

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

## Session 01

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# Introduction

# Introduction to the course

- Presentations

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

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  - Wrap-up session

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- What is a party-system?
  - 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: 'the science of (public) power'
- In this seminar, we will try to understand why European party-systems looks like they are today, considering how they were born and evolved, which surely help us to assess future events (although never fully predict them)

# The origins of party-systems

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



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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 nowadays in any European country?

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- The first two cleavages would be directly influenced by social changes brought by the industrial (and liberal) revolutions
- The other two would be influenced by each 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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  - ④ The threshold of *majority power* (i.e., participation in government)

<sup>1</sup>Lipset and Rokkan mention (1) the traditions of decision-making in the polity, (2) the channels of expression and mobilization of protest, **(3) the opportunities, the payoffs and the costs of alliances**, (4) and the possibilities, the implications and the limitations of majority rule in the system

# European party-systems

# European party-systems: similitudes and differences

- The importance of **overlapping/coinciding** vs. **cross-cutting cleavages**, for example, on the strength of Socialist/Labor parties<sup>2</sup>:

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  - The countries in between has the additional factor or whether the nation-building elites were friendly with the Catholic Church during the period of education and participation expansion (e.g., Austria, Ireland and Belgium)
- What are the mechanisms underlying these processes?

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- Another example, on the factors facilitating the emergence of agrarian parties<sup>3</sup>(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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# The 'freezing hypothesis'

# The 'freezing hypothesis': the German case

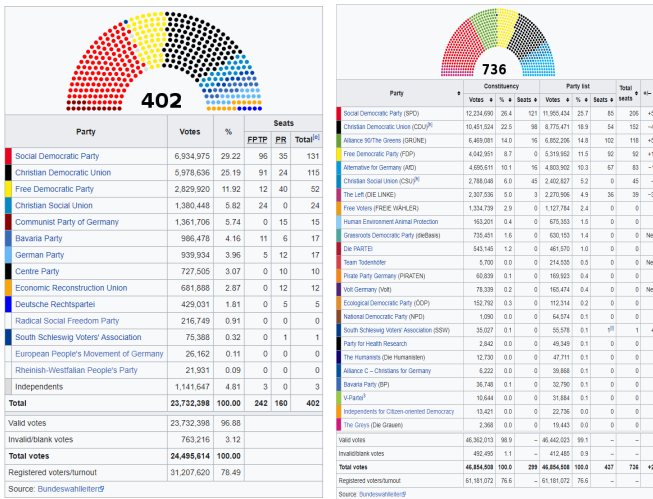


Figure 1: German Federal election results, images from Wikipedia

# The ‘freezing hypothesis’: continuity between the 1920s and the 1960s

- “The authors conclude, perhaps too easily, 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 potential explanations against or in favour of the freezing hypothesis, that is, why should we expect party-systems to remain ‘frozen’ until nowadays (or not). Someone from each group should summarise its main points and then we will briefly debate.

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- The activity begins now!

# References

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