

DEMOCRACY AND ITS DEFICITS

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Defining Democracy

(Webster's dictionary)

- Government by the people especially: rule of the majority
- Government in which the supreme power is vested in the people and exercised by them directly or indirectly through a system of representation usually involving periodically held free elections.
- Term – from Greek δήμος "*demos*" = people and κράτος "*kratos*" = strength or power

SUMMARY

What's wrong with democracy *- the democracy deficits*

- ▣ Inherent deficiencies due to electoral process
- ▣ Issues concerning the electorate (citizens)
- ▣ Issues concerning those elected (representatives)
- ▣ *All exacerbated today by:*
 - Social media & fake news
 - Globalisation
 - Drift to populism

What's pushing the other way

Origins of this talk

Roles of civil society



Origins of democracy

- ▣ Ancient Greek city-states, 508 BCE Athens; led by Cleisthenes "the father of Athenian democracy". Direct, but limited to adult free men. In Sparta, citizens could debate and vote on issues in the *Apella* (held monthly).
- ▣ First parliament, Panionium, Miletus: 5th C BCE male citizens gathered in the *Agora* to decide the laws for the Ionian League (modern day Anatolia).

Evolution into modern era

- ▣ Scandinavia, esp. the Althing in Iceland founded 930 AD (oldest surviving parliament, not continuous)
- ▣ Isle of Man: the *Tynwald* ("House of Keys") is over 1000 years old and has been continuous
- ▣ First English Parliament, 1265: Simon de Montfort's answered to the king, but *Magna Carta* (1215) limited king's power and afforded some human rights
- ▣ First GB parliament 1707: after merger of Eng & Scot
- ▣ In UK, France other W Eur countries increasing emphasis on citizens rights and authority
- ▣ 1st US election 1789 – only 6% citizens eligible

AGE OF ENLIGHTENMENT

- Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 1651;
- Set out the consent needed to bestow legitimacy on rulers
(People subject themselves to rulers but gain security – in a win-win contract)
- Social Contract theory
- Also Jean-Jacques Rousseau, 1762, *Du contrat social ou Principes du droit politique*
- Trade off between rulers' powers and citizens' rights
- Qualified by John Locke (2nd *Treatise of Government*, 1689)
citizens reserve rights over property, self-defence etc



Counter-arguments

- ▣ **Plato** famously distrusted citizens' impulses (not → common good) and favoured an *aristocracy* led by the wisest men (**best, noblest**)
- ▣ **James Madison** the "Father of the US Constitution" distrusted Mob Rule & common people's judgment
 - Hence US Constitution decrees that the President is not elected by the *people* but by 538 "Electors"
- ▣ **Winston Churchill** – "*the worst form of government except all those other forms that have been tried from time to time*"

What is (representative) Democracy?

- ▣ Citizens choose governments they want
 - Can change those governments periodically
 - Also choose representatives to make laws
 - Rule of law – enshrining civil & political rights
 - Governments are held meaningfully to account
 - Governments act in the name of the people
 - ▣ Spending, raising taxes
 - ▣ Law making and enforcement
 - ▣ Use of violence (wars and policing)
- ▣ ***TODAY'S SOCIAL CONTRACT***

The democracy deficits

1) issues inherent in the electoral process

- ▣ The electoral cycle leads to short-termism, but delays change when clearly needed
- ▣ Accountability mechanisms rarely independent
- ▣ Made increasingly irrelevant by globalisation
 - Substance of politics is increasingly global
 - Process of politics remains solidly national & below
 - No effective global parliament, just deal-cutting
- ▣ Binary choices, confronting a mosaic of issues

Top concerns of global citizens especially “Millennials” – 2008 WEF survey

- | | | |
|----|--|-----|
| 1. | Climate change / destruction of nature | 49% |
| 2. | Large scale conflict / wars | 39% |
| 3. | Inequality (income, discrimination)
(world poverty – 29%) | 31% |
| 4. | Religious conflicts | 24% |
| 5. | Corruption / accountability | 23% |
| 6. | Food and water security | 18% |
| 7. | Lack of education | 16% |
| 8. | Safety / security / well being | 14% |

Forums for tackling these issues globally are weak

Political parties reflect a 20th C ideological schism (that is binary)

- ▣ Ownership of means of production
- ▣ Workers' rights (to organise, for security)
- ▣ Basic services and safety nets
- ▣ Right to vote (women, minorities)
- ❖ All issues that fell clearly on L – R divide
- ❖ The Right: property ownership, anti-union, resisted change in society & role of state
- ❖ The Left: transfer of wealth/power; protection of jobs, right to organise, building welfare state
- ▣ We still have the parties that were born to address this bipolarity, albeit they adapt their policies

Today – the discourse is different

- ▣ People less concerned about the ownership of the means of production
- ▣ Much more concerned about:
 - What is produced
 - For what sort of society
 - The consequences of the production processes
 - Related power-relations
- ▣ Also:
 - Fairness and equality of opportunity
 - Security
 - Personal choice
 - Accountability of government

... to summarise

20th C – politics was shaped by ideology

21st C – politics is shaped by identity

20th C issues were national

21st C issues are global

20th C democracy needed National forums

In 21st C we need effective Global forums

The democracy deficits

2) issues about “us”, the electorate

- ▣ How we identify politically (identity politics)
- ▣ Tribalism (figuratively & literally)
 - ▣ Ethnicity (most extreme in Africa)
 - ▣ Class, occupation
 - ▣ Religion, beliefs
- ▣ Selection biases
 - ▣ Gender
 - ▣ Ethnicity
 - ▣ Even height!
- ▣ Increasingly disillusioned with trad. democracy

OUR IDENTITY

- ▣ No longer just “Socialist” or “Conservative”
- ▣ Profusion of labels (our new tribes)
 - Environmentalist, XR
 - Feminist
 - Trans, non-binary
 - Peace campaigner
 - Scottish, Welsh, Brexiteer, Internationalist
 - Vegan,
 - Marathon runner
 - Christian, Muslim
 - Anti-vaxxer etc. etc.

Our selection biases

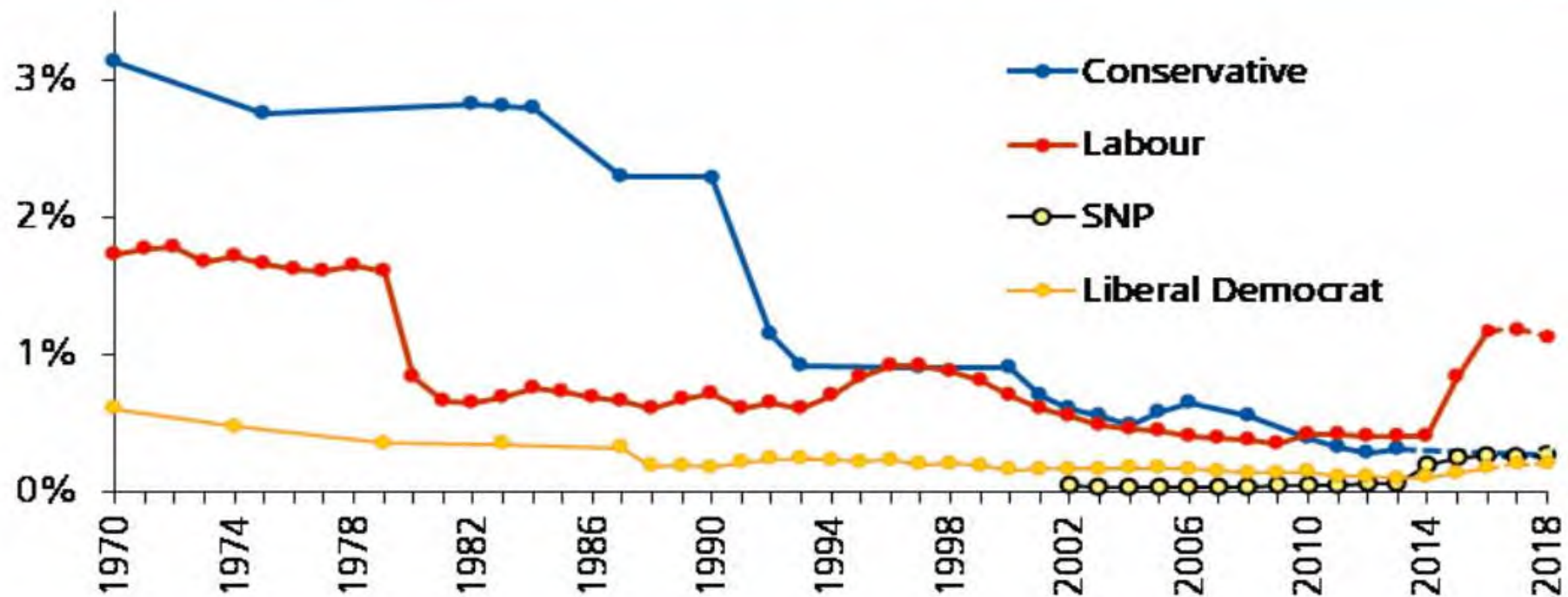
- ▣ Tend to vote along gender/race lines
- ▣ Influenced by religious leaders
- ▣ Even influenced by height of candidate
 - Last 31 US elections tallest won 20; and won 28 in popular vote
 - Leaders tend to be substantially taller than average (China, Japan, Turkey, Canada, Serbia)
 - Applies also with women leaders (NZ, Norway, UK)
- ▣ Greek/Mayan graves show clear link between greater physical stature and "political control"
- ▣ Also in business: Fortune 500 CEOs almost 10x more likely to be 6ft 2ins or taller c.f. average man

Drop in party membership

Party membership across Western Europe
shrunk by more than half 1980 - 2010

EVEN STEEPER IN UK

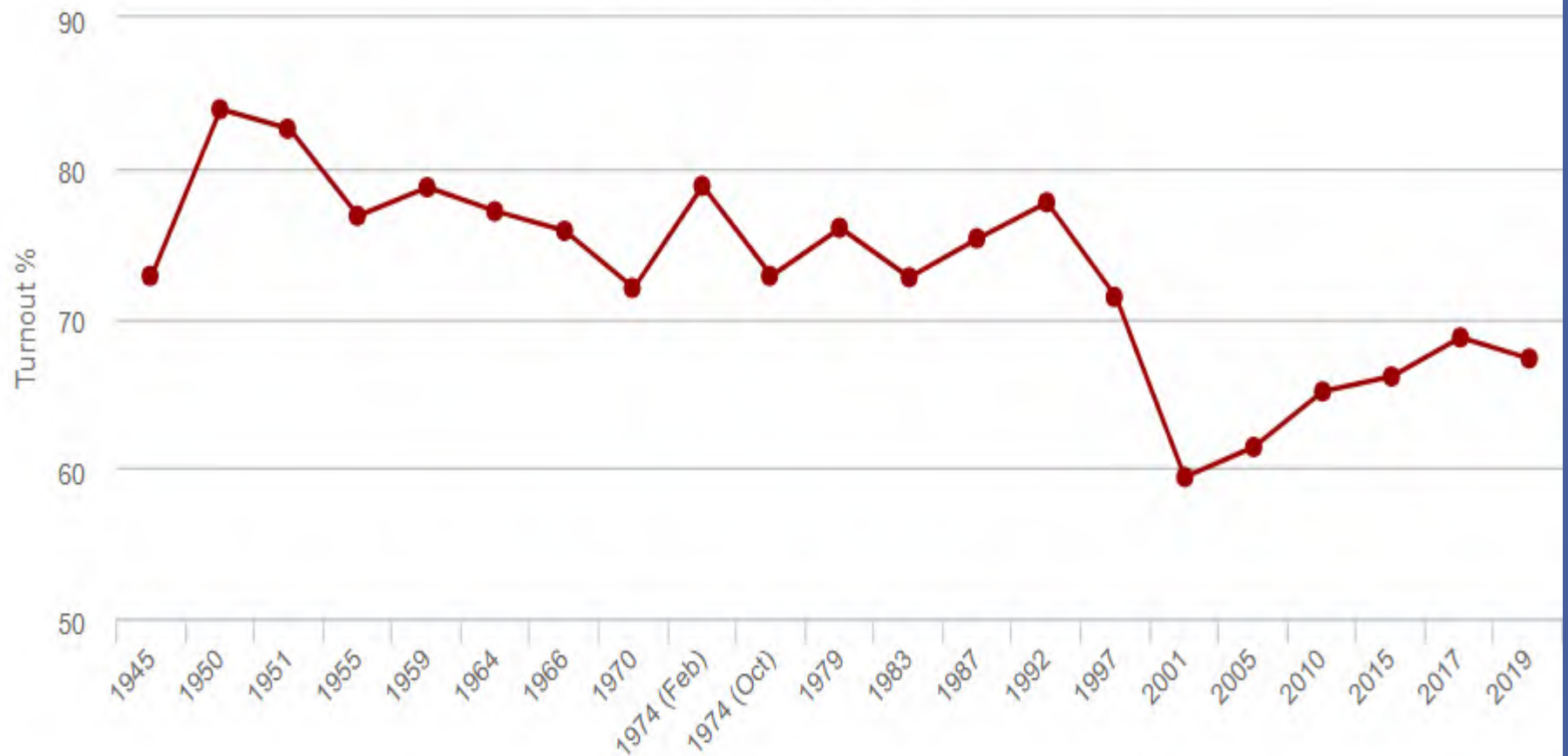
MEMBERSHIP AS PROPORTION OF ELECTORATE



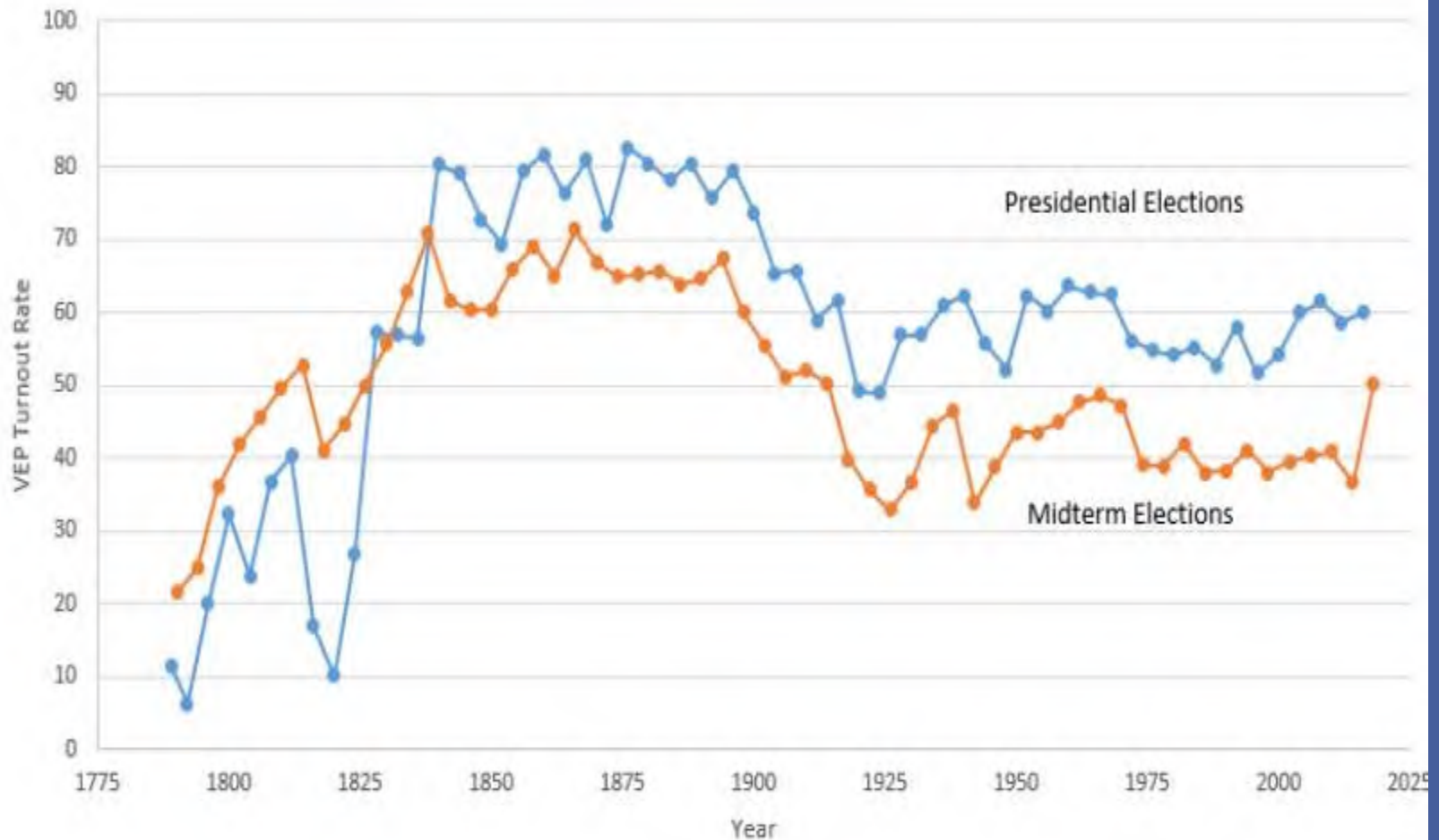
Fall in voter turnout UK

General election turnout since 1945

Tap or mouseover chart for details



Fall in voter turnout USA



The democracy deficits

3) issues about “them”, those elected

- ▣ Integrity / sleaze
 - In USA, gerrymandering and filibustering
- ▣ Money-driven democratic processes
 - Cost of election campaigns rises steeply: 24% in UK from 2013 to 2016; 100% in USA from 2016-20 (\$14.4bn)
- ▣ Populism
 - = Nationalism + Illiberalism
 - Populist governments: Trump's USA, Brazil, India, Philippines, Russia, Belarus, Hungary, Poland, Italy, Serbia, Israel ...

Populism

Institute for Global Change

- ▣ Populists claim:
 - a country's true people are locked into a moral conflict with outsiders
 - nothing should constrain the will of the “true people”.
- ▣ They see politics as a moral battleground between right and wrong – between a country's true people (good) and corrupt outsiders (the elite, experts, foreigners, immigrants, ethnic or religious minorities).
- ▣ They play to gut feeling; make up “facts”, use conspiracy theories, (exaggerated by COVID)
- ▣ They seek to erode checks & balances – both State (independent judiciary) & non-State (ind. CS, free press, civil/political rights)

Rise of populist parties in Europe

analysis by international team of social scientist (G)

Overall populist vote share in Europe, 1998 to 2018

Combined vote share by year for 31 countries, as at last parliamentary election

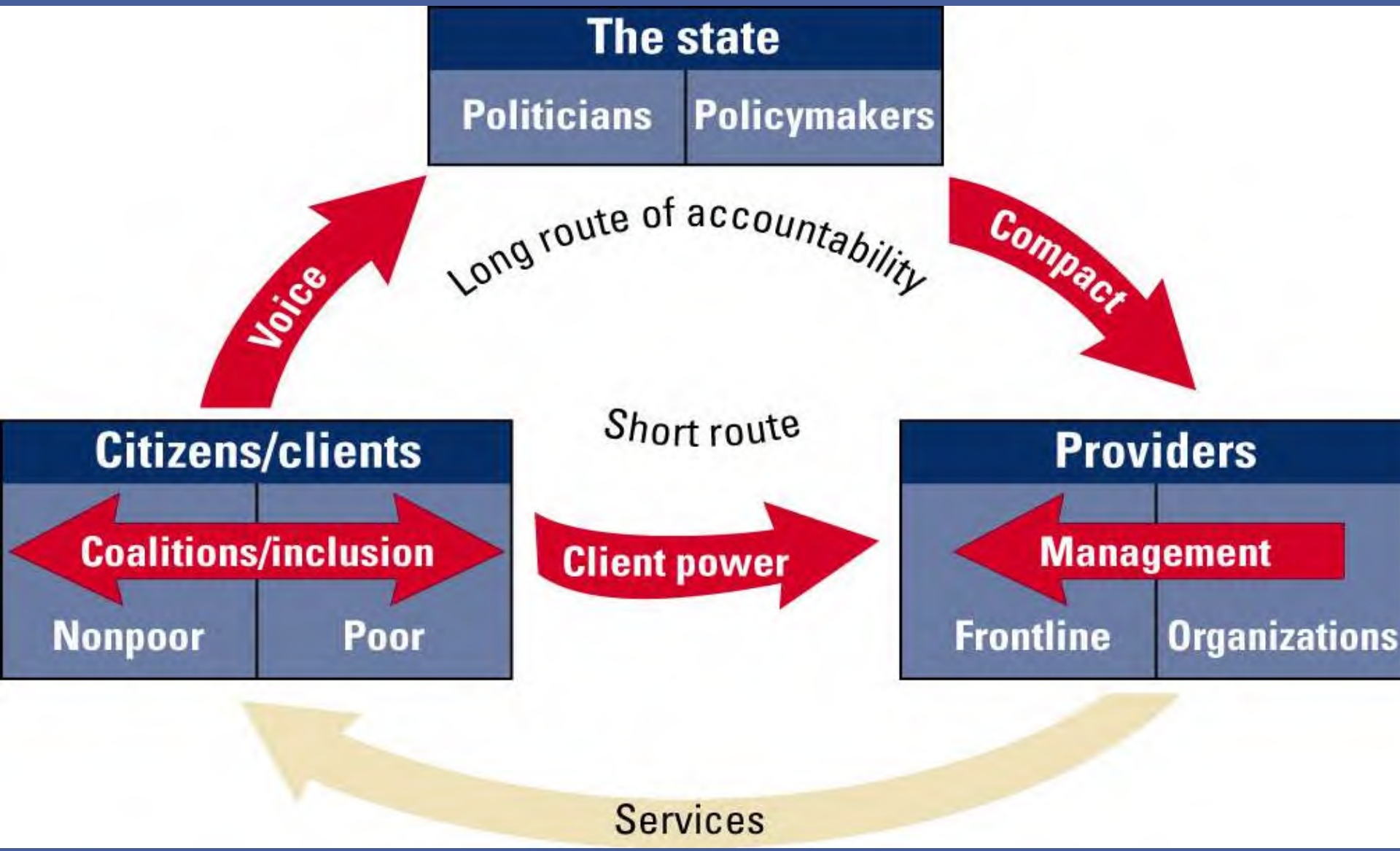


Redressing these deficits

Roles of Civil Society

- ▣ Bringing the issues we care about to prominence
 - Parties follow politics, not make politics
 - ▣ Forming global networks/movements
 - appear better at defining priorities & giving solutions
 - ▣ Conduit for the emerging preference for *participatory* or *deliberative* democracy
 - ▣ Holding governments and MPs to account
- Social Accountability (fostering good governance)**

Traditional or participatory accountability



Bad Governance

Allegory of Good and Bad Government, Ambrogio Lorenzetti 1338-9, Palazzo Pubblico, Siena



Good Governance – A Lorenzetti, 1338-9





AND FINALLY

...a thought about Civil Society as the
21st Century's Super-Power

“Never doubt that a small group
of thoughtful, committed,
citizens can change the world.
.... Indeed, it is the only thing
that ever has.”

*Margaret Mead:
The Making of an American Icon*