

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

Session 01

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Spring Term 2021-2022

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- Presentations

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

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 - Students' presentations

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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)

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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)

¹Lipset 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: similitudes and differences

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The basic party families²:

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Beyond this simplification, most parties compete on several overlapped arenas (a clearly example is the Liberals party family), but depending on the most salient issues, some parties will be stronger than others

²Based on Camia and Caramani ([2012](#))

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- Religious parties, such as the Christian democrats: competition based on the state-church cleavage

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- What are the mechanisms underlying these processes?

³Based 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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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

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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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