

INTER PARES
Parliaments in Partnership
EU Global Project to Strengthen the Capacity of Parliaments

HOW CAN PARLIAMENTS AND DEMOCRACIES DEAL WITH THE LONG TERM?

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“Our responsibility is to preserve nature, to take care of it, and pass it on to future generations.”

But for too long, humanity has forgotten this responsibility. Generation after generation has exploited nature beyond our planet's boundaries. We took, we polluted, we disposed. And this has to stop. We need a new model, which gives back to nature instead of taking away from it. This is the European Green Deal.”



Ursula von der Leyen

“My biggest disillusionment was the slowness and short-term thinking in politics. We rarely reflect on what’s to come for the next generation.”

Political decision-making is so slow that it takes at least four to six years to push major achievements into motion. But a politician can't wait **that** long, of course. He should be able to present results to his voters sooner. That means you have to launch all kinds of proposals or waste your time on crazy ideas.”

Philippe De Backer (former MEP and Minister)

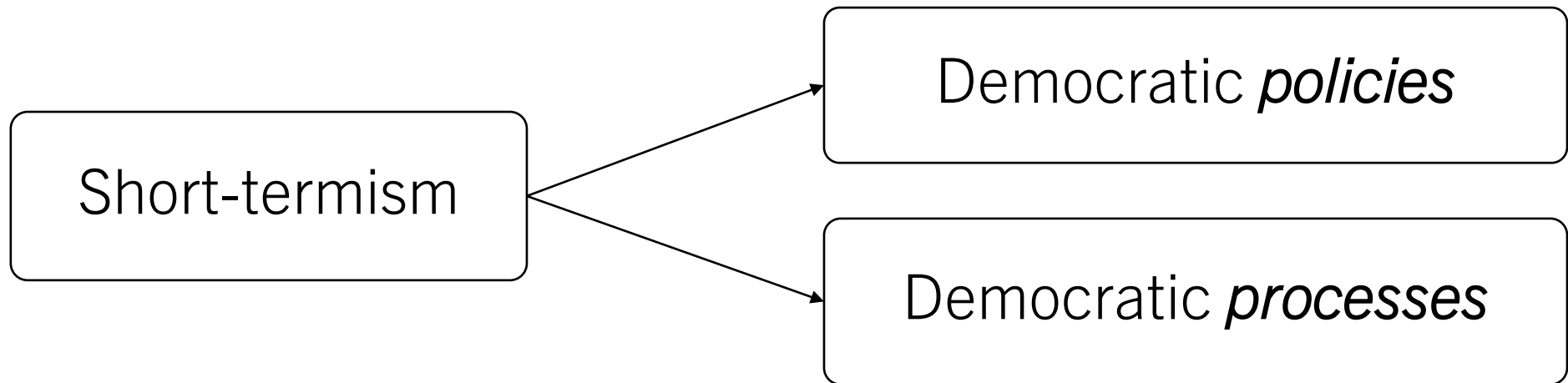


Parliaments and democracies are faced with

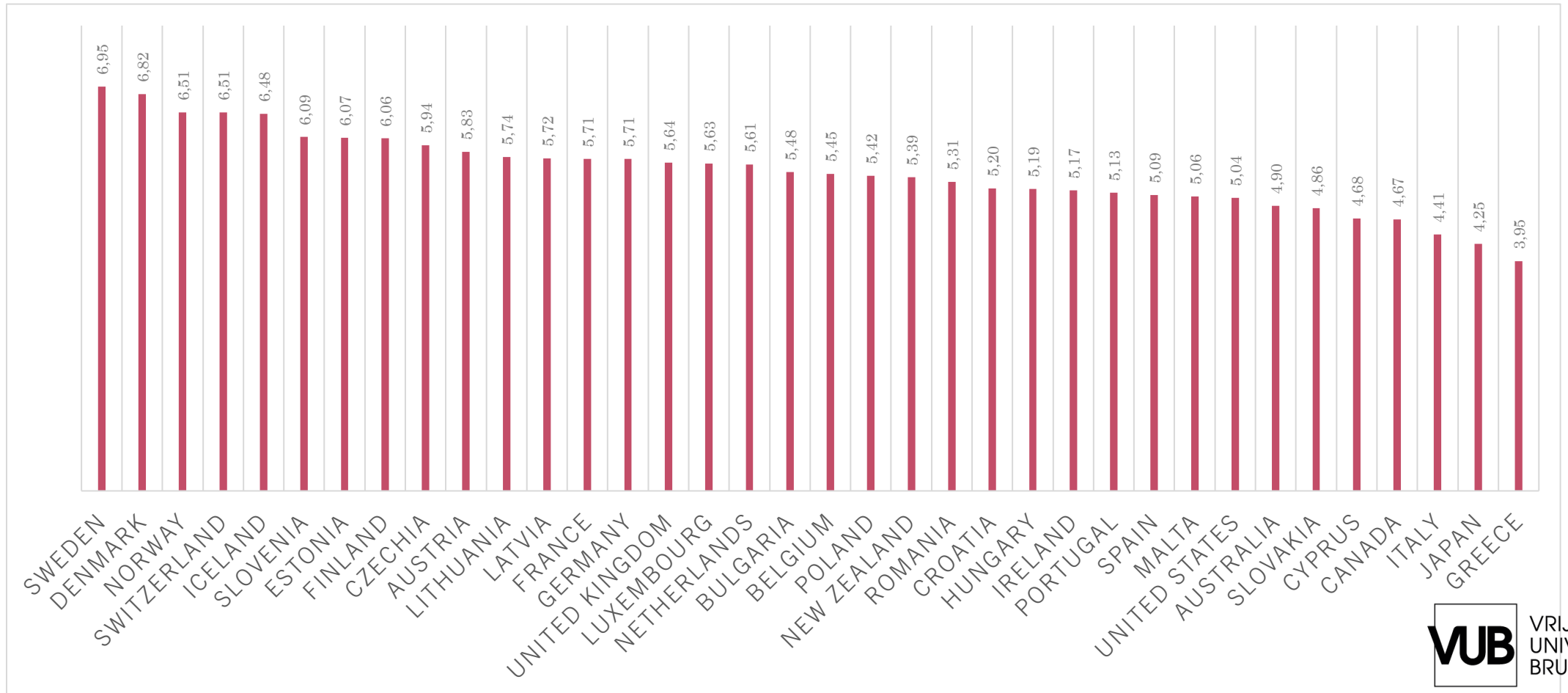
generation-transcending challenges

while also ill-equipped to deal with those challenges

SO, WHAT IS THE PROBLEM EXACTLY?



SOUNDS ABOUT RIGHT, BUT IS THIS EVEN REAL? - POLICIES



(Caluwaerts & Vermassen forthcoming)

Democracies produce *short-termist policies*

(... but not all democracies to the same extent)

SOUNDS ABOUT RIGHT, BUT IS THIS EVEN REAL? - PROCESSES

- Very (really very) few mentions of future generations
- Especially few mentions in election years
- Most mentions by those who are not electorally vulnerable

(Vermassen, Caluwaerts & Erzeel, 2021)

Members of parliament *rarely claim to represent*
future generations

GREAT, BUT WHY SHOULD WE CARE?

- Sustainable development goals
- Intergenerational justice principle
- All/most affected principle



WHERE DOES THIS SHORT-TERMISM COME FROM?

POLICIES

- Mostly cognitive and informational deficits
- Uncertainty

PROCESSES

- Discounting behavior and lack of trust among voters
- Electoral and strategic incentives among members of parliament
- Demographic strength of older generations
- Absence of future generations

(MacKenzie 2018; Smith 2021)

THIS IS STARTING TO MAKE SENSE... BUT WHAT CAN WE DO?

Overlapping generations

- The not-yet-**voting**
- Younger generations

Non-overlapping generations

- The not-yet-**born**
- Future generations

ENGAGING *YOUNG* GENERATIONS IN PARLIAMENT

Constitutional proposals

- Lowering the voting age and candidacy age
- Reserved seats and youth quotas
- Demerit votes

ENGAGING *YOUNG* GENERATIONS IN PARLIAMENT

Parliamentary initiatives

- Youth parliaments and children's parliaments
- Youth days ("MP for a day"...)
- Civic education programmes ("Reporters of democracy"...)

ENGAGING *FUTURE* GENERATIONS IN PARLIAMENT

Constitutional proposals

- Constitutional provisions for the future (Norway, Hungary)
- Non-elected chambers
- Special majorities
- Longer electoral cycles
- Designated MPs

ENGAGING *FUTURE* GENERATIONS IN PARLIAMENT

Parliamentary organization

- Parliamentary futures committees (e.g. Finland, Scotland)
- Manifestos for the Future
- Future/Posterity Impact Assessments
- Independent oversight agencies, accountable to parliament (e.g. Wales, Israel, Hungary)

ENGAGING YOUNG AND FUTURE GENERATIONS *BEYOND* PARLIAMENT

- Democratic innovations and participatory democracy
- Strong effects on participants
- So-far weak political uptake
- Climate assemblies

ADVISE FOR (ASPRIRING) INSTITUTIONAL ENGINEERS

We need institutions that *include* rather than exclude different interests

We need institutions that unambiguously *articulate* the needs of the future

We need institutions that offer long-term *stability*

We need institutions that foster *trust* in government capacity