

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

## Session 01

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Spring Term 2021-2022

- ① Introduction to the course
- ② Mapping the terrain: political parties and party-systems
- ③ The origins of party-systems in Europe
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# Introduction to the course

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- Presentations

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  - Review of party-system formation/evolution in WE

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  - Wrap-up session

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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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  - 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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- A cleavage is characterised by 1) a **social divide** of which citizens at each side develop 2) **social consciousness** and turn into 3) **political demands**
- **Any example of what may be and what may not be a cleavage 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 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 threshold of **representation** (i.e., institutional presence)
  - 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

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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?

<sup>4</sup>Based on Merkl (1969)

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- Another example, on the factors facilitating the emergence of agrarian parties<sup>5</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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  - 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

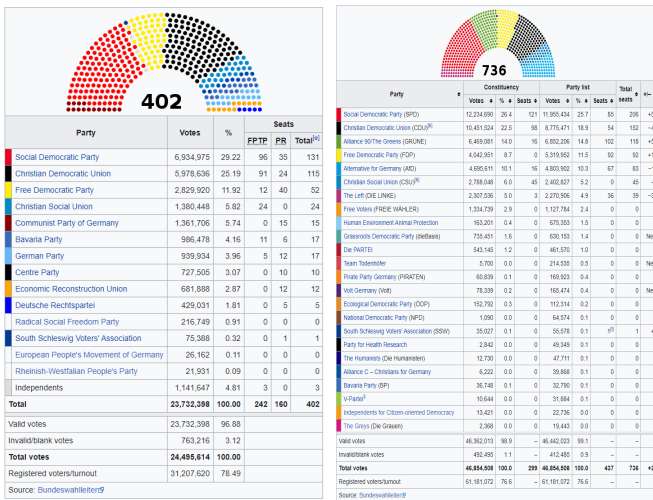


Figure 1: German Federal election results, images from Wikipedia

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

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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 the main points and then we will briefly debate.

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- The activity begins now!

# References



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