

Party Systems and Voter Alignments

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INTRODUCTION

The success of Western democracies is on many accounts a story of stable party systems. Predictability in the choice-set that confronts voters at elections provides several advantages or democratic goods (Sartori 1976; Mainwaring and Scully 1995; Kitschelt et al. 1999; Lipset 2001). A stable party system allows for voters to align with parties and hence strengthens mass-elite linkages. It facilitates different voting strategies on behalf of the voters by allowing them to effectively assign accountability *ex post* and to give mandate *ex ante* (Kiewiet and McCubbins 1991; Tóka 1998; Przeworski et al. 1999; Strøm et al. 2003). Furthermore, a stable party system enables coalition-building and decision-making (Dalton 1996).

One of or perhaps 'the' stabilizing factor of party systems has been the strong impact of social characteristics on voting, which was acknowledged early by Lazarsfeld, Berelson and Gaudet, who stated that: 'a person thinks, politically, as he is, socially. Social characteristics determine political preferences' (1948: 27). The rationale for the powerful behavioural force of social characteristics was later provided with a historical framework in the seminal study *Cleavage Structures, Party Systems and Voter Alignments* by Seymour Martin Lipset and Stein Rokkan (1967), where they outlined the origins of parties and their connection to a stable set of cleavages within society, established during early phases of state-building. From the outset of electoral research, the prevailing image was that of stability in the political behaviour of voters and of parties with firm roots in society.

The cleavage concept has over time been highly central within the field and is often discussed in close connection to party systems. A social cleavage has been defined as a political difference founded in the social structure of a society (Bartolini and Mair 1990). These historically rooted societal differences have shaped groups of people with shared interests, which in turn are reflected in party loyalties or party identification (cf. Dinas [Chapter 13], Green and Baltes [Chapter 14] in this Volume) and translated into electoral support for certain parties. The vertical ties between the masses and political elites are hence not seen as being of individual character, but rather composed of ties between well-defined social groups and political parties.

The general notion of robust effects of social structure and political cleavages on the behaviour of voters has however been seriously questioned during recent decades (Dalton 2000; Franklin et al. 1992). The stabilizing impact of social cleavages on electoral behaviour, by aligning groups of voters with specific parties, has been claimed to be weakening since the early 1980s, which is manifested by a steady decline of strong party identifiers in established democracies (Dalton 1984; Dalton and Wattenberg 2000). The previously dominant pattern of stability has been replaced by a more individualized and volatile electorate, which in turn creates less stable party systems (Dalton et al. 1984; Franklin et al. 1992). The trend, according to which parties to a lesser extent than before are understood as representatives of clearly outlined social groups, is labelled *dealignment*.

The dealignment thesis has however not gone unchallenged. One of the main lines of critique stems from scholars that have tried to establish new patterns of political competition, so-called *realignment*. According to the realignment thesis, dealignment is to be considered as a temporary phase of partisan decay, before new alignments between parties and voter are established (Beck 1979; Campbell 1979; Clubb et al. 1980; Crewe 1980). Researchers have attempted to demonstrate how the support of new political alternatives such as the New Left in the 1970s and 1980s, and more recently by the parties of the New Populist Right (Mudde 2007; Kriesi 2010), can be connected to shifts in value orientations and to new types of cleavage patterns within modern societies. Further, the dealignment thesis has been criticized by scholars emphasizing the persistent strength of traditional cleavages, the endurance of links between social strata within the electorate and party support, and a relative stability of party systems (Heath et al. 1991; Evans 1999 and this Volume [Chapter 9]; Nieuwebeerta and de Graaf 1999; Brooks et al. 2006; Elff 2007).

The aim of this chapter is to outline the major structures of a classic field of research and to provide an overview of how voters have aligned with parties or systems of parties over time. The field is characterized by two dominating, and relatively detached, traditions. The so-called *bottom-up* approach studies voters' alignments with parties from the demand side of politics. It hence takes the perspective of voters and outlines the extent to which social characteristics, interests

and values explain voting behaviour. The *top-down* approach, or the party choice thesis (Jansen et al. 2013) in turn accentuates the actions and strategies of parties and how alterations in the supply side of politics influence the electoral choices made by voters. Both perspectives will be covered to a certain extent, but the main emphasis lies on the demand side of politics, that is, on the voters and their values rather than the impact of parties and their actions. Due to the historical centrality of the cleavage concept within the literature, and the fact that it offers a widely accepted explanation as to how groups of voters with joint interests align with parties, it will be given a fair amount of attention. The current emphasis within the field on the political behaviour of voters in mature Western democracies will be reflected in the text, but the aspect of how well the cleavages travel across contextual settings will also be touched upon.

THE FREEZING HYPOTHESIS

One study above others has served as inspiration and as fuel for debate concerning the impact of social structure on political competition, and that is the classical study on the origins and stability of western European party systems by Seymour Martin Lipset and Stein Rokkan published in 1967. In this widely cited text Lipset and Rokkan famously state that ‘the party systems of the 1960s reflect, with few but significant exceptions, the cleavage structures of the 1920s’, coupled with the ‘party alternatives, and in remarkably many cases the party organizations are older than the majorities of the national electorates’ (1967: 44), commonly referred to as the ‘freezing hypothesis’.

Although studies of party systems and voter alignments have expanded and developed extensively since the late 1960s, the historical-sociological cleavage model by Lipset and Rokkan still offers the most popular explanation for the formation and durability of West European party systems. Accordingly, the most significant elements of this seminal piece will be outlined here, before moving on to more recent developments within the field.

In their theory of social cleavages, Lipset and Rokkan characterize the formation of parties and electoral competition as reflecting a complex set of historical processes triggered by the national and the industrial revolutions. These two revolutions are presented as ‘critical junctures’ and are argued to have shaped two long-lasting structural divisions between specific socio-demographic groups, divisions that in turn gave rise to the political issue conflicts that were present at the breakthrough of universal suffrage and that hence came to influence the formation of modern party systems.

The division between capital and labour has been by far the most influential of the four cleavages identified by Lipset and Rokkan. This economically based cleavage was formed between the dominating actors of the new industrial structure that followed from the industrial revolution, and the workers that constituted

the labour force. The class cleavage, represented by Socialist parties to the left and Conservative parties to the right of the political spectra, has been present and even dominating political competition in most European countries throughout the 20th century. The second structural division identified by Lipset and Rokkan as being rooted in the industrial revolution is the division between agriculture and industry, manifested by parties with aligned groups of voters aiming at defending traditional agricultural interests against the growth of new production methods dominating within urban areas.

The national revolution in turn also gave rise to two distinct cleavages: the division between the centre and the periphery, manifested in parties defending cultural autonomy for certain areas or groups and parties emphasizing a single public authority on a given territory, and the division between state and church, expressed by parties and voters emphasizing a strict division between the authority of the church and that of the state and in parties wanting to preserve an intimate relation between the two.

According to Lipset and Rokkan, only the parties reflecting these four cleavages were able to survive and reproduce themselves electorally and institutionally. These groups of parties hence became the backbone of the modern party systems within the European context. The composition of, and the balance within, the party systems that were moulded in different countries did however vary depending on the relevance of the cleavages within each specific society. Moreover, once a cleavage structure was established it tended to provide a durable (or 'frozen') basis for political conflict expressed through the ballot box (Rose 1974; Bartolini and Mair 1990). Over time voters developed strong and stable bonds to parties, bonds that were maintained and strengthened through processes of political socialization and social learning.

THE CENTRAL CONCEPT OF CLEAVAGE

The cleavage model offered by Lipset and Rokkan strongly influenced the academic debate that followed. It was, however, not left un-criticized. One of the early opponents was Giovanni Sartori, who objected to the proposed causality of the model. Applying a top-down perspective to the link between parties and voters, Sartori (1969) claimed that it is not so much social divisions within society that have caused the birth of certain political parties, but rather that parties have functioned as inspiration and fuel for the politicization of specific social cleavages within society. Sartori also emphasized that parties play an important role when it comes to intensifying or politicizing cleavages that from a social perspective might be in decline (see also Lipset 1970).

Sartori's critique of the causality of the cleavage model has continued to influence the debate and has perhaps gained significance, as the academic debate has begun to revolve around processes of de- and realignment discussed

in more detail below. While the conventional bottom-up perspective suggested by Lipset and Rokkan, in which social divisions in society shape political competition, has continued to dominate the field, research focusing on the impact of ‘political manoeuvring’ of parties has grown, especially when seen as a response to dissolving social structures (Evans 2010, and this Volume [Chapter 9]).

Some of the debate in the aftermath of the freezing hypothesis can be attributed to the relative vagueness of the social cleavage theory. Lipset and Rokkan painted with a wide brush rather than being precise in detail (Deegan-Krause 2007) and, according to Peter Mair, ‘(T)here still remains a marked degree of confusion about what precisely was believed by Lipset and Rokkan to have settled into place by the 1920s’ (2001: 27). Two alternative interpretations are offered by Mair – that it was *the party systems* that froze, and that this stable set of parties therefore managed to grow older than the majority of the national electorates, or that it was *the cleavages or cleavage structures* that froze, with the stability of the party alternatives merely reflecting outward manifestations of these frozen cleavage structures.

The potential confusion that Mair points at gives some insights into the complexity of the relation between voter alignments, political behaviour and party systems in general, and perhaps most importantly to the diverging interpretations made within the literature concerning the relationship between the two. Conceptual consistency and precise definitions have hence not characterized the field. To quote Deegan-Krause: ‘A baffling array of inconsistently-used terms plagues contemporary scholarship on cleavage’ (2007: 538; see also Franklin 2010).

In its fullest or most demanding definition a cleavage consists of three equally important and inter-related elements: an empirical or social-structural, a normative or value-based, and a behavioural element (Bartolini and Mair 1990; see also Frabboni 2001). First, a cleavage should be *empirically* definable in social structure. It departs from a social division, which in turn is outlined in identifiable groups within society. Second, a division in social structure will need to be complemented by a *normative* element, indicating that members of socially structured groups share a common interest or values that create a sense of collective identity. The third and last step involves behaviour. In order for the cleavage to become politically relevant these norms or shared set of values will need to be reflected in voting behaviour. *Behaviourally* a cleavage must hence be manifest in the political alternatives that exist and constituents should vote for a party that represents their group-based interests.

This threefold definition of political cleavages was outlined in prominence by Bartolini and Mair (1990) and further refined by Knutsen and Scarborough (1995) it can be seen as a response to the general development within the field during the 1970s and 1980s, a time at which the social basis of cleavages was played down and the normative aspect of the concept was given higher prominence (Inglehart 1977; Dalton et al. 1984). By outlining a strict threefold definition, Bartolini and

Mair aimed at bringing conceptual clarity to a field that has been described as plagued by ‘weak theorizing’ (Franklin 2010).

Most scholars agree that the classical social cleavage model, although very prominent in explaining electoral choice, has declined in importance since the 1960s (Franklin 2010). As a response to this development, the search for new cleavages has involved conceptual stretching and attempts to outline new, and less comprehensive, models of party competition. In order to distinguish between different types of approaches and to bring conceptual clarity to the study of ‘something less’ than a full cleavage, the concepts *differences* and *divides* have been suggested as complementary to *cleavage* (Deegan-Krause 2007; Bartolini 2011). While Bartolini in his framework applies the concept *divide* for studies that encompass both one (simple divides) and two (compound divides) out of three elements in the threefold model, Deegan-Krause differentiates between *differences* (one out of three elements) and *divides* (two out of three elements), with the variations of *position* (structure and norms), *issue* (norms and behaviour) or *census* (structure and behaviour) divides, depending on the elements included (see Table 3.1).

As is pointed out by Bartolini (2011), a *difference* (or simple divide as he labels it) is not likely to provide a long-lasting base for political structuring. It is, for example, unlikely that an interest orientation with a social basis will endure without a generalized feeling of solidarity or without an organizational foundation to build on. A behaviourally based difference without an ideological knit or structural roots in society is also unlikely to last, which is an important reason why most parties try to establish a cultural or ideological underpinning in order to survive. It is hence difficult to conceive that a political difference based solely in interests, culture or organization can become stabilized and have long lasting political relevance. In order for that to happen, several components will need to be combined.

A framework of this kind, attempting to bring conceptual clarity to the study of various aspects of voter alignments and systems of parties, is very much needed and can be utilized to make relevant distinction and to classify different types of relationships. A difference or different types of divides should, however,

Table 3.1 A conceptual framework for differences, divides and cleavages

Component		Differences			Divides			Cleavage
Empirical	Social division	+	–	–	+	+	–	+
Normative	Cultural/ ideological orientation	–	+	–	–	+	+	+
Behavioural	Organizational base	–	–	+	+	–	+	+
		Interest	Cultural	Behavioural	Census	Position	Issue	Full cleavage

Note: Developed based on Bartolini (2011) and Deegan-Krause (2007).

analytically be kept apart from that of a full political cleavage, not least since the political and societal implications of the different concepts vary substantially.

THE EVOLVEMENT OF VOTER ALIGNMENTS

In the aftermath of the freezing hypothesis followed a time when research on social cleavages and their impact on the behaviour of voters became less fashionable (Brooks et al. 2006). Attention was instead directed further down the funnel of causality (Campbell et al. 1960) at, for example, economic, ideological, cultural or cognitive explanations of the vote (Franklin et al. 1992). This was also a time at which party identification, the concept launched by Angus Campbell and his colleagues in *The American Voter* in 1960, had gained wide acknowledgement outside the American context and was accentuated and highly debated (Budge et al. 1976; Thomassen 1976). In the course of this shift in rationale, the sociological model of voting and the previously strong emphasis on political cleavages was even criticized for lacking theoretical relevance (Achen 1992). The altered agenda of voting studies was also accompanied by a general trend away from the macro-historical perspective towards more micro-empirical designs, triggered by the expanding access to individual level survey data (Frabbbini 2001).

The most important factor behind the decreased interest in sociological determinants of the vote was, however, the fact that scholars started to observe changes in electoral behaviour, changes that went counter to the intuition of the freezing thesis. While Rose and Urwin (1970) in their study of persistence and change in Western party systems up until 1969 had confirmed the stability outlined by Lipset and Rokkan, the pattern was about to change. Less than a decade later Mogens N. Pedersen (1979) concluded, based on a thorough examination of volatility rates in 13 European countries, that it was time to alter the analytical focus from stability to the increasing rates of instability.

The altered patterns of party competition, with a weaker basis in social structure, have become a widely accepted explanation for the increased volatility in elections (Dalton et al. 1984; Dalton 2002; Dalton and Wattenberg 1993; Lane and Ersson 1997; Kriesi 1998). While the importance of the cleavage model appears to have already started to decline in the 1970s with increasing levels of volatility, the magnitude and the implications of the decline has over the years caused extensive debate, and continues to do so (Elff 2007). The meaning of the decline has also been given different interpretations by different scholars. While some have claimed that it was a general weakening of the explanatory power of social structure on vote choice – a trend often described as *dealignment* – others identified new patterns of structured party competition and the emergence of new alignments between voters and parties, labelled *realignment*. Both of these arguments and strands of research will be dealt with in more detail below.

Dealignment

We will start with the dealignment thesis, which dominated the field for about two decades from the early 1980s. The main argument of the dealignment literature is that the socio-structural anchoring of electoral behaviour is weakening. The thesis hence predestines voting behaviour to gradually become more influenced by factors closer to the election, and as such also become more floating and less predictable.

The decline of the political relevance of social cleavages is often attributed to extensive changes at the societal level related to modernization (Bell 1974; Lerner 1958) that is taken to gradually alter the political attitudes and behaviour of voters. These fundamental changes that comprise both class structure and value systems are not new and their political implications have been emphasized by sociologists and political scientists in the European sphere since at least the 1960s (Mair 1989).

The perhaps most powerful change that modernization brings about, in terms of its contribution to the alteration of political competition, is what Dalton labels *cognitive mobilization* (1984; 2000). Cognitive mobilization encompasses the general improvement of education levels within Western societies as well as the spread of information through mass media, both of which are claimed to empower voters to make more individualized electoral choices, independently of the cues provided by social groups (for a more detailed account of cognitive mobilization see Todd Donovan in this Volume, Chapter 15). When the electoral choice in the 1950s was understood as shaped by, for example, class or religious affiliation, and parties through their strong vertical links to social groups were considered as key actors for integrating and mobilizing citizens into the political process, cognitive mobilization brought about a new order in which it was argued that voters *had begun to choose* (Rose and McAllister 1986).

As pointed out by Elff (2007), however, cognitive mobilization, and an increasingly autonomous decision-making process by voters, are not preconditioned to cause electoral change or dealignment. As long as political interests within a social group remain stable, the behaviour of voters and their connection to certain political parties are likely to be constant even if choices are made individually and not by reliance on a few opinion leaders (Berelson et al. 1954). Cognitive mobilization, and the general increase in voters' capacity to make sovereign electoral choices based on increased level of political sophistication and access to information, should hence not be understood as the driving force behind dealignment. It might be a necessary condition for electoral change to take place since it opens up an increased willingness and capacity of voters to make choices that diverge from traditional. It is however not sufficient to cause a restructuring of electoral competition alone.

In order for dealignment to take place, cognitive mobilization will need to be complemented by a weakening of the collective identities within social

groups that have constituted the competing sides of politically relevant cleavages. Considering the far-ranging socio-economic transformation of societies that has taken place since the establishment of most modern party systems, it is not hard to come up with examples of forces that have altered not only the relative size of politically relevant groups but also the composition of groups. Contemporary modern democracies are characterized by heterogeneity in terms of life experiences and by a great availability of options (Kriesi 2010). Social and geographical mobility is far greater today than 50 years ago and secularization has increased (Norris and Inglehart 2004). Moreover, alterations in the class structure, involving a decline of the traditional working class, the growth in low-status white-collar employment, an increasingly important service sector and rising income and living standards of workers have blurred social structure and the basis of support of mainstream leftist parties (Dalton 2009; Evans 2000).

A great bulk of research has until now presented evidence of weakening alignments between socio-structural groups of voters and parties. These results are coupled with the general weakening of party identification, which can be described as one of the most well-known trends in the social sciences (Bengtsson et al. 2014). According to Mark Franklin, the general explanatory power of social cleavages on party choice dropped from around (or above) 30 per cent in the 1960s to around 10 per cent in the 1980s (Franklin et al. 1992). Since then the drop has been less extensive and in the late 1990s the variance in party choice explained by social structure was less than 10 per cent in all but one out of 16 Western democracies analysed (Franklin 2009; see also Brooks et al. 2006; Oscarsson and Holmberg 2013; Hansen and Andersen 2013; Aardal et al. 2015).¹ As is noted by Franklin and colleagues, however, dealignment is not a continuous process, but rather a process that tends to vary in time, across countries and across cleavages.

In an overview of the historically most prominent cleavage in determining electoral choice Knutsen concludes that: 'Class voting is definitely declining in advanced western democracies' (2007: 475; see also Jansen et al. 2011). While many scholars tend to agree that the cleavage impact of the class on electoral choice has declined (see for example Clark and Lipset 1991; Franklin et al. 1992; Nieuwbeerta 1995; Knutsen 2007; Jansen et al. 2011), others have questioned the extent to which this actually holds true. The evidence in favour of a decline in class voting has for example been credited to outdated operationalization of class (see e.g. Heath et al. 1985), coupled with a trend towards increasingly dispersed voting behaviour among the traditional working class due to cross-cutting cultural voting (van der Waal et al. 2007). It also appears as if the development in class voting varies relatively extensively across countries. In countries with historically strong patterns of class voting the structuring power of class has decreased more dramatically than in countries with traditions of less extensive class voting (Bengtsson et al. 2014).

When focusing on comparisons across cleavages in turn, it seems as if dealignment has been less powerful in countries where religious or geographically based

cleavages have been strong (Elff 2007). Cleavages based on ethnicity or language have also proven stable in many countries and there are few examples of parties that cut across salient ethnic boundaries, or of salient ethnic groups without a party representing their interests (Deegan-Krause 2007; Bengtsson 2011; for an example see Westinen 2015).

Moreover, the loosening of the ties between social structure, ideological orientations and voting behaviour can be seen as a gradual development in which generational replacement plays a significant role. The process in which older generations, socialized during an era at which cleavage politics stood strong, are slowly replaced by new generations entering the electorate with different attitudes and behavioural patterns, is likely to have substantial impact on the overall evaluations of re- and dealignment (van der Brug 2010; van der Brug and Kritzinger 2012).

The deviating trends in structurally based voting behaviour, both in terms of time, space and the magnitude of change, are the reason why it has been hard to reach a general consensus as to what extent dealignment has taken place. Scholars documenting the resilience of social class, religion or other cleavages as the basis of structural determinants of political behaviour have criticized the dealignment thesis (Elff 2007; Evans 1999; Heath et al. 1991; Goldthorpe 1999; Manza and Brooks 1999; van der Waal et al. 2007), stating that the 'reports of the death of social cleavages are exaggerated' (Elff 2007, 289) and that it is not a universal trend, but rather a development limited to some cleavages, most prominently the class cleavage, and to some countries.

It has also been argued that changes in social structure do not necessarily imply dissolving structures; they can also contribute to re-shaping them by making social groups more distinct (Evans 2010). Secularization in European societies has, for example, contributed to making the church/state cleavages in its various forms more salient even though the share of religious people is declining (Goldberg 2014; Knutsen 2004; Madeley 1991; Minkenberg 2010; van der Brug and van Spanje 2009).

Realignment

One of the major debates within the field of voting behaviour revolves around the question if, and to what extent, dealignment has been replaced by realignment, that is by new structural links between social groups and voting behaviour. According to Lipset and Rokkan the formation of new structural cleavages or new party-voter alignments develop in response to major social transformations or 'critical junctures' – dramatic changes that seen from a historical perspective can be considered as fundamentally altering the structures and the living conditions within societies in the 18th and 19th centuries. From the perspective of realignment, a highly relevant question is if it is possible to identify critical junctures of our time, changes that have the power to restructure political

competition by creating new cleavages that connect socially identifiable groups with shared political interests and parties that articulate these interests.

It has been argued that the development in education during the 1970s and 1980s constitutes one such critical juncture (Bornschier 2009). Another attempt to identify a modern critical juncture has been made by Hanspeter Kriesi with colleagues, who present globalization and denationalization as a major force that has transformed the basis for political competition in Western Europe (Kriesi et al. 2006 referring to Zürn 1998 and Beisheim et al. 1999; see also Kriesi et al. 2012). According to Kriesi and his colleagues, the development towards globalization has created a new political cleavage consisting of those who are 'winners' and those who are 'losers' of the denationalization process. They label this new cleavage, which is said to cut across the older structural cleavages identified by Lipset and Rokkan, the 'integration-demarcation' cleavage.

Kriesi and colleagues (2012) present the 'integration-demarcation' cleavage as constituted by three distinct societal changes, which have developed into political conflicts. The first conflict stems from changed patterns of *economic competition* based on increasingly open economies and global patterns of competition. The second is founded on increasing *cultural diversity* shaped by migration processes with immigration of culturally distinct groups to western societies. The third conflict revolves around *political integration* and the transformation of political power to institutions beyond the nation state, such as the European Union. In terms of the organizational part of the cleavage, these values are largely seen as being articulated by parties of the New Left and the New Right, with the former group being represented by Green parties and the latter by Populist Right parties.

The work by Kriesi and colleagues is only one of many attempts to establish new patterns of alignments between voters and parties. The common theme in most of this research is the gradual transformation of values in society. The applied concepts have varied over time and between scholars, but target similar, or at least closely related, value patterns. Flanagan and Lee (2003) and Kitschelt (1994) use the concepts libertarian/authoritarian values, Inglehart post-materialist/materialist (1977) or self-expression/survival values (Inglehart and Welzel 2005); Hooghe and colleagues (2002) label it GAL/TAN (green-alternative-libertarian/traditional-authoritarian-nationalist) values. Bornschier (2010) in turn uses the division between libertarian-universalistic/traditionalist-communitarian values. This line of research has convincingly demonstrated that there has been a shift in values in modern Western societies and that this divide in most countries has made political competition more multidimensional than before (see, however, van der Brug and van Spanje 2009).

In order to establish that realignment is taking place in the classical sense and that these new value orientations constitute a full cleavage, it is however crucial to identify stable patterns in which structurally based groups of voters share these values and to connect these groups to organized actors claiming to represent their

political interest. This process has proven demanding. To cite Hanspeter Kriesi in his Stein Rokkan lecture in the late 1990s: 'The crux is to identify theoretically and empirically the relevant social divisions in a world in flux, and to study their political formation' (1998: 181). Others have argued that the full-fledged cleavage model, including all three components and in particular the requirement of a socio-structural origin of cleavages, radically narrows down the applicability of the cleavage concept since the mechanisms that sustain politicized collective identities are not necessarily tied to social groups, but rather limited to shared values (Enyedi 2008). Given that the value component is more successful in linking the winners and losers of the globalization process to political behaviour (Kriesi 2010: 677), this pattern should be considered as a 'value-based divide' (cf. Deegan-Krause 2007) rather than a full-fledged political cleavage.

In more recent work based on six West European countries, Kriesi and colleagues (2008, 2012) have however been able to identify an increasingly stable social basis for the 'demarcation-integration' cleavage founded on education and social class, partly by a reconceptualizing of the latter since the division appears to cut across the new middle class and divides cultural professionals from managers and technocrats (see also Knutsen 2004, 2006). The group who are identified as 'losers' of the globalization or denationalization process are unqualified workers, that is, citizens with a low level of education and workers with a low level of skills often employed within traditionally protected sectors. Cultural professionals, entrepreneurs and highly qualified employees in sectors open to international competition are on the other hand identified as coming out on top of the process.

Other scholars have identified similar patterns both when analyzing the support for Radical Right parties supplemented with distinct age and gender patterns (Ivarsflaten 2005; Oesch 2008) and for parties of the New Left (Dolezal 2010). While voting for parties of the New Left is strongest among the highly educated professionals of the middle class, Radical Right parties gain their strongest support from the less educated and the working class. The importance of education is also stressed by Stubager (2010), who identifies education as a structural divide for the liberal-authoritarian value difference, based on concerns for the environment and for immigration.

Kriesi (2010) does however emphasize that, although the cultural dimension is related to electoral support for parties of the New Left and the New Radical Right, it should not exclusively be connected to these parties since the entry of these parties to the electoral arena has caused a transformation of the traditional political space, involving a repositioning of the old mainstream parties (2010: 683). Social Democratic parties have, for example, in many countries been able to partially adopt the policies of Green parties and in some countries Conservative parties have applied the same strategy in order to handle competition offered from the Populist Right. Due to the adaptable character and the repositioning of mainstream parties it is hence difficult to ascribe these values solely to the parties of the New Left and the New Populist Right (Kriesi 2010). This top-down

perspective, taking into account the supply-side of politics, will be discussed in more detail below.

Assuming that Kriesi is right, and that the shifting strategies of mainstream parties make it difficult to establish stable alignments between voters and specific parties based on this value dimension, we might not even be dealing with an *issue division* (or political division as Kriesi labels it, influenced by Bartolini 2005, 2011) but rather a *cultural difference* (cf. Deegan-Krause 2007) in terms of values. A value difference that to some extent is detectable in social structure and that can be connected to Green parties and Populist Right parties, but also to more established parties of the Left and Right. Such an interpretation would indicate that these new values, and the voting patterns that are connected to them, over time are about to become absorbed by the division between left and right still dominating most European party systems (Bale 2003; Mair 2007; see however Kriesi et al. 2006). If this turns out to be the case, we can expect a limited impact on the overall functioning of party systems in the long run, with the exception that it is likely to bring about greater polarization. On this matter it appears the jury is still out.

THE PARTY SYSTEM PERSPECTIVE

Voters and their interest articulation do not work in isolation but rather are strongly dependent on the actions of the organizational part of politics – that is, political parties. Despite the fact that studies of public opinion have demonstrated that the attitudes of citizens tend to be structured along more than one dimension on a number of issues (e.g. Middendorp 1991; Kitschelt and McGann 1995), party systems in many countries have had a predominantly one-dimensional structure. This has already been acknowledged by Sartori: ‘When the citizen speaks, he may have many things to say. But when he is coerced into casting a ... vote, he may well have to ... vote for the party ... perceived as closest on the left-right spectrum’ (1976: 338). Hence, while opinions in many countries appear to be structured along two different and largely independent dimensions – a value-based dimension and a classical left-right dimension – the supply side, that is, the alternatives that are offered to voters during the election campaign, have tended to be dominated by the left-right schema (e.g. Oppenhuis 1995; van der Eijk and Franklin 1996; Mair 2007).

Despite the fact that the supply and demand side of politics work in tandem, the evolution of voting behaviour and party system research have tended to be relatively separate fields of research. De- and realignment are commonly discussed and studied from the perspective of voters using a generic categorization of parties or party families, and the evolution of parties and party system that represents the organizational component of the cleavage concept is in turn commonly studied in isolation from that of voters and their behaviour. However,

during the last decade or so, it appears as if the separate traditions have begun to converge, with more scholars applying integrative research designs that take into account both the positions of parties and values and behaviours of voters (see for example Kriesi et al. 2008, 2012; Jansen et al. 2013; Oskarson and Demker 2015; Dahlström and Esaiasson 2013).

Studies applying a top-down perspective, looking at changes from a party and in particular from a party system level have tended to draw slightly different conclusions concerning the overall effects of electoral change than those applying a bottom-up perspective. Studies of aggregate electoral patterns and overall balance of party support in the 1990s did at least draw conclusions of continuity rather than change (Bartolini and Mair 1990; Mair 1993, 1997; Pennings and Lane 1998). Electoral volatility has indeed increased substantially over time (Pedersen 1979; Dassonneville 2015) and the effective number of parties has increased in many countries as new parties have entered the political scene. Still, the overall effects on the functioning of party systems have tended to be relatively limited in the long term. At least within the West European sphere, the bulk of aggregate volatility takes place between groups of parties belonging either to the left or the right side of the ideological spectrum and a relatively limited share of the electoral instability transfers across blocs (Bartolini and Mair 1990; Oscarsson and Holmberg 2013; van der Meer et al. 2012).

As Sartori points out, a party system means ‘a system of interactions resulting from inter-party competition’ (Sartori 1976: 44). From the perspective of party systems, what is of interest is not the individual parties as such, but rather the extent to which these parties have had an impact at the systemic level by, for example, making them more polarized, by transforming two-party systems to multiparty systems, or, and of particular relevance for the purpose of this chapter, by altering the patterns of electoral competition by introducing new ideological cleavages and stable patterns of alignment between groups of voters and parties.

Party system change can be, and has been, operationalized in a number of different ways. The classic work by Sartori (1976) outlined the still-dominating distinction based on the number of relevant parties in terms of their blackmail or coalition potential, and dividing systems into one- two- and multiparty systems.² In terms of this classification it appears as if not much has changed within the West European sphere, since most countries have had multiparty systems since the 1940s. And the few examples of two-party systems (most notably the UK and Malta) have tended to be stable, even though the system appears to have moved in a more volatile direction in the last few elections in the UK (Mudde 2014). Sartori did however not only take into account the number of relevant parties, but also their ideological spread, when he divided party systems into moderate and polarized pluralism, and from this perspective it seems as if alterations have occurred, or are about to occur, in many countries.

Seen from a party system perspective, the stability thesis has been faced with two main challenges since the late 1970s. In the 1980s this challenge came from

the rise of the New Left and environmentalism. Green parties entered parliaments in many countries and often claimed that they represented a new ideological dimension with the power to reshape party alignments (Müller-Rommel 1989; Richardson and Rootes 1995). In retrospect it does however appear as if the existing party systems were relatively successful in integrating these parties into the dominant left-right framework (Dalton 2009). In a study of the implications of the Green parties and their success in Western Europe, Peter Mair (2001) concludes that, as these parties became mainstream and acceptable for coalitions, the general effect on the party system level was that it strengthened the Left and its potential when it comes to coalition building, and reinforced the bipolarity of many multiparty systems.

The second, and more recent, challenge for the stability of party systems has come from the Populist Right parties. Although Radical Right parties have emerged in several waves in Western Europe since the Second World War (von Beyme 1988), it is only since the 1980s that these parties have begun to establish themselves as integral parts of national party systems (Mudde 2014). The trend has been relatively dramatic during the first 15 years of the new millennium, with a general increase in the electoral support for Populist Right parties, coupled with a number of cases in which these parties have become *Koalitionsfähig* ('acceptable for coalition'). The fact that there has been an increased willingness of the mainstream right-wing parties to collaborate with Populist Right parties in turn speaks to a further polarization of party systems into a left-libertarian and a right-authoritarian side (Bale 2003; Dalton 2009; Mudde 2014). The agendas of the Populist Right parties do however propose a greater challenge to the establishment of party systems than the New Left did in the 1970s and 80s, since their authoritarian-nationalist agendas tend to attract supporters from both the traditional Left and Right (Kriesi et al. 2006, 2008, 2012), in line with Lipset's (1959) thesis of the 'authoritarian working class' already formulated in the late 1950s.

The fact that the supply side has had a tendency to strike back, to force even newly established parties to arrange along a uni-dimensional space, has been put forward as a factor that nurtures increasing volatility rates. Although much research has demonstrated that large shares of volatility take place within blocs and hence have a limited impact on the overall functioning of the party system and the ability of parties to structure political competition, there are reasons to believe that this pattern is about to become challenged by cross-cutting opinion patterns. If party positions structure along one dimension and voters' opinions are increasingly multidimensional, there will be groups of citizens whose opinions do match the supply that is offered to them, and whose issue positions are not fully represented by any of the available parties. This is likely to make election results more dependent on which issues dominate the political agenda during the election campaign and can cause increased cross-bloc volatility over time (Maddens 1996; Petrocik 1996; van der Brug 2004; Kriesi 2010). Another potential effect is detachment from politics and decreasing rates of turnout. If

voters have diverging party preferences, depending on which issues that are emphasized, they might be confronted with cross-pressures (Tingsten 1937; Lipset 1963) and decide to withdraw from politics.

BEYOND MATURE WESTERN DEMOCRACIES

The theory of cleavage politics was developed within the West European sphere, based on the historical experience from the processes of national unification and of industrialization, and how these experiences were politically incorporated during the process of democratization. The academic debate has also to a large extent concentrated on this context, and on other mature Western democracies such as Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the US. The general impression is that, although the types of cleavages in different societies vary, where for example cleavages in the US tend to revolve around cultural aspects such as region, race and religion (Manza and Brooks 1999), the general concept of cleavage travels relatively well within this broader context of mature democracies. When moving beyond this relatively narrow milieu to other parts of the world, evidence becomes more scattered and the relevance and utility of the cleavage model is disputed (Randall 2001).

As was noted in the introduction to this chapter, the stability of parties and party systems founded in enduring alignments with groups of voters can be considered as a key explanation for the success of Western democracies. The significance of cleavages for the functioning of democracy is naturally not isolated to this part of the world. According to Margit Tavits, '(F)ew institutional developments are more critical to democratic stabilization than the development of stable party systems' (2005: 283). The value of established ties between parties and groups within society can hence be understood as a contributing factor to democratic stability in new democracies by contributing to decreasing electoral volatility and increasing predictability of political outcomes (Whitefield 2002). The crucial role of cleavages in new democracies is also emphasized by Lipset, who writes that '(P)arties in new electoral democracies will be inherently unstable unless they become linked to deep-rooted sources of cleavage, as the parties in the older institutionalized western democracies have been' (2001: 5). The counter argument is that electoral competition based on solid structural cleavages may undermine democracy in highly polarized societies, especially when voters align according to deep ethnic cleavages, since elections run the risk of becoming 'winner-takes-it-all' exercises (van de Walle 2003). The dominant view in the field is however that persistent volatility resulting from an absence of durable alignments between voters and parties in the long run reduces a democracy's ability to survive.

Unstable party systems and high rates of volatility have plagued many new democracies, not least in Latin America and in post-Communist Europe (Tavits

2005; Epperly 2011; Powell and Tucker 2014). The extent to which electoral volatility decreases naturally over time as patterns of electoral competition and partisanship develop in new established democracies is debatable. Lupu and Stokes (2010), for example, argue that the proportion of voters with partisan attachments should increase with the number of years that have passed since the democratic breakthrough (see also Tavits 2005). Mainwaring and Zoco (2007), on the other hand, claim that volatility persists in countries that were democratized late, since parties lack social attachment to voters and they generally have not been as involved in the process of voter enfranchisement, as was the case in Western Europe.

In post-Communist Europe, party politics have been structured along different lines and at various degrees of institutionalization. Overall, the literature has concluded that there are weak alignments between voters and parties in this region (Mair 1997; Enyedi 2008; Elster et al. 1998). Although full cleavages occur for example when it comes to ethnic minorities (Deegan-Krause 2007), these cleavages tend to be of low significance due to the small size of these minorities. The class conflict, traditionally dominating many Western European societies, has been less influential in Eastern Europe, with the exception of the Czech Republic (Casal Bértoa 2014). The generally low salience of the class cleavage has been explained by the fact that these societies emerged from socialism as 'flattened societies' (Wessels and Klingemann 1994), i.e. that communism to a large extent eroded the socio-economic basis for the class cleavage. Party preferences have instead been dominated by cultural divides of different kinds, often including nationalist elements (Deegan-Krause 2013). Despite the overall fragile nature of citizen-party linkages and high rates of party instability in Eastern and Central Europe, party systems and electoral behaviour are not purely random, but rather have tended to be structured around a predictable set of factors related to society and the salience attached to these factors (Whitefield 2009; Casal Bértoa 2012).

Moving on to Latin America, Torcal and Mainwaring (2003) and Bustikova and Zechmeister (Chapter 6, this Volume) present voters as far less anchored to parties through social cleavages, compared with voters in Western Europe. Party systems have tended to be unstable and rates of volatility high, and research has to a large extent been concentrated on the absence of a structural or even attitudinal base of party support (Conaghan 1995; Kitschelt et al. 2010). The weak party system institutionalization has been seen as a defining characteristic that separates Latin American party systems from those in Western Europe (Dix 1992; Mainwaring 1998; Kellam 2013). Class politics have been of low salience in most Latin American countries due to the small size of the industrial working class compared with employees in other sectors, and the weak union movement (Dix 1989; Torcal and Mainwaring 2003; Knutsen 2007). Ethnic or linguistic divides are also rare in the region, and tend to have a limited impact on party competition at the national level (Yashar 1998). Issue divides with relevance

for party competition have often revolved around aspects of regime and culture. Moreno (1999) has emphasized the democracy-authoritarianism divide, salient in many countries in the early 1990s. It does however appear as if other cultural issues such as abortion, religiosity or nationalism have gained in importance over time, while issues related to the process of democratization have become less salient.

Research on political cleavages in Asia has established that few countries have followed the European cleavage patterns and volatility has been fairly high, with levels comparable to those of Latin America (Hicken and Kuhonta 2011). Clientelist networks are common, especially in South East Asia, sometimes in combination with cleavages such as ‘primordial’ conflicts based on ethnicity and religion (Ufen 2012). The general pattern is however that of a generally weak impact of social structure or cultural divides. Japan represents a different and more stable pattern, and a prominent left-right divide has characterized Japanese politics. This divide has however in general been conceived as being more relevant for attitudes concerning foreign policy and defence than for redistributive politics (Weisberg and Tanaka 2001) and age and education have been stronger structural determinants of the vote than class (Knutsen 2007). In South Korea and Taiwan in turn, parties have generally failed in making programmatic appeals to voters and relied on strategies of personalization (Kim 2000; Wong 2004; Jou 2010).

There is a great diversity in the ways in which parties and voters align outside the context of mature democracies. A few examples from different parts of the world have been very briefly touched upon here. Overall, there are few examples of full threefold cleavages, volatility rates are often high and clientelistic relations between voters and parties are common. As Deegan-Krause (2007) concludes, it appears as if attitudes play an important role in structuring political choices made by voters around the world. Which issues that are the most prominent do, however, vary from one context to another.

CHALLENGES TO THE STUDY OF PARTY SYSTEMS AND VOTER ALIGNMENTS

The fact that voters’ alignments with parties or systems of parties continues to attract great scholarly interests is hardly surprising. Established patterns of electoral competition are considered as having an intrinsic value for the stability and long-term survival of democratic systems. It provides political predictability and enhances the prospects for voters to influence political outcomes by allowing them to assign responsibility *ex post* and to give mandate *ex ante*. At a very overarching level, the study of the extent to which voters align with parties can contribute to forecasting the future of democratic systems. The field has also had the advantage of a common source of inspiration – a seminal contribution grand

enough to inspire generations of future researchers, and vague enough to guarantee a continued debate.

It is however a research field faced with a great deal of challenges. One of these challenges is the moving character of the target. While the evolving landscape of voters' behaviour and loyalties stimulates continued intense research, it is also an important explanation as to why the field is characterized by diversity in terms of empirical findings. The general vagueness and inconsistency in the use of central concepts, and a great variety in terms of the research designs that are applied, further contributes to the diversity.

Yet another challenge for the field is the fact that patterns of electoral competition display major temporal and spatial variations. While it is possible to detect general patterns of de- and realignment described in previous pages, these configurations vary by country and take place at different periods of time. Moreover, they can be expected to vary over time within a certain environment, with one election realigning voters with established parties and the next election being of a more volatile nature. Hence, although the social cleavage theory can be expressed in quite general terms, it cannot be expected to apply in the same way across countries, or even within individual countries across time.

Moreover, in much of the current research there is a lack of attention given to the institutional setting, rules of the game that can facilitate or hinder processes of de- and perhaps especially realignment. The openness of the Dutch electoral system has for example been acknowledged as one of the driving forces behind the increasing volatility rates and process of de- and realignment in the Netherlands (Irwing and van Holstein 1989; Mair 2008). Comparative research however often neglects to take the rules of the game into account, and also often do not acknowledge that the relevant cleavages and their general impact vary between countries. It is hence not only the fact that de- and realignment processes take place at different periods of time in different countries that complicates things; also the point of departure and prerequisites for change are far from constant. The fact that social cleavage theory was never intended to apply the same way across countries is often overlooked due to the general saliency of the class-based cleavage and also due to a sizable appetite for generalizations.

To further complicate matters, the study of voter alignments and party systems is characterized by two important perspectives that seldom communicate effectively: the top-down perspective looking at parties and systems of parties and how they develop, interrelate and forge new political issues, and the bottom-up perspective, looking at the development of voters, their structural basis, values and behaviour. It would be misleading to assume that these two major forces of representative democracy develops in isolation. In order to gain a full understanding of the electoral behaviour of voters, and in particular how voters align with parties or systems

of parties, these two research perspectives will need to be combined to a larger extent than has been the case so far.

Notes

- 1 The exception was the US, in which social structure accounted for 12 per cent of the explained variance in party choice (Franklin 2010, 651).
- 2 See also Blondel (1968), which added the two-and-a-half party system based on the West German case in which two dominating parties govern alternately with the same minor coalition partner.

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