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Alignment, realignment and dealignment in multi-party systems : a conceptual and empirical study

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CHAPTER 3

FINDING A WAY THROUGH THE DISORDER – THE PROBLEMS OF IDENTIFYING OF ALIGNMENT, REALIGNMENT AND DEALIGNMENT

“The clarification and refinement of concepts is a fundamental task in political science.”

Adcock and Collier (2001:529)

Scholarly discussion of the mechanisms of alignment – party identification and socio-structural cleavage(s), and more importantly about the relevance of these concepts for the period after the 1970s – created another debate in the literature of Political Science that follows either the socio-psychological or the socio-structural approach (both approaches are discussed in the previous chapter). This debate is focused on whether or not the connections between voters and political parties in the party systems of Western democratic states are still relatively stable and structured, whether or not these party systems have changed and, – if so – what kind of change has occurred.

Three major empirical arguments dominate this debate. The first suggests that the relationship between voters and parties has hardly changed, that voters are still affiliated to the political parties in much the same way as they always have been, and that the connection between voters and parties is stable; as such the party systems are still in an alignment. The second argument suggests that since the 1970s, the connection between electorates and the parties has changed and has led to a new alignment. In other words, we have witnessed wide-scale realignment at some point since the 1970s. The third argument suggests that the party systems of industrialised democracies have been experiencing a process of dealignment since the 1970s, with a diminishing connection between voters and political parties, and no new alternative connection asserting itself.

This empirical debate is a barrier obstructs our understanding of the current state of the party systems of the Western democratic states. This chapter addresses the dispute, exploring why we cannot tell which of these three situations (alignment, realignment, or dealignment) characterises industrialised democracies. The second part of this chapter examines the empirical and theoretical literature regarding the alignment-re/dealignment processes, and suggests that the empirical dispute has its roots in a conceptual problem.

The conceptual problem is that there is neither a single agreed operational definition of either realignment or dealignment, nor what Adcock and Collier (2001) call ‘systematized concepts’ (operational definitions that are adopted by a group of scholars). In order to contribute to the resolution of this empirical dispute, I propose to study the empirical situation from a new perspective – the semi-modular approach – in the last part of this chapter. This new approach will help us to develop a new model, which clarifies the positions of party systems regarding the alignment issue.

3.1 The Empirical Dispute

The literature mentions three different empirical research results that form the basis for the empirical dispute. It is necessary to emphasise that this dispute does not reflect different personal opinions on this controversy, as Dalton and his colleagues (2000:37) imply; scholars – however – may find contrasting evidence and, therefore, draw divergent conclusions, particularly when they examine different countries or different periods of time.

The first type of research results indicated that the party systems of industrialised democracies have not changed, remaining stable and in alignment. Bartolini and Mair (1990:68) reported that the volatility index rates of thirteen European states¹ between 1885 and 1985 “reflect a fundamental bias towards stability”.² Later, Mair (1997:78) argued that until the 1990s the “image of electoral change [wa]s largely mythical”. He claimed that the realignment and dealignment processes never occurred, and that

¹ The states are: Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, and United Kingdom.

² The only exception to this conclusion is the party system of Denmark during the 1970s, as I will mention below.

instead, party systems continues to be frozen, since the old parties “adapt and modify their appeals and their methods of mobilizing support” (Mair, 1997:89).

Only since the 1990s, when the volatility rate increased and the levels of voter turnout declined in fifteen European countries³, does Mair accept (2002b:138) that “the impression that comes across from these data is not one that points to realignment, but rather to increasing detachment and disengagement.” But these increasing trends did not infer that the party system was unstable, since the change has been only partial. As was concluded by Gallagher, et al., (2006:296), “we can see that contemporary Western European politics is characterized at least as much by continuity as it is by change.” According to these scholars, “if realignment is taken to mean the replacement by an alternative divide of the fundamental division between the right and the left, then the evidence in favor of realignment is far from convincing. If it is taken to mean a significant shift in party fortunes within both the left and right, on the other hand, then a limited realignment may well be taking place” (Gallagher, et al., 2006:287). In addition, regarding the occurrence of dealignment, they claimed: “we see evidence that the period around the turn of new century is different from what has gone before. Here again, we *may* be witnessing real signs of dealignment” (Gallagher, et al., 2006:296) (*italics added*).

The second type of research results suggested that since the 1970s, some of the party systems of industrialised democracies have changed and a new alignment has emerged. Namely, a realignment has occurred at some point since the 1970s. Dalton, et al., (1984c:451), for example, stated that “from the perspective of early 1980s [...] [p]rocesses of realignment have been highlighted in Japan, West Germany and Italy.” Realignment occurred during the 1970s and in Denmark (Bartolini & Mair, 1990:71-2) and in Australia (Weakliem & Western, 1999) or more recently in Denmark (Stubager, 2010b).

The third type of research results showed that since the 1970s, some of the party systems of industrialised democracies have weakened and that the party systems are now going through a process of dealignment. Dalton, et al., (1984c:451) argued again

³ The countries are: Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, and United Kingdom.

that “from the perspective of early 1980s [...] [in] The Netherlands, Britain, Scandinavia, and Spain – party instability follows at least temporary electoral dealignment.” Later, Dalton, et al., (2000) found evidence of dealignment trends within eighteen advanced industrialised democracies.⁴ Borre (1984) also identified dealignment in three Scandinavian states – Sweden, Denmark and Norway – during the 1960s and 1970s. Klingemann (who examined Denmark, Germany, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, and the U.K between 1944 and 2001) discovered that the “results do not support the stability hypothesis. Measures of fragmentation, polarization, and volatility – comes closer to the secular change hypothesis [i.e. dealignment]” (Klingemann, 2005:50).

We may also find these various research results in country-specific analyses. Research into the Italian political system uncovered three different research results. Peripheral dealignment (where the proportion of weak identifiers declines and the non-attached grow accordingly, while the strong party identifiers do not follow any trend; (Schmitt, 1989; Schmitt & Holmberg, 1995) was found between the mid 1970s and the late 1980s (Schmitt, 1989). In the same period - between the mid 1970s and 1990s – a dealignment was also identified (Bardi, 1996a); see also (Bartolini & D’Alimonte, 1996). Later Bardi (2007:712) argued that a gradual dealignment has been observable in Italy from 1987, suggesting a “[s]izeable electoral dealignment in Italy is a relatively recent phenomenon, whose beginning barely preceded the huge transformations of the 1990s.” Researchers also found that between 1987 and 1996, Italian politics passed through a major partisan realignment (Wellhofer, 2001), or a party realignment (in the first half of the 1990s) (Bardi, 2007). Each of these studies reached a different conclusion concerning the question of the Italian party system’s alignment situation, despite the fact that they examined the same period of time (namely the mid 1970s to the late 1980s). This contrast in results for the same period can be found for other countries too. In research regarding the British party system, we find two different research results. Some research shows a partisan dealignment occurring from 1964 onwards (Alt, 1984), or beginning with the two elections of 1974 (Crewe, 1983, 1985a); see also (Clarke & Stewart, 1998; Särilvik & Crewe, 1983). It has also been found that the change during this period was limited – a peripheral

⁴ The states are: Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland and United Kingdom.

dealignment was identified in Britain between the mid 1970s and the late 1980s (Schmitt, 1989); see also (Clarke & Stewart, 1984), which continued until 1992 (Schmitt & Holmberg, 1995). We also find two differing results from research into the Israeli party system. Realignment is seen both before the 1970s (Arian & Shamir, 2001); see also (Arian, 1979), and since 1977 (Arian & Shamir, 2002), which has continued to the 1990s (Hazan, 1998:162). At the same time, it was also identified that as of 1992, Israel went through a dealignment (Arian & Shamir, 2001; 2002). Another case is the German party system, for which we also find two different results. Some research stated that the alignment of West Germany remained stable until the late 1980s (Klingemann, 1985; Schmitt, 1989). Other research, however, showed that between 1953-1983 the German party system experienced a secular realignment (Dalton, 1984), and that a new party realignment occurred during the 1980s (Rohrschneider, 1993). Others assert that initial signs of dealignment existed in the late 1980s (Dalton, 2004:33). The American political system is the fourth example for which two different research results are evident, but in this case some researchers held that the party system experienced realignment (Meffert, et al., 2001; Petrocik, 1981), or a “Republican realignment,” which began in the early 1980s (Campbell, 1997:845). Others, however, have disagreed that such realignment occurred in the American political system (Ladd & Hadley, 1975; MacKuen, et al., 1989), or have argued that the realignment that occurred during the 1980s remains incomplete (Shea, 1999), hollow (Wattenberg, 1998) or of a limited nature (Miller & Shanks, 1996:166). Furthermore, some researchers have argued that a dealignment process occurred in American politics between the 1960s and 1980s (Beck, 1984a) and continued throughout the 1980s (Clarke & Stewart, 1998; Flanagan & Zingale, 1985; Shea, 1999). A similar dispute exists regarding the Netherlands. For the same period (between the mid 1970s and the late 1980s), it has been argued that the Netherlands went through either realignment (Schmitt, 1989) or dealignment (Irwin & Dittrich, 1984).

In addition, other scholars have concluded that alignment, realignment and dealignment processes can occur simultaneously within the same party system. Flanagan (1984), for example, discovered that between the 1950s and 1970s, Japan underwent two processes. The first was when the Liberal-Democrat party supporters changed from prealignment to alignment, and the second was when opposition

supporters shifted from being aligned to dealigned partisans. Ladd (1989) argued that due to the changes of the last quarter-century, the American political system has realigned – thus, the current system involves a new voting alignment and dealignment. Vowles (1997) also found that during the 1970s and 1980s, New Zealand went through realignment and dealignment simultaneously.

Some more creative scholars use exclusive terms in order to describe or identify a realignment or dealignment. There is a large variety in concepts currently in vogue for each of these processes. For the dealignment process, the terms strong dealignment, peripheral dealignment (Schmitt, 1989; Schmitt & Holmberg, 1995), ideological dealignment (Crewe, 1983), issue dealignment (Carmines, et al., 1987) and stable dealignment (LeDuc, 1984) are all used. For realignment, researchers use concepts such as post-realignment (Schmitt, 1989), an old Left realignment and a new party realignment (Rohrschneider, 1993), issue evolution realignment, secular and ideological realignment (Abramowitz & Saunders, 1998, 2006), party realignment (Green, et al., 2002), and philosophical realignment (Ladd, 1997).

These contradictory empirical arguments, I argue, have their roots in a conceptual problem, which will be presented in the next section of this chapter.

3.2 The Conceptual Problem

Key was the first scholar to discuss the occurrence of realignment. In 1955, he identified what he called a ‘critical election’ (Key, 1955:4). This is an election “in which voters are [...] unusually deeply concerned, in which the extent of electoral involvement is relatively quite high, and in which the decisive results of the voting reveal a sharp alteration of the pre-existing cleavage within the electorate.” This kind of election, according to Key, creates a new alignment, as the new voting pattern “persists for several succeeding elections.” Later, this will be termed ‘critical realignment’. While this kind of realignment is fast and happens in one election, a few years later Key argued for another model of realignment: the ‘secular realignment’. This is “[a] secular shift in party attachment [that] may be regarded as a movement of the members of a population category from party to party that extends over several presidential elections”. This type of realignment is created by processes that “operate

inexorably, and almost imperceptibly, election after election, to form new party alignment and to build new party grouping” (Key, 1959:198-9).

Key’s work paved the way for identifying continuous patterns of voting behaviour – alignment or a change to a new durable pattern – after a realignment. In early research it was assumed that the transition from one alignment to another also causes a temporary period of instability (Dalton, et al., 1984b:14; McAllister & Studlar, 1995:202). Yet, the significant decline of party identification in the U.S.A. and evidence that this process is likely to continue for the coming years, lead Inglehart and Hochstein (1972:345) to discuss the occurrence of a new phenomenon – a dealignment, so called because there are “declining rates of identification with *any* party.” (On this innovative argument; see also (Dalton, et al., 1984b:14).

With equivalent social-demographic and economic developments occurring throughout the Western world, the two concepts became popular for defining new patterns of voting behavior. The concepts not only applied to American voting behaviour (the origin of the concepts), but were also applicable to research regarding countries with other political traditions, for example European countries, Israel, Japan, Australia and New Zealand (Arian, 1979; Dalton, et al., 1984a; Vowles, 1997). The extensive research of these two phenomena has created a conceptual problem. There is no single agreed operational definition for either the realignment or the dealignment phenomenon. Indeed, there are too many operational definitions for realignment and too many indicators (which function as operational definitions) associated with dealignment. On the top of this, there are no ‘systematized concepts’ in place (those commonly accepted by groups of scholars) (Adcock & Collier, 2001). As consequence of this, scholars disagree over the manifestation of re/dealignment.

In the section below, I will demonstrate this problem. My analysis is restricted to definitions of realignment and dealignment in the context of electorates and party systems. I will not address definitions of realignment and dealignment in other areas of the political system, like the legislative or the judicial branches, although some scholars associate electoral realignment with changes in government policy (e.g. (Mayhew, 2000).

3.2.1 The realignment process

The absence of a single agreed operational definition of the realignment process is highlighted through analysis of the abundance of definitions found in Political Science literature. Some years ago, Sundquist (1983:4) articulated this nicely: “after a quarter century of study, the concept of party realignment is still far from clear. The writers all employ the same term – realignment – but it is difficult to find any two works that give it the same definition”. Yet, in my effort to organise these definitions, I discovered that they can be divided into different categories according to their reference to three levels of analysis: the electorate, the party system structure and the cleavage.

Realignment as a process caused by a change within the electorate

In the first category are definitions that describe “realignment” or “partisan realignment” as a change that occurs within the electorate. Namely, realignment emerges when the electorate changes its party loyalty and starts identifying itself as a partisan of another party.

The electorate is, however, treated as either a collection of individuals or as members of various social groups. In the first meaning, realignment is a lasting change in which the individual voters switch their party loyalty and become partisans or loyalists of another political party (Beck, 1974; Inglehart & Hochstein, 1972; Johnston, 1987; Stanley, 1988); see also (Dalton, et al., 1984b:13) or when nonpartisans or new voters mobilise into the party system (Sundquist, 1983; Wanat & Durke, 1982). This is a conversion of individual voters (Sundquist, 1983:7).

In the second meaning (the electorate as composed of various social groups), “[a] realignment occurs when the measurable party bias of identifiable segments of the population changes in such a way that the social group profile of the parties – the party coalitions – is altered” (Petrocik, 1981:15); see also (Dalton, et al., 1984b:13; Ladd, 1981:3; Petrocik, 1987; Sheingold, 1973; Van der Eijk & Niemöller, 1983).

This is probably due to the influence of the so-called Columbia and Michigan Schools on the study of voting behaviour, as was discussed in the previous chapter. The first meaning of ‘electorate’ emphasises an individual’s party identification, a definition linked to the Michigan School. The second meaning assumes that voting must be seen as a group process in the tradition of the Columbia School, which focused on the sociological base of political predispositions and the reinforcing effect of information received during a campaign.

A concept that combines these two meanings is that of ‘party realignment’, argued to occur when the social characteristics of the party identifiers of one party change (Green, et al., 2002).

Besides these two meanings of ‘electorate’, there is also inconsistency in conceptualisations of the magnitude of electoral change necessary for realignment. Campbell and his collaborators (1980:83) stated that “any shift in the partisan identification” can be defined as realignment, while others insist that a realignment only occurs through a significant electoral change (Beck, 1974:203; Dalton, et al., 1984b:13; McMichael & Trilling, 1980:25). Those who tread a path between the two points of view have invented new concepts to distinguish between these two types of change. Sundquist (1983), for example, calls the former ‘minor realignment’ and the latter ‘major realignment’; see also (Cavangh & Sundquist, 1985) and Burnham (1970) named the former “subrealigning”.

Realignment as a process that includes a change in the structure of a party system

The second category of definitions refers to the level of electorate, but also discusses the possible effect of a change in the electorate on the party system structure. The main difference of opinion among researchers pertains to the necessity of change in the party system structure. There are those who view realignment as a process that includes an alteration in the structure of the party system – a change of the major party in a two-party system (Shea, 1999) or as “substantially altering the format of party competition or redefining party alternatives” (Wolinetz, 1988:299) (a definition that can also be applied in a multi-party system). In contrast, others describe realignment as a process of change in partisans’ electoral support or in terms of voter

mobilisation, which *may* create a change in the structure of the party system. This could be the emergence of a new majority party. However, this change is optional and not necessary to the definition of realignment (Petrocik & Brown, 1999; Pinkney, 1986; Trilling & Campbell, 1980). Clubb, et al., (1980:78) drew on this definition when they described two types of lasting rearrangements (i.e. realignments). In the first, there is a change in the party system structure caused by an increase (or decrease) in the total number of votes received by the parties. In the second type of realignment, the pattern of change involves shifts in the sources of electoral support, but its changes are counter-balancing: there is no change in the total support for the political parties, and the structure of the party system remains intact.

Crewe (1985b) presented three types of the realignment process that differ from each other regarding change in the party system structure. The first type is a social or ideological realignment, wherein “[t]he social and ideological bases of party support change, but the number and strength of existing parties remains much the same” (Crewe, 1985b:17). This type of realignment is a change in the electorate, but not in the structure of the party system and, unlike the earlier definitions, it refers to the electorate as being composed of different social groups. The second definition is a two-party partisan realignment, wherein partisans change their political support from one to the other, and the party balance changes between the two parties. The third definition is a multi-party partisan realignment, wherein the electorate support changes in such a way that it influences the major parties as along with the minor or new parties. The difference between these last two types of realignment is the influence of the change on the different parties. While in a two-party system partisan realignment will affect the parties that structure the system, in a multi-party system, the change will also affect minor or new parties. Clubb, et al., (1980:77-83) also described two scenarios of lasting electoral change. The first is ‘Across-the-Board’ change and the second is ‘Differential-Electoral-Change.’ While in the first type of change, the balance of power between parties changes (as there is an increase or decrease in the vote received by the parties), in the second type of change the overall partisans’ support remains the same and therefore there are no shifts in the relative electoral strength of the parties.

The inconsistent attitude towards the necessity of change in the party system structure (for definitions of realignment) can also be found in the literature on specific types of realignment – critical realignment and secular realignment. Burnham (1975:6), for example, held that a critical realignment causes an alteration of the relative electoral support, wherein majority parties become minorities; see also (Carmines & Stimson, 1984). Petrocik (1981) supported this view and claimed that a situation wherein balance is stable may be termed ‘noncritical realignment’. Other scholars argued that a critical election does not necessarily cause a change in the structure of the party system, but that a shift in the party balance is likely to occur (Campbell, et al., 1960:534, 536) since “it is expected that the redistribution of party support will benefit one party more in relation to the other” (McMichael & Trilling, 1980:31). Pomper (1967) expanded on this possibility and argued that one should not confuse these two different effects (a change in partisan commitments, and a change in the party balance). He argued it is also possible for partisan commitments to change while the party balance does not: the party voters retain the same majority party, although different partisans now endorse it.⁵ In addition, Nexon (1980) claimed that critical realignment may include two scenarios. One possibility is that the party balance may change due to a change in the proportion of partisan support for each party. Another scenario is that the relative support given to each party by any group in the population may change, but these changes may cancel each other out, thus the proportional support for each party does not change and neither does the party balance. Ladd and Hadley (1975:26) also opposed the idea of the creation of a new majority party as the essential component of critical realignment, though they argued that “[w]hat really matters is that both the policy expectations and social group composition of electoral coalitions [are] transformed. It may or may not follow that there will be a new majority party”.

We can also note a similar inconsistency in the literature regarding secular realignment. In his discussion of secular realignment Key (1959:199) focused on the change of the social base of the parties, arguing that this change does not necessarily hail a change in the electoral trends and certainly causes no change in the party

⁵ This is, according to Pomper (1967), the main difference between “converting” and “realigning” elections; in the first, the party system structure does not change as the majority party wins, while in the second type of election, by contrast, the majority party is defeated.

system structure; see also (Dalton, 1984). Others have stated that secular realignment also creates a shift in the relative strength of political parties (Abramowitz & Saunders, 1998). Nexon (1980:62), however, took a different position by distinguishing between three types of secular realignment. According to him, the party balance shifts in two of these types of secular realignment, while in the third type the electoral change is slow and moves in different directions so that, over time, the elements making up each party coalition change.

The confusion surrounding the necessity of change in (and its effects on) the party system structure is exacerbated in countries with presidential government. Here, it is unclear if it is necessary for a change of majority party to occur in both the legislative and the executive (the president) branches. Specifically to the American case, Ladd (1997:16) explained that during two eras of major realignment the government was divided and “neither of the major parties [...] attained majority status”; see also (Ladd, 1989), Wolinetz (1988) called this a ‘split-level realignment’, while Shea (1999), on the other hand, claimed that this situation constitutes an incomplete realignment.

Realignment as a process caused by a change of cleavage

In the third category of definitions are those that define realignment as a change of alignment along a cleavage. Schattschneider (1960), for example, argued that a transition from one alignment to another is caused by a shift from one cleavage to another. Flanagan and Dalton (1984:8) explained that realignment occurs when “parties and their electorates adjust their position along a new cleavage dimension”; see also (Dalton 2009). Gallagher, et al., (2006:284) used a similar definition, noting that “as traditional cleavages wane in importance and new cleavages emerge, voters go through a process of ‘realignment’.” Lachat and Dolzal (2008:246) described realignment as a process wherein specific social groups develop attitudinal distances concerning a new cleavage: the political parties will articulate this cleavage, and this will transform the structure of the political space. Vowles (1997) defined realignment as a situation in which the influence of one cleavage overcomes another in the political competition between parties.

There is also disagreement regarding the implications of the realignment process on two levels of analysis – the electorate and the party system structure. The change of the cleavage occurs when electorates as individuals (Beck, 1979; Cavangh & Sundquist, 1985; Schattschneider, 1960; Sundquist, 1983) or as members of social or ideological groups (Flanagan & Dalton, 1984; Gallagher, et al., 2006; Lachat & Dolezal, 2008; Rohrschneider, 1993) change their party support. This alteration may cause a change in the party system structure (McAllister & Studlar, 1995; Schattschneider, 1960), but will not necessarily do so (Beck, 1979; Cavangh & Sundquist, 1985; Flanagan & Dalton, 1984; Sundquist, 1983; Wolinetz, 1988).

Some scholars have suggested that preventing such an electoral transition is the strategy of the established parties. Inglehart and Rabier (1986), for instance, argued that voting behaviour began to reflect a more value-based axis because of the realignment of established parties, and also partly through the emergence of new ones. The first scenario is elaborated by Inglehart (1984:68), who argued that in a process of realignment “existing parties may split, or be taken over by reorienting elites”. The emphasis here is on party strategy and mainly the role of party elite. Regarding this aspect, Rohrschneider (1993) differentiated between the two scenarios by using different names – “New party realignment” (when voters begin to support a new party due to a new cleavage, which creates party system change) and an “Old Left realignment” (which occurs when the old parties (in this case Left parties) adopt the cleavage’s issues: partisan choice is still made on the basis of the new cleavage, and therefore party system change is avoidable) (for a similar scenario, see (McAllister & Studlar, 1995).

On top of the disagreement regarding the other two levels (the electorate and party system change), the basic concept of ‘cleavage’ has three different formalisations in realignment literature. The first meaning – an electoral cleavage deals with the electoral distribution of voters – was implied by Key (1955) in his discussion on ‘critical realignment’; see also (McMichael & Trilling, 1980) and was also used by Pomper (1967).

In the second definition, a cleavage is a major political conflict that functions as a base for political alignment. This meaning is related to that of political division or

conflict, which does not necessary relate to the socio-structural definition of cleavages; rather, any issue can divide the electorate into two antagonistic reference groups, with each reference group represented by one party or bloc of parties (Cavangh & Sundquist, 1985; McAllister & Studlar, 1995; Rohrschneider, 1993; Schattschneider, 1960; Sundquist, 1983). In Zuckerman's words (1975:236), "the tie to social divisions is left to hypothesis." The same meaning can be found in Macdonald and Rabinowitz's definition (1987) of 'structural realignment'. This is what Deegan-Krause (2006) termed an "issue divide"; Carmines (1994:77) explained realignment as the "introduction of a new dimension of conflict.". The term 'cleavage' is employed within the context of explaining durable party support in terms of ideological voting: voters identify their own ideological position with that of the parties, and vote accordingly (Oppenhuis, 1995). Layman (2001:292) (cited at (Carmines & Wagner, 2006:74) clarified that a realignment occurs when a large number of people feel strongly about political issues present on the political agenda over a long period of time, which provokes resistance and cuts across existing lines of cleavage.

The third understanding of the term 'cleavage' is as a socio-structural division between people that underpins their interests and demands, and which will therefore be a site of political conflict. According to this definition, realignment occurs when a new socio-structural division appears and members of socio-structural groups who identify with this new cleavage change their patterns of party(ies) support accordingly, while parties adjust their positions along this new cleavage (Flanagan & Dalton, 1984; Lachat & Dolezal, 2008; Van der Eijk & Franklin, 2009; Vowles, 1997).

Table 3.1 maps the three levels of definitions, conceptualisations and inconsistencies regarding the electorate, the party system structure and the cleavage.

Table 3.1: The different definitions of the realignment process

<i>The level of analysis</i>	<i>The different meanings</i>			<i>Additional concepts or inconsistencies</i>
<i>The electorate</i>	<i>In realignment, the electorate changes its party loyalty and begins to identify itself as a partisan of different party.</i>			Inconsistency about the magnitude of change necessary, whether any (Campbell 1980) or significant (Dalton, et al., 1984a; McMichael & Trilling 1980); ‘minor realignment’ and ‘major realignment’ (Sundquist 1973; Cavanagh & Sunquist 1985); or ‘subrealigning’ (Burnham 1970).
<i>The different meanings of ‘the electorate’</i>	<i>The electorate is composed of individual partisans.</i>	<i>The electorate is compose of social or ideological groups.</i>		
References	*Beck 1974; Johnston 1987; Stanley 1988. **Clubb, et al., 1980; Crewe 1985b; Pinkney 1986; Trilling & Campbell 1980; Petrocik & Brown 1999; Shea 1999. ## Macdonald & Rabinowitz 1987 structural realignment. ***Beck 1979; Cavanagh & Sunquist 1985; Schattschneider 1960; Sundquist 1973.	*Arian & Shamir 2001; Dalton 1984, 1988; Dalton, et al., 1984a; Ladd 1981; Petrocik 1981, 1987; Macdonald & Rabinowitz 1993 (structural realignment). **Crewe 1985b. ## Vowles 1997; Flanagan & Dalton 1984; Gallagher, et al., 2006; Lachat & Dolezal 2008. *** Rohrschneider 1993.		
<i>The party system structure</i>	<i>The possible effect of the realignment process on a party system</i>			
<i>The different anticipated effects</i>	<i>In realignment, the party system structure changes.</i>	<i>It is not necessary that in realignment the party system structure will change.</i>		* It is unclear whether a change in the majority party of both branches is necessary in presidential government: yes it is necessary (Shea 1999), not necessary (Ladd 1989, 1997).
References	**Shea 1999; ** Norpoth & Rusk 2007.	**Clubb, et al., 1980; Crewe 1985b; Pinkney 1986; Trilling & Campbell 1980; Petrocik & Brown 1999. ***Beck 1979; Cavanagh & Sunquist 1985; Flanagan & Dalton 1984; Schattschneider 1960; McAllister & Studlar 1995; Sundquist 1973; Sundquist 1973; Inglehart & Rabier 1986; Rohrschneider 1993 Old left realignment and New party realignment.		
<i>The cleavage</i>	<i>Realignment is a change of alignment along a cleavage.</i>			
<i>The different meanings of ‘cleavage’</i>	<i>A cleavage is an electoral distribution.</i>	<i>A cleavage is a major conflict.</i>	<i>A cleavage is a socio-structural division.</i>	- ‘structural realignment’ (Macdonald & Rabinowitz 1987).

References	Key 1955, McMichael & Trilling 1980.	***Cavanagh & Sunquist 1985; Schattschneider 1960; Sundquist 1973; McAllister & Studlar 1995; Carmines 1994; Rohrschneider 1993 Old Left and New party realignment.	## Vowles 1997; Flanagan & Dalton 1984; Gallagher, et al., 2006; Lachat & Dolezal 2008. ***Beck 1979.	
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Index for signs of references:

(*) Definitions that refer to the first level – the electorate.

(**) Definitions that combine the two levels of the electorate and the party system structure.

(##) Definitions that combine the two levels of the electorate and the cleavage.

(***) Definitions that combine the three levels.

Scholars who accept the socio-structural meanings of cleavage and are especially interested in class cleavage employ different terminology but similar concepts when they argue for the existence of new voting patterns within the working class. The first is of ‘class realignment’, which refers to a change in the pattern of class as the social basis for electoral support without any reduction in the overall strength of this association (Evans, 1999). The second concept is ‘class dealignment’, used to describe a change in the way the electorate votes by means of factors other than class association (Crewe, 1983; Evans, 1999; Knutsen, 2007).

3.2.2 The dealignment process

While an enormous number of definitions exist for the phenomenon of realignment, definitions of dealignment are rare. Beck defined ‘dealignment’ as “a decay in the preexisting mass bases of support for the political parties – that is, an erosion of the mass party coalitions.” (Beck, 1984b:233) and Ladd (1981:3) argue that “[i]n a dealignment, voters move away from parties altogether; loyalties to the parties, and to the parties’ candidates and programs weaken, and more and more of the electorate become ‘up for grabs’ each election.”

The main conceptual problem of the dealignment process is rooted in the abundance of indicators that function as operational definitions associated with the concept. However, these indicators can be organised along the three levels of analysis – the

electorate, the party system structure and the cleavage, as was accomplished for the definitions of realignment, above.

The indicators referring to the first level – the electorate – can also be split into two groups: one referring to the electorate as individual voters, and another referring to the electorate as social groups. There are scholars who combine both these groups. Denver (1985:402), for instance, stated: “[b]oth of these features, then – weakening party identification and attenuation of social group/party link – would indicate a dealigning party system”.

Concerning the party system level of analysis, very often scholars simultaneously employ different indicators testing the possibility of dealignment at the electorate and the party system level (e.g. (Dalton, et al., 1984a; Dalton, et al., 2000; Gallagher, et al., 2006; Pennings & Lane, 1998; Vowles, 1997). At first this might seem a reasonable method, since these indicators appear to be coherent with each other. However other scholars have questioned this method, on the grounds that changes in patterns of party support will not necessarily change the party system structure. Crewe (1983:211), for instance, presented a variety of scenarios that could occur in a two-party system: frequent changes of party system (unstable dealignment); an enduring change, when one of the major parties grabs and maintains new supporters (two-party realignment); a change of the party system structure, either into a multi-party system (new party system) or a different two party system (when one of the major parties fades away); or a situation in which voters change their patterns of party support but the aggregate votes stays the same (stable dealignment). The last situation was identified by LeDuc (1984) in Canada, where the party identification of partisans has decreased but the party system remains stable, since electoral change rarely operates in one direction. However, most of the scholars who study patterns of dealignment have assumed that the party system structure will change, and have employed several indicators for capturing this transformation.

We saw in the realignment literature a tendency to distinguish between old and new parties, especially in the context of party system change. The first type of parties is that which can prevent party system change, while the electoral success of the second type indicates the occurrence of party system change. In the dealignment literature, by

contrast, both types of parties are seen to contribute to change at the level of the party system, especially regarding indicators of increasing fragmentation and the increasing number of parties, as both types of parties can contribute to these increases.

Three indicators can be ascribed to the third level of analysis – the cleavage: single issue voting, voting by candidate orientation, and voting by government performance. These three indicators imply that the electorate no longer votes according to its ideological position or socio-structural background, but based on other factors. The employment of the first indicator of single issue voting for identifying dealignment is particularly interesting due to its closeness to the ideological voting theory. The ideological theory explains voting according to voters' position on one or other side of the dividing ideological line – the cleavage; single issue-voting means, by contrast, voting that occurs according to voters' positions on one or more issues (Oppenhuis, 1995). However, these issues are not integrated into one ideological dimension and hence the cleavage component is absent here.

In addition, as in the case of the realignment process, there is no clarity with respect to what magnitude of change may be identified as a dealignment. On this problem, Schmitt (1989) preferred to differentiate between general change and limited change, and invented a new concept by defining limited change as a “peripheral dealignment”; see also (Schmitt & Holmberg, 1995).

Table 3.2 maps the list of indicators based on the three levels of analysis used to identifying dealignment.

Table 3.2: The different indicators for identifying dealignment

The level of analysis	Indicators	
The electorate	Composed of individual voters	Composed of social or ideological groups
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - a decrease in the party-affiliated portion (or party identifiers) of the electorate - a decline in party membership rates - an increase in the number of people who define themselves as independent of parties, or as nonpartisans. - an increased tendency amongst voters who maintain strong party ties to vote contrary to their party identification - a decrease in the importance of the parties - an increase in levels of electoral volatility - an increase of volatility during election campaign - a decline in turn-out (so-called demobilisation). - an increase in split-ticket voting - voting decisions made increasingly late in the election campaign 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - an erosion of the partisan attachment of the various social groups - voting differentiation between social groups that does not persist
(Modification) of party system structure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the disappearance of old parties - the entrance of new parties to the political arena - an increase in fragmentation - a growing number of parties - the rapid rise and then demise of new parties 	
Factors other than cleavages that explain voter behavior	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - a rise in single issue voting - voting by candidate orientation - voting by government performance 	

Sources: Alt, 1984; Arian & Shamir, 2001; Beck, 1979, 1984a, 1984b; Burnham, 1970; Carmines, et al., 1987; Clarke & Stewart, 1998; Crewe, 1983, 1985a; Dalton, 1996, 2006; Dalton, et al., 1984b; Dalton, et al., 2000; Denver, 1985; Flanagan & Dalton, 1984; Flanagan & Zingale, 1985; Gallagher, et al., 2006; Inglehart & Hochstein, 1972; Irwin & Dittrich, 1984; Klingemann, 2005; Knutsen & Scarbrough, 1995; Ladd, 1981; LeDuc, 1984; Mair, 1983; Pennings & Lane, 1998; Särilvik & Crewe, 1983; Schmitt, 1989; Schmitt & Holmberg, 1995; Shea, 1999; Vowles, 1997.

On top of this, the third level of alignment along a cleavage and (specifically) the question of its persistence creates several distinguishable types of dealignment. Kriesi (2008:38) differentiated between two sorts of dealignment: structural dealignment (the weakening of voters' attachment to the established parties), and functional dealignment (the greater detachment of the voters from the parties in general). While the first "is expected to be temporary and may give rise to a realignment under the

impact of the articulation of the new structural cleavage, the [concept of] functional dealignment [...] predicts a generally declining structuring capacity of parties". Bonschier (2010:61) argued that the links between parties and social groups may become weaker due to what Martin (2000) and Lachat (2004) defined as structural and behavioural dealignment. The first occurs due to socio-demographic changes: 'modernisation leads to long-term change in the strength of [...] social groups'. The second – behavioural dealignment – occurs when new political issues or a new dimension of political conflict become important and the political allegiance of a given social group is changed. This definition of behavioural dealignment is especially interesting, as some scholars (especially those who define a cleavage as a 'major conflict') would describe this scenario as a realignment (!).

3.3 Towards a New Approach – The Semi-Modular Approach

In this section I present a new approach that seeks to resolve the conceptual problem of the realignment and dealignment phenomena, in order to clarify the connection between voters and political parties. Since this problem derives primarily from the existence of diversity in operational definitions (or indicators), the fundamental principle of the approach proposed here is to develop a core unifying definition, usable by most scholars in the field.

I have demonstrated that this collection of definitions and indicators can be organised by their reference to three main levels of analysis: the electorate, the structure of the party system, and a cleavage. In addition, this categorisation of definitions and indicators demonstrates that the electorate is treated either as individual voters who have party allegiances, i.e. partisans, or as socio-demographic groups that share patterns of party choice. These two meanings derive from the socio-psychological and socio-structural approaches to the concept of alignment. Realignment literature has also raised three different meanings for concept of 'cleavage'. A cleavage can manifest as an electoral distribution, a socio-structural cleavage, and as an issue causing major conflict.

The distinction of different meanings (or treatments) for the main concepts here – 'electorate' and 'cleavage' – is not affected by geographical location or by the

separate literature regarding the American two-party system and (European) multi-party systems. Similarly, the selection of case stud(ies) has not affected the different meanings; this issue will be discussed in Chapter Five.

However, not all these definitions tie in with all three levels of analysis. Some definitions include a reference only to one or two levels (demonstrated by the references in Table 3.1). On top of this, a change in the level of the electorate and the cleavage does not necessarily cause an effect at the level of party system structure, as some of the scenarios of realignment and the empirical results concerning dealignment demonstrate.

All of this indicates that a semi-modular approach is required here. Therefore, I propose to study the phenomena of realignment and dealignment by exploring the question of stability and change at the different levels of electorate and cleavage separately and independently from each other – i.e. in modules.

The separate examination of stability and change at the electorate and cleavage levels will also assist in exploring the possible occurrence of realignment or dealignment based on the socio-psychological and socio-structural approaches to the phenomena of alignment (presented in the previous chapter). Concerning the first definition of the electorate (the electorate as composed of individuals), I will examine patterns of partisanship. This will be done based on two meanings of the concept of partisanship or party attachment: party identifiers (the core concept of the socio-psychological approach) and stable and durable party support, presented in Chapter Five. The second treatment of the electorate concerns the voting behaviour of socio-demographic groups, and is the main concern of the socio-structural approach. This articulates the assumption of voting according to a socio-structural cleavage. Voter alignments along the most salient socio-structural cleavages – class and religious cleavages – will be studied in Chapter Six.

Through examining the two different definitions of the electorate, I will explore two separate manifestations of alignment: partisan alignment and voter alignment along a cleavage. In addition, I will determine for each of these manifestations the duration of

the alignment, the occurrence of realignment and the creation of a new alignment, and/or the occurrence of a dealignment (as Figure 3.1 shows).

As I noted in the previous chapter and in this chapter, some scholars have argued for the identification of new cleavages. The first is the Materialist/Post-Materialist cleavage⁶, which is value- or belief- based. However, I will not examine this cleavage due to the major scholarly theoretical and empirical criticism of its existence. Knutsen and Scarbrough (1995:497) argued that the Post-Materialist cleavage is not a cleavage since it is not based on social division. In addition, Bartolini and Mair (1990:214) criticised the argument of value as a new basis for an alignment. They argued the traditional cleavages (for example, the class cleavage) also have normative-ideological components.

A more recent argument for a new cleavage is the globalisation cleavage, argued to consist of “opposing ‘winners’ and ‘losers’ of globalization within national political contexts” (Kriesi et al., 2008a:4). In their study of the possible occurrence of a realignment in six Western European polities (Austria, Britain, France, Germany, the Netherlands and Switzerland), Kriesi and his collaborators (2008b) examined this cleavage as is articulated by two issue dimensions: the economic and cultural dimensions. An issue dimension is an aggregation and clustering of positions concerning several related single issues (Morgan, 1976:421). In this sense, Kriesi, et al. (2008a:4), merged the two meanings of the term ‘cleavage’ in the realignment literature, as a socio-structural divide and as an issue causing major conflict.

I decided, however, not to examine cleavage in terms of a major issue conflict for several reasons. Firstly, the class and religious cleavages articulate the issues of the most important dimensions. As Kriesi and his collaborators (2008a:11) explained, “the four Lipset and Rokkan cleavages – the centre/periphery, religious, rural/urban and owner/worker, boil down to two dimensions: a cultural (religion) and a social-economic one (class)”. They suggested socio-economic and religious issues have remained salient over the years despite assuming different meanings in the 1970s, when new social movements appeared. Kriesi, et al., (2008a:13) explained that at this

⁶ The Materialist/Post-Materialist cleavage has several names, such as ‘value cleavage’ (Flanagan, 1987) and ‘new politics cleavage’ (Kitschelt & Hellemans, 1990).

time, the Left reinforced its position regarding socio-economic issues and the cultural dimension became “one opposing culturally liberal or libertarian concerns, on the one side, and the defence of traditional (authoritarian) values and institutions, on the other.” A second transformation of the cultural dimension’s character occurred, according to Kriesi, et al., (2008b:257), in the 1990s. At this time “[t]he traditional moral or religious issues [...] bec[a]me less important than the new ‘globalization issues’, i.e. European integration and immigration.”; see also (Kriesi et al., 2006:943).

Van der Brug and Van Spanje (2009:310), who examined Kriesi and his colleagues’ argument by utilising different data sources (expert judgments of party positions and survey data of voters, rather than the newspaper sections used in the original research), found that parties and voters are not structured by the same two dimensions, but rather that “there is a substantial mismatch between party positions (which are structured by one dimension) and opinion of voters (which are structured by two dimension)”. These findings suggest that the study of dimensions in the context of realignment cannot be done, as there is no coherent structure of voters and parties in the political space, as is assumed in realignment literature.

Theoretically, Van der Brug and Van Spanje’s results (2009:310) concerning party positions may have been a result of the data-set they used. Using expert surveys for measuring party positions is problematic, not only because it is subjective (reliant on expert’s perceptions), but also because it is static – the same survey results are employed over a long period,⁷ despite the fact that parties may change their position over the years. A good method of combating this deficiency would be to examine party positions across election years. This could be achieved by examining party positions as they are articulated in party manifestos. For example, The Comparative Manifesto Projects (CMP) (Budge, et al., 2001; Klingemann, et al., 2006) is a well-known and used source. Still, this data source cannot be used for studying the issue of immigration, as there is no dedicated variable for this topic. Of course, one could develop different methods for establishing parties’ positions (see for example Pellikaan’s confrontational method; Pellikaan, et al., (2007); Pellikaan, et al., (2003). However, unravelling manifestos requires possession of all the relevant documents

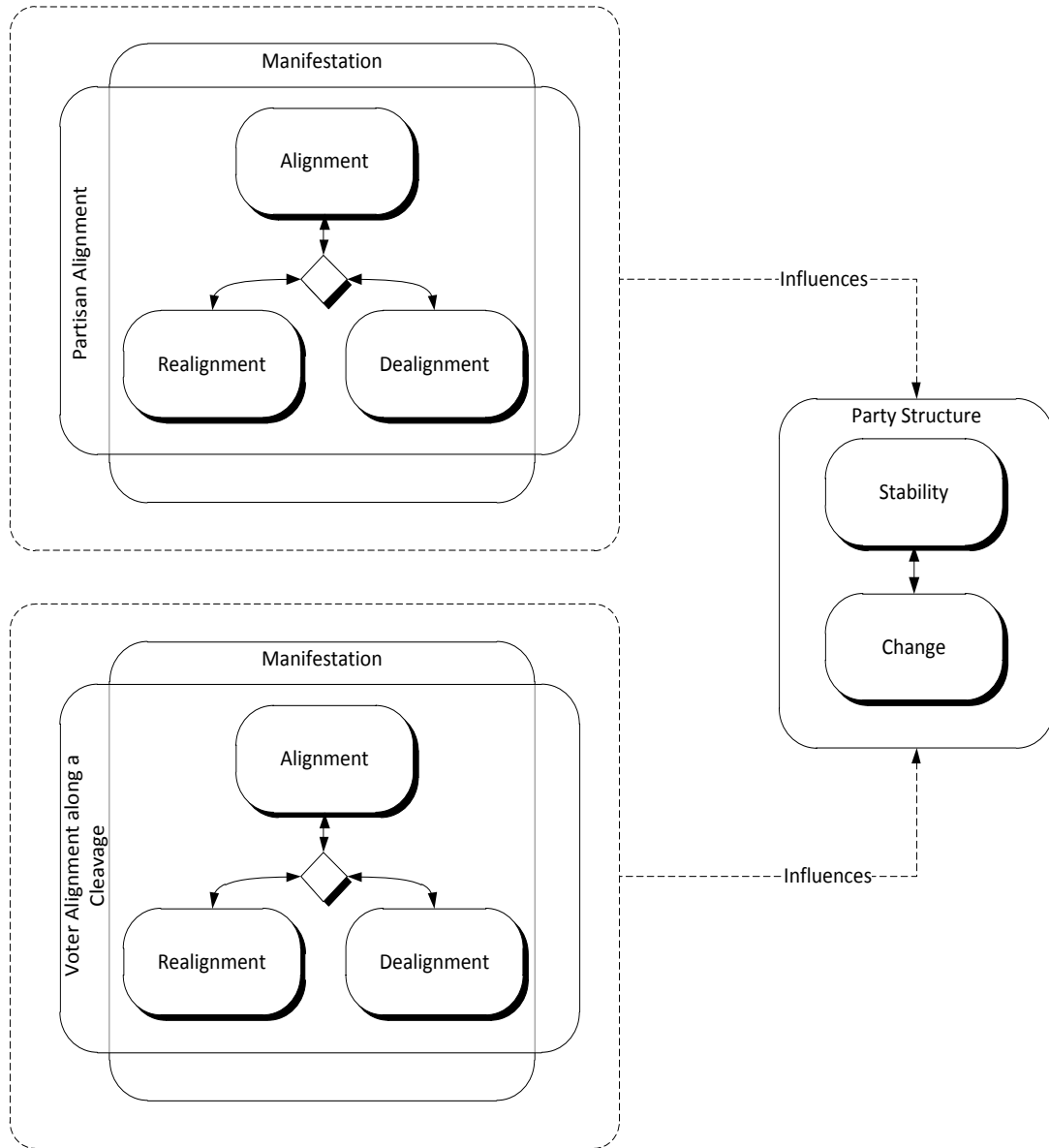
⁷ Theoretically one can use several similar expert surveys, but this then raises the question of matching a survey with specific election years, as setting cut-off points could influence the empirical results.

(and knowledge of relevant languages), which is impractical for the eleven cases examined in this research.

My discussion of the definitions of re/dealignment also shows a lack of clarity concerning the effects of changes in partisans' alignment and in voter alignment along a cleavage on the party system structure. Here the scholars are divided regarding the necessity of party system change as a consequence of realignment and dealignment. Moreover, realignment literature suggests that a change of party system structure is preventable, especially through old (or established) parties' strategy.⁸ Thus, in a separate chapter I will explore the possible effects on the party system structure of the re/dealignment of partisans and of re/dealignment along cleavage(s). Put differently, the examination of change and stability at the level of the party system structure will not be done independently, as was the case in the other two chapters. Rather, I will examine this issue when realignment or dealignment is identified in one of the manifestations of alignment – partisans and along a cleavage – making the use of a semi-modular approach inevitable. In addition, I will take into account party identity as an important component for identifying the modification of the party system structure.

⁸ In a very recent piece, Deegan-Krause and Enyedi (2010) presented a typology of elite possible actions for creating, re-shaping or preventing shifts in alignment, not only concerning party positioning, but also in the society (for example, regarding objective socio-structural difference, or group consciousness) or of other socio-cultural aspects (such as national symbols).

Figure 3.1: The semi-modular approach: the study of Alignment, Realignment and Dealignment along the two manifestations of alignment, and their possible effect at the party system level



The semi-modular approach theoretically allows for the three phenomena of alignment, realignment (and the creation of a new alignment), and dealignment to be exhibited at each of the two manifestations of alignment. These manifestations include trends of partisanship (as measured by party identifiers and stable party support) and patterns of voter alignments along the class and religious cleavages. For each manifestation of alignment in each election year, I established whether the alignment between voters and parties shifted into a new alignment (after a realignment) or eroded and no new alignment was created (a dealignment). By

examining these empirical results across the two manifestations, I will identify the link and causality between the three phenomena. This will enable me to build coherent models of realignment and dealignment and to develop definitions for both phenomena. I will then examine the possible effects of the models of realignment and dealignment on patterns of stability and change of the party system structure.

I aim to contribute to scholarly understanding of realignment and dealignment. I will do so by presenting:

- up-to-date empirical evidence (collected for my research) for the ties between voters and parties, and the effects of such ties on the party system structure,
- coherent models of the phenomena of realignment and dealignment, and
- definitions associated with realignment and dealignment.