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CLEAVAGE POLITICS IN OLD AND NEW DEMOCRACIES:
A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE AND
AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

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Abstract

Stein Rokkan's comparative historical account of party system formation in Western Europe has proved enormously influential due to the appeal of tying individual political behaviour to large-scale historical transformations. This article reviews the literature that has studied the genesis of cleavage-based party systems, as well as theoretical and empirical assessments of the degree to which they have remained "frozen". If it is adapted to allow for a more dynamic perspective, the cleavage approach also helps us to make sense of recent transformations of Western European party systems by pointing to new "critical junctures" that are likely to have a lasting impact on party competition and on individual political behaviour.

In the second part of this review, I discuss applications of the approach outside Western Europe, focusing above all on Latin America and Central and Eastern Europe. If it is modified according to the specific historical trajectories of these countries, the cleavage concept helps us understand both how party systems become institutionalized in new democracies, as well as the type of conflicts they are likely to reflect. Furthermore, criticisms of social structural determinism have resulted in a new generation of scholarship that insists on paying more attention to the interplay of structure and agency in forging long-term bonds between parties and voters.

Keywords

Cleavages – Stein Rokkan – Party systems – Linkages – Political representation – Western Europe – Democracy – Latin America – Central Eastern Europe

Introduction

The “Rokkanian” concept of cleavage (Lipset and Rokkan 1967, Rokkan 1999) has for a long time occupied a central role in the literature on the formation of European party systems and in studies of contemporary voting behaviour. More recently, it has also been used in accounts of party system formation in new democracies. The term cleavage denotes a specific type of conflict in democratic politics that is rooted in the social structural transformations that have been triggered by large-scale processes such as nation building, industrialization, and possibly also by the consequences of post-industrialization. One of the great appeals of the concept thus lies in its ability to link individual political behaviour to macro-historical processes, and to make sense of the way “critical junctures” may shape politics in path-dependent ways for decades. In a perspective of comparative methodology, the cleavage approach helps us to understand the origins of similarities and differences between party systems and countries.

In this review, I will be concerned primarily with the literature that seeks to explain the genesis and the subsequent evolution of party systems from a cleavage perspective. The recent themes addressed in this strand of research are the question to which degree historical conflicts are still of relevance for party politics today, and whether the new political conflicts that have emerged in advanced industrial countries since the 1960s can be expected to acquire the same stability as the traditional cleavages related to class and religion. I also discuss how the cleavage concept has been applied to the study of party politics in new democracies. In its original formulation, the concept is tightly interwoven with the Western European historical path to nation state formation and industrialization, precluding its direct application to other contexts. However, since the central hunch of the cleavage approach may be that some links between parties and voters are firmer than others, the concept travels reasonably well. In fact, Tóka (1998: 596) states that the success of this “obscure concept” derives from the intuitive appeal of the idea that some motives of individual vote choice are more likely to “cement” party loyalties than others.

The article is structured as follows. First, I present Rokkan’s (Lipset and Rokkan 1967, Rokkan 1999) model of party system formation in Western Europe, from which much of what may be considered “cleavage theory” is derived. I also address the controversies surrounding the question of what accounts for the subsequent stability of these party systems. In order to avoid the static bias inherent in the approach, the relationship between cleavage politics and the concepts of dealignment and realignment are then discussed. While dealignment denotes the weakening of the established structure of conflict, by realignments we mean the process of forging new links between parties and social groups. This provides the point of departure for discussing the possible waning of the historical cleavages and the advent of new divisions related to the expansion of education, the intensification of globalization, and identity politics, which may be related to critical junctures that have occurred after the original approach was written. In all of these respects, the vast amount of research that has been pursued on Western Europe will allow me to be synthetic in my discussion.

The second part of this article is devoted to some recent uses of the cleavage concept in new democracies. First of all, making the approach travel requires identifying how critical junctures other than those relevant in Western Europe may have shaped party systems, or, what is in fact more common, have failed to do so. It is the absence of large-scale processes of political change and upheaval, coinciding with extensions of the democratic suffrage that help explain why clientelism has remained so pervasive in many contexts outside the Western world. Secondly, applications of the cleavage approach to more recent instances of party system formation have ascribed a more prominent role to political actors and their ability to shape politics. While there are limits to the ability of elite actors to shape partisan ties from above, the experience of new democracies suggests that much of the empirical research in the cleavage tradition has suffered from an unwarranted degree of social determinism. One of the prime reasons for this has been the focus on the relatively homogeneous Western European party systems, where a class cleavage has emerged everywhere. Another reason is that in closely following ongoing processes of party system formation in the new democracies, current

research is less synthetic – and also less comparative – than was the case in the old democracies, and consequently, more attention has been paid to how actors actively forge or downplay social divisions.

With the virtual explosion of formal democratic rule around the globe in the past three decades, the geographical focus of the second part of this essay is necessarily limited. Most of the work in the cleavage tradition has focused on Latin America and on Central and Eastern Europe, and I will concentrate on these two regions. In the final part of this essay, I will briefly touch upon the relationship between cleavages, party system institutionalization, and democratic consolidation. I conclude by pointing to common challenges for the study of cleavages in old and new democracies.

Established Democracies and their Cleavages, Old and New

The European Model

Across Europe, the twin processes of the national and the industrial revolutions have constituted “critical junctures” determining subsequent political development, and have led to long-term alignments between social groups and political parties.¹ In Lipset and Rokkan’s model (Lipset, Rokkan 1967, 1990), an extract from Rokkan’s macro-historical research endeavour, now collected in a single volume (Rokkan 1999, 2000), the national and the industrial revolutions have each resulted in two cleavages. The national revolution refers to the process of nation state formation. The antagonisms to emerge from this revolution have been territorial on the one hand and cultural on the other. The *centre-periphery cleavage* was triggered by “the conflict between the *central nation-building culture* and the increasing resistance of the ethnically, linguistically, or religiously distinct *subject populations* in the provinces and the peripheries”, while the *religious cleavage* developed from “the conflict between the centralizing, standardizing, and mobilizing *Nation-State* and the historically established corporate privileges of the *Church*” (Lipset, Rokkan 1990 [1967]: 101, emphasis in original).

As opposed to these cultural conflicts, *functional oppositions* have arisen only after a certain degree of internal consolidation of the national territory and a certain level of cultural standardization. The processes of state formation and external boundary building have been crucial preconditions for the internal political structuring of the polity along functional lines, as Caramani (2004) and Bartolini (2005a: Ch. 2) have recently argued. Going back to Rokkan (1999), cross-local oppositions first resulted from the *industrial revolution*, which in the 19th and early 20th centuries produced two cleavages: a *sectoral cleavage* between the first and the secondary sectors of the economy, opposing agricultural and industrial interests, and, as the historically youngest divide, the *class cleavage*. While this last cleavage has not necessarily been the strongest one, it has probably received most attention in comparative politics because it has come to structure politics in every European country.

The mobilization of the four historical cleavages identified in the classic approach have given birth to the modern party systems in Europe. Subsequently, as Lipset and Rokkan (1967) have famously noted, the full mobilization of European electorates led to a “freezing” of the major party alternatives. Building on a new set of data with district-level electoral results, Caramani (2004) has shown that the end of territorially fragmented politics was an early process that came about as a consequence of the national spread of the religiously based opposition between liberals and conservatives. The formation of national party systems, in other words, was completed before the First World War. The basic structure of European party systems has thus proved remarkably stable throughout much of the 20th century, as Bartolini and Mair (1990) have demonstrated in their seminal study that relies on aggregate measures of volatility between ideological party blocks. There is more disagreement on the stability of the divisions that underlie party systems and on the exact interpretation of the mystical “freezing” metaphor, however, two points I will return to later.

¹ For a theoretical account of the mechanisms accounting for path dependency, see Pierson (2000).

The Concept of Cleavage: A Definition

The intuitive meaning of the term cleavage is a deep and lasting division between groups based on some kind of conflict. Although the meaning of the concept may thus appear straightforward, definitional disputes have plagued the field. While the term has been and continues to be compounded with various adjectives, such as “social”, “attitudinal” or “political”, something of a consensus among those true to the Rokkanian legacy has emerged around a definition of a cleavage put forward by Bartolini and Mair (1990: 213-220), and recently justified in more detail by Bartolini (2005b). According to this conceptualisation, a political division must comprise three elements to constitute a cleavage: (1) A *social-structural* element, such as class, religious denomination, status, or education, (2) an element of *collective identity* of this social group, and (3) an *organizational manifestation* in the form of collective action or a durable organization of the social groups concerned. A cleavage is thus necessarily a “compounded divide”, according to Bartolini (2005b) and Deegan-Krause (2006, 2007), encompassing interests, normative or attitudinal outlooks, and a strong organizational base. Both of the above authors develop typologies of divisions that exhibit some, but not all of the elements characterizing a full cleavage. Presumably, what accounts for the durability of cleavages as a basis for the political structuring of a political system is that they feature all elements. Going beyond the three constituting elements of a cleavage, then, the term cleavage is usually reserved for durable patterns of political behaviour linking social groups and political organizations.

Neither the basic macro-historical model, nor the definition presented above has provoked explicit resistance, even if some authors continue to use the term cleavage interchangeably with “division” or “conflict” (e.g., Moreno 1999). More disagreement is evident when it comes to the sources of stability of the party systems formed by the historical cleavages, as well as in empirical applications of the concept. One of the most central problems is how cleavages are to be analyzed in a dynamic perspective. A related question is the somewhat unclear status of new political divisions within the concept. Allardt (1968) has noted early on that the concept has a static bias. There is also a tendency to assume an extraordinary character of the original four divisions identified by Lipset and Rokkan. It is these points that I now address.

Differing Interpretations of the “Freezing-Hypothesis”: Cleavages and Party Systems

Contrary to the explanation of the genesis of European party systems, the mechanisms accounting for their remarkable long-term stability have not been analyzed in detail in the original Lipset-Rokkan article, and not in Rokkan’s later work (Rokkan 1999). For the authors, as Mair (2001) points out, the so-called “freezing-hypothesis” was not so much a hypothesis as an empirical observation. Lipset and Rokkan (1990: 134) had stated that “[...] the *party systems* of the 1960s reflect, with few but significant exceptions, the *cleavage structures* of the 1920s” (emphasis mine). Empirical tests of the continuing validity of what is presumed to be a hypothesis have proceeded along two main lines, as Mair (2001: 28-33) points out in an article devoted to the differing interpretation of this part of Lipset and Rokkan’s argument. These approaches are based on differing interpretations of what exactly “froze” into place in the 1920s:

(1) The first possibility is that the relationship between specific segments of society such as classes on the one hand and parties representing their interests on the other hand, was established in the early process of party system formation and remained largely unchanged thereafter. The stability of party systems thus derives from the social groups divided by a cleavage supporting the same parties generation after generation. Scholars adhering to this view typically track the social structural determinants of voting behaviour in terms of class, religion, and urban-rural residence over time, allowing them to assess to which degree the original relationship between social groups and parties has remained intact. To explain the relative stability of party systems in this way is rather unrealistic in view of the important changes in employment structures, religious beliefs, and geographical mobility. As Mair (2001: 30) points out, this understanding of “freezing” could only be correct if society itself were “frozen”. Empirical examples of this line of inquiry will be reviewed in more detail below.

(2) The second strategy is to focus on the *stability of party systems* formed by the historical cleavages. Most of the work focusing on aggregate levels of electoral volatility if not explicitly, then at least implicitly falls into this category. This also applies to Bartolini and Mair's (1990) study. This perspective seeks to explain the persistence of party divisions even beyond the conflicts that originally brought them into being, and follows more closely from the macro-historical accounts of the cleavage concept. In this reading, cleavages entail collective political identities and organizational loyalties that determine individual political behaviour, and which are not easily broken down or diluted by new political movements. The relationship between the last of the four historical cleavages and the three historically older ones illustrates this nicely. The impact of the class divide, despite representing the main commonality of European party systems, has been far from uniform in the different countries. On the one hand, this is due to the country-specific opportunities for alliances with other political movements, a point that is central in Lipset and Rokkan's (1967) framework. Even more relevant, however, is that the class cleavage's strength as well as the make-up of its social basis have been heavily determined by the older cleavages and the loyalties and identities that they entailed (Rokkan 2000: 277-412, Bartolini 2000: Ch. 8). Workers' parties thus found their mobilization space constrained by prior mobilization efforts of the religious, nationalist and agrarian political movements. As a consequence, the share of the working class vote for left parties varies heavily across countries, and so does the social structural homogeneity of the electorate mobilized by the left (Bartolini 2000: 497).

The class cleavage being the last of the four original divides to become mobilized, Lipset and Rokkan (1990: 134) state that the "support market" for new parties has been "narrowed" to such a degree as a result of the formation of mass parties that a "freezing of the major party alternatives" was observable. A frozen party system is thus equivalent to a structurally consolidated or institutionalized party system, in Sartori's (1976) terms. The stronger a party system structures the expectations of actors over time – at the elite as well as at the mass level – the more it contributes to channelling old and new conflicts into established structures of competition. As Mair (2001: 38) suggests, "Predictability then becomes a surrogate of structuration: the more predictable a party system is, the more it is a system as such, and hence the more institutionalized it has become. This is also what freezing is about". It is in fact the link between social divisions and party system institutionalization that makes the cleavage concept fruitful for the study of democratic consolidation, as I will argue later on.

This view also implies, however, that changing links between social groups and parties are at least implicitly taken as a given. If party systems retain their basic shape in the midst of an evolving society, then this can only be accounted for by the forming of new links between social groups and parties. This reveals that Bartolini and Mair's (1990) highly influential definition of a cleavage is in fact somewhat problematic, since it can only be read and has in fact been interpreted as putting great emphasis on the social structural homogeneity of parties' electorates. Even the authors themselves, in other instances, adhere to a far less strict understanding of cleavages. Both Mair (1997) and Bartolini (2000) accept a long-term decline in the social structural homogeneity of a party's electorate as quite natural. Hence, the authors' definition, emphasizing the social structure-collective identity-organization linkage, seems adequate primarily to analyze the initial mobilization of cleavages, since it corresponds to a mobilization sequence put in evidence by social movement research (e.g., Tarrow 1992, Klandermans 1997): common interests fail to result in political mobilization by themselves. In the absence of a collective identity, individuals will not overcome the free-rider problem, and thus not act together politically.

Party System Change: Linking Cleavage and Realignment Theory

At least since the early 1980s, when new value conflicts made their way onto the political agenda in advanced industrial democracies, the continuing validity of the freezing hypothesis has been questioned (Dalton, Flanagan, Beck 1984). Before turning to the content of the new conflicts that many authors claim are disrupting traditional cleavage politics, I will discuss how the cleavage

account can be accommodated with party system change. If the approach is to carry any weight today, such an understanding is essential.

To the degree that new issues divide the same social groups as the conflicts that have been prevailing so far, they are reconcilable with the predominating antagonisms, and will simply be taken up by parties. As a result, the meaning or political content of the dominant lines of conflict within a party system are to some degree altered. However, if parties' established electorates are divided concerning an issue that is new or was of minor salience hitherto, parties will try to avoid positioning themselves regarding this question. This is different in phases of *realignment*. If new issues cannot be integrated into the existing structure of conflict, and if one of the parties within the system – or a new party – takes them up, the other parties will have to take sides as well, and the linkages between social groups and political parties may be reconfigured, and cleavages altered. While old connections are weakened in a process of *dealignment*, new and salient issues may lead to the formation of new linkages. The latter processes are at the heart of the theory of *political realignments* (for overviews of the concept, see Dalton, Flanagan, Beck 1984, Martin 2000, Mayhew 2000).

Small realignments may occur continuously, according to Martin (2000), but when party systems adapt to new structures of conflict, this is usually a rather eruptive process, and can be traced to a number of “critical elections”, characterized by higher levels of volatility accompanying the modification in party constituencies. This eruptiveness is due to the inherent inertia of party systems as a consequence of their freezing along historical antagonisms, and to their lack of responsiveness in times of “normal politics”. The latter in the theory of realignment denotes phases where the system is stable and where the prevailing alignments are not altered, because, in Schattschneider's (1975) famous words, the established cleavage structure tends to “organize” issues cutting across established lines of division “out of politics”.

Martin (2000: 84-86, 422-427) has developed an elegant depiction of how the cleavage concept relates to such extraordinary phases of party system change. It is useful to distinguish three levels of analysis or of abstraction in studying politics, two of which are related to cleavage theory and the realignment approach, respectively:

- (1) The most fundamental forces of politics lie in the *long-term evolution of social structure*, the primary focus of *cleavage-theory*. Here, the focus is on those critical junctures, such as the national and industrial revolutions, which heavily influenced political development in a path-dependent function. Following Allardt (1968) and Kriesi (1999), it can be argued that the educational revolution of the 1960s and 1970s has constituted a further critical juncture. Furthermore, it has been claimed that the processes of globalization and Europeanization that have intensified since the 1980s and 1990s also constitute a critical juncture shaping party systems (Kriesi et al. 2006, 2008). In an inverse reading of the preconditions of cleavage formation outlined earlier on, Bartolini (2005a) has argued that the lowering of national boundaries in Europe does not necessarily lead to a new line of opposition, but to a de-structuring of the functional cleavages at the national level.
- (2) These developments do not translate directly into new antagonisms within the party system due to the force of existing alignments and the freezing of party systems along historical divides. The established parties will seek to avert the entry of new parties by responding to new potentials within the electorate, within the limits set by their historical position. The adaptation of the existing structure of conflicts to new political potentials is the central focus of the *theory of political realignments*, which is situated at an intermediate level of analysis. The weakening of prevailing alignments and the emergence of conflicts cutting across a prevailing cleavage makes electoral coalitions, united by virtue of this cleavage, break apart and opens the way for the *establishment of new links between social groups and political parties*.²

² An overview of the debate concerning dealignment and realignment in Western Europe is provided by Enyedi (2008).

- (3) The least abstract level of analysis focuses on everyday politics. Here, cyclical issues of minor importance, corruption scandals and the popularity or unpopularity of politicians and governments affect the results of elections. Even if such issues dominate everyday politics, these events rarely affect the two higher levels of political development.

In a restructuring of oppositions in a party system, levels one and two interact and therefore have to be analyzed jointly. In my view, this implies that attention must be paid to the issues that political conflict is actually about, and how these issues relate to traditional conflicts. In order for voters to become available to the mobilization efforts of new actors, the links between social groups and parties on which the established structure of conflict is based must have weakened. If this leads social groups to actually abandon the party they have supported, we speak of *dealignment*, which can either be structural or behavioural (Martin 2000, Lachat 2007). In the case of *structural dealignment*, modernization leads to a change in the strength of those social groups in which the old structure of conflict is anchored. Here, the long-term evolution of social structure situated at the first level impinges upon the second level, that of realignment-theory. For example, the advent of a post-industrial economy has led to a shrinking of the traditional working class, while secularization has led to a decline in the share of regular churchgoers in Western European countries. A party system reflecting primarily these conflicts will therefore be less rooted in social structure than a few decades ago, opening a window of opportunity for the mobilization of new conflicts.

Processes of *behavioural dealignment*, on the other hand, are not necessarily connected to a gradual shift in the strength of social groups. Here, links between social groups and ideological party blocks formed by cleavages undergo change as a consequence of the rising importance of new political issues, the advent of a new dimension of political conflict, or because a party abandons its customary position. If the policy or value positions of an ideological block of parties and its voters no longer match, or if the electorate considers the political offer to be out-dated, the established links between parties and voters become fragile. Behavioural dealignment can, however, also be a consequence of a change in parties' programmatic offer, and it may for this reason be useful to analyze to which degree parties stick to their established ideologies or whether they adopt new positions.

To what degree the old conflicts are capable of organizing new ones out of politics depends not only on the intensity of the new conflicts, but also on the grip of the established cleavage structure. Kriesi and Duyvendak (1995) have postulated a zero-sum relationship between old and new conflicts, and much therefore depends on whether the established cleavages have been pacified and on the degree of social closure characterizing the social groups that are divided by them. Together, these elements condition the stability of political alignments.

Taking this reasoning further, it is possible to distinguish various types of divide that have varying consequences for the manifestation of new conflicts (Bornschieer, Forthcoming: Ch. 3). Besides the degree of polarization and the stability of alignments between parties and voters, the congruence between the programmatic positions can also be taken to impinge on the durability of cleavages. Cleavages can be characterized by segmentation, meaning that parties and voters are durably aligned along a conflict. Alternatively, they can live on primarily in terms of ideology and feelings of belonging, without being reinforced by contrasting voter orientations and party positions. Finally, parties may form "cartels" (Katz and Mair 1995), reflecting cleavages that no longer matter to voters. Different types of cleavage thus vary in their ability to preclude new conflicts to manifest themselves politically.

Empirical assessments of the persistence of the traditional cleavages

The question to which degree historical cleavages still determine political behaviour today has been approached from two perspectives. One approach centres on the social structural basis of cleavages, while the other focuses on the way new political issues have transformed the meaning of the historical antagonisms. In the following, I first review the society-centred approach and then turn to the question of how it has been combined with a focus on elite political actors.

“Bottom-up” approaches: *The social structural basis of party choice*. The literature on the persistence or change of the social structural basis of party preferences has mainly focused on the class cleavage and has produced contradictory results.³ In an important comparative over-time study of the class cleavage in a wide array of advanced democracies, Franklin et al. (1992) state that the explanatory power of the classical socio-demographic variables has declined in most countries examined. In the two European countries where this is not the case, Italy and the Netherlands, cohort differences lead them to assume that they will follow suit.

Divergent findings are presented by authors employing more refined class schemata and statistical tools, such as the work assembled in the volume edited by Evans (1999a), a second large comparative research endeavour in the field. Some of the contributors to this book either fail to find such uniform trends across countries (Nieuwbeerta, de Graaf 1999, Weakliem, Heath 1999), while others can show that at least in certain countries, socio-structural characteristics do not structure voting choice substantially less than thirty years ago (e.g., Müller 1999). While Evans (1999b) criticizes Franklin et al.’s (1992) work for employing an inadequate and out-dated conception of social class, the difference between the two approaches is in fact more conceptual than methodological. Relying on the classical blue collar vs. white collar distinction, Franklin et al. (1992) are in a position to address the question to which degree *established bonds between social groups and political parties* have either remained stable or have waned in force. On the other hand, Evans (1999b: 12) argues that only class schemata employing more fine-tuned class distinctions are apt to detect processes of *realignment*. Consequently, they have little to say concerning what the policy antagonisms are about that have resulted in the new alignments they discover. As Mair (1999) and Franklin (2002) have both pointed out, this tells us a lot about *class voting*, but less about *class politics*, contrary to what the book’s title would suggest. More than offering a test of the strength of the *historical* cleavages, then, this is an analysis of the existence of structurally based conflicts *as such*.⁴

Many of the more recent studies on the evolution of cleavages over long spans of time have also focused on the religious cleavage as the second common structuring element of Western European party systems (e.g., Knutsen 2004, Oskarson 2005, Brooks, Nieuwbeerta, Manza 2006, Lachat 2007, Elff 2007a).⁵ While the impact of religious denomination has often declined, religiosity, commonly measured in terms of the frequency of church attendance, continues to have an impact on voting choices. One should note, however, that this measurement moves the analysis away from religious groups as social structural categories with clear-cut and not easily to overcome boundaries, to a more value-based conception of religion. It is quite natural, then, that the impact of religiosity on voting choices is stronger than that of religious denomination.

While much work has been done on the link between the social structural and the organizational elements of the traditional or transformed cleavages in terms of voting choices, the inclusion of the collective identity element has faced obstacles that have been difficult to overcome. This is mainly for the reason that survey data rarely allows the measurement of group attachments as individual-level equivalents of collective identity. Weakliem’s (1993) study on class consciousness in Britain shows, however, that only members of the working class that were class-aware voted for the Labour party rather than for the Conservatives in the 1960s. This underlines the crucial importance of the collective identity element in cleavage mobilization processes.

The only explicit attempt, to the best of my knowledge, to include all three elements constituting a cleavage in empirical analyses of political behaviour is the essay by Knutsen and Scarbrough (1995), and Tóka’s (1998) application of their approach to Central and Eastern Europe. Here, the authors overcome the lack of data by using shared value preferences as an expression of collective identity. In

³ Most of the literature I review in this section comes from research on voting behaviour. See Brooks et al. (2003) for an overview of this field and the place of cleavage-based models within it.

⁴ For an argument in defence of the continued significance of class voting and a more complete review of the literature, see Evans (2000).

⁵ For an analysis of the impact of these and other cleavages on voting behaviour in the US, see Manza and Brooks (1999).

their model, cleavage voting is analytically distinguished from social structural voting as well as from value-based voting in that it has to include both of the other elements. Cleavage voting then follows a causal chain where social structure influences values and values influence voting choice. Empirically, however, voting behaviour partly follows this chain, but not exclusively. Not quite surprisingly, values turn out to have an independent impact on party preference as well. More strikingly, another path leads from social structural characteristics directly to voting choice, without running through shared values. As a matter of fact, Knutsen and Scarbrough (1995: 514) conclude that only the Netherlands turns out to conform to the “stereotypy” of cleavage-dominated politics. Hence, in their analysis, cleavages hardly have an impact, which is quite striking, to say the least. Rather than dismissing cleavage politics altogether, this may point to the difficulty of finding appropriate categories to measure social structure and collective identity.

“Top-down” and combined approaches: integrating the role of parties. A different body of work approaches the issue primarily from the perspective of the political parties or party systems to which the historical cleavages have given birth. In other words, these authors adhere more to the second interpretation of the freezing hypothesis outlined above. Because parties reflect the identities and interests of social groups, they reproduce or can even construct collective identities, as Sartori (1968, 1990) has claimed early on. Scholars within this tradition have probably paid most attention to parties’ responses to new political potentials that have arisen from the transition to post-industrial society, as exemplified in the work of Mair (1997) and Kitschelt (1994, 1995). As Mair (1997) has insisted, the historical party organization’s remarkable resilience over time is precisely due to its ability to adapt to structural and cultural changes.

Ideally, from a cleavage perspective, research should focus on the interaction of the structural basis of political alignments and parties’ mobilizing strategies. For instance, class voting is presumably related to the degree to which party programs make reference to social class (Evans 2000: 413). Elff (2007b) pursues an analysis of this sort using data from the Comparative Manifesto Project (see Budge et al. 2001, Klingemann et al. 2006). His results shows that at the aggregate level, both class and religious voting are influenced by parties’ programmatic offer in most countries.

This tells us something about the reasons for dealignment between parties and voters, but not much about the forces of change. An obvious starting point here are the conflicts the “New Politics” literature singles out as particularly important in post-industrial societies (Inglehart 1977, 1997). According to some authors, value-based divides are crosscutting the older distributional or class cleavage, which was closely tied to social structural characteristics (see Dalton, Flanagan, Beck 1984, and therein especially Inglehart 1984). Centring on questions of lifestyle and moral guidelines, this opposition is now commonly referred to as one between libertarian and authoritarian values (Kitschelt 1994, Flanagan, Lee 2003). Kitschelt (1994, 1995) has most explicitly and convincingly related this new value opposition to transformations in Western European party systems. His work has focused on the transformation of Social Democratic parties and the emergence or reinvigoration of parties of the Radical Right, relating these evolutions to the dimensions underlying the attitudinal space of European mass publics. Data constraints preclude a rigorous test of the hypotheses regarding the social structural foundation of these attitudes, however.

Until we have been able to show that these conflicts are anchored in social structure just like the older class and religious conflicts, the value divide cannot be called a cleavage. After all, the older divides had important cultural components as well (Knutsen and Scarbrough 1995, Bartolini 2000: 16). Furthermore, in propagating a new value cleavage we risk jumping rather quickly from cleavages that resulted from large macro-historical processes to value differences which are still rather young and of which we do not know if they will be characterized by the same persistence. What, then, could the social structural basis be that makes a long-term structuring of politics along these conflicts plausible?

One approach holds that class antagonisms continue to be the bread and butter of politics. Kriesi (1998), for example, starts off with concrete libertarian-authoritarian value conflicts and attempts to find their social structural base by differentiating within the “new” middle class. Both Kriesi (1993, 1998) and Müller (1999) have shown that significant divisions have arisen concomitantly to the

expansion of the middle class. These are rooted in different work logics and the degree of hierarchy or autonomy they involve. As it turns out, however, class position does not entirely account for these value differences. This may either indicate that the value divide lacks a clear social structural foundation, or, what is just as plausible, that we lack the appropriate categories and concepts to make sense of contemporary antagonisms and their roots in an evolving social structure. Ever more refined conceptions of class have responded to recent changes in employment structures. While retaining classical vertical class divisions, Oesch (2006) complements these with a horizontal differentiation based on work logic. This may help in identifying the social support base of new parties such as the populist right (Oesch 2008).

A second hypothesis suggests that differences in education may be the driving forces of the new value conflicts. Allardt (1968) has suggested early on that new cleavages could emerge as a product of the “educational revolution” of the 1960s and 1970s, which has led to a significant expansion of higher education. In fact, it can be shown that while the advent of new value conflicts has blurred the social structural homogeneity of the classical left-right opposition in terms of social class, political preferences are now closely related to education (Kriesi et al. 2008). And education also has a strong influence on party choice (e.g., Knutsen 2004), in particular concerning the Ecologists and the populist right, the two party families that resulted from the new cultural conflicts that have played an important role since the late 1960s (Bornschieer, Forthcoming). Furthermore, in a pioneering study based on a specially administered survey conducted in Denmark, Stubager (Forthcoming) reveals that high and low educational groups do in fact exhibit some degree of collective identity and perceive an antagonism with the other educational group in terms of interests. These findings point to the emergence of a full-fledged cleavage encompassing social groups that exhibit a shared consciousness.

A final line of research interprets differences between educational groups as part of a more encompassing antagonism between the “winners” and “losers” of the economic, cultural, and political processes of globalization of the past decades (Kriesi et al. 2006, 2008). After the emergence of a libertarian-authoritarian divide in the 1970s, these processes have transformed cultural conflicts and party systems yet again. Their analysis shows that this is one of two dimensions structuring party positions and voter orientations in Western Europe, the other dimension being the state-market cleavage, which remains salient. Furthermore, conflicts over European integration, which have received considerable attention recently (e.g., Marks et al. 2006), have become “embedded” into this two-dimensional structure of conflict, according to the authors. By focusing on the location of social groups and party electorates in the political space created by these two dimensions, they show that each of them divides social groups defined in terms of class and education, while religion has lost much of its political impact. Including data on party positions also allows a focus on the way party political actors have mobilized new structural potentials, thus combining “bottom-up” and “top-down” approaches to cleavages.

The Formation of Cleavages in New Democracies

Making the cleavage concept travel

The application of the cleavage concept outside the founding democracies in the West has faced formidable obstacles. Either the national and industrial revolutions have not occurred in the same form as in Western Europe, or they have failed to produce a similarly lasting impact on party systems (see Randall 2001, Cammack 1994). As van Biezen and Caramani (2007: 7-8) note, “The concept of cleavage is the product of a very specific transformation that took place in Western Europe exclusively”, and coincided with the expansion of democratic voting rights. In Latin America, for example, states consolidated their territory under colonial rule and most of them never saw something comparable to the national revolution with the ensuing conflicts characteristic of Western Europe. Similarly, universal voting rights were often granted long before the formation of a significant working class, and due to the widespread practice of clientelism, the formation of class-based parties was retarded for decades. Mainwaring and Zoco (2007) have recently shown that there is nothing automatic in the stabilization of interparty competition over time. Although a lot has been said about

rising levels of electoral instability in Western democracies, the advanced industrial democracies remain distinctive for their low levels of volatility. These lasting differences are the result of specific historical sequences and subsequent path dependency, according to the authors. Beyond this somewhat schematic contrast, however, lies a great diversity in the degree to which party systems in new democracies are rooted in society.

In order to fruitfully apply the cleavage concept to new democracies, then, a number of modifications of the original approach are in order. First, we must abstract from the European experience in looking for the critical junctures that have left a lasting stamp on party systems in some countries, but not in others. In the next section, I will review some of the rare comparative work that has undertaken this step, focusing predominantly on Latin America. Secondly, a more adequate understanding of the role of agency in cleavage formation is necessary. Established elites may not only have an interest in, they may also be capable of shaping party systems and even of preventing social structure from manifesting itself in politics. Accounts of this kind are somewhat alien to the macro-historical literature on Western Europe, where the standardizing force of the national and industrial revolutions has allowed a social determinism to survive that does not fare well in new democracies. The starting point for a focus on political actors is the founding moment of a new democratic regime. However, we also need to understand how cleavages can emerge gradually over long periods of time and in the absence of large-scale processes that accelerate the institutionalization of party systems. Here, I will review some of the recent literature on political conflicts that may eventually result in the manifestation of cleavages in Central and Eastern Europe, Latin America, and elsewhere.

Critical junctures: Adapting and Extending the Macro-Historical Account

Since many Latin American countries' initial experience with democracy dates back to the first half of the 20th century, the recent wave of democracy meant re-democratization on this continent. As a result, a number of Latin America's parties are much older than those in other Third wave countries, and some of the rare work in the cleavage tradition outside Western Europe and the US has focused on this continent. The starting point, nonetheless, is usually the peculiar absence of the kind of cleavages that have manifested themselves in the developed world. To begin with, religious homogeneity and early state consolidation under colonial rule, and the coincidence of industrial and landed interests do not lead us to expect strong religious or sectoral cleavages in Latin America (Dix 1989, Coppedge 1998). The near-absence of strong class-based parties in the midst of extraordinarily high levels of inequality, and the predominance of catch-all parties even in the early stages of political development is more surprising, however. Dix explains this with the timing of the expansion of the suffrage, which occurred "(...) relatively early and 'from above', by elites seeking political allies or pursuing a strategy of cooptation, thus precluding a prolonged consciousness-raising struggle for political participation" (1989: 33).

What makes Latin America a particularly interesting region to apply cleavage theory is the amount of intra-regional variation both in party system institutionalization and in the degree that party systems reflect social structure. Path-breaking attempts at measuring party system institutionalization, assessing parties' roots in society and the regularities in the interactions among them, underscore the diversity of Latin American politics (Dix 1992, Mainwaring and Scully 1995). Only a few scholars have applied a historical cleavage framework to try to make sense of these differences (Dix 1989, Coppedge 1998), but their research testifies to the applicability of the concept outside Western Europe. Collier and Collier's (1991) study certainly represents the most ambitious and theoretically elaborate application of the concept of critical junctures, which they consider the essence of the cleavage approach, to regime dynamics to Latin America. I will not discuss their book in detail, however, not only because of its monumental scope, but primarily because their analysis does not explain the genesis of the party system as such, but focuses on the later stage of the incorporation of the labour movement and its long-term impact on party competition and the viability of democracy.

While some party systems like the Brazilian one seem to have emerged more or less from scratch after every disruption of democratic rule, the party systems in Colombia, Uruguay and Chile have not

changed very much since the first decades of the 20th century. Strong linkages between parties and voters seem to have “frozen” these party systems into place much like their European counterparts. This has not resulted in the same conflicts being represented, however. Coppedge’s (1998) paper is the creative attempt to apply not the Rokkian variables, but his logic of thinking to explain the differences in social entrenchment of the party system in eleven Latin American countries. In the aftermath of independence and prior to the extension of the franchise, a common antagonism between liberals and conservatives similar to the one in Western Europe was predominant throughout the region (Coppedge 1998, Dix 1989). In Uruguay and Colombia, where a protracted civil war between these two groups divided the citizenry into two halves, this division is still reflected in the party system. Similar to the pluralist parties of North America, the two traditional parties in Uruguay are catch-all parties, which do not have clear-cut links to social structure (see Epstein 1980). Thus, while the division between them falls short of being a full cleavage according to the definition outlined earlier on, the early extension of the franchise to the entire adult population has frozen the party system into place along this line of division. Even if new parties have emerged later on, this was a slow process characteristic of strongly institutionalized party systems.

The gradual expansion of the suffrage in Chile has produced an institutionalized system with a more clear-cut social basis. In fact, the party system preceding Pinochet’s military coup reflected a Catholic-secular and a class cleavage much like in Europe. It is only in the process of re-democratization, and as a consequence of the deliberate strategies of the parties supporting democracy that these conflicts have lost in importance (Torcal and Mainwaring 2003), a point I will return to. In Brazil, on the other hand, universal suffrage came in 1945, long before a substantial working class existed, had effectively organized, and called for the vote. Together with the establishment of a state-sponsored workers’ party, this precluded a clear class cleavage from materializing despite high levels of socio-economic inequality to this day (for recent evidence, see Samuels 2006). From a cleavage perspective, the absence of a class-based party in Brazil can be explained by the skilful obviation of the process of collective identity formation of the lower classes by the ruling elites, reinforced by the crafting of clientelistic bonds between citizens and elected representatives (Bornschier 2008). Until recently, this allowed political elites to control politics and to contain the growth of party mobilization from below (Hagopian 1996).

The contrast between the Brazilian and the Chilean case thus supports the hypothesis that the timing and the magnitude of suffrage extensions, by determining the homogeneity of the social groups that are enfranchised, impinges on the specificity of the interests that parties reflect.⁶ What Dix (1989) and Coppedge (1998) neglect, however, is that it cannot be taken for granted that parties represent the interests of social groups at all. As Kitschelt (2000) and Kitschelt and Wilkinson (2007) have laid out, we can distinguish between clientelistic, charismatic, and programmatic linkages between politicians and voters in democratic politics. In the lack of strong mobilization from below, and if they have access to the resources this requires, established parties will have little incentive to rely on programs rather than on clientelism and patronage. Only “externally mobilized parties”, as Shefter (1977, 1993) has called them, which come from outside the ruling circles of power, push for programmatic competition – because programs are all they have to offer. Their task is not an easy one, however. Parties of this kind, which seek to mobilize functional oppositions based on class or other interests, must be capable of disrupting vertical links of authority and of exchange that predominate in many less-developed countries, which Chalmers (1977) described in a seminal article trying to make sense of the lacking societal roots of Latin American parties.

While Kitschelt and Wilkinson (2007) argue quite convincingly that clientelism simply becomes too expensive to be worthwhile for politicians at a certain point, the level of development would have led us to expect programmatic parties long ago in many parts of Latin America, as Dix (1989) has stated. Thus, the process by which clientelism gives way to programmatic politics remains poorly

⁶ See also Bartolini (2000: Ch. 5) who finds that differences in the timing and the tempo of suffrage expansion have a lasting influence on the strength of the left and on the character of its support base across Western Europe.

understood to date. In their pioneering study of elite-mass congruence in policy preferences across Latin America, Luna and Zechmeister (2005) have shown that not only social and economic variables such as the level of poverty impinge on programmatic linkages between citizens and policymakers, but also the degree of institutionalization of the party system and the strength of leftist parties. The institutionalization of political conflict characteristic of cleavage-based party systems, in other words, seems to promote accountability and crowd out clientelistic mobilization. The strength of left parties in this process, on the other hand, points to the role of political actors in mobilizing cleavages. This is the last research topic I address in this essay.

Political Agency and the Politicization of Social Structure

If collective identities are conceived as being to some degree socially constructed, the collective identity element that cleavages encompass should quite naturally draw attention to the actors who help to building such identifications. Yet, despite the fact that some time has passed since Sartori (1968) and Zuckerman (1975) urged for a focus on political elites in cleavage formation, the role of agency in cleavage formation has become a prominent topic in research only recently. As Enyedi (2005: 699) states, “(...) interpretative frameworks of the political elites decisively influence whether differences of interests are perceived as social conflicts. (...) In this approach, parties are perceived as political actors combining interests, values, cultural milieus and social networks”. In a book on the divergent paths of the Czech Republic and Slovakia after their break-up, Deegan-Krause (2006: 207) notes: “Although leaders cannot necessarily control the relationship between attitudes and party choice, they can exert strong influences”. Since historical cleavages are giving way to new conflicts, top-down approaches have become more diffused in the old democracies as well, as we have seen. Even more, however, the focus on recent experiences of democratization has driven attention to the ways elite actors shape nascent party systems. Chhibber and Torcal (1997) suggest that agency plays a larger role in the new democracies because party elites have greater flexibility to make strategic choices in societies where secondary organizations are less developed.

Particularly in research on Central and Eastern Europe, scholars have pointed to the importance of the founding moments of the democratic regime, when new parties are established. The absence of strong cleavages that make party systems reflect social structure in Central and Eastern Europe can be explained by the failure of the critical junctures that have been decisive in Western Europe to leave their imprint, compounded by the period of socialist rule (Caramani 2003, van Biezen and Caramani 2007). Nonetheless, broad economic and cultural structures, differences in the marketization, in ethnic and religious diversity, and the like, are likely to affect the make-up of party systems and relevant issue dimensions in post-communist countries (Evans and Whitefield 1993, 2000, Elster, Offe, Preuss 1998, Lawson et al. 1999, Kitschelt et al. 1999).⁷

As an example of such an approach, Kitschelt and his colleagues (1999) distinguish different types of communist rule that interact with elite strategies and the electoral rules, and thereby derive predictions about the character of oppositions in the nascent party systems. Depending on the degree to which a formal-rational state apparatus existed already under communist rule, and on how the communist parties instilled compliance with their rule, political competition is either likely to evolve around clientelistic goods or around programmatic competition. Here, the analysis builds on Shefter's (1977, 1993) work, already referred to. The cases where competition is primarily programmatic, either economic, religious-cultural conflicts, or both types of conflict can be prevalent, as exemplified by the cases of the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland, respectively. Elites thus face incentives based on historical and institutional factors, and they are constrained by the dimensionality underlying citizen orientations. Whether the dimensions of conflict mobilized in the 1990s will develop into cleavages by exhibiting clear-cut social bases and acquiring a high degree of stability remains to be seen. If cleavages are to emerge in new democracies at all, however, they are likely to look different than in

⁷ A more complete review of the literature on cleavages in post-communist Europe is provided by Whitefield (2002) and Enyedi (2006).

Western Europe. An approach centred on specific countries' historical development is therefore promising in predicting how party systems may become rooted in social structure.

Building exclusively on demand-side data, Moreno (1999) identifies issue divides in Latin America, Eastern Europe, and Western Europe that sometimes, but not always have a structural basis. Discriminant analyses then reveal which of these issue divides underlie citizen-party alignments, and are thus reflected in the party system. Similar to the findings of Kitschelt and his colleagues, regime divides between supporters and opponents of accountability and democratic rule are evident in a number of new democracies, reflecting winners and losers of democratization. In other contexts, divergences over economic reform appear more salient. One of the focal points of political agency is situated here, between the constraints provided by citizen orientations and the patterns of opposition ultimately represented in the party system: to a certain degree, elites have the ability to combine the various issue dimensions differently into over-arching divides or cleavages (Deegan-Krause 2006).⁸

To the degree that divides have come to shape party systems, the question is how durable its impact is likely to be. Zielinski's (2002) game-theoretical model represents the extreme case of attributing central importance to the first divisions to emerge. Assuming the ability of political actors to make political competition diverge from the underlying social conflicts and an inherent tendency of party systems to freeze into place by discouraging the entry of new competitors, the first few elections become crucial, according to Zielinski (2002: 185): "Indeed, they are the founding moments when political actors determine which cleavages to depoliticize and which to establish as the permanent axes of political competition". There is clearly too much voluntarism involved here, since the party system is unlikely to become institutionalized if it fails to represent salient divisions in the electorate. At least the Latin American experience shows that some party systems do not institutionalize even over several election cycles. Consequently, as long as the electoral system does not impede them, new parties may enter the system relatively easily.

What is more, we should not confound the persistence of a set of parties that emerged at the outset of democratic party competition with that of the underlying cleavages that have brought the party system into being. Indeed, as discussed earlier on, parties in Western European have demonstrated a remarkable capacity to adapt to new conflicts. A number of authors therefore point to the continuing ability of elites to forge or dilute links between themselves and specific social groups. For example, Enyedi (2005) analyzes how the Hungarian Fidesz party has been able to profoundly modify its original ideological appeal as a left-libertarian party. In a process accompanied by a major realignment, the party merged various ideological dimensions and right-wing segments, and consolidated a new divide by creating impermeable boundaries between the two sides. Two further studies show that parties can both establish and downplay cleavages. In Spain, the left originally adopted a catch-all strategy after the transition to democracy, and social class did not have an influence on the vote (Chhibber and Torcal 1997). The adoption of a more redistributive profile in economic policy-making, and the capacity to actually enact a number of its propositions in government then resulted in an anchoring of the party in terms of social class. In Chile, the left took the opposite route. Because the regime question loomed large after the transition to democracy, the left de-emphasized redistributive issues in order to form a coalition with the Christian Democrats, the other pro-democratic party. As a consequence, according to Torcal and Mainwaring's (2003) analysis, the party system's roots in social class put in evidence before the coup vanished.

For an understanding of cleavages as long-term representations of social structural conflicts, the malleability of the social bases of party competition may pose a problem. What is it, then, that anchors party systems durably in society? Tóka (1998) applies Knutsen and Scarbrough's (1995) distinction between pure social structural voting, value voting, and cleavage voting (the latter encompassing both social structural and value voting, as discussed earlier on) to explain individual-level volatility in

⁸ How divides over accountability and regime preferences come to coincide with other divides such as conflicts over national unity may have important implications for the survival of democracy in a country (Deegan-Krause 2006).

voting choices, using panel data from Central and Eastern European countries. His analysis reveals that while social structural characteristics alone do not stabilize party choice in any way, value-based voting and organizational encapsulation have the strongest stabilizing effect. This finding is actually in line with the party system based interpretation of the “freezing hypothesis” presented earlier on in this review: it seems that it is not the social structural roots per se, but rather antagonistically related collective identities that stabilize party systems. The subcultures created by conflicts therefore constitute the durable basis of cleavages, and not their immutable social bases.

Conclusion

While there continues to be some disagreement over what may properly be termed a cleavage, its intuitive appeal, as noted by Tóka (1998), lies in the idea that some links between parties and voters are more stable than others. Especially with regard to divisions in new democracies, but also due to the transformation of cleavages in their Western European heartland, scholars have begun to question whether the requirement of clear-cut roots in social structure may not be too demanding and unnecessarily narrows down the applicability of the concept (Enyedi 2005, 2008). One of the reasons why it is sometimes difficult to identify the social roots of political conflicts is methodological, or perhaps conceptual: our categories for describing social structure often lag behind our understanding of the conflicts themselves. One way out is to refine our terminology with respect to various types of divisions, which more often than not may fall short of constituting a cleavage, as Bartolini (2005b) and Deegan-Krause (2006, 2007) have suggested. The other possibility is to put primary emphasis on their enduring character as the defining element of cleavages.

Especially when stated in the second way, the cleavage concept is useful not only with respect to Western Europe, but also to characterize a type of political conflict that helps in institutionalizing party systems. Together with the ensuing reduction of volatility, this installs mechanisms of accountability (Mainwaring and Scully 1995, Mair 1997, Tóka 1998: 591-2). Cleavage-like conflicts are therefore good for democracy and democratic consolidation, rather than a threat. In the old democracies, the decline of cleavage based voting and the fact that voters “began to choose” (Rose and McAllister 1986) first seemed to be saluted by many observers, while the spectre of populism then led to more gloomy assessments of the state of democracy in the 1990s. While their outgrowths are perhaps unpleasant, the prospect of new value conflicts consolidating into cleavages in Western Europe may therefore be good, rather than bad news for democratic accountability.

In any event, political agency has received the place it deserves in the recent literature on cleavages both in the old and new democracies alike. However, neither social determinism, nor voluntarist accounts of elite political behaviour help us to make sense of politics and its long-term evolution. Recent developments in the literature help us to bridge the “bottom-up” and “top-down” approaches, and thus have taken a promising direction. In Western Europe, the programmatic stances of parties mobilizing along the traditional conflicts impinge on the long-term endurance of these conflicts, and their reactions to a changing social structure determine if and how new conflicts manifest themselves politically. In more recently democratized contexts, on the other hand, we witness the initial formation of party systems. Path dependency has a central place in the cleavage account, and depending on the divisions that are institutionalized in these countries, and the degree to which they can oust clientelism as a mode of political mobilization, different prospects for democratic consolidation and for the representation of interests emerge.

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