

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

Session 01

Álvaro Canalejo-Molero

University of Lucerne

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 4. The 'freezing hypothesis' revisited: Mair & Bartolini in the 90s

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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

04. European party-systems

04. European party-systems: similitudes and differences

- The importance of **overlapping/coinciding** vs. **cross-cutting cleavages**, for example, on the strength of Socialist/Labor parties²:

²Based on Merkl ([1969](#))

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- What are the mechanisms underlying these processes?

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- Another example, on the factors facilitating the emergence of agrarian parties³(e.g., prevalent in Nordic countries vs. Southern Europe):

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- Another example, on the factors facilitating the emergence of agrarian parties³ (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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05. The ‘freezing hypothesis’

05. The 'freezing hypothesis': the German case



Figure 1: German Federal election results, images from Wikipedia

05. 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?

05. 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!

06. References

References I

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