

Party-system formation in Europe and the 'freezing hypothesis'

Session 01

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- The course: what is it about and what are we going to do

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 - Review of party-system formation in WE

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 - The **interaction of parties** competing in the given electoral market. It is characterised by the number, size, and ideological preferences of the parties, among other aspects

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- In the end, party politics is a crucial aspect of political science, and studying party system comparatively is an important way of looking at it
- In this seminar, we will try to understand why European party-systems looks like they are today, considering how they emerged and evolved, which will help us to assess current events

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 - ① Institutional approaches
 - ② The **socio-historical approach**, famously indebted to Lipset and Rokkan ([1967](#))

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- For example, the **Duverger law** stipulates that single-ballot plurality-rule elections (such as first-past-the-post system) structured within single-member districts tend to favor a two-party system

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- **Any other example** of direct vs. indirect effect?

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- **Any example of what may be and what may not be a cleavage in any European country?**

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- The other two would be influenced by the **national revolution**, and it would depend on specific preconditions (e.g., strong privilege of the Catholic Church in Italy / strong minority elites in Spain)

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- The class cleavage is not only the one that **accounts for the most part of variation on voting behavior across social groups**
- **It is also the only cleavage that holds across European countries and over time**

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 - ③ **the opportunities, the payoffs and the costs of alliances**
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- The basic party families²:
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 - **Religious and people's parties**, such as the Christian democrats: competition based on the state-church cleavage
- Beyond this simplification, most parties compete on several overlapped arenas (a clearly example is the **Liberals** party family; class and urban-rural), but depending on the most salient issues, some parties will be stronger than others

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- **What are the mechanisms underlying these processes?** (i.e., the story behind)

⁴Based on Merkl (1969)

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- Another example, on the factors facilitating the emergence of agrarian parties⁴(e.g., prevalent in Nordic countries vs. Southern Europe):

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- There are typologies beyond the scope of this seminar that help to explain differences within clusters (e.g., consensual vs. majoritarian institutions)

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- Depending on the combination of parties and their modes of interaction, we can talk of two main types of party systems ([Sartori, 2005](#)):

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 - ① **Moderate party systems** have relative small ideological distance between the major parties, a propensity to form coalitions between parties of different views and predominantly centripetal competition
 - ② **Polarised party systems** have two main strongly opposed party blocks, presence of small 'anti-system' parties and substantial ideological distance between parties at each side, with predominantly centrifugal competition

The 'freezing hypothesis'

The 'freezing hypothesis': the German case

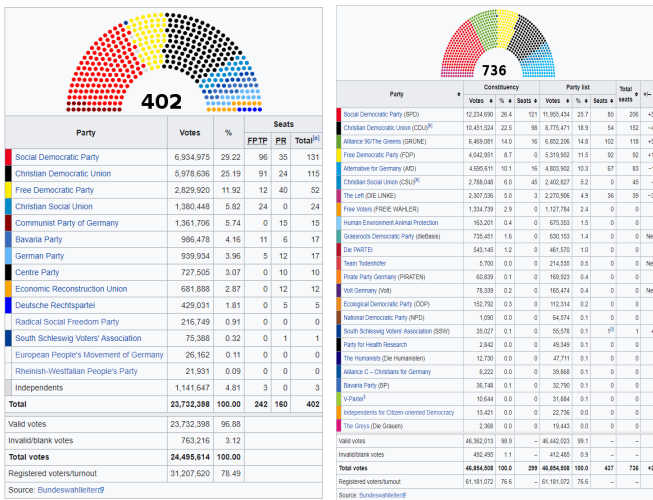


Figure 1: German Federal election results, images from Wikipedia

The 'freezing hypothesis': continuity between the 1920s and the 1960s

- “The authors conclude (...) that the current European party systems, with some exceptions, reflect the survival of the ‘cleavage structures’ of the 1920’s in spite of the onslaught of Fascism and National Socialism and World War II” ([Merkl, 1969](#))

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- Lipset and Rokkan highlight the shockingly pervasive stability of European party-systems despite intermittent wars, autocratic periods and revolutions
- **But are European party-systems currently frozen? What does the case of Germany suggest to you?**

The 'freezing hypothesis': let's debate!

- ***Final activity!*** Let's divide the class in two groups. You have 5-10 minutes to discuss current political events to argue against or in favour of the relevance of the freezing hypothesis today. That is, are party-systems still 'frozen' or not? Someone from each group should summarise the main argument and then we will briefly debate.

References

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