

Introduction

Political parties are an established feature of contemporary democratic politics. For decades, parties have organised government, competed in elections and influenced the way society is run. Yet despite their importance, parties' position in society is presently unclear. As has been documented over successive decades, there is wide-ranging evidence of discontent with traditional party politics, with mainstream parties witnessing declining popular support and being described in almost uniformly negative terms. But, simultaneously, there are also signs that the public have not entirely renounced party politics, with newer parties and unconventional party leaders achieving support and success. In such a climate it is not clear how citizens view political parties and what it is that people desire from these organisations.

In this book, I use a range of methods to explore what citizens ideally want from parties, and then probe how parties are currently seen to measure up to these desires. Given that many parties are seeking to generate public appeal through innovations such as the creation of registered supporters' networks, the adoption of community organising principles and even the use of data mining, this book provides important insights into the kind of reforms that may be able to bring parties in line with citizen desires. Probing citizens' views, I explore different influences upon public perceptions of parties in an attempt to determine what it is that citizens like and dislike, and

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where and how people would like to see parties change. To do so, I direct attention to the way parties represent, provide opportunities for participation, govern and conduct themselves. Through this analysis I demonstrate that there is no simple cure for parties, but neither is there a rejection of partisan politics; rather, what many people appear to desire is an expansive reimagination of the way that parties operate.

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The idea of a reimagined party captures the desire for a wide-ranging change in party politics. But it does not signal the rejection of established ideas of party democracy in favour of more technocratic or populist ideas. Rather, I argue that people want existing aspects of party politics – such as aggregation and mediation, responsive and responsible governance, and partisan leadership – to be performed in a slightly different way. People therefore call for more open and inclusive parties, ones that listen to different views but that also advance principled visions of the national interest. They want to see established principles of party democracy reimagined to reflect new norms and ideas.

To think about what this means, it is useful to consider an analogy from the car industry, where the idea of ‘reimagined’ cars is often found. Car manufacturers frequently claim to ‘reimagine’ classic car designs and models, drawing on the best from the past to create new models equipped with the latest mod cons. Take the example of the Mini, which was relaunched in 2001. Whilst the classic Mini had been successful in its day, for modern customers the car no longer had appeal. Although originally praised for its go-kart-like handling and simple interior and mechanics, these features and style were no longer viewed as desirable. In part this was due to technical functionality. The old Minis lacked air conditioning, heated seats and an efficient engine, meaning that most people – with the exception of a number of classic car enthusiasts – were unlikely

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to buy the car. But it wasn't just this – there was also a sense that the 'feel' of the car no longer chimed with modern buyers and that it wouldn't be enough to simply add integrated satnav or parking sensors to the old Mini body. What was required was a reimagining of the car that, recognising the growing popularity of SUVs and larger, safer cars, created a new Mini that was playful, practical and that, whilst recognisable as a Mini, was undoubtedly new. The new, reimagined Mini therefore did not just add new functions or change how existing features performed, but also signalled a step-change in how the car was viewed and felt to drive. Without these changes the Mini would have continued to wane, becoming the preserve of devoted classic car fans.

Political parties are somewhat like the old Mini design. Whilst essential for politics, many parties have become somewhat tired and out of kilter with modern practices and desires. Although all the essential ingredients are there, parties need to be updated. Like Minis, this does not just mean adding new functions, capacities or processes to the existing shell: it requires a more thorough re-evaluation of what a party looks like, how it behaves and what kind of emotional response it provokes. Only if parties adapt in this way can their longevity be secured.

This kind of change is something that is not new to parties. Parties have long had to evolve and transform to remain relevant. Whilst once the preserve of a small elite, parties have expanded and adapted, adopting new structures, procedures and policy ideas to remain abreast of modern trends (Budge et al., 1987; Katz and Mair, 1994; Mair, 1997). What is at present unclear, however, is what form of evolution or change citizens now desire. To offer answers to this question, in this book I explore people's desires for parties and how current practices measure up to these ideals. Whilst finding that people do not have uniform preferences, I show that many people from different backgrounds, who support a range of parties, voice an unrealised desire for parties that are more open and inclusive, responsive and responsible, and that offer principled leadership.

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Presenting these insights, I consider whether and how parties wish to respond to citizens' views, and argue that whilst it is not possible to identify a single initiative or set of reforms that will guarantee positive perceptions, it is possible to highlight the types of change that many citizens desire.

The value of parties

In calling for parties to be reimagined, I build on an extensive body of theoretical work about parties. This scholarship outlines parties' position as seminal democratic institutions that have helped to bridge the gap between rulers and the ruled by providing mechanisms through which the people can engage in politics and political institutions can be run. In thinking through the traits that define systems of party democracy, a number of ideas and principles can be identified, but it is common to see emphasis placed on parties' representative capacities, their ability to deliver responsive and responsible governance, and the provision of political choice.

As democratic organisations, much emphasis has been placed on parties' capacity to facilitate democratic linkage (Figure 0.1). As Lawson (1980, p. 3) illustratively outlines, political '[p]arties are seen, both by their members and by others, as agencies for forging links between citizens and policy-makers. Their *raison d'être* is to create a substantive connection between rulers and ruled.' This capacity to combine and execute representative and governing functions simultaneously renders parties unique and pivotal organisations because, unlike other bodies, they are able to identify, articulate and enact



Figure 0.1 Parties' role as linkage organisations

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citizens' desires. Whilst alternative systems of governance may be capable of replacing certain party functions, no alternative has yet emerged that is able to balance the varied roles that parties simultaneously perform (Dommett and Rye, 2017).

As representative organisations, political parties act as key institutions through which citizens can channel their ideas into the political system and exert some influence (however small) over the way societies are run. In systems where hundreds of thousands of people hold opinions and are given a say, parties provide a mechanism through which many different voices and ideas can be aggregated and transformed into coherent agendas that inform how the country is governed. By performing functions including facilitating participation, integrating and aggregating different views and managing conflict, Sartori (2005) argues that parties are able to identify and represent the views of the people. This makes parties key mediating organisations that collect and integrate many different views.

In addition to acting as representative organisations, parties also perform key governing roles. As Mair (2009, p. 5) has outlined, parties develop policy programmes, select governors and implement agendas, helping to bring about change in society and deliver governing outcomes. Many of these activities can be conditioned by the representative desires citizens outline, with parties, in Sartori's (2005, p. 24) terms, 'communicating the demands of society to the state, as the basic link or connector between a society and government'. And yet parties are not simply vehicles for transmitting public demands; they are also agencies of the state and therefore play a role in shaping and managing competing demands. Parties have to balance these pressures by being *responsive* to citizens' demands and also *responsible* in recognising 'internal and international systemic constraints and compatibilities' (Bardi et al., 2014a, p. 236; see also Birch, 1964, p. 13). This means that parties can act contrary to public demands, being influenced by factors such as material pressures, the need to balance long-term needs and short-term demands, and

systemic constraints. What is key to maintaining legitimacy is that parties deliver publicly acceptable outcomes, meaning that people accept instances in which their desires are not executed (Keman, 2014). Parties are therefore judged on multiple fronts, suggesting that it is not only their capacity to channel citizens' views into the political system that matters, but also their ability to realise publicly acceptable political outcomes (Rothstein, 2009, p. 313).

In addition to their functional roles, parties also enable democratic politics by providing political choice. Operating within electoral systems, parties are authorised and held to account through competitive elections that give citizens equal opportunity to grant or withdraw a political mandate (Lipset, 1959). When parties obtain the support of a plurality of voters they are authorised to act as citizens' representatives (Pitkin, 1967), giving them governing authority. It is on this basis that parties claim that their exercise of power is rightful, and why, as Beetham (2004, p. 107) argues, those subject to party authority have a duty to obey. It is also key that citizens have the opportunity to object to party practices by being able to choose an alternative regime (Pitkin, 1967).

Political parties therefore need to provide voters with choice. Although choices can be made on many different bases – such as evaluating the relative competence of different parties or the physical attractiveness of different political candidates (Milazzo and Mattes, 2016) – historically choice has been offered through the provision of different political agendas. As argued by Edmund Burke in the eighteenth century, parties exist as 'a body of men [sic] united for promoting by their joint endeavours the national interest, upon some particular principle in which they are all agreed' (Burke, 1998 [1770], p. 271). Given that people do not share uniform conceptions of the national interest and prioritise different principles, different parties form and compete to win power, providing a vehicle through which those with shared beliefs and objectives can come together to promote their common vision of society. It is these ideas that underpin the principles of the 'responsible party model' proposed

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by the American Political Science Association (1950), which argues that, amongst other traits, parties offer different partisan positions that allow citizens to exercise choice (Kitschelt and Wilkinson, 2009).

Cumulatively, these traits define parties' role as democratic institutions. Parties have historically been understood as representative institutions that balance responsive and responsible governing imperatives, and that provide citizens with political choice.

The relationship between parties and citizens

Interestingly, the principles of party democracy leave a number of questions about how parties actually enact each of these ideas. Rather than there being one benchmark for how all parties should and do connect with people and the state, the past and present practices of parties show that these organisations can operate in very different ways. In regard to representation, for example, it is possible for parties to connect with citizens using different styles of representation and different organisational structures. Parties may also focus on different representative constituencies, and demonstrate different degrees of responsiveness to citizen demands. These alternatives (and many others besides) mean that parties can come in many different forms (Scarrow et al., 2017) and that their practices can vary over time. Far from being settled institutions, the dynamics of party politics can therefore vary and adapt.

In thinking about the history of political parties, it appears that the form of party organisation has evolved. Whilst they were once small, elite-led organisations, over time parties became mass-membership bodies in which ordinary citizens could become involved. The evolution of parties has been prompted by a range of pressures and impetuses, but attention has often been paid to the significance of how parties are seen. Over previous decades, therefore, it has been common for scholars to diagnose popular discontent with parties and to call for them to adapt and change. Indeed, scholars have used survey data to identify negative views

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(Clarke et al., 2016; Hay, 2007; Stoker, 2006) and to raise concerns about ‘the viability of party democracy’ (van Biezen and Saward, 2008). Many of these calls have seemed particularly pressing because whilst mainstream parties are viewed negatively, there have been signs that new political parties and unconventional politicians are achieving support. Far from signalling a flaw within the very idea of partisan politics, these dynamics suggest that certain attributes or practices are not garnering public appeal and could be beneficially changed. What is not presently clear, however, is what precisely it is that citizens want and whether established mainstream parties can adapt to meet these desires. For this reason, there is a need for empirical analysis that explores how parties are viewed and what it is that citizens desire.

In this book I evaluate and explore our understanding of parties by looking in detail at how they are viewed by citizens, largely through an empirical mixed-methods study (detailed later in this chapter, under ‘Empirical data collected in this book’). Distilling citizens’ views of representation, participation, governance and party conduct, I discuss different facets of how parties are perceived, to argue that there is a desire amongst many citizens for parties to be reimagined. Outlining the form of public desires and the challenge of realising these ideals, this book is intended to help scholars and practitioners alike understand citizens’ views of parties and consider avenues for possible response.

Analytical approach

In examining the connection between citizens, parties and the state, this book is of course by no means unique and it is possible to find many existing studies of parties. However, unlike past work, which has tended to ask ‘what is the problem with parties?’, in this book I ask ‘what do people want from parties?’ This subtly different question has important implications, as it focuses attention on public perceptions and ideals.¹

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Studies of public perceptions are often conducted in political science. In addition to established survey methodologies, scholars utilise focus groups, interviews, deliberative discussions and many other methods to generate insights into how citizens think about and engage with politics. In the party context, a study of public perceptions is particularly appropriate because parties themselves are inherently concerned with what the public think. Whether acting to represent citizens or to secure their own electoral success, parties seek new ways to discern and interpret the public's ideas, using, for example, focus groups to test policy positions or the resonance of political campaigns. In this book, a wider lens of analysis is adopted by examining citizens' views of parties in general (rather than of a specific party), asking how people view current practices and what they ideally desire from these organisations.

A study of public perceptions is particularly valuable in the context of debates around how parties are viewed. Whilst much attention has been devoted to how the public think and feel about parties, many of the claims made in existing studies – and especially those diagnosing party decline and the growing illegitimacy of parties – have relied on proxies to infer public opinion. Scholars have used data outlining declining party membership levels or falling levels of party affiliation as indicators of how parties are viewed. Whilst there may be a connection, there is no guarantee that these metrics capture public views. Indeed, it is possible that falling engagement may reveal more about changing patterns of participation than views of parties per se. This suggests the value of asking citizens about how they perceive parties, and of directly probing their desires and perceptions of the way parties currently perform. Whilst these views may not always be the most informed, it is important to see how citizens understand parties. I therefore agree with Dalton and Weldon's (2005, p. 932) assertion that '[b]ecause parties are central to democracy, public orientations toward political parties are an important research question'.

In studying public perceptions, it is important to consider from the outset what is meant by the idea of public opinion and what

implications these ideas have for the claims made in this book. The idea of public opinion is widely encountered and it is common for academics and political commentators to talk about what the public think, often using single methods (and often survey data) to support their claims. Such analysis is highly insightful, but within this book I argue that there are important limitations to such techniques that often go unacknowledged. These limitations concern the kind of data provided by measures of public opinion, and have implications for the way methods were selected for the empirical study reported in this book. To unpack these ideas, it is useful to think about two questions often implicit in discussions of public opinion: first, does ‘the public’ exist; and second, what do we mean by ‘opinion’?

Beginning with the question of whether the public exists, and the associated query as to what it is we study when we refer to this idea, it is important to note that in this book I do not argue that the ideas of all the people can be captured and described. Understanding the term ‘the public’ to refer to the collective of people within any given jurisdiction, it can often be the case that analysts (unwittingly) give the impression that they know precisely what percentage of the people accept the principles of democracy, favour capital punishment or like a particular soap opera (amongst many other topics). Without careful reporting, such claims can suggest that the views of *all* of the people have been observed, collected and distilled into relatively homogenous descriptive categories, belying the impossibility of measuring the ideas of each and every member of the population. In practice, any description of public opinion is a generalisation based on samples and indicative inquiries that are used to construct an account of what the population as a whole are likely to think. This is because no method can capture what every individual person thinks, and even if it could, analysts would be unlikely to uncover sufficient similarity in views to allow them to produce a singular account of what the public as a unified entity think. As such, descriptions of public opinion are not capturing something that exists and that can simply be observed, but are, rather, highlighting patterns to offer

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a narrative of what might be said about collective views based on individual responses (Zaller, 1992).

Recognising the constructed nature of public opinion and analysts' role in constructing accounts of what the public think, it is useful to think of the observation of public opinion as an art rather than a science. Even the most robust, demographically representative sample relies on assumptions about the representativeness of individual views and constructs an account of what the public think. Whilst some methods of generalisation are, of course, more robust than others, public opinion should not be viewed as something that can be simply observed, but rather as something that we construct. For this reason, in this book I explore different data sources to build up a picture of what people think. By observing patterns in how those who participated in the empirical study think about parties, and exploring explanations for these beliefs, I build a deeper understanding of public ideas. To do this, different methods are used, examining and testing the resonance of ideas uncovered through an online survey and in deliberative workshops to build up a rich picture of what people think.

In adopting this approach I argue that it is important to think about public opinion towards parties not as a homogenous thing, but something that contains important nuances and variations. Highlighting different trends in how the public think and talk about parties, I show that people often don't think in the same way, and that there are important gradations and differences in public ideas that make it difficult to talk about public opinion as a uniform thing. For this reason, I highlight major trends in public attitudes, discussing the extent to which certain ideas are held, and the degree of agreement around those ideas.

Adopting this approach, in this book I conduct analysis in accordance with a specific answer to the second question – what it is we mean by 'opinion'. Public opinion can be evoked as a homogenous entity just waiting to be 'discovered' by academics and politicians, but it is deeply complex and often diverse. Whilst

frequently discussed as something that is fully formed and which can simply be tapped by questions that probe citizens' thoughts, a wealth of research has shown that, in practice, people's views are tentative, changeable and sometimes even entirely contradictory (Converse, 1964). Indeed, studies have shown that when the same people are asked the same question in repeated interviews, only about half give the same answers (Zaller and Feldman, 1992, p. 580). This insight may suggest that any attempt to measure public opinion is doomed to fail, but within this book it is simply seen to reveal the importance of understanding the *kind* of insight that studies of public opinion offer.

What researchers encounter when they conduct opinion polls, surveys, focus groups or interviews are often answers that do not reflect concrete, long-held positions (although this can be the case) but that frequently represent a more unpredictable collection of ideas and views, triggered and shaped by different question wording, circumstances and environments. Public opinion observed through research therefore exists as one account of a set of ideas and opinions that guide citizens' responses. These opinions can, of course, change, but even at a single point in time, an individual is likely to present her or his ideas in different ways. A respondent can therefore at one instance indicate support for a more egalitarian society and economic redistribution, whilst at another argue that the benefits system is defunct and rewards the feckless and idle. These two views, whilst appearing contradictory, call upon different ideas and associations that prompt the individual to make two very different responses. Expressions of public opinion are therefore contingent upon a range of shifting and varied contextual factors. This means that survey responses or workshop findings should not be seen to offer an unshakable picture of public attitudes or indeed to capture a given sample's fixed preferences. Rather, these methods provide contextually contingent insights into public views on particular subjects, views that can be compared and contrasted to test and explore the resilience of these ideas.

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In line with this understanding, public opinion is not something that can be easily or precisely measured to produce concrete facts. Rather, it is capricious and complex. This conception may appear to undermine the very agenda I pursue in this book. If, after all, public opinion doesn't exist as an observable phenomenon, and if all opinions uncovered are contingent, then how is it possible for a book such as this to offer insight into people's views of parties? This question goes to the heart of the knowledge claims presented in this text. Far from striving to discover people's fixed ideas and views, I am interested in exploring how different groups of people understand and make sense of the world. Using a mixed-methods approach, I build up a picture of how people think about parties, how fixed their ideas are and whether there are patterns in how different types of people answer the questions posed. This means that, rather than focusing on single data points, I am interested in using findings to identify recurring themes and ideas that underpin people's responses.

Contribution

This book sets out to make two contributions: first, it offers empirical insight into how parties are viewed; and, second, it interrogates these findings to unpack their implications for parties. Whilst parties are a familiar component of contemporary politics, there have been few studies focused on attitudes towards these organisations as a component of the democratic system. There have been many studies of democracy, parliaments, political representatives and government, but less attention has been devoted to parties as discrete organisations (Martin, 2014). By focusing attention entirely on parties, this book therefore adds new insight into how politics is viewed.

In looking at parties, this book also takes another distinctive approach. Previous analyses of public attitudes have tended to examine attitudes towards *specific* parties, for example in the British context generating findings about Labour, the Conservatives or Liberal Democrats that highlight, say, the way a particular party's

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performance affects its electoral success and appeal. In this book I instead think primarily about parties at the regime level, generating insights of relevance to all political parties. This approach reflects a desire to identify their common challenges; however, it is important to recognise that previous studies have shown differentiations in how specific parties are viewed. An extensive literature on partisan influences has shown that people tend to speak more positively about their favoured party than about opposition parties (Campbell et al., 1960). Whilst partisan attachments have been shown to be weaker today than in the past (Dalton, 2004), party affiliations and identities can nevertheless be a powerful influence on how people think about parties.

In line with this insight, it might be expected that people will view the party they support favourably, whilst arguing that other parties violate important ideals. This dynamic means that there are some instances in which parties may be doing everything a citizen says they want, but still be seen to be acting contrary to those desires. Acknowledging this possibility, I am nevertheless interested in seeing whether there are certain core principles and ideals that people want from all parties. For this reason, throughout the Party Survey and workshops that formed the empirical basis to this study, participants were prompted to think about parties as a classification of organisation, and were presented with prompts such as: ‘These questions are about political parties in the UK. When answering, please try and think about your views of parties in general, rather than a specific political party.’ It should be noted that many respondents did find it challenging to disaggregate their views, despite being given numerous prompts and reminders. Participants in one workshop had the following exchange:

I think it depends on the party, because the party in government at the moment is definitely more focused on governing than representing, so it depends on which political party you’re thinking about. I don’t think they are all the same.

I think it is very valid to say that it depends on the party.

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Comments in other workshops included:

It's difficult, because it depends on which party. If I think of that party I'd give that answer. If I think of that party I give that answer.

I think words apply differently to Conservative and Labour, but I'm not sure about the smaller parties.

These difficulties are acknowledged and addressed in the analysis in different ways. First, to explore whether differences in partisanship informed how parties in general were viewed, multivariate analysis was used to look at trends in people's responses. Statistical methods were used to explore whether the supporters of specific parties and strong/weak partisans answered questions in similar ways (amongst other variables), making it possible to determine whether partisans had different views and desires of these organisations. Interestingly, significant variations in response were not found, suggesting that partisanship does not drive different attitudes towards parties in general.

It may also, however, be the case that people judge specific parties differently from how they judge parties in general. To assess this possibility, it may have been preferable to ask participants about their views and desires of every specific party; however, issues of cost and survey fatigue meant that this approach was not adopted.² Instead, in the Conclusion, I present a supplementary analysis, of a follow-on survey done in April 2019 (Party Survey 2), that tests the degree to which different parties are seen to live up to the ideals this book identifies. Asking about Labour, the Conservatives and the UK Independence Party (UKIP), I explore the degree to which these specific parties are seen to align with identified ideas. Employing these two strategies I interrogate the differences between views of parties in general and views of specific parties, offering new insight into the dynamics of people's views.

Thinking about attitudes towards parties in this way, this book offers an important corrective to some existing debates. When speaking about the public's views of politics, commentators and academics often talk in sweeping terms about widespread malaise and

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unrealistic demands, but data collected in this book reveals interesting gradations of public opinion. Whilst it is undoubtedly the case that people are often instinctively negative about parties, I show that people's views are nuanced and that, for many citizens, parties are realising their ideals. Moreover, I show that many citizens are not simply negative, but can identify and articulate a set of principles and beliefs that parties would do well to take seriously. This book therefore offers an important extension to our understanding of citizens' attitudes towards parties.

Whilst a study of public perceptions of parties is in itself valuable, this book also explores the practical implications of these findings for party politics in present-day Britain. In focusing on public perceptions and asking 'what do people want from parties?', I am inherently interested in how parties may wish to respond. A key part of this book is therefore highlighting citizens' desires in order to discuss how parties may wish to change. It is important to clarify, however, that this does not lead me to identify specific policy reforms that will result in more positive views. As the idea of the reimagined party communicates, citizens do not simply want parties to add new functions or processes to their existing structures; rather, there is a desire for a wide-ranging re-evaluation of what a party looks like and how it acts. This means that specific initiatives such as supporters' networks or open primaries are not guaranteed to advance the type of change that citizens' want to see. Instead, there is a need for parties to implement reforms in accordance with the type of ethos that I show many citizens to desire. This dynamic prevents me from offering a roadmap for reform, but in the Conclusion I do identify some options for change that parties may want to consider.

In thinking about parties' response, it is, however, important not to assume that parties – established or new – will be interested in embarking on programmes of reform designed to enact public desires. Whilst parties are important vehicles for democratic linkage, there are many reasons why they may want to disregard public views and

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act in their own regard. Indeed, factors such as the capricious nature of public sentiments (discussed above), the influence of the media and the seemingly inexhaustible nature of public demands (Flinders, 2009, p. 343; Hatier, 2012; Kimball and Patterson, 1997; Naurin, 2011; Stoker, 2006) may incentivise parties to ignore public desires. In line with this claim, the Conclusion of the book considers how parties may wish to use this data, outlining the potential for parties to *reform* in line with citizen views (by acting to bring themselves in line with citizen ideals), *re-educate* public views (by highlighting how the party already exemplifies desires) or *recalibrate* citizen views (by promoting alternative benchmarks for party success). These possibilities suggest that, whilst parties may not all want to reform in line with public views, they can benefit from gaining a more detailed understanding of how parties are viewed.

By entwining theory and practice in this way, I seek to contribute to debates on the future of political parties. To ground this discussion, a study of Britain is used. Whilst the findings of this book will offer important insights for countries elsewhere, it is necessary to focus on just one country in order to generate detailed, multifaceted insights into the public's perceptions of parties. Given the range of methods used, it is challenging to do justice to the data from just one country, let alone present a cross-country comparative analysis. For this reason, I use this case study to think about lessons for elsewhere, offering a benchmark for scholars to extend and test these ideas.

Empirical data collected in this book

In this book, a combination of data from two nationally representative surveys and three deliberative workshops are used to understand what the public think, and to map the possible responses of political parties.

To test public attitudes towards parties I commissioned a survey with YouGov – the Party Survey – to examine citizens' views of parties in general, specifically interrogating ideas around representation,

participation and governance. Given the complex nature of these ideas, questions were extensively tested and refined to ensure that respondents would be clear about what they were being asked (a challenging task when dealing with multifaceted concepts such as representation).³ Responses were also tested to ensure their reliability, and if reliability was called into question they were not included in the analysis. For example, data from individuals who had conducted the survey in less time than it would take the average person to read the questions, let alone answer them, was removed. Valid responses were gathered from 1,497 people between 17 and 21 November 2017. The data presented are weighted in accordance with YouGov measures to extrapolate a nationally representative sample from respondents. The figures presented in the book show the percentage of respondents rounded up to the nearest whole number to avoid spurious accuracy in the reporting of public opinion.

In addition, a second, shorter survey (Party Survey 2) was fielded via YouGov between 8 and 9 April 2019. This survey gained 1,692 valid responses and was used to test the findings of the book and, specifically, their implications for judgements of specific British parties. Importantly, respondents to this survey were not from the same group as the Party Survey and hence this sample was not used to test changes in respondents' views.

Throughout the book, survey results are mainly presented using descriptive statistics and diagrams. Some regression analysis is conducted, the output tables for which are presented in Appendix 3, in order to make the presentation in the main text more accessible to those unfamiliar with statistical tools. Regressions were used specifically to determine whether factors including age, gender, educational level, previous voting behaviour, knowledge about how parties work, strength of partisanship, party affiliation and trust in parties predict people's responses. This allowed me to see whether public preferences are uniform, or whether they vary in accordance with certain common traits and ideas held by different groups. Where interesting trends emerged, these are highlighted in the text.

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In introducing the statistical analysis within this book, it should be noted that the results presented contain ‘Don’t know’ responses. Although it is common for analysts to remove ‘Don’t know’ responses in presenting their results, the decision was made to report this data because of the relatively high number of instances in which ‘Don’t know’ was selected. Given the abstract nature of many of the questions asked, it is perhaps unsurprising that this option was frequently chosen (Bourdieu, 1979, p. 128). Nevertheless, I believe it is important to report this data in order to make it abundantly clear that a large proportion of respondents do not have clear ideas. Where preferences for party linkage and conduct can therefore be discerned, it is important to remain cognisant of the large number of people who do not report favoured ideas and who may or may not support the conclusions presented here. Far from undermining the argument of this book, this approach allows me to reflect in more detail on the challenge any party faces in seeking to respond to public views.

To complement the use of survey data, I also utilise deliberative workshops to generate insight into citizens’ ideas. A mixed-methods approach is valuable because studies have shown that surveys in particular are vulnerable to producing contingent knowledge. Contextual prompts and question wording have been shown to affect how individuals respond to questions and responses can vary if questions are asked in a different way. Survey data therefore offer an important glimpse into the ideas that individuals hold on complex and unfamiliar topics, but I argue that they are most fruitfully viewed alongside other indicators that allow respondents’ ideas to be tested, probed and understood. Indeed, in my own analysis, many puzzling survey responses became comprehensible only when viewed in the context of more expansive qualitative data. In line with this belief, additional data was gathered at deliberative workshops.

Deliberative workshops can come in different forms and generate different kinds of data, hence it is important to clarify the form of knowledge generated here and the precise mechanism used. Within

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this study, three deliberative workshops were held in Sheffield in January and February 2018. In each workshop, five smaller groups were facilitated simultaneously, with four or five individuals undertaking common tasks introduced by a facilitator. This allowed more data to be collected within the budget confines of the project. The workshops themselves had different compositions:

- Workshop 1: party activists and campaigners,
- Workshop 2: people with no formal engagement with political parties,
- Workshop 3: a 50/50 split of the above two groups.

In total, 68 people participated in these workshops, with an average of 22 people in each session.⁴ In the text, the first two groups are respectively referred to as ‘activists’ and ‘non-activists’.

These deliberative workshops differed in important ways from more traditional focus groups. Focus groups are traditionally used to provide insight into citizens’ opinions, helping scholars to understand how and why views are formed. Usually composed of homogenous groups of strangers (Morgan, 1996), they reveal how a ‘particular population or group process and negotiate meaning around a given situation’ by observing how meaning is constructed and how different ideas and social norms affect the opinions groups come to hold (Stanley, 2016, p. 237). For this study, the focus group method was adapted in workshops to generate insight into what and how people think about parties, but also how they want these organisations to behave. Given that participants often do not have fixed ideas, in the workshops respondents were given the opportunity to discuss and reflect on their priorities, after being presented with additional information and scenarios designed to test and develop their thinking. This mirrors the tenets of deliberative theory, which suggests that ‘[r]esponses manufactured on the spot are not necessarily what respondents would say in answer to the same questions if they had had some information and time to think or discuss with

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others what was involved' (Fishkin et al., 2000, p. 658). When people encounter new ideas, hear different perspectives or are encouraged to grapple with potentially competing ideas, it is argued that different kinds of knowledge emerge. Given that my interest is in not only what citizens think, but also how parties may want to respond, these workshops generated important insights, as they allowed detailed scrutiny of the attributes participants believed to be essential for parties, and revealed the trade-offs they were willing to make when led in a task to design their ideal party. This method therefore allowed the project to move beyond collecting a simple list of what respondents said they wanted in regard to representation, participation, governance and conduct, to tease apart priorities and desires. The sessions therefore differed to conventional focus groups, but were also distinct from deliberative forums, as the objective was not to promote good deliberation or produce a consensual view amongst participants, but rather to allow participants to confront and discuss different ideas.

Returning to the idea of what different methods can capture in relation to public opinion, these sessions were not conducted in an attempt to identify generalisable conclusions that could be extrapolated to explain how the wider public think. Participants were selected on the basis of their engagement with parties, as well as their gender, age, ethnicity and partisan support to ensure that a cross-section of society was represented, but it is not claimed that they represent a microcosm of society. This means that these sessions were used to identify different explanations, discuss rationales and observe patterns in responses, providing rich insight into why citizens view parties as they do. Data drawn from these workshops is therefore discussed in two ways to examine how participants responded and reacted to prescribed tasks. First, content produced by participants in response to pre-defined tasks (such as being asked to list three words or short phrases associated with parties) is aggregated to examine the extent to which common views emerged across the different groups. Second, the workshop discussions (over 60

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hours in total) were recorded and analysed using NVivo software to detect common explanations, processes of rationalisation and shifts in position. Through these means, it becomes possible to explore existing theories around linkage, but also to diagnose a desire for certain kinds of party conduct and, more widely, for reimagined parties. Presenting this data, the book uses tables and quotations. In places, passages of discussion are reproduced. It is worth noting that these passages and quotes were not transcribed verbatim; rather, an intelligible transcript was produced that accurately captured the ideas but also the language that an individual used. Specific participants are not distinguished by name or identifying marker, but it is specified, where relevant, which workshop that participant was in. One notable finding of this analysis was that participants often varied only marginally in their views – with activists and non-activists alike commonly expressing the same frustrations and ideas.

A mixed-methods approach allows findings to be tested and explored in different contexts and ways. However, it is important to note that the surveys and workshops did not recruit the same individuals. Survey respondents were recruited by YouGov, whilst workshop participants were identified by a local company in Sheffield (see Appendix 2), hence there is no overlap in respondents. To evaluate the comparability of findings, all participants in all parts of the study were asked to answer the same set of questions covering some basic demographic and political characteristics (see Table A.1 in Appendix 1). This exercise revealed similarities and differences that in many ways reflect the challenges of recruiting research participants; however, these differences do not hinder the task of asking (and answering) ‘what do people want from parties?’

Book structure and findings

In introducing the idea of a reimagined party, this book comprises seven main chapters. Each of these can be read in isolation to identify valuable insights about citizens’ views of and ideals for parties,

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but they are most informative when considered collectively, as this reveals the presence of recurring reimagined ideals.

In Chapter 1, I review existing evidence on public attitudes towards parties in the UK and beyond to understand what we know about the public's views of parties. Presenting data from cross-national and UK-based surveys, I demonstrate that, far from parties uniformly being seen as negative, there are important nuances in people's views. Seeking to gain greater insight into what citizens want from parties, I argue that there is a need to look at current perceptions and desires. Outlining this approach, I argue that there is value in looking at two facets of party organisation to understand citizens' views. The first is connected to the idea of democratic linkage, whilst the second focuses on party conduct. Introducing these ideas, I set out an agenda for the remainder of the book, outlining the value of inquiry that explores citizens' desires for and perceptions of parties today.

Chapter 2 is the first of three chapters that explore citizens' perceptions of democratic linkage and begins by interrogating citizens' views and desires for representation. Exploring three aspects of representation – parties' style of representation, their representative source and their degree of responsiveness – this chapter shows that there is a gulf between citizens' perceptions and ideals. Rather than indicating a desire for a move away from traditional partisan principles of representation, the analysis instead suggests that citizens want parties to represent a more expansive range of ideas and views. There is, accordingly, evidence of support for an open and inclusive party ethos, and for a mediating approach. Looking at current perceptions, it appears, however, that, for many people, parties are seen to fall short of these ideals.

Chapter 3 turns to examine a second aspect of citizens' relationship with parties by exploring perceptions of participation. The chapter reviews citizens' perceptions of participatory opportunities, requirements, rights and mediums to argue that whilst there is a desire amongst citizens for more opportunities for participation,

there is little desire to engage personally. This suggests that reforms are unlikely to improve public engagement, but that there are still areas in which participatory opportunities are currently seen to be out of kilter with public ideals. Specifically, it is argued that many citizens ideally want engagement opportunities where they can make a clear impact, and are attracted to the idea of ‘multi-speed’ parties where they can get involved with different levels of commitment and via different mediums.

Chapter 4 considers a final aspect of democratic linkage, concentrating on perceptions of parties’ connection to the state. The chapter specifically explores views on governance, timeframes and motivations, and finds that performance in government is a vital dimension of how political parties are evaluated. Unpicking what citizens desire, I argue that there is a wish for parties that are reliable, trustworthy and that deliver their promises, take advice and act to promote the national interest. At present, however, parties are seen to be self-interested, electorally focused, unreliable organisations that focus on short-term demands rather than long-term interests. This suggests, once again, a gap between ideals and current practice. However, it does not indicate a desire for parties to become more technocratic, administrative organisations akin to businesses, but rather suggests a wish for parties to rebalance responsible and responsive governing imperatives.

Chapter 5 turns to consider party conduct. Reviewing existing theories of party conduct, I present evidence that people have specific desires for how they would like parties to behave that cluster around seven principles, evident with remarkable uniformity in the data gathered for this book. I argue that there is a desire for parties that are transparent, communicative, reliable, principled, inclusive, accessible and that act with integrity. However, when looking at how parties are currently viewed, it appears that these ideals are often not manifest in the way parties are seen to conduct themselves. Once again, therefore, there appear to be significant differences between citizens’ ideals and perceptions of parties.

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Chapter 6 explores the evidence presented in the previous four chapters. Although these chapters can offer valuable insights when read in isolation, in this chapter I argue that they also reveal cumulative insights about what citizens want. Reviewing quantitative and qualitative data, I challenge the idea that parties are seen in uniformly negative terms and show variation in the demand for, and desired form of, change. Using this data, I argue that there are certain areas where there is a greater incentive for parties to respond to citizens' views. Highlighting these areas, I do not focus on specific data points to outline discrete policy reforms, but instead look for patterns within this data that, I argue, show the presence of certain recurring principles and ideals. I go on to identify three clusters of ideas that relate to unrealised desires: a wish for parties that are more open and inclusive, more responsive and responsible, and that offer principled leadership. These principles are of interest because, far from challenging the tenets of party democracy, they instead suggest a desire to reimagine well established principles. Offering this diagnosis, the chapter closes by reflecting on the challenges faced by any party seeking to respond to public opinion. Discussing issues of universality and reliability, I show why efforts to enact reimagined ideals may not be greeted favourably or improve how parties are viewed.

The final chapter concludes the book by revisiting the idea of the reimagined party and exploring what this idea means for parties in the UK and around the world. Extending existing analysis, I consider the insights these findings offer for *specific* parties, considering how the Conservative Party, Labour Party and UKIP measure up against these ideas. Equipped with these insights, the chapter then explores the different ways in which parties may want to respond to this data. Three types of potential response are identified and discussed: parties might wish to reform, to re-educate or to recalibrate citizens' desires. Reviewing these options, that concluding chapter discusses the implications and limitations of this work.