

FRAGMENTED POWERS

Confrontation and Cooperation in the English-Speaking World



Editors

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Prologue by Donatella della Porta

**Fragmented Powers: with a Prologue by
Donatella della Porta**

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Fragmented Powers: Confrontation and Cooperation in the English-Speaking World

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

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Like many edited volumes, this volume started with a conference, which was held at Sorbonne Nouvelle University in June 2022. Therefore, our thanks first go to all those who helped prepare and organise this event, particularly James Cohen, Pierre Gervais and Sarah Pickard. We also want to acknowledge the financial support given to the event by Sorbonne Nouvelle University and more specifically by our research centre, the Centre for Research on the English-speaking World (CREW).

The three-day international multidisciplinary conference, which gathered over 50 participants, was a wonderful human experience in difficult times – it was the first large-scale event to be organised as we were starting to come out of the COVID-19 pandemic. Only a fraction of the papers given over the length of the conference resulted in a chapter in this volume, but the book owes of course a great deal to the exchanges between all the participants during the sessions and breaks. Among those, we extend special thanks to our keynote speakers, Donatella della Porta, Philip Golub and Gerry Stoker. The enthusiasm shown by all comforted us in the view that the issue of fragmentation was a timely and fruitful lense through which to analyse past and current phenomena.

We want to thank the authors in this volume not only for the quality of their chapters but also for their exceptional responsiveness and their patience with a long-drawn process, as well as our many colleagues who produced reports on early versions of the chapters and on the book proposal as a whole. Without their corrections and insightful comments, this volume would not be what it is. Any errors left are ours alone.

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We hope that this volume will continue to generate conversations and debates on issues of fragmentation, conflict and cooperation in English-speaking democracies.

Emmanuelle Avril, Laurence Cossu-Beaumont, David Fée, Fabrice Mourlon
June 2024

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Prologue: Fragmentation, Coordination and Convergence: Some Reflections

Donatella della Porta

This volume addresses the concept of fragmentation from different angles, including reflections on transformations going from the multiplication of political parties to scale shifts at different territorial levels pointing at the connections between what I would define as institutional fragmentation and social fragmentation. It has done so by looking especially at transformations in the English-speaking world, which had been characterised by specific forms of divisions of power and a bipolar party system. I will consider these reflections in a cross-national comparative perspective, looking at social movement studies for ways to address fragmentation.

The reflection on *institutional* fragmentation as uncoordinated distribution of competences and powers helps to address some dramatic challenges to democratic developments in countries that – like the United Kingdom and the United States – had been considered as the most long lasting example of stable democracies. In the former, dissatisfaction with democratic performances has reached a high point with the political and social disasters caused or enhanced by Brexit. In the latter, the first Trump presidency has shown the fragility of internal checks and balances. In both countries, the racist legacies of the colonial and settlers' colonial history are reflected in institutional forms of racism that amount to social and economic discriminations.

Racism and inequalities have been embedded in both countries in a specific form of capitalism, with specific relations between the state and the market. In their typology on varieties of capitalism, Peter Hall and David Soskice (2001) have contrasted the liberal market economy which characterises the United States and, increasingly, the United Kingdom (defined by the prevalence of market relations) with the coordinated market economy, more typical of continental Europe (allowing for more consensual relations among enterprises and between them and social partners). Additionally, the English-speaking world has developed variants of the global economy: integration in a world economy based on the division of the world into hegemonic power and dependent economy (Arrighi et al., 1989; Wallerstein, 1990). These considerations are important in order to locate the research on fragmentation of power presented in this volume into a specific political-economic context, characterised by a lack (or weak) coordination between the state and the market. While neoliberal capitalism also became dominant in coordinated market economy, yet it took different forms.

Additionally, the reflection on the specific forms of institutional fragmentation should take into account the shifting movements and counter-movements between market liberalisation and social protection that have characterised much of capitalist history (Polanyi, 1957). In the Polanyian pendulum between market dominance and social protection, the English-speaking world has come to represent the worse expression of a blind trust in the market. Representing the most advanced experiments with neoliberal economic reforms and related commodification of citizens' rights, both the United Kingdom and the United States were especially hit by the unequal consequences of the global pandemic, which showed the deadly effects of social inequalities. The Black Lives Matter protests, that in the Summer of 2020 spread from the United States to the United Kingdom and then to all Europe, have pointed at the ways in which racialised groups have been denied social and political rights (della Porta et al., 2022).

The weakening of the welfare state in the United Kingdom, given a long history of neoliberal reform with dominance of market competition and new public management, and the traditional presence of a residual welfare state in the United States had in fact important effects on what I define as social fragmentation. This, I would consider in fact as most resonant with Zygmund Bauman's notion of liquid modernity, which implies insecurity and flexibility, which makes collective identities difficult to develop. In his view, postmodern men and women have 'exchanged a portion of their possibilities of security for a portion of happiness. The discontents of modernity arose from a kind of security that tolerated too little freedom in the pursuit of individual happiness. The discontents of postmodernity arise from a kind of freedom of pleasure-seeking which tolerate too little individual security' (1997, p. 3). With the end of the illusion of a collective telos (as a state of perfection to be reached), there is a deregulation and privatisation of tasks and duties from collective endowments to individual management. In this view, individualism wins over the community. Here as well, where these widespread trends increase social fragmentation, insecurity and precariousness are most present, the highest the reliance on free market versus social protection.

Reflecting on fragmentation from the perspective of social movement studies could help further disentangle different dimensions of the phenomena and connect it with other similar conceptualisations. First of all, it is to be noted that the challenges of fragmentation do not come from a division of power which, in social movement studies, is rather seen as opening channels of access to institutions for protestors. In fact, research on the political opportunities for contentious politics, has considered the functional division of power as well as territorial decentralisation as favouring protests and avoiding radicalisation even if they might reduce the capacity to implement changes (della Porta & Diani, 2020, Chap. 7). The presence of a strong and independent judiciary power as well as free and pluralistic media are most important for opening additional channels of accountability. Social movements themselves add another layer of democratic accountability in what Pierre Rosanvallon (2006) has defined as 'counterdemocracies', i.e. a democracy of controls. Representative conceptions of democracy have been the most challenged by the developments towards what has been defined as a 'neoliberal' conception of

democracy, which reduces the role of citizens to that of electors if not of consumers (Crouch, 2004). The need has developed, therefore, to think about other democratic qualities that are better able to enhance citizens' capacity of surveillance (Rosanvallon, 2006). This does not imply a disavowal of the function of the state, but rather a request of politics as capable of reducing economic inequalities and their inefficiencies, together with unfairness. In fact, historically, democratic states have legitimated themselves not only in terms of political equality (and negative freedom) but also (in the output) because they claim to provide a modicum of welfare to their citizens (see also della Porta, 2013, 2015).

By the same token, the presence of a multiparty system reflects the historical structuration of different political cleavages: the class cleavage but also the cleavage between the city and the countryside, the Church and the State, the centre and the periphery. As Stein Rokkan stated, multiple cleavages emerged as main conflict lines in the development of European societies and politics.

Two of these cleavages are direct products of what we might call the *National Revolution*: the conflicts between the *central nation-building culture* and the increasing resistance of the ethnically, linguistically or religiously distinct *subject populations* in the province and the periphery; the conflict between the centralizing, standardizing and mobilizing Nation-State and the historically established corporate privilege of the *Church*. Two of them are products of *Industrial Revolution*: the conflict between the *landed interests* and the rising class of *industrial entrepreneurs*; the conflict between *owners and employers* on the one side and *tenants, labourers and workers* on the other.

(Rokkan, 1999, p. 284)

While Rokkan thus singled out the social groups on which the structuration of political conflicts developed, looking at the class cleavage in particular, Stefano Bartolini and Peter Mair (Bartolini, 2000; Bartolini & Mair, 1990) contributed to a conceptualisation of cleavage as composed of three elements: (a) a socio-structural reference (referred to as 'empirical' element); (b) a cultural element, as informed by 'the set of values and beliefs that provide a sense of identity and role to the empirical elements and reflects a self-awareness of the social group(s) involved'; and (c) an organizational/behavioural element, linked to a set of individual interactions, institutions, and organisations, such as political parties, that structures the cleavage (Bartolini, 2000, p. 17). The development of cleavages as a politicised divide is therefore a process composed of various twists and steps such as the generation of opposition due to different interests and values, the crystallisation of opposition lines into a conflict, the rise of alliances of political entrepreneurs engaged in mobilising support for some policies, then the choice of mobilisation strategy (community versus purpose specific) and conflict arena (electoral versus protest). The cleavage itself emerges through processes of politicisation, mobilisation, and democratisation in the nation-state: it is, that is, transferred into politics (rather than repressed or depoliticised) by the action of party translators. This implies that the presence of

multiple parties representing multiple cleavages is not per se an instance of fragmentation, but rather could help forms of aggregation if the political systems facilitate this process. To the contrary, when these cleavages are still active, an artificial reduction in the number of parties might leave groups of citizens non-represented, without solving the problem of potential instability, often related to personal factions inside parties.

We can in fact note that in democracy, in order not to produce fragmentation, the division of power and the multiplicity of political parties have to be accompanied by the presence of informal practices and brokers which allows for building a general consensus and negotiate differences, often building collective identities or at least an awareness of the others' reasons. In this sense, political parties have traditionally acted as mediators between the state and the citizens, also facilitating the peaceful elaboration of compromise between different ethnic or religious groups or opposite ideologies. The development of deliberative forms of democracy requires the opening of discursive arenas, inside but also outside public institutions. The development of public spheres, including subaltern ones, is in fact most important in order to overcome social fragmentation by building collective (and political) identities (della Porta, 2013).

Some most recent developments in social movement studies also point at the importance not only of institutional coordination but also of the convergence of different struggles. In this direction, intersectional frames and practices have contributed to the acknowledgement of multiple sources of inequalities that potentially fragment the social bases. Against this background, the combined effects of capitalism, paternalism and racism are addressed through mobilisations that recognise diversities in forms of inequalities but also single out a common target and shared frames. In this sense, the concept of intersectionality coined in activist circles by women of colour has been defined in different ways, connecting to different concepts. In fact, at the *macro-level*, intersectionality has been connected to interlocking inequalities. It is important to note that the sources of these inequalities intersect in a capitalist system which affects positions in terms of class, gender, ethnicity by fuelling patriarchy and racism. These inequalities affect people's lives in different ways in different moments in time, being reflected in fluid types of identification. Intersectionality implies for social movement activists as well as scholars '(1) looking at the ideas, practices and repertoires of actions adopted internally by feminist movements and their organizations to counter the marginalisation of disadvantaged groups and (2) turning our gaze towards the characteristics of cross-movement alliances that connect feminist and other social justice struggles and goals etc. Therefore, we define intersectional solidarity as an ongoing political process of building cooperation by altering power asymmetries within and between organisations and groups located at different intersections of class, race, gender, sexuality, religion and able-bodiedness, and across geographical boundaries' (Ciccio et al., 2021, p. 176). The intersectional framing points at inclusivity, as 'attention to intersectional issues translates into coalitional practices which foster the representation and participation of multiply-marginalized groups within the coalition' (Evans & Lépinard, 2019). The creation of a multiplicity of public spheres is an important step in the aggregation of different claims, interests and identities into broader ones.

The pandemic times have certainly affected social fragmentation. The spreading of fears and the scapegoating of the poorest and marginalised groups of the population has ignited individualistic trends as well as conspiracy theory (della Porta, 2023). Individual freedom has been opposed to solidarities in anti-vax protests that have often seen a large presence of far-right groupings. In this protest, the discourse of individual responsibilities has been taken as proof that those who were most exposed to contagious and related risks were themselves responsible for their destiny. The circulation of fake news has contributed to reducing trust in science, politics and society. Competition between different interests has been increased in times of scarcity in the face of increased needs. While often presented as heterogeneous in their social and political composition, anomalous in their ideological profile, and pre-modern in their repertoires of action, the anti-vax protests can be considered to be a form of regressive contentious politics during an emergency critical juncture. Indeed, in line with the conceptualisation of right-wing thinking, they privileged individual freedom over equality, as well as personal interest over the common good. They were also anti-modernist in nature, aligning on anti-state positions. There was also a significant retrograde character to the protests, with anti-vax activists constructing a dystopian view that was heavily influenced by politicised conspiracy beliefs in the plots of Satanist cosmopolitan elites drinking the blood of innocent children (della Porta, 2023). In a context characterised by radicalisation in the forms and symbols of the anti-vax protests, regressive framing has focused on the defence of individual freedoms, with an actual denial of solidarity with the part of the population that was most exposed to the virus and its consequences; with health considered as a personal responsibility to be achieved through alternative practices and compliance with the so-called natural order.

At the same time, however, progressive social movements have developed forms of solidarity that have helped to overcome isolation and the fragmentation of individual needs. They have also shown that politicisation helps the convergence of claims around conceptions of justice and democracy. The very idea of creating commons is opposed to the commodification of public services. In fact, pandemic times have been times of social fragmentation and competition for scarce resources, but also of solidarity. Focusing on social movements that endeavour to expand social rights and political participation, my research indicated that the COVID-19 pandemic has undoubtedly been a contentious period. While the lockdown initially seemed to have frozen all opportunities for protest, by confining people to their homes or at least heavily constraining their ability to move freely and assemble in groups, social movements proved capable of adapting to these external circumstances that were themselves rapidly changing. During the pandemic, the repertoires of contention by progressive social movements built upon previous experiences in forms that are influenced by specific challenges, such as a physical reduction of open spaces, limitations on freedoms and the growing urgency to provide for the material needs of an increasing number of people. Alongside protesting in the street, progressive social movements focused on mutual aid. Due to increasing inequalities and the growing demand from people in need, there was a rise in mutual aid activities, which were

based on existing experiences of solidarity initiatives that were adapted to the constraints of the pandemic. The provision of food and shelter, social support and legal advice went beyond simple charity in a process of politicisation of claims but also a prefiguration of alternative ways to care for others. Last but not least, activists also engaged in knowledge building. They not only employed but also updated existing platforms and devices to spread counter-information on anti-contagion measures as well as on government policies, including acts of repression.

As research showed (della Porta, 2022; della Porta et al., 2024), collective action thus proved particularly important when faced with disruptive events, stimulating relational, cognitive and affective mechanisms which helped overcome social fragmentation. At the relational level, action itself tended to produce a sort of social capital, putting individuals and organisations in contact with each other as well as creating arenas for encounters to take place. Although the emergency restricted the amount of time available to find solutions to immediate needs, the lockdown also offered opportunities to engage in collective activities. There was, therefore, at the same time a need to offer alternative care but also an increased need to receive it. Intense emotions fuelled social participation as collective action was driven by indignation and compassion that motivated people to organise themselves and create solidarity networks in order to participate in the collective effort against the virus. At the cognitive level, the pandemic conditions disrupted normal routines and ways of thinking, driving the development of alternative knowledge, the importance of which increased in such uncertain times.

In sum, addressing the challenge of fragmentation requires a re-thinking of the conception of democracy, going beyond representative ones and searching instead for forms of participation that can help form collective identities. Moreover, it requires considering the connection between politics and the market.

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General Introduction: ‘Fragmented Powers’ – A Critical Evaluation

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Abstract

This introductory chapter presents the book’s rationale and structure and reflects on the notion of ‘fragmented powers’ as a key entry into understanding evolving power dynamics in the English-speaking world. Combining historical and contemporary perspectives, from the late 18th century to the contemporary era, fragmentation as a non-linear process reveals the tensions between centralisation and decentralisation, as well as confrontation and cooperation in the fields of constitutional and institutional issues, politics and political party systems, the media, and in urban and social policies at both the intra-national and transnational levels. The adoption of a long view perspective and a multidisciplinary approach allows to critically assess the concept of fragmentation by questioning both its positive and negative effects on the cultural, political and socio-economic environments.

Keywords: Decentralisation; fragmentation; cooperation; confrontation; institutions; political parties; media; urban policies; social policies; social movements

Conceptual Framework

Any locus of power can undergo processes of (de)fragmentation, from feudal fragmentation to the nation-state to globalisation, mirrored or counteracted by processes of decentralisation and localism. Such changes are not linear since contradictory trends may coexist, creating tensions or reinforcing each other. In recent decades, fragmentation has been seen as having positive effects, enabling shifts in power away from centralised structures towards private economic actors, citizens and consumers as well as local authorities. Indeed, the Enlightenment and

Fragmented Powers, 1–16

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19th century liberal view posited that checks and balances would further democracy by avoiding tyranny and abuse (Flathman, 2005), and classical economics called for decentralisation and free market exchanges. Hence, liberal regimes reflect principles such as *laissez-faire*, the separation of powers, federalism and social pluralism, which are regarded as welded to the notion of democratisation and as providing opportunities for autonomy, allowing for political resistance as well as economic development.

Yet, from a negative perspective, fragmentation can be a source of weakness, leading to disunity and the inability to guarantee basic rights, devise common strategies, maintain stable and functioning economies or organise effective opposition to state power. When political authority is dispersed both inside and outside of the state and government becomes ineffective, voters can paradoxically withdraw from politics or support more authoritarian forms of government. Fragmentation in a globalised world may preside over the emergence of isolated loci of power floating on a sea of opposition and strife, requiring new models of activism (della Porta et al., 2006, 2017) or underlining the need for regulation and state intervention (Piketty, 2014). The neoliberal rolling-back of the state and the fragmentation of providers, in order to create competition and give consumers more exit power (Hirschman, 1970), has left the United Kingdom and the United States with a fragmented and poorly organised system of public, private and voluntary providers in planning, education, housing and other public services (Pollitt, 1993). Deregulation in both nations is said to have opened the door to environmental disasters. Thus, the fragmented structures that have valuable democratic benefits may also contribute to substantial democratic deficits and polarisation along new lines.

The reality and extent of fragmentation can be put into question, as suggested by the paradox of a seemingly universal and converging process of liberal globalisation taking place in a world of increasingly divided, fractured and powerless polities and economic agents. Taking the long view, one has to decide whether polities, economies and social groups today are really more fragmented than they were one, two or three centuries ago – long-term comparisons may lead to very different analyses of what fragmentation entails. Even within the last century, trends in governance (administrative, political or corporate), with more rigid bureaucratisation and state control in most of Europe and the United States, rather point to a dwindling of cooperative politics, of places of collective elaboration of a compromise and of the very possibility of local and decentralised agency, particularly for individuals in the workplace (Chapoutot, 2020; Dejours, 2016). Is fragmentation merely an optical effect, hiding deeper trends towards centralisation of economic and political power in the hands of a few? Or is it a reaction to this very centralisation, pointing to either a dystopian future or to new dynamics of resistance and mobilisation?

Lastly, what one means by fragmentation is also open to interpretation and depends in part on the scale at which one observes the process, from infra-national to trans-national dynamics. Nationally, individualistic and populist trends have been viewed as eroding social cohesion and fostering the displacement of citizenship (Kamens, 2019), while regional, ethnic or racial identities may collide with the

national identity (Citrin & Sears, 2014; Modood, 2019). Internationally, globalisation has engendered the multiplying of actors and processes in world economic and political governance and the restructuring of state forms (Clark, 1997). The new liberal international order hailed by the end of the Cold War did not deliver its promise of a peaceful and democratic world environment based on transnational interdependence and global economic convergence but rather led to a disintegration and challenge to Western politics and a systemic crisis of capitalism (Golub, 2010). As the authority of historically legitimate powers, in particular of Western leaders such as the United States and the United Kingdom, becomes diluted in what may now form a 'multiplex world', the relevance of nation-states seems to wane (Acharya, 2018). Yet, with such power diffusion and dilution of recognisable loci of authority, the alleged 'post-national' order and the consensus over globalised standards and practices have not prevailed. A case in point is policy transfer where opaque decision-making processes and more or less informal elite networks have superseded ambitions at rationalised trans-governmentalism (Legrand, 2012). In addition, the conceptualisations of new dynamics of power (like 'soft power'), beyond national scale and outside state action or outside the scope of globalisation's international institutions, have veiled the resurgence of territorialised trends such as protectionism or ethno-nationalism (Golub, 2019). In this context, the 're-embedding' (Polanyi, 1967), not just of economic trends in the context of global capitalism, but of such national and global fragmentation, is an explorative approach that the book editors and contributors utilise in their examination of US and UK case studies that also reflect on more global perspectives.

These trends have a particular significance and are addressed in this volume when it comes to constitutional and institutional issues. True, various forms of institutional and constitutional fragmentations can be construed as balancing the distribution of power and allowing for a better definition of policies geared to local needs. Yet, in the United Kingdom, the devolution process initiated in 1998 has not only decentralised policymaking centres but also introduced imbalanced situations in England, Wales and Scotland, furthering a sense of fragmentation, not to mention the Northern Irish experience of power-sharing which encourages conflicting communities and political parties to find a common ground, leading to gridlocks. The combined forces of devolution and rising national sentiment mean that electoral choices have become increasingly differentiated at the level of the four UK nations, with voters increasingly faced with general election campaigns that are largely disconnected from each other (Awan-Scully, 2018). This dispersion/stasis conundrum is reflected in the United States by conflicts over the 10th Amendment's imprecise distribution of enumerated and reserved powers, respectively, to the federal state and to the states. And although States' rights proponents draw the line at a consensual need to avoid new episodes of (even symbolic) secession, the fragmented geography of unequal access to rights, health services or minimum wage protection has been compounded. Furthermore, clashes within Congress abound, the absence of pluralism in a two-party system being conducive to constant negotiations and, there too, frequent gridlock. Also illustrated by this volume's contributions are the powerful currents reinforcing

anti-statism to promote individual or community agency that take shape in conservative activist movements.

In the political field, although some dispute the extent of its impact on the core executive (Marinnetto, 2003), growing fragmentation of power has been widely identified as one of the key features behind the rise of a flexible governance model that is said to have replaced the post-war hierarchical model of governing, sometimes called the Westminster model in the United Kingdom. By governance, broadly speaking, we mean the process through which policy is made and implemented, and the volume questions recent evolutions in that regard through the scope of fragmentation. Indeed, the new model refers to the changes in the nature and role of the state, revolving less around hierarchy and the state and more around markets and networks at a meso level (Bevir, 2011); it is also multi-level (Stoker, 2004, p. 20). The key feature of these networks is the mutual dependence of the actors, be they private, institutional or voluntary (Rhodes, 1997). The scale of the fragmentation undergone by central government in the United Kingdom for two decades, in order to achieve this, is staggering: by 2009, there were 766 non departmental public bodies sponsored by the UK Government employing 111,000 people and spending £46.5 billion (Rhodes, 2017, p. 178). Likewise, the United States, with its 91,126 governments in 2017, 99% of them being local entities, has been labelled a 'nation of local governments', with augmented fragmentation that unfolds both horizontally and vertically (Goodman, 2019).

The shift, whether motivated by a neoliberal push to roll back the state to cut public expenditure and increase efficiency (UK), or by a combination of this and the tradition of strong local governance in the federal context (US), affected public services most. It was argued that excessive demands placed on the state to secure the welfare of citizens had overburdened the welfare system (Pierson, 2006, p. 146). One route was to lessen the power of producers and strengthen that of consumers. Another was to separate steering (strategy) from rowing (delivery) (Osborne & Gaebler, 1992, p. 35). However, numerous flaws have become visible over the years, in terms of accountability, public scrutiny, overlap and inefficiency as networks can weaken central control (Rhodes, 2017, p. 78). Whereas central government expected that institutional fragmentation would lead to networks of organisations rowing more efficiently, it has deprived the centre of its ability to steer as self-organisation often prevails. Yet, more recently, the fragmentation that lies at the roots of networks and 'independence from central government and local ownership' have been regarded as coming 'close to the ideals of participatory democracy' (Enroth, 2011, p. 26).

Party systems worldwide have undergone growing fragmentation (Bergsen, 2019), a notion which refers, at a first level of analysis, to the well documented increase in number of political parties competing in elections and the increase in support for minor parties (e.g. Best, 2013; Coleman, 1995). This raises concerns as 'the dispersion of political power into so many different hands and centres of power [makes it difficult] to marshal enough political power and authority for democratic governments to function effectively' (Pildes, 2021). Political power today is dispersed among political parties, organised groups or movements,

non-organised groups, as well as independent political figures who fall largely out of the control of the institutional framework. In this sense, fragmentation is considered to constitute a threat to democratic systems since it leads to higher levels of extremism and raises the risk of political gridlock.

Even in two-party systems, such as the United States and the United Kingdom, where parties typically function as ‘broad churches’ aggregating a wide range of interests and platforms around a common set of values and goals, fragmentation is becoming more apparent. The dominance of mainstream parties has been eroding, albeit not in a linear fashion, with the emergence of insurgent protest parties, often located at the more ‘extreme’ ends of the political spectrum, such as Nigel Farage’s UK Independence Party (UKIP) (now Reform Party), while other attempts to break the mould from a centrist position, as in the case of the breakaway The Independent Group, then Change UK, have failed. Growing political instability in the United Kingdom is illustrated by the two snap elections in 2017 and 2019 and the failure of the majoritarian FPTP system to deliver majority governments in 2010 and 2017. Instability resulting from internal fragmentation within parties is reflected in the astonishing turnover of UK Prime Ministers, most of whom (May, Johnson, Truss) were forced to resign by their own party rather than being forced out by the voters in a general election. In the United States, such new parties have not emerged and polarisation has mostly occurred within the Democratic and Republican parties and among the electorate. Evidence of this lies in the repeated failures of the Republican Party to elect a House Speaker in Congress (Pildes, 2023) and in Trump’s capture of the Republican Party. Trump and Johnson have demonstrated that the democratic regimes in place offer no protection against political leaders who are able to harness or abuse the immense powers granted by the system they wish to disrupt.

Parties are also faced with an increasingly fragmented electorate: British society has become more stratified, with an erosion of social mobility, and the US middle class is allegedly vanishing, with blue-collar vote or minority vote now possibly escaping the Democrats. Parties are struggling to build the electoral coalitions necessary to secure large majorities. The issue of Brexit, dividing its electoral base into Leavers and Remainers (Avril, 2021), meant that in the run up to the 2019 general election, the Labour Party faced an intractable conundrum which allowed Johnson’s conservative party to capture its heartland voters (the ‘red wall’). The growing importance of issue voting – such as national sovereignty, social justice, environmentalism, and immigration – indicates that these issues are likely to further fragment politics across the Atlantic. Beyond electoral stakes, party fragmentation has also hindered the efficacy of decision-making in Parliament and Congress, the latter navigating government shutdowns in 2018 and 2019 and narrowly avoiding one in 2023 or 2024. Still, the capacity of the US Government to function beyond disunion and gridlock has been viewed as perhaps its very characteristic, and the current fragmentation may be understood in the larger historical context of ontological division.

A key line of questioning raised in this volume thus regards the impact of fragmentation on the quality of democracy: is it undermined or enhanced by party fragmentation? And what is the impact of such fragmentation on the relationship

between political power and the citizenry? On the one hand, recent upheavals would indicate that political power is no longer ‘effectively controlled’ by ‘the centralised, major institutions that had long been perceived to be the legitimate vehicles for organising and exercising that authority’ (Pildes, 2021). On the other hand, it may be argued that the current fragmentation reflects a process of realignment. Comparative studies have consistently shown that citizen satisfaction with democracy increases with party-system fragmentation, with much higher satisfaction rates in countries where minority governments are the norm (e.g. European Parliament, 2023).

Debates on fragmentation in the media are meaningful for the purpose of this book. Far from being new, they need however to be set in the context of most recent trends, in particular the evolution of the traditional media landscape, the constant emergence of new phenomena online generally and on social media specifically, and the relationship between traditional and new media. The advent of what has been labelled the age of ‘post-truth’ interrogates the responsibility of media, often acting as power brokers, rather than neutral observers, in democratic regimes. In times of uncertainty, and with the rapid evolution of media technology, and the abundance of (dis)information and fake news, access to accurate and reliable information is paramount. This is highly relevant to this volume since democratic backsliding and the rise of populism can be facilitated by political polarisation insofar as ‘polarisation encourages people to think in terms of “us” and “them,” and – potentially, gradually – to view political opposition as illegitimate’ (Russell et al., 2022).

Fragmentation in the media refers both to the ever increasing number and variety of media channels, platforms, and technologies available to audiences (Mancini, 2013), leading to a more diverse – and, crucially for this volume, divided – media landscape (Van Aelst et al., 2017, p. 5), and to audience fragmentation – the partition of media consumers into many small audiences (Webster & Ksiazek, 2012) – whereby audiences confronted with an expanding choice of media outlets may seek out those that best fit their interests and preferences (Mutz, 2002), and thereby wall themselves off from dissenting opinions. This is where fragmentation and polarisation differ: media fragmentation simply refers to the increase in the number of available sources of information while polarisation denotes the level of partisanship of media outlets (Fletcher et al., 2023). The multiplication of online media sources which produce what is seen as ‘bias-confirming content’ is argued to increase ‘selective exposure’ (first identified by Lazarsfeld et al., 1944) and the ensuing fragmentation of the public (Steppat et al., 2022). For example, studies based on the United States have shown the polarising effect of exposure to like-minded content (Lelkes et al., 2015; Levendusky, 2013). Instead of contributing to greater pluralism, this comes with the risks of amplifying polarisation and increased isolation, each subgroup being trapped in their echo-chambers (Sunstein, 2017). The polarisation and fragmentation of the contemporary public sphere addressed in several contributions of the book can be seen to have adverse effects on the proper functioning of the democratic public sphere, and as a result, as a danger to democracy itself (Downey & Fenton, 2003).

Increasing social and physical fragmentation in the urban environment in the United Kingdom and the United States is tackled in this volume. Historically, cities in both countries have been marked by social segregation since the late 19th century at least, with the move of the middle classes to the suburbs and beyond, as public transport and private housing development expanded. In the United Kingdom, the rise of public housing in the early 20th century and the building of council estates in the suburbs did not alter the situation but led to vast mono-tenure working class estates. Private philanthropic experiments such as Garden Cities in the United Kingdom (a major influence on the Green Town Programme in the United States) at the turn of the 20th century and 1920s reinforced this trend as they mostly attracted middle class residents in search of clean air, space, and greener cities. Only the post-war UK New Towns, built in an egalitarian era with a view to deconcentrating UK cities, went some way to lessening the social and physical fragmentation of British cities into working class and middle class neighbourhoods. Planned on the principle of social balance, they managed to accommodate and attract a broad social spectrum, albeit with an above average representation of skilled manual workers (Champion, 2021, p. 123).

On the face of it, successive urban regeneration policies launched by UK and US governments from the 1960s onwards to tackle the decline of great American and British cities appear to address urban fragmentation. The War on Poverty in the United States and its UK counterpart the Urban Programme and their successors were officially designed to address the multiple deprivation affecting inner city residents. However, post 1980s property-led regeneration policies have widened urban segregation again (Edwards & Imrie, 2015, p. 116). Urban policy stands accused of having sought to attract middle class residents in order to improve the social capital of inner city communities (Imrie & Raco, 2003), instead engineering micro-segregation as older working class, ethnic communities, and newcomers have failed to mix on a daily basis, as illustrated by gated communities. Further, policies like New Labour's Urban Renaissance in the 2000s are even said to have fostered a top down government-led gentrification in places like London that has gradually pushed older residents away (Lees et al., 2008). Broadly speaking, social polarisation in cities, whether in the United States (Abrahamson, 2014, p. 142) or the United Kingdom, has grown (Davidson & Wylie, 2012).

These urban policies have been implemented by fragmenting local power, changing the role of local authorities in a shift from what was called urban managerialism to urban entrepreneurialism (Harvey, 1989). Local authorities were forced to enter into partnerships with the private sector or act like it. In the United Kingdom, some, at metropolitan level, were even abolished in the 1980s (the Greater London Council most infamously). Urban policymaking has become horizontal as local authorities have sometimes been side-lined, deprived of their planning powers or made to collaborate with the private sector and with community organisations. The privatisation of urban policy has led to conflicts between the various local actors as consultation was often tokenistic or nil (North, 2003, p. 129) and regeneration priorities different. By encouraging private companies to invest in inner cities and recycle brown fields and derelict heritage into

luxury residential development and offices, it was hoped a virtuous circle of economic growth and regeneration would be kick-started. Instead, urban entrepreneurialism and the economic restructuring of cities has often led to dual cities (Castells, 1983) where the segmentation of the labour market has increased (Edwards & Imrie, 2015, p. 116).

The fragmentation of the inner city housing market as well as its gentrification have led in turn to protests and campaigns against development and redevelopment schemes. More generally, these mobilisations are often structured along consumption cleavages (private/public) and united by a community of residence. Some see three stages in urban movements in recent history: from protests against the post-Fordist society in the 1960s and 1970s, their object has shifted to austerity policies in the 1980s and from 1990s to the neo-liberal city and its economic growth and global flows of investment principles. They form to defend or challenge the provision of urban public services and to protect the local environment (Lowe, 1986). Paradoxically, by bringing individuals together, they contain the remedy against what early sociologists considered to be the inevitable atomisation of urban life (Tonnies, 1887). Beyond housing and urban questions, the dichotomy between the universal and the individual and the conflict between vertical and horizontal forms of protest stems from a shift from class politics towards identity or issue-based politics. This has given way to fluid and pluriversal movements that postcolonial and decolonial theories or anarchist models seem to promote or to populist and anti-state forms of activism, examples of which are analysed by this book's contributors.

Presentation of the Book

The chapters in this volume are gathered in order to reflect on the notion of 'fragmented powers' and its role in understanding evolving power dynamics in the English-speaking world. Combining historical and contemporary perspectives, from the late 18th century to the contemporary era, the book invites a critical evaluation of fragmentation and of the processes of confrontation and cooperation that have shaped socio-economic as well as political and cultural environments and opens up a wide variety of approaches at various scales.

Indeed, the editors' and contributors' take on fragmentation stems from their varied backgrounds in history, political science, sociology, and cultural studies as reflected by the all-encompassing French academic 'civilizational approach'. While the term 'civilization' has become, understandably, a disfavoured one, it needs to be tied back to the contributions of Fernand Braudel and his insistence on embracing the historical, social, and institutional reality of a regional area he deemed identified by a shared 'civilization', in his case the Mediterranean world, in the present book's case the English-speaking world (Braudel, 1976).

This posits a scientific stance that of course welcomes nuance and is interested in conflicting trends within that space, as the concept of fragmentation in the English-speaking world fully reveals in the present collection. Adopting a perspective that seeks to go beyond the mere comparison or contrast of power