

# Party Competition in Western Europe

## Cleavages and Partisan Realignment

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## Event announcement

Next week, we'll kick-off a speaker series on *Understanding Democracies: Challenges and Solutions*.

- Diane Bolet will be our first guest
- Presentation on “The Globalization Backlash in Rural Areas: Price Shocks, Far Right Support, and the Limits of Agricultural Subsidies”
- you are all invited to join us directly after our seminar next Wednesday, 12-13 in Room SCH 100.3

## What we did last week...

- discuss KKV and the comparative method
- define parties and party systems
- list party functions and motivations

## Plan for today

Today, we are dealing with the following content:

1. party systems in Austria, Italy, the UK and the Netherlands
2. how cleavages (still) structure political behaviour

# Party systems around the world

Country	Electoral System	Parties	Volatility/ Fragmentation
Austria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>open-list (proportional</li><li>threshold: 4%</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>previously: catch-all parties in centre</li><li>powerful far-right challenger</li></ul>	average but increasing
Italy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>mixed electoral system</li><li>threshold: 3%</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>electoral blocs (left and right)</li><li>multiparty</li></ul>	quite high
Netherlands	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>proportional</li><li>threshold: only de-facto</li><li>nation-wide constituency</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>multiparty (a lot)</li><li>larger coalitions</li></ul>	high fragmentation, increasing volatility
UK	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>majoritarian</li><li>single member districts</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>two-party system</li><li>high disproportionality in parliament</li></ul>	mid levels of volatility but increasing

# Cleavages

What do we mean when we are talking about a political cleavage?

## Definition of cleavages

According to Lipset and Rokkan (1967), a cleavage can be defined...

- cleavages capture the lines of conflict running through a society
- they are dynamic both in spatial and temporal terms
- for a cleavage to be manifested, it must...
  - lead to socio-structural differences
  - entail a commonly shared value space among its members
  - institutionalize the conflict (e.g. through associations or parties)

Political cleavages organize politics. They capture demands of social groups and let parties adopt strategies to appeal to these groups strategically.

## Four cleavages by Lipset/Rokkan



## Four cleavages by Lipset/Rokkan



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## Group work on cleavages

*In groups of four, discuss what your cleavage is about. What kind of socio-structural differences does it represent? What's the value space of the opposing factions? Which parties might represent which side?*

# The Social Bases of Political Parties



# The Social Bases of Political Parties

In the course of the seminar, we'll usually follow this scheme to discuss the articles we've read.

- **Research Question:**
- **Main Argument:**
- **Data and Method:**
- **Results:**
- **Implications:**

How would you complete the scheme regarding Marks et al. (2023)?

# The Social Bases of Political Parties

- **Research Question:** How can we measure cleavage strength over time?
- **Main Argument:** Cleavage strength depends on composition of group in party and general population.
- **Data and Method:** Election data from surveys from 1973-2019; descriptive analysis of cleavage strength
- **Results:** Cleavages do not lose in significance but new ones gain prominence
- **Implications:** Re-alignment instead of de-alignment

## Two opposing perspectives

Which opposing perspectives do Marks et al. (2023) present to motivate their study?

## Two opposing perspectives

They outline how scholars on the demand- and supply-side have approached the issue of change in social structures of voting:

1. **voters** increasingly lose attachment to parties and vote for values/issues → more volatility and de-alignment
2. **parties** continue to exist: old cleavages disappear, new appear and are activated

# Method

$$P_{i,j}^S = 100 \cdot (p_{j|i}^S - p_j^S)$$

What does this formula mean?

## Method

$$P_{i,j}^S = 100 \cdot (p_{j|i}^S - p_j^S)$$

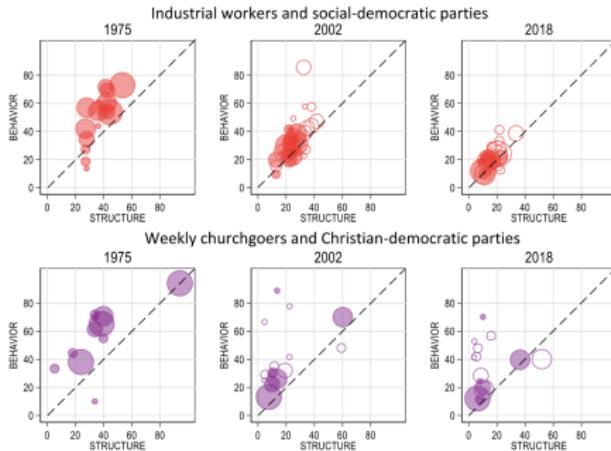
where

- P: probability of
- S: social characteristic to be part of
- i: social basis of a party
- j: share of the group in the party

In words: the prominence of a group for a party is given by its share in the general population minus its share in the party (times 100 to get percentages).

The higher the value of P, the more a social group is associated with a certain party.

# Results



**Figure:** Evolution of cleavage strength for Social Democrats and Christian Democrats (Marks et al. 2023, p. 254)

*What's the story here?*

# Results

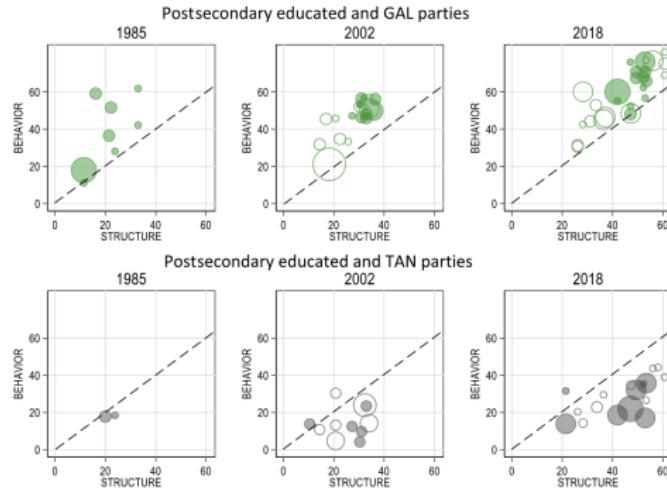


Figure: Evolution of cleavage strength for Greens and TAN (Marks et al. 2023, p. 255)

# Results

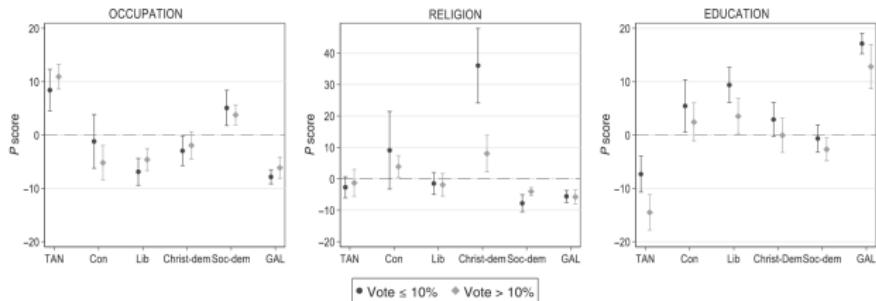


Figure: Evolution of cleavage strength for Greens and TAN (Marks et al. 2023, p. 255)

So, radical right parties are working class parties now?

# Results

Not quite...

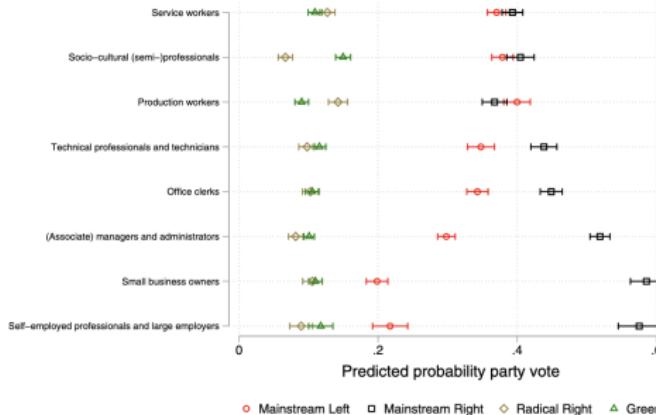


Figure: Voting probability for different party families by class (Abou-Chadi and Hix 2021, p. 87)

## Results

Vote share matters as well! For the far-right, working class voters are important – but they are still more present in the centre-left!

## What we've done today...

- complete our study on different electoral systems
- defining cleavages
- discussing changes in cleavage structures and how to measure them

## To prepare for next week...

- Next session on polarization and data for voter analyses
- Readings:
  - Main readings
    1. **Burn-Murdoch J (2024)** A New Global Gender Divide Is Emerging. *Financial Times*
    2. **Bischof D and Wagner M (2019)** Do Voters Polarize When Radical Parties Enter Parliament? *American Journal of Political Science* **63** (4), 888–904. ISSN: 0092-5853, 1540-5907. DOI: [10.1111/ajps.12449](https://doi.org/10.1111/ajps.12449)
  - Complementary readings
    1. **Iyengar S, Sood G, and Lelkes Y (2012)** Affect, Not Ideology: A Social Identity Perspective on Polarization. *Public Opinion Quarterly* **76** (3), 405–431. ISSN: 0033-362X. DOI: [10.1093/poq/nfs038](https://doi.org/10.1093/poq/nfs038)

## To prepare for next week...

2. **Wagner M (2021)** Affective Polarization in Multiparty Systems. *Electoral Studies* **69**, 102199. ISSN: 0261-3794.  
DOI: [10.1016/j.electstud.2020.102199](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.electstud.2020.102199)
3. **Gidron N, Adams J, and Horne W (2023)** Who Dislikes Whom? Affective Polarization between Pairs of Parties in Western Democracies. *British Journal of Political Science* **53** (3), 997–1015. ISSN: 0007-1234, 1469-2112. DOI: [10.1017/S0007123422000394](https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007123422000394)

Thank you for your attention!  
Any further questions?

## Literature

-  **Abou-Chadi T and Hix S (2021)** Brahmin Left Versus Merchant Right? Education, Class, Multiparty Competition, and Redistribution in Western Europe. *The British Journal of Sociology* 72.
-  **Bischof D and Wagner M (2019)** Do Voters Polarize When Radical Parties Enter Parliament? *American Journal of Political Science* 63 (4), 888–904.
-  **Burn-Murdoch J (2024)** A New Global Gender Divide Is Emerging. *Financial Times*.
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## Literature

-  **Iyengar S, Sood G, and Lelkes Y (2012)** Affect, Not Ideology: A Social Identity Perspective on Polarization. *Public Opinion Quarterly* **76** (3), 405–431.
-  **Lipset SM and Rokkan S (1967)** *Party Systems and Voter Alignments: Cross-National Perspectives*. Free Press, 1967.
-  **Marks G et al. (2023)** The Social Bases of Political Parties: A New Measure and Survey. *British Journal of Political Science* **53** (1), 249–260.
-  **Wagner M (2021)** Affective Polarization in Multiparty Systems. *Electoral Studies* **69**, 102199.