Explore-your-Assembly/resources/teacher-resources/student-representative-councils-a-parliamentary-model |

TABLE 14: APPROACHES THAT FACILITATE CIVIC EXPERIENCE IN STUDENT ACTIVITIES OUTSIDE OF SCHOOLS

| APPROACH | DESCRIPTION | WEBSITE |
|---|---|--|
| Service learning, Community service | Service learning combines community service and classroom learning goals in a way that enhances or benefits both the student and the community. Schools should further encourage students to engage in volunteering or doing community service by initiating volunteering and community service as part of a school project. | https://www.accreditedschoolsonline.org/resources/service-learning-for-high-school-and-college-students/ https://www.helperhelper.com/5-practices-engaging-students-community-service |
| School-community partnerships (e.g. with local sports clubs) | Example: The German federal program "OPENION – Bildung für eine starke Demokratie" has the goal of strengthening feelings of empowerment throughout local cooperation and different approaches such as dialogues, advisory councils and other forms of political action supported by local project partners. ⁴² | https://www.openion.de (DE) |
| Issue-based learning outside of schools (e.g. museums) | Example: "Lernort Stadion": the project aims to use the many facets of football to impart political knowledge to young people and to encourage them to participate actively in society. The learning centers are directly located in big football stadiums. | https://www.lernort-stadion.de/about-us-in-english/ |

38 Kahne and Sporte (2009); Neundorf, Niemi, and Smets (2016).

39 Rooduijn (2018); Spruyt et al. (2016).

40 Putnam (2000).

41 Kahne and Westheimer (2006); J. Torney-Purta and Amadeo (2003); Youniss et al. (2002).

42 Käferstein, 2018: <https://www.openion.de/ueber-openion/> (retrieved on March 25, 2020).

3.2.5 Challenge: Social Media Changes Communication and News Consumption

RESPONSE TO THE CHALLENGE: Complement civic education with efforts to enhance online/digital literacy in order to foster critical awareness of disinformation.

HOW TO DO THAT?

The recent debate about fake news, echo chambers and filter bubbles has led to a variety of projects and campaigns whose resources can be used by educators.

“Young people develop an awareness for democratic values through our educational resources when they experience that their opinions are valued. This process teaches them that it is personally more rewarding to be a committed and eloquent individual than despondent and voiceless.”

Source: *Lernort Stadium*

TABLE 15: PROJECTS AND RESOURCES ON NEWS MEDIA LITERACY

| PROJECT | DESCRIPTION | WEBSITE |
|-----------------------|---|---|
| Common sense | The initiative empowers educators and students with lessons, videos and printed materials to strengthen news media literacy. The resources are not only about facts vs. fiction, but also deal with identifying credible sources, and recognizing different perspectives and cultural contexts. | https://www.commonsense.org/education/news-media-literacy-resource-center |
| News Literacy Project | The project offers independent, nonpartisan programs for educators to teach digital citizenship. | https://newslit.org/educators/ |
| NewsFeed Defenders | The platform icivics created a learning game that is designed to sharpen students' news literacy skills by managing a fictional social media site. | https://www.icivics.org/node/2563177/resource?referer=curriculum/play/all&page_title=Curriculum%20All%20Games |

3.3 Civic Education for Adults

Civic education can happen over a variety of different channels:

- Organized political events, workshops, courses run by state or non-state actors.
- Civil society groups like sports clubs, church communities, NGOs.
- The media providing information, reflective and critical analyses.
- Social media.

Part 2 of this resource guide has already offered some answers to the question *what is working against illiberal challenges* regarding civil society groups and (online) media. Strong and inclusive civil societies are key to depolarization. Sports clubs, schools, church communities, and other interest groups can be arenas for talking and working together with people of different views and backgrounds. Civil society groups can be places of inclusiveness where people are united by a common goal or interest. Within these settings, tailored civic education can reach people of every age and teach civics in seminars, projects, and at events. We present four examples of how civic education can involve adults, especially hard-to-reach groups.

State actors in all countries should promote civic education in schools by making space in the civics curriculum and in interdisciplinary projects where skills in civics can be taught.

Successful initiatives need long-term funding and support in communicating their programs to school officials.

Civic education teachers need to be better trained to be able to respond to current challenges.

EXAMPLE 1: “Football, Integration, Democracy and Participation” – A project that hits two birds with one stone: Teaching civics and encouraging voluntary activity.

Football is the most popular sport in almost all European countries. Star players and national teams can use their influence to promote human rights, tolerance and fairness,⁴³ while big football clubs can take social responsibility at the macro level by developing their own campaigns, often against racism and right-wing extremism.

The biggest opportunities for fostering democratic values lie at the micro level but with diversity among their members, they can still be places where social capital emerges. An example is the Social Foundation of Hessian Football in the German state of

43 E.g. through the campaign “No to Racism” <https://www.uefa.com/insideuefa/social-responsibility/respect/no-to-racism/> (retrieved on March 29, 2020).

Hesse and its new project “Football, Integration, Democracy and Participation (FIDT)”. It is a demand-based, low-threshold offer for all Hessian football clubs and aims to reach the following target groups in each club:

- Refugees.
- Migrants on extended stays in Germany, but not having made a commitment to volunteer in the association.
- Women and girls.
- Socially disadvantaged/people from less educated classes.

The program successfully reaches groups that are at risk of voting for illiberals, while bringing them together with refugees to overcome prejudices. In addition to promoting democracy, integration and conflict prevention, the project seeks to attract participation from peer role models by offering the possibility of receiving a scholarship for a DFB football coach license.

The following are some of the civic education modules offered within the project:

- Experience democracy in the club.
- Respect! For working together in football.
- Intercultural conflicts – fit for diversity.
- Conflict competence in football.

Sports clubs, church communities, and interest groups offer a structure in which to implement civic education for a diverse group of people. Including groups that are hard to reach is more likely in this setting compared to participation in state-organized projects. Furthermore, state and non-state actors specifically offer programs in civics, funding opportunities, and professional coaching for each sphere.

EXAMPLE 2: Using social media as a learning platform.

Social media represents an opportunity to provide online civic education. Findings from a social media experiment suggest that online civic education can be effective in fostering democratic orientation and political engagement. Civic education on social media has limitations and faces some challenges but has great potential to reach many people at relatively low cost.⁴⁴

A recent study⁴⁵ carried out a successful experiment with online civic education:

- Advertised on Facebook and Instagram, and incentivized by the possibility to win Netflix coupons.
- 2,300 Tunisians between 18 and 35 took part in the experiment.
- Participants in the treatment group watched three short videos in the context of Tunisia on:
 - Gains (emotional): Stressing the virtues of democracy.
 - Avoidance of loss (emotional): Pitting democracy against autocracy.
 - Efficacy (non-emotional): Explaining elections and knowledge transfer.

Compared to the placebo group, the treatment group showed higher levels of political efficacy, rated democracy and democratic values higher, and rated autocracy as a regime type lower.

While this was online civic education in a post-authoritarian setting such as Tunisia, it is evident that there is a significant, untapped potential in utilizing social media for promoting civic education.

Similar efforts are in the works in Germany, for example, where the creative agency *Explainity* prepares current topics from society, business and politics in an easily understandable manner on YouTube (<https://www.youtube.com/user/explainity>).

EXAMPLE 3: Aktion Zivilcourage – Strengthening democratic processes in rural areas.

Aktion Zivilcourage (Project moral courage) aims to open up perspectives for social engagement and to make democracy tangible. This project organizes community events and (financially) supports local associations, focusing on workshops and coaching in civic education for children, young people, educators and companies. In 2019, they successfully reached 5,000 children, 8,000 young people and 7,000 adults. Among the learning outcomes of their courses and workshops are increased self-efficacy, feelings of empowerment, and improved social skills.

More information: <https://www.aktion-zivilcourage.de> (DE).

⁴⁴ Abbarno, Aaron et al. (2019), <https://doi.org/10.1257/rct.4509-1.0> (retrieved on April 13, 2020).

⁴⁵ Ibid.

EXAMPLE 4: Back to school – How student-parent programs can teach civics.

Involving parents in their children’s education offers an opportunity to reach and bring together adults from different milieus. The organization *Families in Schools* as part of *Project Citizen* aims to strengthen people’s capacity to participate competently and responsibly in the political system.

During *Project Citizen*, an entire class of students deliberate to identify a public policy problem in their community. After researching it and evaluating potential solutions, they develop their own solution and public policy, as well as an action plan to enlist local or state authorities to adopt their proposed policy.

Many of the student groups involved in the program take the next step of direct civic engagement by contacting appropriate public officials to get their policy proposal adopted. Families in Schools’ goal is to seamlessly integrate parental input and family participation into the core activities at each stage of the program.

Overall, the program helps participants to learn how to monitor and influence public policy. Teachers and students make sure that families are informed and included. In the process, they develop support for democratic values and principles, tolerance, and feelings of political efficacy.⁴⁶

⁴⁶ https://www.civiced.org/images/stories/ProjectCitizen/PC_Community/Parent_Engagement_Supplement_Final.pdf.
For Project Citizen see: <https://www.civiced.org/pc-program> (retrieved on April 3, 2020).



PART 4:

Resources for Democratic Politicians and Political Parties

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Illiberal political parties – such as the Sweden Democrats and the Alternative for Germany – have gained increasing support in recent decades. Illiberal parties lack full commitment to the institutions and norms that make a democracy meaningful and enduring, such as civil liberties, the rule of law, and horizontal accountability (see sub-section 1.1.1).

Such parties demonstrate this lack of commitment by, for instance, supporting political violence, challenging courts, and agitating against minorities (see Table 16). When in power, illiberal politicians often dismantle democratic institutions piece by piece while maintaining a façade of compliance with the law.

The emergence of an illiberal party challenges democratic politicians in numerous ways. How should they respond? Demonize the challenger and risk alienating some voters? Invite illiberal parties to join a coalition government and risk normalizing their illiberal rhetoric and ideology? Or confront the illiberal party and risk giving their main issues disproportionate attention in public debate?

In this chapter, we organize the potential responses for democratic political parties into three categories:

- 1 **Approaches of Exclusion** – demonize and exclude the illiberal party and their issues;
- 2 **Approaches of Integration** – include them in coalition governments and political discourse; and
- 3 **Approaches of Confrontation** – try to combine the advantages of the first two options.

Section 4.1 discusses the approaches of democratic parties vis-à-vis illiberal challengers and presents research-based arguments for and against adopting them. Section 4.2 offers some insights into what has actually worked in reducing the success of illiberal parties in Europe. Section 4.3 recapitulates and concludes this chapter.

4.1 Strategies of Democratic Parties vis-à-vis Illiberal Parties

Democratic political parties have adopted very different approaches in response to the growing strength of illiberal parties. In general, the established, democratic parties do not seem to have followed a clear and thoroughly laid out strategy, but rather have gone down a “learning by doing” path combining varying approaches, and adapting to changes in context.¹ These approaches can broadly be divided into three categories: approaches of exclusion, integration, and confrontation (Table 16). Party strategies differ in their rhetoric about, and behavior towards, the illiberal parties. The option of changing the issue positions of the democratic party is also handled in different ways.

Approaches of exclusion entail demonizing and excluding the illiberal party, and build on the idea famously formulated by Karl Popper, that a tolerant society cannot tolerate the intolerant.² Approaches of integration entail including illiberal parties in government coalitions and perhaps even accepting some of their policy positions. This may be an attempt to avoid contributing to increased polarization but can also be a strategy to deradicalize the illiberals by forcing them to assume responsibility.³ Approaches of confrontation can be seen as a middle path between exclusion and integration. This approach seeks to strike a balance between exclusion and integration by incorporating both an unwavering critical stance towards the illiberal party but at the same time making room for rigorous debate.

1 For example, many of the state-level German parties do not follow a specific strategy, but instead utilize a “learning by doing” approach. See Heinze (2020).

2 Popper (1945/2003, 293).

3 Linz (1978, 34); McCoy and Somer (2019).

TABLE 16: SUMMARY OF THE THREE MOST COMMON STRATEGIES BY DEMOCRATIC PARTIES VIS-À-VIS ILLIBERAL PARTIES⁴

| | EXCLUSION | CONFRONTATION | INTEGRATION |
|---|---|--|--|
| RHETORIC ABOUT THE ILLIBERAL PARTY | Demonizing | Critical deliberation, while clearly distancing own party from the illiberal party | Indifferent |
| BEHAVIOR TOWARDS THE ILLIBERAL PARTY | Establishing legal restrictions and obstacles | Cordon sanitaire | Formal coalitions and collaborations |
| OWN POLICY POSITIONING | Sticking to own party policy positions | Sticking to own party policy positions | Parroting: Copying the illiberal party's positions on key issues |

4.1.1 Approaches of Exclusion

Approaches in this category are predicated on the idea that illiberal parties cannot be tolerated in a democratic political system and therefore must be treated fundamentally differently from other parties. The core message to potential voters for illiberal parties is that “illiberal parties are evil and do not belong here”. By adopting approaches of exclusion, democratic actors hope to decrease the salience of the illiberal party and its issues, and consequently also its share of the vote. This disengagement from political agreements, collaborations, and debates is intended to signal to the electorate that the party is illegitimate and that handing them political power would be dangerous. Approaches in this vein may also seek to convince the populace that a vote for the illiberal party is wasted, in the hope that they will cast their vote for a democratic party with higher chances of having political influence.⁵

Examples of approaches within this category include:

- A *demonizing rhetoric*, by which the illiberal party and its actors are portrayed as the embodiment of malicious ideas, such as those associated with Nazism or fascism.⁶
- Establishing *legal obstacles* for the illiberal party. This may include banning the party, raising the vote share threshold for seats in parliament, or changing other electoral rules to the illiberal party's disadvantage.⁷
- *Business as usual* when it comes to the democratic parties' own policies. This means sticking to the parties' core issues and policies, while more or less ignoring the illiberal party's core issues in an attempt to avoid increasing the salience of the illiberal party's core issues.⁸

Why Adopt Approaches of Exclusion?

Scholars have argued strongly in favor of measures such as establishing party bans and other legal obstacles to combat the rise of illiberal parties. The underlying argument is often that if these parties are allowed to grow and to spread their views, the current situation may deteriorate even further and that the history of the 20th century demonstrates that taking no action can lead to disaster.⁹ If a party ban is not feasible, some scholars suggest changes in the electoral system or rules for state funding and media coverage as alternatives to reduce the outreach and influence of illiberal parties.¹⁰

Moreover, many illiberal parties strike a careful balance between presenting themselves as legitimate and simultaneously advancing a clearly illiberal agenda. They often tread cautiously to not push boundaries too far, which could cost them votes.¹¹ A demonizing strategy seeks to highlight their illiberal attributes in order to dissuade some of their potential supporters who are more moderate in their views.

Why Not Adopt Approaches of Exclusion?

Several academics argue that no empirical evidence suggests that demonization is an effective measure for containing illiberal advances in a democracy.¹² Once an illiberal party has successfully entered the national party system, demonizing it does not seem to reduce their support.¹³ They skillfully represent and give voice to citizens who feel ostracized by other parties by politicizing previously ignored or muted issues. The demonization of parties pursuing such a strategy may instead contribute to polarization, and augment their image as a victim of exclusion by an

⁴ Our categorization of response strategies builds on Meguid (2005) who wrote about dismissive, adversarial and accommodative strategies as well as Minkenberg (2001) who used the concept of confrontation as a sub-label for strategies of disengagement. In addition, we draw on Downs (2001) and Goodwin (2011) who were among the first to use the two-fold categorization of engage and disengage (former) and inclusion and exclusion (latter) when addressing the strategies of democratic parties towards niche parties and the radical right.

⁵ Art (2017, 577–578).

⁶ van Heerden and van der Brug (2017).

⁷ Downs (2001).

⁸ Meguid (2005).

⁹ Bale (2007).

¹⁰ van Donselaar (2017, 549–551).

¹¹ Akkerman (2016, 278).

¹² See summary in Downs, Manning, and Engstrom (2009).

¹³ van Heerden and van der Brug (2017).

“evil elite”.¹⁴ The consequence can be an increase in electoral support for the illiberal party and a boost for its image as owner of their key issues (such as immigration).¹⁵

Some also argue that demonization is easily defeated by de-demonization strategies. Illiberal parties can just change their rhetoric and compromise on some of their more radical policies, thus making it very hard for democratic parties to maintain an excluding and demonizing approach.¹⁶

It is tempting and perhaps morally justifiable to “fight fire with fire”, and separate one’s own party from an illiberal party, its policies, and its voters. However, this typically leads to a vicious circle of polarization and division of society into camps, which only aids illiberal parties in gaining more support.¹⁷ In addition, ignoring the issues that are making an illiberal party grow can cause the democratic party to come across as unresponsive to voters and their concerns.¹⁸ Reinforcing its own positions of tolerance and multiculturalism, while concerns about migration are growing in salience, also has drawbacks.¹⁹ It may make the democratic party seem out of touch with reality, in contrast to the illiberal party which claims to be “telling it like it is” and to represent “real people” rather than “the elite”.²⁰



An unintended consequence of using legal obstacles aimed at illiberal parties can also be a decrease in trust for the parties in government.²¹ It is important to keep in mind that democracy fundamentally entails compromising between a large plurality of

views,²² and if democratic parties choose to rely on approaches of exclusion to root out intolerance from party systems, they may appear intolerant of plurality.

4.1.2 Approaches of Integration

Approaches of integration are chosen as attempts at reducing polarization and abiding by democratic principles of inclusion and plurality. This includes parroting – adopting the illiberal party’s policy positions in an effort to seize ownership of issues that are central to the illiberal party – and engaging in official collaborations such as government coalitions with the illiberal party.²³

When the support of illiberal parties grows, democratic parties pursuing integrative measures typically pay significant attention to the illiberal party’s main issues in an attempt to win back voters.²⁴ The hope is to both satisfy an assumed demand from voters as well as to limit the attention that illiberal parties receive.²⁵

Another approach of integration is to collaborate with the illiberal party, either in parliament or in government as coalition partners. Parties may opt for this in order to obtain government power, to achieve a particular legislative agenda, or to win back voters from the illiberal party.²⁶ Forming a government with an illiberal party can also be an attempt to keep them busy “fixing potholes” so that they do not have the time and resources to promote more radical policies.²⁷

Examples of approaches of integration include:

- **Parroting.** Copying or attempting to take over the illiberal party’s ownership of an issue or positions on their key issues.²⁸
- An *indifferent rhetoric* toward the illiberal party. Democratic parties use neither explicitly positive nor negative language towards and about them.
- *Engaging in formal collaborations* with the illiberal party. This may include parliamentary collaborations, official governmental support, or forming a coalition government.

Why Adopt Approaches of Integration?

The merits of approaches of integration are disputed between scholars. Some research points to the benefits of collaboration and parroting. For instance, illiberal parties often claim that they

¹⁴ Rovira Kaltwasser (2017, 501–503); Saveljeff (2010).

¹⁵ Meguid (2008, 31); Geden (2007, 24).

¹⁶ Akkerman (2016, 280).

¹⁷ McCoy and Somer (2019).

¹⁸ Downs (2001).

¹⁹ Bale et al (2010).

²⁰ Downs (2001); Heinze (2018).

²¹ Heinze (2018); Grzymala-Busse (2019).

²² Zen (2006).

²³ Van Spanje and de Graaf (2018).

²⁴ De Lange (2017, 599).

²⁵ Heinze (2018); Bale et al. (2010).

²⁶ De Lange (2017, 591).

²⁷ Berman (2008).

²⁸ Van Spanje and de Graaf (2018).

“fill a gap” by representing issues that have allegedly been ignored by the ruling parties. Parroting the illiberal party or adopting its policy positions can enable democratic parties to assume issue ownership and win back voters.²⁹ However, the cost of adopting some of the illiberal party’s radical policies can be an ideological U-turn that consequently risks a loss of traditional voters opposed to the sudden shift. By adopting some of these controversial issues themselves, democratic parties may hope to control and hence soften the implementation of more radical policies. However, they still need to decide whether winning back a few voters from the illiberal party is worth the price.

If they decide it is a price worth paying, some research suggests that parroting is an efficient approach if done in combination with an effective ostracization of the illiberal party. That is, when a democratic party adopts some of the issue positions of the illiberal party, it must also be able to keep it out of collaborations. Only then will a vote for the democratic party be the best choice for voters who favor the newly adopted positions since the illiberal party has no power to implement them.³⁰

Analysts point to other potentially positive sides of including illiberal parties in government. They are claimed to often perform badly in government, with mundane but necessary issues (such as “fixing potholes”³¹) distracting them from pushing their radical policies. Illiberal parties are often better at mobilizing electoral support than at translating policies into action. That tends to disappoint their support base and eventually presents the illiberal party with the choice of leaving government or losing electoral support.³²

Why Not Adopt Approaches of Integration?

A large body of research points to the risks of approaches of integration. For example, illiberal parties tend to have a contagion effect when legitimized by integrative measures. Any interactions with other parties provide varying levels of agenda-setting powers. For instance, radical right parties have often managed to successfully shift democratic parties’ positions to the right on cultural and social issues such as immigration, whether they are in parliament or in government. Making sure they stay a pariah can help limit this agenda-setting power of an illiberal party.³³

When it comes to *collaboration*, some scholars suggest that inclusion in government forces illiberal parties to deradicalize.³⁴ However, other researchers argue that such a moderation has

not materialized with those parties that are in fact in government, such as the Swiss SVP since 2003, and the Austrian BZÖ between 2006 and 2008.³⁵ Even parties that became slightly less radical while in office re-radicalized as soon as they joined the opposition again.³⁶

Parroting strategies have also been suggested to produce more negative than positive effects. Studies show that mainstream parties do not benefit electorally from emulating illiberal parties’ positions on immigration for instance.³⁷ It can instead legitimize the illiberal parties’ radical positions while at the same time raise the question of whether the parroting party is serious about their newly adopted position.³⁸ The parroting approach may thus have the unwanted effect of increasing the illiberal party’s vote share. The democratic party can end up contributing to the perceived significance of the illiberal party’s main issue and only bolstering the credibility of the original issue owners amongst voters.³⁹

The ideological U-turn also risks alienating core supporters of democratic parties, who do not approve of the new position, and subsequently lead to internal dissent.⁴⁰ This further undermines the credibility of the parroting party with additional vote losses as a consequence.⁴¹

A recent study shows that democratic parties (both on the center-left and center-right of the political spectrum) are more likely to adopt stricter stances on immigration when radical right parties start gaining more support (especially when they are close to entering parliament), regardless of whether the electorate leans more towards anti-immigration policies or not.⁴² Democratic parties’ decisions to move to the right seem to be more a function of what they believe will weaken the challenger party, rather than a genuine increase in demand (public opinion) for more restrictive immigration policies. Taking Austria as an example, the authors argue that accommodating the positions of the radical right challenger party does not in fact seem to weaken them. Countries like Sweden also fit this description, where the radical right party remains strong despite the mainstream parties shifting to relatively strict stances on immigration. The rightward shifts in these countries seem to have made anti-immigration policies and discourse more legitimate, in turn enhancing the illiberal parties’ attractiveness to competent personnel, helping them to further expand.⁴³

29 Bale et al (2010).

30 Van Spanje and de Graaf (2018).

31 Berman (2008).

32 Heinsisch (2003).

33 Norris (2005); van Spanje (2017, 485); Minkenberg (2001).

34 Berman (2008); Heinsisch (2003).

35 Akkerman & Rooduijn (2015); Akkerman (2016, 279).

36 Akkerman (2016, 276).

37 Abou-Chadi and Krause (2018); Spoon and Klüver (2020).

38 Akkerman and Rooduijn (2015).

39 Abou-Chadi and Krause (2018).

40 Bale et al (2010).

41 Heinze (2018); Abou-Chadi and Wagner (2019); Bale et al (2010).

42 Abou-Chadi and Wagner (2018).

43 Abou-Chadi, Krause and Cohen (2019).

Perhaps most importantly, parties that have adopted approaches of integration do not tend to go back to approaches of exclusion or confrontation. Once integrative approaches are adopted, they cannot easily be undone.⁴⁴ If unsuccessful, approaches of integration may thus legitimize and empower the illiberal party rather than diminish it.

4.1.3 Approaches of Confrontation

The idea behind approaches of confrontation is to combine the advantages of both exclusion and integration: Continuously levelling criticism at the illiberal party's policies without demonizing the individuals, which necessitates engaging with them in critical debates while refraining from any formal collaboration. The hope is that by unveiling and challenging an illiberal party's stances on issues, voters will recognize how narrow-minded and harmful their policies are. These measures include adopting a *cordon sanitaire* – signaling to the electorate that the illiberal party is not suited for parliamentary or governmental collaboration. Democrats often hope that this strategy will either reduce the vote share of illiberal parties or deradicalize them.

Approaches of confrontation include:

- **An unwavering criticism** of the illiberal party and its policies. Adopting a rhetoric that does not categorically demonize the illiberal party and its leaders, but focuses on the problematic and illiberal substance of their policies.
- **A *cordon sanitaire***. Democratic parties openly refusing to collaborate or negotiate with the illiberal party in parliament, and do not entertain the possibility of a government coalition that includes them.⁴⁵
- **Sticking to their own parties' positions**.

Why Adopt Approaches of Confrontation?

Approaches of confrontation avoid several pitfalls of both the exclusion and integration approaches.

In terms of rhetoric, approaches of confrontation are **unwaveringly critical** of and towards illiberal parties, and in particular their policies, without demonizing the party as such or the individuals who lead and support them. Such a strategy avoids the potential negative effects of normalizing and legitimizing illiberal parties in integrative approaches. At the same time, the strategy minimizes the risk of alienating more moderate supporters of illiberal parties that the demonization in exclusionary approaches can result in. Allowing channels of communication to remain open

and engaging in vigorous debates rather than simply ignoring or demonizing them, undercuts the illiberal party's argument that "the political elite" is conspiring against them. Thus, while red lines against violations of democratic norms must be drawn, the reasons have to be explained – again and again. Challenging the illiberal parties' position holds the promise of convincing voters that the illiberal party is wrong. Democratic parties should be careful not to accept the illiberal party's own framing of the issue, however.⁴⁶ As an example, Müller provides the following scenario: *"Were there really millions of unemployed in France in the 1980s? Yes. Had every single job been taken by an 'immigrant', as the Front National wanted the electorate to believe? Of course not."*⁴⁷ This way, democratic parties can reach (potential) supporters of illiberal parties while at the same time refraining from inadvertently raising such parties' profiles by adopting their framings and expressions.

More arguments and ideas for effective deliberative strategies towards illiberal parties can be found in [Section 2.1](#).

By placing an illiberal party into a *cordon sanitaire*, democratic parties openly refuse to collaborate or negotiate with this party.⁴⁸ A ***cordon sanitaire*** presents a choice to the illiberal party: Either they stick to their policies and are excluded from collaborations in parliament and government coalitions, or they deradicalize. The democratic parties ensure that a fully illiberal party does not hold government positions or influence policy through deals and agreements in either case.

Obviously, a ***cordon sanitaire*** is a safe bet to keep illiberal parties from getting a seat in government. It also sends a clear signal that illiberal policies are not legitimate in a democracy.⁴⁹ For instance, in interwar Belgium, all parties and groups – including the Catholic Church of Belgium and the Communists – stayed united against the far right party, and this ultimately stopped its rise.⁵⁰ A contemporary example is Sweden where the main response by the democratic parties against the Sweden Democrats has been a united ***cordon sanitaire***. Neighboring Denmark, Norway, and Finland have adopted more integrative strategies. At the time of writing, Sweden is the only Nordic country with a radical right illiberal party that has not been a support party in the national government.⁵¹

By sticking to one's ***own party's position***, democratic parties may avoid the pitfall of unintentionally strengthening the illiberal party, which seeking to emulate their issues in public debate can lead to, especially when democratic parties lack credibility on these matters in the eyes of the voters (see discussion about parroting above). They also avoid disappointing their core supporters with political U-turns.⁵²

44 Heinze (2018).

45 Akkerman and Rooduijn (2015).

46 Müller (2017, 84–85; 103).

47 Müller (2017, 84).

48 Akkerman and Rooduijn (2015).

49 Downs (2002, 49).

50 Møller, Skaaning and Cornell (2017, 20).

51 Heinze (2017).

52 Van Spanje and de Graaf (2018).

Why Not Adopt Approaches of Confrontation?

While a *cordon sanitaire* seems to be an effective tool for restricting the immediate political influence of illiberal parties, it may not be as successful in reducing their vote share or deradicalizing them. Some illiberal parties subjected to ostracizing approaches, such as the Austrian FPÖ and the Finland's True Finns, have instead radicalized further,⁵³ while other parties have neither moderated nor radicalized their positions.⁵⁴ Illiberal party leaders of the Belgian Flemish Bloc, the Sweden Democrats, the Danish People's Party, and the Dutch Party for Freedom even welcomed a *cordon sanitaire* and used it to play up victimhood in largely successful efforts to attract voters.⁵⁵ Hence, *if* democratic parties attempt a *cordon sanitaire*, they must carefully prepare to counter such narratives with a convincing communication strategy. However, this may be easier said than done, which adds to the risks of adopting a *cordon sanitaire*.

Another potential drawback of confrontation is that an unwavering criticism of and ongoing debate on the illiberal party's issue positions may keep the illiberal positions at the center of public debate and reinforce the illiberal party as the owner of these issues. This increased issue salience can prime voters to cast their votes based on this issue, rendering this strategy potentially more harmful than beneficial to the democratic parties.⁵⁶

4.2 Reasons for Recent Declines in Illiberal Far-right Parties in Europe

To find out what has worked in the past, we studied all 16 cases where European populist far-right parties – an influential subtype of illiberal parties – have lost substantial vote shares or government office since 2002.⁵⁷ Table 17 summarizes the results and the Online Appendix provides detailed case descriptions and sources.⁵⁸ The main finding is, perhaps disappointingly, that the declines of populist far right parties cannot be linked to the actions of democratic parties. So, for all the deliberations detailed above, the choice of strategy unfortunately does not seem to make a significant difference.



Conversely, *internal factors* are more prevalently associated with the loss of support or office for these illiberal parties than *external or contextual factors*. *Internal factors* are those where the responsible actors are members of the illiberal party itself, such as leadership changes, divisions within the party, or scandals involving party members. *External factors* are those where external actors, or the actions of external factors, such as the emergence of a similar party, parroting strategies by democratic parties, or issues with governmental collaborations. *Contextual factors* are those that relate neither to the illiberal party nor its competitors directly, but rather that a change occurred in the general political context that worked to the disadvantage of the illiberal party. Examples include a change of electoral rules (Romania, 2008), a terrorist attack (Norway, 2011), and the country deciding to leave the EU (United Kingdom, 2016).

The color coding on Table 17 indicates whether a far right populist party was part of the government as a senior (orange) or junior (yellow) partner or not at all (green). Entering government as a junior coalition partner was not necessarily bad for the electoral performance of the illiberal party. Although we do not include illiberal parties that managed to stay in government, such as the Swiss People's Party, we still see that inclusion in government as such does not reduce their vote share. *If* illiberals suffered a substantial loss of vote share, they always lost government office.

Overall, internal/coalition conflicts are most often behind a loss of votes or office for European illiberal parties, often in combination with a leadership change, a scandal, or the introduction of a similar party. In the following paragraphs, we discuss these four factors in more detail.

53 Van Spanje and Van der Brug (2007) mention the Walloon and French National Fronts, the Republicans in Germany and the Dutch Centre Democrats during the period 1989–2004.

For more recent examples, see the Austrian Freedom Party, which was in government with the Austrian Christian Democratic Party in the early 2000s, when they elected a new leader that radicalized the party (Art 2017, 585; Heinisch and Hauser 2016, 76). The True Finns were in cabinet in 2017, when they elected a new party leader and radicalized, leading the PM to split up the governing coalition as he thought they were now too radical: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/jun/12/finnish-prime-minister-seeks-to-break-up-coalition-government> (retrieved on April 10, 2020).

54 Akkerman & Rooduijn (2015).

55 Akkerman (2016, 159 and 280); Lindroth (2016, 107); Downs (2002, 48); Lucardie, Akkerman, & Pauwels (2016, 209–210); <https://sverigesradio.se/sida/gruppssida.aspx?programid=83&grupp=14020&artikel=7399248> (retrieved on April 10, 2020).

56 Meguid (2005).

57 We used data from the PopuList (Rooduijn et al. 2019) to identify all right-wing populist parties (a sub-group of illiberal parties) in Europe, and combined this with data from ParlGov (Döring and Manow 2019) to get their vote shares and parliament/executive status over the years. We then selected all far-right populist parties that have substantially reduced their vote share or lost government office between any two elections since 2002. Although data further back in time was available, we chose to cut off earlier in order to reduce the number of cases to a manageable quantity for qualitative case studies. We chose 2002 as the cut-off year, as we believe it is reasonable to assume that the political world experienced a substantial transformation after the 9/11 terrorist attacks in 2001, and thus it is more suitable to exclusively focus on post-9/11 cases for comparative analysis. We then studied what the cause of loss of votes or office could be for these parties, primarily using scholarly sources, but also quality media outlets. Based on these resources, we formed a cohesive idea of the cause of vote or office loss and categorized the reasons to identify which factors were more often responsible for the loss, and the results are presented in Table 17.

58 <https://www.v-dem.net/en/our-work/research-projects/democratic-resilience/> (retrieved on April 10, 2020).

TABLE 17: FACTORS AFFECTING THE LOSS OF VOTES OR OFFICE FOR EUROPEAN FAR-RIGHT POPULIST PARTIES 2002–2020.

| COUNTRY | PARTY | YEAR | PREVIOUS POSITION | SUPPORTED PREVIOUS GOVERNMENT | VOTE LOSS | OFFICE LOSS | INTERNAL FACTORS TOTAL = 21 | | | | EXTERNAL FACTORS TOTAL = 13 | | | CONTEXTUAL FACTORS TOTAL = 4 | | |
|----------------|-----------|------|-------------------|-------------------------------|-----------|-------------|--------------------------------|----------|----------------|------------------|--|-----------|-----------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------|--|
| | | | | | | | INTERNAL / COALITION CONFLICT | SCANDALS | LEADER RESIGNS | DERADICALIZATION | RELUCTANCE TO JOIN / COLLABORATE IN GOVERNMENT | PARROTING | LOST TO SIMILAR PARTY | PUBLIC PRIORITIES CHANGED | CHANGE OF ELECTORAL RULES | |
| Poland | PiS** | 2007 | PM | Yes | | Yes | Yes | | | | | | | | | |
| Austria | FPÖ** | 2006 | Govt. | Yes | | Yes | Yes | | | | | | Yes | | | |
| Austria | FPÖ | 2019 | Govt. | Yes | Yes | Yes | | Yes | Yes | | | | | | | |
| Austria | BZÖ | 2013 | Govt. | Yes | | Yes | | | Yes | | | | | | | |
| Bulgaria | Ataka | 2019 | Govt. | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | | | Yes | | Yes | | | |
| Finland | Ps | 2017 | Govt. | | | Yes | Yes | | Yes | Yes | | | | | | |
| Norway | FrP | 2020 | Govt. | Yes | | Yes | | | | | Yes | | | | | |
| Slovakia | SNS** | 2010 | Govt. | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | | | | | | Yes | | | |
| Belgium | VB* | 2010 | Opp. | | Yes | | Yes | | Yes | | | | Yes | | | |
| Bulgaria | Ataka | 2014 | Opp. | Yes | Yes | | Yes | Yes | | | | | | | | |
| Denmark | DF | 2019 | Opp. | Yes | Yes | | | Yes | | | | Yes | Yes | | | |
| France | FN* | 2007 | Opp. | | Yes | | | | | Yes | | Yes | | | | |
| Netherlands | PVV* | 2012 | Opp. | Yes | Yes | | | | | Yes | | | | | | |
| Norway | FrP | 2013 | Opp. | | Yes | | | | | | Yes | Yes | | Yes | | |
| Romania | PRM | 2008 | Opp. | | Yes | | | | | | | | | Yes | Yes | |
| United Kingdom | UKIP | 2017 | Opp. | Yes | Yes | | | | Yes | | | Yes | | Yes | | |
| Total | 16 | | | 10 | 11 | 8 | 7 | 6 | 5 | 3 | 4 | 4 | 5 | 3 | 1 | |

* Later recovered their vote share

** Later recovered their vote share and regained office

The Four Most Common Reasons Behind Substantial Loss of Votes or Office for European Illiberal Parties, 2002–2020

1. Internal Splits in the Party or Coalition

In seven of 16 cases of illiberal parties that lost votes or office, splits in the party or the coalition was a main contributing factor. For example, the radical right party FPÖ split following serious divisions after a more radicalizing leadership in Austria in 2005.⁵⁹ In Finland, the True Finns split and were excluded from government in 2017 after a period of deradicalization that was followed by a leadership change and radicalization.⁶⁰ In Belgium, disagreements over political strategy led to divisions within the Flemish

Bloc in the 1980s and 1990s, which grew over the years and after a substantial vote loss led to a split of the party in 2010.⁶¹ And in Bulgaria in 2019, after media attention focused on party-internal scandals, Ataka was thrown out of the coalition.⁶² When these parties experience internal or intra-coalitional tensions, external pressure on the issues causing the divisions seem to contribute substantially to a split of the party or coalition. Typically, the combined vote share for both parties declines and usually only one continues to gather a substantial number of votes after the split.

2. Dishonesty or Criminal Activity of Party Elites

In six of 16 cases, a scandal occurred in close proximity to the vote loss. Examples include Poland in 2007 when a bribery scandal involved the Deputy Prime Minister and member of the Law and

59 Heinisch and Hauser (2016, 79).

60 <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-finland-government-populists/finland-dodges-government-collapse-after-nationalists-split-idUSKBN19411Z>; <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/jun/12/finnish-prime-minister-seeks-to-break-up-coalition-government> (retrieved on April 10, 2020).

61 Lucardie, et al. (2016, 209–210).

62 <https://sofiaglobe.com/2019/07/25/bulgarias-ultra-nationalist-united-patriots-coalition-officially-disbanded/> (retrieved on April 10, 2020).

Justice Party;⁶³ Austria in 2019 when the Vice Chancellor and party leader of the Austrian Freedom Party and another party member were caught on tape saying that they wanted to control the media;⁶⁴ Bulgaria in 2014 and 2015 when the party leader of Ataka was arrested for physical altercations and caught on camera performing Hitler salutes;⁶⁵ and Denmark where the Danish People's Party was accused in 2019 of misuse of EU funds.⁶⁶ The attention around criminal acts and misconduct damaged the parties' vote shares, and cost them cabinet positions or Prime Ministerial office. There are other cases, such as the Sweden Democrats, where misbehaving illiberal party members seemed not to damage the party's vote share.⁶⁷ It is possible that misbehavior has a stronger effect if it is connected to corruption or other core issues for the illiberal party, and that scandals related to the use of physical violence or racist statements do not make much difference. When looking at political scandals involving all parliamentary parties, researchers found that Sweden had more political scandals than any of the other studied countries (Norway, Denmark, and Finland).⁶⁸ At the same time, the Sweden Democrats are the only illiberal party in the Nordic bloc that did not suffer a loss of office or a substantial vote loss. Most scandals by the Sweden Democrats (and True Finns) are connected to racist attitudes, while most scandals of other illiberal parties (see Table 17, above) are of an economic nature – corruption being the most common. Anti-corruption attitudes are central to the illiberal parties' ideology and identity, and so corruption scandals amongst democratic parties resonate loudly among voters with illiberal attitudes, making them more likely to vote for an illiberal party.⁶⁹ However, corrupt behavior by illiberal actors more seldom turns into a scandal than that of democratic actors. Thus, much of the corruption committed by illiberal actors is not broadcast to the public. Democratic actors could thus benefit from bringing bad behavior, such as corrupt activities by members of illiberal parties, to the voters' attention.⁷⁰

3. Emergence of New Right-wing Party

In five of 16 cases, a new illiberal party attracted voters away from the first. In some cases, the new illiberal parties were less extreme than the original party. For instance, the break-away faction of the Freedom Party, Alliance for the Future of Austria, presented

itself as a market-liberal, more acceptable alternative and gathered votes from the Freedom Party electorate between 2005 and 2008;⁷¹ and the National Front for the Salvation of Bulgaria was also nationalist and rightwing but surrounded by fewer scandals than Ataka, and drew votes from Ataka between 2013 and 2017. In other cases, the new parties were more extreme than the original party. For instance, in Denmark two new illiberal parties emerged (the anti-EU New Right, and the ethno-nationalistic utilitarian Hard Line), and were stricter on immigration than the Danish People's Party, and presented themselves as more radical alternatives. In addition, the Social Democratic Party adopted a stricter stance on immigration, seeking to attract voters as the softer alternative. In effect, the Danish People's Party lost votes to both the left and the right.⁷² When it becomes less socially acceptable to vote for a particular party, such as after a scandal involving the party has surfaced, the emergence of a new party seems to be effective in reducing the original illiberal party's vote share. If it emerges as a right wing protest party that one can vote for without being labeled "racist", it may seem like a more comfortable alternative to many prospective voters. However, in three of the five cases here (Austria, Slovakia, and Belgium), the far-right party that originally lost votes later restored its vote share and/or gained a seat in cabinet.

4. Resignation of the Party Leader

Resignation of the party leader is connected to vote or office loss in five of 16 cases. The rise of illiberal parties is often led by a charismatic leader, and their resignation means that a lot of the party's attraction diminishes. For example, the leader of the Freedom Party in Austria resigned in 2019 after camera footage surfaced of him saying he wanted to control the media;⁷³ the leader of True Finns resigned in 2017 and was replaced by a controversial and polarizing leader, creating divisions in the party;⁷⁴ in Belgium the leader of the Flemish Bloc resigned and left the party when he felt a rival faction had taken over;⁷⁵ and in the UK, the leader of UKIP resigned after winning the fight over Brexit saying he felt his mission was completed.⁷⁶

63 Szczerbiak (2008).

64 <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-48348651> ; <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2019/09/27/austrians-vote-sunday-with-major-corruption-scandal-background/> (retrieved on April 10, 2020).

65 Lansford, (2017, 205); <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-bulgaria-nationalist-arrest/bulgarian-nationalist-leader-arrested-over-fracas-with-students-idUSKCN0T61GQ20151117> (retrieved on April 10, 2020).

66 Kosiara-Pedersen (2019).

67 The Swedish Democrats have had a steady increase in vote share since they entered parliament in 2010, despite being the center of media attention for months due to involvement by members with high positions in a fight outside a restaurant in Stockholm, 2012, where they exhibited aggressive racist and sexist language, and armed themselves with iron pipes (that they did not use). <https://www.svt.se/nyheter/inrikes/sd-topparna-bevaprna-sig-med-jarnror> (retrieved on April 10, 2020).

68 Pollack, Allern, Kantola, and Ørsten (2018).

69 Müller (2017, 23); Hawkins, Rovira Kaltwasser, and Andreadis (2020).

70 Pollack et al. (2018); Herkman (2018).

71 Heinisch and Hauser (2016, 86–87).

72 Kosiara-Pedersen (2019).

73 <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-48348651> (retrieved on April 10, 2020).

74 <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-finland-government-populists/finland-dodges-government-collapse-after-nationalists-split-idUSKBN1941IZ> (retrieved on April 10, 2020).

75 Lucardie, et al. (2016, 210).

76 Heath and Goodwin (2017); Johnston et al. (2017); Prosser (2018).

4.3 Concluding Remarks

Democratic parties normally enact a mix of approaches in response to the emergence of illiberal parties. We presented approaches of exclusion, integration and confrontation a classification of democratic parties' responses. They all have advantages and disadvantages. How and where these approaches are applied and combined affects their success in reducing the influence of illiberal parties. This makes it challenging to provide clear recommendations on which strategy is preferable when.

This is further augmented by the study of 16 European far right populist parties which indicates that internal factors are the most decisive in reducing illiberal parties' vote shares. The strategies of democratic parties seem to make a difference at the margins at best. European far-right parties lost vote shares after changes in leadership, corruption scandals, and internal splits. This leaves democratic parties with one main tool: Use spotlights to broadcast illiberal parties' scandals and internal conflicts.⁷⁷ Democratic parties could also develop creative strategies seeking to force factions in illiberal parties to take positions unpopular with other parts of the party. Essentially this means reverting to the old saying "divide and conquer".

When it comes to the overall strategy, mixing and matching approaches while adapting to changes and learning from mistakes may be the best way to go about it. This points to the confrontational approach, which combines advantages from both approaches of exclusion and approaches of integration.

However, democratic parties should be careful when adopting approaches of integration since they are not as easily reversed as others, given that they may cement the inclusion of illiberal parties.⁷⁸ One should be particularly wary of inviting illiberal parties to

share government responsibility in the hope of achieving deradicalization. Of all European far-right parties that lost votes or office since 2002, only one deradicalized as a result of becoming a government coalition partner.⁷⁹ Finland's True Finns deradicalized in 2015 and as a member of a governing coalition supported legislation on gay marriage, welcomed refugees, and signed off on the Greek bail-out.⁸⁰ However, this created divisions leading to a party split and leadership change, followed by a re-radicalization and exclusion from government in 2017.⁸¹ This supports arguments made by scholars skeptical of approaches of integration.⁸²

Furthermore, it is not a given that illiberal parties will accept an invitation to join government. Several illiberal party leaders explicitly rejected cabinet positions,⁸³ and others have left in protest when asked to compromise too much. For example, when the party left cabinet in protest in January 2020, Odd Eilert Persen of the Progress Party (Norway) said that "there have been too many compromises at the expense of the electorate, and we are not delivering to our voters."⁸⁴

Empirical reality unfortunately demonstrates that there is no single "silver bullet" for how democratic parties should respond to the emergence of illiberal parties. The potential disadvantages of all possible approaches are all too evident. Illiberal challenger parties put democratic parties in a position where there are no good options. Nevertheless, the research summarized in this chapter points to approaches of integration being riskier than others. Confrontational approaches – such as a cordon sanitaire – might at least keep illiberal parties' influence limited and skillful argumentation may succeed in persuading some voters to disengage from illiberal parties. Highlighting debates that can contribute to internal divisions within illiberal parties, and broadcasting widely such divisions along with any scandals that may emerge, seems to be a particularly useful strategy.

77 Downs (2002, 49) also recommends such an approach.

78 Heinze (2018).

79 Since we performed case-studies of many parties, we needed to put a restriction on how far back in time we would go. We decided to go back to 2002 to capture the post-9/11 era until today.

80 <https://www.economist.com/europe/2017/06/14/finlands-populist-party-has-cracked-in-two> (retrieved on April 10, 2020).

81 <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-finland-government-populists/finland-dodges-government-collapse-after-nationalists-split-idUSKBN1941IZ> (retrieved on April 10, 2020).

82 For example, Akkerman (2016, 276).

83 Jimmie Åkesson, leader of the Swedish Democrats, said in an interview that "it is the policy content that matters, and not positions. I think the voters understands that. We will do what we can to influence the policy content as much as possible. Then prestige and things like that can't be in the way." The Danish People's Party leader, Kristian Thulesen Dahl, said in interviews that "...influence is not necessarily greatest [in cabinet position]. So, if we decline minister posts it evokes respect with the voters, I think". Likewise, Gert Wilders, leader of the Dutch Party for Freedom, said that they are content with indirectly influencing policy, and are unwilling to trade anything for office. In 2014, he said: "At the moment, the PVV has 0.0 power, but a lot of influence. You do not need power to have a lot of influence". (p. 159). And the Flemish Bloc in Belgium welcomed the cordon sanitaire, as it would ensure the party's purity and prevent it from having to compromise on its principles. <https://sverigesradio.se/sida/gruppsida.aspx?programid=83&grupp=14020&artikel=7399248> (retrieved on April 10, 2020). Lindroth (2016, 107; Akkerman (2016, 159); Lucardie, Akkerman, and Pauwels (2016, 209–210).

84 <https://www.nrk.no/norge/fylkesleiarane-rasar-1.14861103> (retrieved on April 10, 2020).

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At the Berlin Democracy Conference (11 and 12 November 2019) more than 100 scholars and practitioners discussed about ideas for defending democracy against illiberal challengers.

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Global Standards, Local Knowledge



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