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

Session 01

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- 1 Introduction to the course
- **2** Mapping the terrain: political parties and party-systems
- **3** The origins of party-systems in Europe
- **4** European party-systems: similitudes and differences
- **5** The 'freezing hypothesis'
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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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 - Review of party-system formation/evolution in WE

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 - Wrap-up session

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 - ② Economic voting and the Great Recession: new politics in Southern Europe

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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: '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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 - 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 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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 - **3** The threshold of *representation* (i.e., institutional presence)
 - 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

The basic party families²:

 Socialist and communist parties: competition based on the class cleavage

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

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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)

 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

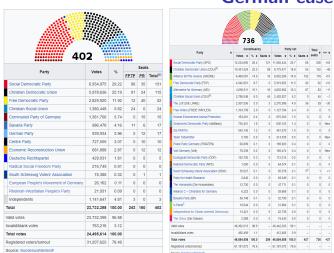


Figure 1: German Federal election results, images from Wikipedia

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

 "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

References I

- Boix, C. (2007). The emergence of parties and party systems. In *The oxford handbook of comparative politics*.
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