

The State of the Parties

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It is nearly 150 years since a large part of the (male) urban working class were enfranchised by the Representation of the People Act 1867. For much of that time mass democracy has been realised through the mechanism of mass-membership political parties. This system is facing fundamental challenges. Do these amount to a crisis? This article explores the nature of the challenges facing political parties, and the implications for a Christian understanding of citizenship.

Introduction: a story of decline

It is generally agreed, even by supportive commentators, that democracy is facing some tough challenges. Some radical critics go further: the political systems commonly thought of as democracies are not democratic at all – they are republics (US) or constitutional monarchies (UK), where the *demos* are held at arms-length, shut out from power. Treasured notions of democratic citizenship, they argue, are little more than an elaborate con-trick to keep us – the 99% – quiet. While these views do not yet prevail, they have significant momentum, and chime with a broader public sense that democratic political systems are not delivering their desired outcomes. The privileged continue to prosper, while the man or woman on the Clapham omnibus is struggling to pay his or her rent, working longer hours and probably into their 70s.

Political parties, so long thought to be an important part of representative democracies, are now often perceived to be part of the democratic problem.

What is the charge sheet? Common complaints include: they offer insufficient choice to voters; they are indistinct from each other; they are clientistic; they are dominated by a homogenous metropolitan elite; they are unrepresentative of the general public in terms of gender, ethnicity and social class; they are insufficiently principled and simply follow the changing winds of public opinion; they only seek out the general public at election time... and so on. Of course, these are threads drawn from a bigger tapestry of political mistrust and disaffection, the subject of much hand-wringing on the part of national politicians.

It is easy to either underestimate or over-react to these sentiments. On the one hand – as one *Economist* article summarised De Tocqueville – ‘democracies always look weaker than they really are: they are all confusion on the surface but have lots of hidden strengths’.¹ On the other, there are clear and observable trends across Europe, and indeed more broadly, which confirm not just a *mood* of disaffection but actual disengagement. Turnout at major elections, so long thought of as an essential litmus test of a healthy democracy, has declined. Virtually all major European democracies have seen declining party identification and membership, although the UK’s fortunes in this regard have been amongst the worst. Engaged citizens now ‘spread’ themselves across a larger number of parties (with the Green Party and nationalist parties growing in recent years), but it is also the case that overall levels of membership and identification are declining. The pace of change has been brutal – in 1983 3.8% of the electorate were members of the three main political parties, while in 2013 that figure had been reduced to 0.8%.

Democratic Audit estimates that the combined membership of all UK political parties in 2010 sat at around 0.5 million, about 420,000 of whom were drawn from the three main parties. This represents a fall of 200,000 in the decade, mostly attributable to a loss of about 100,000 members each from the Labour and Conservative Parties.

Quoting Sarah Childs, Democratic Audit suggests that these changes are so great in magnitude and singular in direction that 'the era of mass parties is clearly over'.²

Not only do parties have fewer members, but their memberships are less active. James Graham suggests that only around 10-24 per cent of local Labour party members were active during the 2005 general election campaign.³ The core work of ordinary parliamentary democracy – i.e., campaigning during a general election – is carried out by around 250 activists in each constituency. Any party member or organiser will know that this is indeed a symptom of the cycle of increasing public frustration. The statement 'we only see you lot when elections are on' hurts because, all too often, it is true – not because political parties set out to alienate the general public, but because they focus their limited resources at times of maximum potential impact. There is a further knock-on effect on party funding strategies, which focus not on mass membership but on attracting the support of high net-worth individuals, which in turn raises the spectre of money buying political influence.

Political parties are clearly experiencing a crisis, and it is very likely that they will not be able to muddle along for very much longer. What is less clear is whether this necessarily threatens the quality of our democracy, or whether our political system has the capacity to adapt and survive, incorporating different political mechanisms which will replace or partially replace mass-membership political parties.

In the last decades, most Christian agencies and lobby groups have advocated a 'stepping-stone' model of public engagement which sees voting and party membership/involvement as the key steps to political influence. They have been preaching to the choir. The British Social Attitudes Survey reports that the religious are already more likely to think that voting is a civic duty: the more religious you are, the more likely you are to think that, and the more likely you are to identify with a party.⁴ In other words, the religious are more inclined towards basic, familiar forms of democratic acts than their non-religious counterparts.

How is that to be interpreted? Are religious believers better, more responsible citizens? Or are they behind the times, attached to forms of citizenship that many others have discarded as ineffective? Politics in general is not just a matter of setting out the best vision, or identifying the best policies to achieve it. It is also about understanding *how* power is built and exercised. Christian political engagement tends to prioritise the first of those three, occasionally exploring the second, while usually ignoring the third (with honourable exceptions). With a closely contested general election around the corner, but considerable anxiety about the durability of political parties, a more holistic Christian political praxis must pay greater attention to the 'how' of democratic politics. It must ask whether the changing fortunes of political parties as the core of the participative life of a democracy require us to do anything differently.

Part I of this article seeks to explore the democratic function of political parties – what, ideally, should they achieve? Part II considers some of the underlying social, political and economic factors which may lay behind the public distrust and disengagement with political parties, digging beneath the usually unfair complaint that 'politicians are just in it for themselves'. Part III will briefly consider the specific challenges facing individual political parties and then turn to the question of what a faithful Christian citizenship looks like in twenty-first century Britain.

I The life and soul of the party

It was unfortunate for the main political parties that the closing stages of the Scottish independence referendum campaign coincided with their party conferences. The contrast between the passionate feelings and participative debate, north of the border, and the images of grey-suited professionals in secure-cordon conferences held in expensive hotels, south of the border, was stark. If politics can be like *that*, why on earth does it usually look like *this*? The contrast exacerbated the sense that party conferences and all they represent are part of a deceased form of politics – or at least one that was dead to the general public.

This is a forceful argument. Party conferences are increasingly hollowed-out events, and the ratio of party members to public affairs consultants is increasingly unflattering. Yet it is also an unfair comparison. The judgement that Scottish voters were required to make on 18 September 2014 was a complex one, based not simply on how each voter felt or thought about their identity or national loyalties. Responsible citizens had to think carefully about likely practical outcomes on a range of issues – the problems of sharing a currency, membership of international institutions such as the EU, and so on. Ultimately, however, there was one choice to be made, two options to choose

from. Referenda – particularly such momentous, constitution-shaping ones – are not political ‘business as usual’. The complex, slow and complicated processes of policy development and implementation, the high-stakes positioning that electioneering involves, or the grinding perseverance of delivering local public services year after year – all these things constitute ‘normal’ politics, and require democratic participation of one kind or another. But none generate the dramatic appeal and clarity of choice evoked by a referendum debate.

This alerts us to an important but mostly unobserved point – that political parties are a kind of democratic technology that has evolved within democratic systems to fulfil a collection of specific functions. Political scientists may disagree on the precise composition of the list, but Peter Mair offers a succinct taxonomy in the form of a summary of conditions for party government:

1. A party (parties) wins control of the executive as a result of competitive elections
2. Political leaders are recruited by and through parties
3. Parties offer voters clear policy alternatives
4. Public policy is determined by the party (parties) in the executive
5. The executive is held accountable through parties.⁵

Note here that the list is a condition for *party government*. In UK politics since 1945, only three parties have been able to succeed in fulfilling these conditions. But the list points to general features of parties that will help our exploration.

Organisation

First, parties organise people – candidates and party members – and marshal resources to fight elections. The primary objective is to fight those elections in order to achieve their political goals. They may not even need to win those elections – indeed, some may know that they have no hope of controlling the executive functions of government. They may, for instance, fight elections in order to force a particular issue onto the political agenda, or even to mock or satirise the political system. The crucial point, however, is that political parties and democratic elections are symbiotically linked, and the purpose of elections is to form governments, local and national. Elections are (at least in mainstream liberal democratic theory) the means by which citizens, literally, delegate their ‘power’ of self-government and political parties are those who look to citizens to delegate it to them. Arguably, from a Christian perspective, this understanding of the nature of electoral democracy is overly fixated on the sovereignty of the individual will, as opposed to fuller notions of duty to uphold the demands of public justice. Under a Christian account, voters may be doing something very different in an election – namely putting in place those who will best govern according to divinely established normative purposes of government.⁶ The important connection between political parties and elections, however, would remain.

Coherence

Second, parties are a means of making leadership and representation within a democracy collective, meaningful and effective. A parliamentary system composed entirely of independents would have no coherence – there would be no way to form an executive, or determine which policies should be pursued. A citizen would have his or her representative, but that representative would lack the power to achieve any of the goals that he or she had committed to pursuing before election. To ensure that the citizen has any chance of being meaningfully represented, interests and preferences must be aggregated in some way. Of course, in our Westminster system we do vote for individuals. These individuals are not merely avatars of the party, but we assume that they will work with others to pursue a broader, shared agenda which their voters, in the main, will support.

Yet that picture is a little too abstract: political parties are also part of concrete human communities, shaped by intellectual traditions and human experience. Historically speaking, at least, they do not represent the aggregation of various interests, but social movements. The most obvious example here is the Labour Party – formed as the Labour Representation Committee (LRC) in 1900 which, in the words of Kier Hardie’s founding motion, should be ‘a distinct Labour group in Parliament, who shall have their own whips, and agree upon their policy, which must embrace a readiness to cooperate with any party which for the time being may be engaged in promoting legislation in the *direct interests of labour*’ (my emphasis).⁷ The ‘why’ of the LRC was not political power for the sake of it, but to represent the ‘direct interests of labour’ – a distinct group of people, with a distinct range of interests and aspirations and who are already organised in existing institutions. These groups and institutions are constituted by shared experiences and a shared notion of the good, from which they draw conclusions about the role of the state

and the nature of politics (a crucial point to which we return). And as part of their attempt to secure the interests of particular groups, political parties and movements also perform an important function in developing, training and educating their members and potential political leaders. They are interested in the *formation* of citizens.

Debate

This leads us neatly to our third point. Political parties are networks within which debates about public goods can occur and shared political agendas developed. Given the people being represented, given their concerns and challenges, and given their place and interests in wider society, what actions can the state take to enhance their well-being and improve their fortunes? Of course, given the bewildering complexity and sheer range of government activity, this policy making process is now informed by a much wider group of interests. Yet, in theory at least, political parties still provide representation in a fuller sense – that of recognising and incorporating the interests of particular groups or constituencies (metaphorical and actual) into the direction of the activities of the state.

Accountability

Fourth, political parties are a means by which political power is held accountable. In the case of a winning party, members help secure a form of accountability on the part of their leadership. As noted, parties are little if they are not capable of fighting elections. Members are those who have organised and expended time and money on seeing candidates elected. Those candidates should be attentive to the contributions of those who have worked hard to put them there – not least since a party's internal democratic mechanisms might, for example, see them deselected, or their policies voted down at a party conference.

Even if a given party is unsuccessful in winning an election and gaining executive power – in other words, if they are not in a position to implement their policies – they can nevertheless continue to provide voice and representation to those who elected them, and critical scrutiny on the policies, decisions and directions of the winning parties. They can seek to expose weaknesses in the victors' policy and decisions with a view to building their own credibility as a future government, but also with the hope of contributing to the improvement of processes of government generally. An opposition party may not be able to change the overall direction of a government, but it might be able to exert much influence over policy details and implementation. Often, it might be able to bring a neglected moral consideration to bear on particular decisions – asking not only whether a policy is effective but also whether it is just or right.

Political parties thus remain an indispensable part of the democratic system. In the next part, however, we examine some of the serious structural challenges to their fulfilling of these core functions.

II Structural challenges to parties

Sovereignty curtailed

As noted, a key purpose of parties is the contestation of elections with a view to forming governments. Clearly, parties still fight elections (even though many feel that the process of building public support and winning an election is losing its credibility, for example through the reliance on negative campaigning and attacks on character). Increasingly, however, winning an election is no longer a guarantee of the ability to form an effective government.

This is not simply a point about the decline of the two-party system (briefly addressed below) but about the increased complexity of governing in a globalised environment. In the last few years, the democratic will of the citizens in several European Union (EU) states (such as Greece, Spain and Portugal) has more or less been bypassed through the imposition of technocratic administrations. Why? Not in this case because of any despotic intent but in an attempt by EU institutions and member states to shore up the credibility of financially vulnerable national governments in the eyes of international money markets. Capability in the management of the economy has been placed ahead of democratic legitimacy by these external powers.

National sovereignty has always suffered from constraints: the influence of other states, international treaty obligations and sheer exigency. What is different on this occasion is the extent to which governments have been caught in a cleft stick between the expectations of voters (of ever improving and expanding public services) and the reality of what uncompetitive and heavily indebted economies are able to fund. Looking for other sources of capital, such national governments became too dependent on international money markets. When the economic downturn came, and without the flexibility provided by an independent national central bank, it became too expensive for

Eurozone democracies to borrow, and markets had to be assured of political and economic reform through the imposition of technocratic administrations, austerity budgets and the removal of labour rights. The UK has faced a milder version of the same problem. In many ways, then, both citizens and political leaders have seen sovereignty ebbing away.

Similar things are at play in specific policy areas. Conservative Party immigration commitments of 2010 were not met, largely because the UK government must abide by EU treaty obligations. Political parties, however, are sometimes unwise enough to make pledges they know cannot be met and to make promises that cannot be honoured (e.g., Liberal Democrat commitments on tuition fees), especially when under pressure from insurgent alternatives. The sheer complexity of the activity of the state brings its own problems. Even when a political party is convinced of the need for large-scale, radical change, the immense practical challenge of effecting such change when in office should not be underestimated (think of the much-touted, but much-troubled, introduction of Universal Credit). And even when a policy is implemented, will it have the desired effects, and how will we know?

The recent success of the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) is birthed from the frustration felt by many over the sovereignty ceded to EU institutions. This is one of the factors leading to the fragmentation of the internal coalitions of the two main parties, a theme to which we now turn.

The fragmentation of social and political coalitions

A second problem facing political parties is the fragmentation of the social movements on which they traditionally rested – the networks of individuals and institutions with a shared working notion of the public good. The ‘ghosts’ of these movements still haunt British politics, and their influence is still felt – parties can still be said to have ‘core voters’ (even though, for the reasons set out above, they are increasingly frustrated with parties they formerly trusted to represent their interests). The driver here is deep structural change across social, political and economic life neatly, encapsulated in Robert Putnam’s metaphor of ‘bowling alone’ – the growing atomisation of social life. Politics has been recast – where once there was ‘the direct interests of labour’, there is now only the interests of me, my family or others whose plight might arouse my sympathy.

On an electoral level, political parties have sought to broaden their appeal, and indeed have made a point of publicly rejecting the social or ideological bifurcations of previous generations. Both New Labour and ‘modern, compassionate Conservatism’ are instances of this strategy, resulting in ‘catch-all’ appeals to the political centre – the former perhaps more successfully than the latter. Some will ask, given the decline in their core vote, what else could these parties do? What has been lost, however, is the sense of the ‘us’ behind the traditional parties of government, and therefore of the narratives and communities of reason that sustained them. Put simply, politics has followed culture, and become more individualistic.

In place of historic political identities, shaped heavily by social class, the parties and movements of critique have multiplied – on the left, anti-globalisation movements and Occupy and, on the right, UKIP. In the past, their sentiments may have found a home in mainstream political parties. Now, however, the main political parties hover around the centre ground, often embarrassed by distinctive ideological positions that in times past would have been considered unexceptional. It is ironic that political parties, in responding to the fragmentation of their own social coalitions and seeking to occupy the political centre, themselves exacerbate the process of fragmentation. All the while, it is becoming harder to see those large parties achieving working majorities in the immediate future.

Parties and policies

Following from the above, voters are often heard to complain of the lack of a meaningful policy *choice* between the two main parties. The word is an interesting one: it presumes that the relationships between political authority and the individual is like that between a consumer and providers of goods and services. The weakness of that conception of politics is revealed by the irony of the complaint itself – in actual fact, there is now *more* political ‘choice’ than before: more political parties, more single issue campaigns, and more campaigning platforms than ever. But the complaint points to an important underlying problem for political parties. They are social and collaborative: not all political desires or aspirations can be accommodated. Yet, politics in the ‘age of authenticity’ is throwing up an ever greater appetite for avenues of political engagement which ground their legitimacy in the ability to choose or express what they see as their own freely chosen objectives.⁸ Parties, in many ways, are ill-suited to these cultural conditions: when people join a political party, or even vote for it, they experience considerable discomfort in having to sign up for the ‘job lot’.

In theory, party membership is more dialogical. To a greater or lesser extent, parties have mechanisms whereby members can influence the direction of policy. These are not imaginary, but in reality they will not be sufficient to create a sense of identity – that this party is for me. It's particularly difficult for parties that aspire to government. As we have said, at local or national level the role of the state is broader and more complex than ever. Some issues may still be presented in moral or ideological primary colours, but more often than not we are faced with a variety of shades of grey; better or worse, rather than right or wrong. It is the Mario Cuomo conundrum – political parties 'campaign in poetry and govern in prose'.

From the perspective of a party that aspires to govern, most incentives militate against greater internal democracy. It is easier to avoid the business of opening up the sphere of policy making to ordinary party members. They have even sought to de-politicise policy in an effort to ensure that voters get what they want, which is assumed to be better public services. Nearly all governments of recent years have signed up to the doctrines of 'New Public Management' which, broadly speaking, require the adoption of market principles and practices to drive improvements and efficiencies in public service, as opposed to an ideological approach which deduces policies from first order principles.⁹ Many feel that this has had a corrosive effect, but those who lay that charge need to be prepared to offer an alternative 'theory of change'. We have conflicting expectations of governments – we want to have the best public services, but we also tend to vote for lower taxes. As politicians increasingly reach for the tools which seem most effective at bringing about change, what typically comes to matter is not what is morally or ideologically coherent, but what they think will 'get the job done'. Party leaders then seem disinclined to listen to their memberships, preferring inaccessible policy wonkery on the one hand, and, on the other, the dark arts of party management, political communication and electoral triangulation, to the hard work of listening and organising.¹⁰

III Christian citizenship in 2015 and beyond

The foregoing analysis of the problems of political parties is, I think, more faithful to the facts than the increasingly familiar but mostly misplaced accusations of corruption and malpractice. Before we turn to a brief concluding discussion of what these challenges might mean for Christian political action, it is worth reflecting how this analysis is tangibly affecting the political landscape in the run up to the general election.

In 2015 and beyond, the stakes are high. Two factors in particular come to mind, both prompting questions which are not simply technical, but also profoundly moral. First, the Scottish referendum has ignited a chain reaction, the result of which is that the UK constitution is liable to be significantly altered. Even the apparently unobjectionable proposals currently on the table (e.g., 'English votes for English laws') are riddled with complexity, never mind being highly charged politically. Second, as noted by the respected Institute for Fiscal Studies' response to the Autumn Budget Statement, we stand on the verge of 'colossal' budget cuts which will require 'a fundamental reimagining of the role of the state'.¹¹ No more will we have just a little less of the same: the entire scope of the activity of the state looks set to change. In other words, just as people are becoming ever more alienated from formal politics, politics could hardly matter more.

Some of the limitations to national sovereignty will continue to be felt. In particular, any future government's freedom of action on public spending will be severely constrained. The UK is heavily indebted, and the annual cost of servicing our national debt now runs to around £40 billion, and, like any long term debt, it needs to be periodically refinanced. Any party making a serious claim for government must account for this, which will likely result in paradox. On the one hand, we are liable to see the unimaginative politics of competitive spending commitments from the major parties (the political equivalent of a supermarket price-match promise). On the other, political parties will be forced to imagine what the alternative might be to a government which exists simply to channel resources to particular public services or spending projects. They will be forced to confront the fundamental question, what are the capabilities and the limitations of the state? What must it do as a matter of justice and, beyond that, what else is it capable of doing? The state may indeed be smaller in the future, but there is therefore all the more reason to work for a much richer discourse about political justice than we have seen for a long time.

We also see the big two parties struggling to maintain their internal coalitions. UKIP is not simply a home for disaffected Conservative voters, even though they are clearly a large part of its constituency. The leadership of the Conservative Party is probably less fearful of UKIP winning a significant number of seats (unlikely) than of denying them a win in a relatively small number of seats (likely). Announcements on immigration and English Votes for English laws have no doubt been made with a sharp eye on the UKIP challenge.

Of late, Labour have sought to maintain a broad offer to the British Public – to serve as a ‘progressive coalition’. They have clearly benefited from the unpopularity of the Liberal Democrats in the Coalition but, in seeking to bolster their economic credibility, have broadly accepted the Coalition’s own position on the direction of public spending. For this and other reasons, they may lose support in Scotland to more radical parties (e.g., the Green Party), or simply fail to motivate what remains of their ‘core vote’.

Liberal Democrat fortunes look especially uncertain, though they have proved more resilient than expected in the past. It may be, though, that their story will prove to be a morality tale on the risks of political parties resting their case to the public on the trustworthiness and integrity of the alternatives to the two main parties. Political office has necessarily resulted in ugly compromises. The question is what narrative the Liberal Democrats will now offer, so that they can no longer say, ‘don’t trust the others – trust us’?

Conclusion

This is, no doubt, not the full story about British political parties today. In fact, there is a fruitful analogy between the decline in ‘organised religion’ and that in ‘organised politics’. Just as we now know that sociologists of religion overplayed the extent to which the biggest challenge to religion was growing disbelief, as opposed to broader cultural changes which made people far more suspicious of authority and hierarchy, it is also wrong to assume that the general public have been generally de-politicised.

In that vein, and following political scientists like Ronald Inglehart, it may be that what we are seeing is not decline but *diversification*. Modern forms of political organisation such as mass membership parties are giving way under cultural processes set in train by increased prosperity and education. Put simply, the questions posed in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (‘materialist’ concerns) are not those now being posed in the post-industrial globalised twenty-first century (‘post-materialist’ concerns).¹² Some political goals might indeed be better pursued outside of political parties (hence the turn campaigning platforms like 38 Degrees).

It is probably likely that we will indeed need to adjust our thinking to a more diverse political ecology where special interest groups and non-partisan campaigns play an ever greater role. Nevertheless, some of the functions of political parties set out in the first part of this article simply cannot be fulfilled by single-issue campaign groups or political independents. What does this changing landscape mean for Christian citizenship, particular *vis-à-vis* participation in political parties? To conclude, then, some observations following the four features of political parties.

First, parties will continue to seek to govern but their freedom of action when they do win elections will be constrained: the 2015 parliament will be a matter of Austerity 2.0 whoever wins. But that does not mean that political parties are at liberty to ignore the clear demands of justice. Christians should be motivated to ensure that the interests of the most vulnerable are protected, and should recognise that political parties are a place where they can collaborate with others, with or without faith, to ensure that this happens.

In particular, one gift that Christians (and other religious believers) have is the gift of association in a culture of individualism. The decline of the social movements and institutions which traditionally sustained political parties cannot simply be wished away, but it does need to be responded to – politics needs to be redeemed from individualism, which cannot sustain it. We need to find new spaces for democratic deliberation and ways of rebuilding the sense of ‘us’ – Citizens UK is one example.¹³ The difference, it could be said, is between a nourishing political stew comprised of individuals and institutions, and a bland soup, comprised of the undifferentiated mass of individuals. A recent Social Integration Commission report found that churches are one of the only remaining places which offer ‘bonding’ social capital in our highly individualistic society.¹⁴ In the Christian model of democratic citizenship, therefore, we need to avoid our own collapse into the individualism that blights the political system – too often, we have wanted to include Christian thinking in our theological action while ignoring the Church as a social institution.

Second, we have said that politics should give proper regard to the demands of justice, but this can easily be misunderstood. Like much secular political commentary, Christian political engagement often comes in the shape of sweeping normative categories – the state (good!), the market (bad!), or *vice versa*.

Beneath the level of principle, a mature Christian citizenship has to work with others inside political parties towards the formulation of concrete, realistic policy recommendations. These will never be perfect or final – nor will they be ‘Christian’, but to expect anything else is a theological mistake. A useful example would be the work around a payday lending interest rate cap which has been pursued, alongside others, by diverse Christian agencies. It is a limited measure, but positive change can be delivered incrementally. Political parties have a central role to play in creating momentum around policies like this, even if they are not always the instigator or final decision-maker.

Parties are at a cross-roads, and the complaints against them are not wholly misplaced. They are becoming narrower, often more homogeneous, often focused more and more on the election cycle – desperately trying to attract broader support, but ironically more tribal than ever. Yet they continue to have an essential role in creating and sustaining democracy. Christians should continue to assume that membership and participation in them will be part of our public vocation.

Suggested Further Reading

- Luke Bretherton, *Christianity and Contemporary Politics: The Conditions and Possibilities of Faithful Witness* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2010).
- Phillip Coggan, *The Last Vote: The Threats to Western Democracy* (Allen Lane, 2013).
- Matthew Flinders, *Defending Politics: Why Democracy Matters in the Twenty First Century* (Oxford University Press, 2012).
- Peter Mair, *Ruling the Void: The Hollowing of Western Democracy* (Verso, 2013).
- Park, et al, eds., *British Social Attitudes: the 30th Report* (NatCen Social Research, 2013). Available online at www.bsa-30.natcen.ac.uk
- Graham Ward, *The Politics of Discipleship: Becoming Postmaterial Citizens* (Baker, 2009).

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- ¹ ‘What’s gone wrong with democracy?’, *The Economist*, 1 March 2014 <http://www.economist.com/node/21596796/wrap-xhr>
- ² Stuart Wilks-Heeg, Andrew Blick and Stephen Crone, *How Democratic is the UK? The 2012 Audit*, (Democratic Audit, 2012), §2.2.3. Available at <http://www.democraticaudit.com/>
- ³ James Graham, *Local Politics: A Case for Treatment?* (Unlock Democracy, 2006), quoted in Wilks-Heeg, Blick and Crone, *How Democratic is the UK?* §2.2.3.
- ⁴ In the 2009 wave of the BSA, 44.2% of the non-religious agreed that voting was a civic duty. The comparable figures for the other groups were as follows: religious (no attendance) – 58.3%; religious (limited attendance) – 66.6%; religious (regular attendance) – 74.5%. Figures available from <http://www.britsocat.com/>.
- ⁵ Peter Mair, *Ruling the Void: The Hollowing of Western Democracy* (Verso, 2013), 60-73.
- ⁶ See Jonathan Chaplain, ‘Christian Justifications for Democracy’, *Ethics in Brief* 11.3 (Autumn 2006).
- ⁷ See <http://www.phm.org.uk/our-collection/1906-labour-party-minutes/>
- ⁸ Canadian Philosopher Charles Taylor argues that an appetite for authenticity (‘the background idea that everyone has their own particular way of being human and that you can then be either true to that or untrue to that’) characterises contemporary western societies and exerts a powerful influence over how we relate even to religious ideas and practices. <http://theotherjournal.com/2008/06/23/religious-belonging-in-an-age-of-authenticity-a-conversation-with-charles-taylor-part-two-of-three/>
- ⁹ For a critical analysis of the role of New Public Management on democratic culture, see Matthew Flinders, *Defending Politics* (Oxford University Press, 2012), 79-88.
- ¹⁰ There are other factors at play here which there is no space to explore – the important yet double-edged role of the media, for example.
- ¹¹ ‘‘Colossal’ spending cuts to come, warns IFS’, BBC Online, 4 December 2014 <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-30327717>
- ¹² Paul Abramson and Ronald Inglehart, *Value Change in Global Perspective* (University of Michigan Press, 1995), 3.
- ¹³ See Luke Bretherton’s theological interpretation of this movement in *Christianity and Contemporary Politics: The Conditions and Possibilities of Faithful Witness* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2010).
- ¹⁴ ‘Churches are the best social melting pots in modern Britain’, *Daily Telegraph*, 7 December 2014. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/religion/11276878/Churches-are-best-social-melting-pots-in-modern-Britain.html>