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

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CHAPTER 4

DATA AND METHODOLOGY

My research aims to examine the citizen-parties nexus since the Second World War. The main subject is the stability and change of multi-party systems in Western democratic countries. It explores the question of whether the voters in established democracies have remained attached to political parties according to the same pattern as when these political systems were first institutionalised, or whether a changed has occurred at some point from the mid 1960s and caused the connection between electorate and parties to be restructured. One possible scenario is the phenomenon of realignment, in which a new alignment between voters and parties is generated; a second is dealignment, in which the link between voters and parties has been broken.

As Chapter Three discusses, the term 'realignment' originated in the American two-party system. The term 'dealignment' was also identified for the first time in a study of the party systems of the U.S.A. (Inglehart & Hochstein, 1972). This research, however, examines these phenomena in eleven cases of multi-party systems. Consequently, my research is challenged by the application of the definitions of re/alignment to a different type of party system. The main justification for doing so is found in the research design of this thesis. I decided to design my research as a comparison between "relatively similar" cases and to study ten European multi-party systems with an electoral system of proportional representation: Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway and Sweden.[1] This research design "sets out to neutralize certain differences in order to permit a better analysis of others [i.e. the question or phenomena we are studying]" (Dogan & Pelasy, 1990:178).

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[1] Italy (only between 1994 and 2005) and Germany both have a mixed electoral system. However, I examined only the votes that were cast according to the proportional representation system, the so-called 'second vote'.

In the analysis presented in this thesis, however, eleven different party systems are distinguished as I studied the Belgian sub-national party systems – Flanders and Wallonia – separately. The creation of these two sub-national party systems occurred between 1968 and 1978 when the three major parties split one after another in a fashion that caused each splinter group to run as a separate party in two or three of the regions (Deschouwer, 2004). The first was the Catholic Party (CVP/PSC), which split into two separate parties – the Flemish Christian People's Party (CVP) and the Walloon Christian People's Party (PSC) in 1968. In the next election (1971) the Liberal party (PVV/PLP) split into the Party of Liberty and Progress (PVV) and the Party of Liberty and Progress (PLP), and in the 1978 election the Socialist party (BSP/PSB) followed the other parties and split into the Flemish Socialist Party (BSP) and the Francophone Socialist Party (PS). Although the party system of Flanders and Wallonia started to form its present structure in 1968, I analysed each of them separately from 1950 onwards. This was done in order to make their cases comparable to the other nine cases under investigation here.

In my empirical analysis, I also distinguish between the so-called two Italian Republics. The second Republic in Italy began in 1993, with the first electoral reform for the legislative assemblies, as the electoral system for the Lower House (the Chamber) and the Upper House (the Senate) changed from proportional representation (PR) to a mixed electoral system.[2] My analysis for these two separate periods, however, does not differ from the analysis of the other cases. Concerning Germany, my analysis until the 1990 election refers to Federal Republic of Germany (i.e. West Germany) and from 1990 onwards (with the reunification of Germany) also includes what was called the German Democratic Republic (i.e. East Germany).

To give a complete picture, the analysis presented in this thesis encompasses 60 years

[2] According to the mixed electoral system for the Lower House, 75 percent of the deputies are elected with the 'single-member, single ballot' plurality principle and the remaining 25 percent (with 4 percent threshold) are elected under the PR system. The PR was also addressed with a correction mechanism: in every region, the vote in the PR system for parties successfully elected according to the district system are reduced by an amount related to the number of votes which were actually required to win this district deputy (Ignazi, 1994). This electoral system was modified again in December 2005. Italy returned to the PR electoral system with a close party list vote in multi-member constituencies (26 constituencies for the Lower House). The threshold for electoral coalitions was only 2 percent and for single parties 4 percent. On the top of this, a majority bonus is given to the wining coalition: in the Lower House the coalition wining the largest plurality of the votes (provided that it reaches a minimum of 10 percent of the votes), gets 54 percent of the seats (Ignazi, 2006).

of electoral history. It begins in 1950 and finishes in 2010. Its data has been gathered by studying the national elections for the legislature's Lower House for each case. I consider national contests to be decisive for the structuring of the party system. They are more appropriate for my research's purpose than other elections, such as sub-national elections or European-parliament elections, which are considered second-order elections. Besides this, the European parliament election results only became available after the first election in 1979. In addition, one of the countries included in this research – Norway – is not a member of the European Union.

Table 4.1: Periods, number of cases based on individual-level and aggregate data, per case

	Aggregate data (official election results)		Individual-level data (national election surveys)	
	Period	N (time-points)	Period	N (time-points)
Austria	1953-2008	18	-	
Belgium (Flanders)	1968-2010	14	1991-2003	4
Belgium (Wallonia)	1968-2010	14	1991-2003	4
Denmark	1950-2007	23	1971-2005	14
Finland	1951-2007	16	1991-2007	5
Germany	1957-2009	15	1961-2009	13
Italy – 1st Republic	1953-1992	10	-	
Italy – 2nd Republic	1994-2008	5	1994-2008	5
Luxembourg	1951[3]-2009	13	-	
the Netherlands	1952-2010	18	1967-2006	13
Norway	1953-2009	15	1965-2005	9
Sweden	1952-2010	19	1960-2006	15

In total, 161 national elections are examined.[4] Table 4.1 specifies the number of time-points for each case. One of the assumptions of my research is that between 1950 and 1964 the party systems are in a situation of alignment and therefore the volatility is

[3] The 1951 election in Luxembourg was not a national election but was held only in the North and Centre constituencies. The elections in the South and East constituencies were held in 1948 (Mackie & Rose, 1991).

[4] If one counts the elections in Flanders and Wallonia separately,179 elections are investigated in total.

low. However, the 1953 election in Germany has been considered highly volatile for this period (Pedersen, 1979:11). Therefore, I excluded this election from my research; this election is considered a deviant case.

As I explained in the third chapter, empirical research into the patterns of connection between voters and parties finds that the definitions of realignment and dealignment differ from each with respect to three levels of analysis – the electorate, the party system and the cleavage. Therefore, I decided to use a semi-modular approach for examining separately the possibility of a shift into realignment (and the creation of a new alignment) or dealignment. These are considered for two manifestations of alignment – partisan and voter alignment along a cleavage. This will also aid in establishing the (possible) effect of a change in both alignment manifestations on the party system structure.

The main question of this research addresses the occurrence of these changes in both alignment manifestations and in the party system, per case and over time. It is not in my intension to provide an explanation(s) for evidence of stability or change. Therefore time is the independent variable for the major part of this research.[5]

4.1 The Study of the Two Alignment Manifestations and the Party System Structure

4.1.1 The first manifestation of alignment: partisan alignment

The first manifestation of alignment represents the socio-psychological approach. It is based on two understandings of the concept of partisanship. The first pertains to party identifiers, the second to durable and stable patterns of party support. Addressing the first definition, I examined levels of party identification (and those voters who have strong party identification) over the years under study. For all the countries studied, the data is based on individual-level data, but there are two types of surveys employed. For some cases, I utilised data from national election surveys. For others,

[5] Overall in my empirical research, I applied a condition if a new pattern is identified and when this new trend is sustained for at least 10 years in at least three successive elections, as Smith (1989a:166) suggested: "[a] run of perhaps three elections will be needed to see whether a trend is under way."

the data source was Eurobarometer and the European Election Study 1999 surveys, as presented in Dalton (2004) (Appendix C specifies the file numbers and Appendix D the name of variables). The second definition of partisanship was examined based on patterns of stable party support. To this end, I studied the level of voters who support the same party in two successive elections, while taking into account both those moving to support another party and all other electorate groups, including voters casting invalid votes and those who did not cast a ballot.

This is achieved by examining the levels of two indicators of stable party supporters. The first indicator is the proportion of those within the electorate who reported voting for the same party in two successive elections, based on individual-level data. The second is its equivalent estimation based on aggregate data (which I estimated): the Electoral Total Partisans index (ETP), based on measurement of (the complementary number) of the Total Volatility (TV) index, calculated by subtracting the TV index level from the percentages of the valid votes in the current election (for more information on these indices, see Appendix A).

I used indices based on calculations of volatility in two chapters of my research - Chapter Five (partisan alignment) and Chapter Six (voter alignment along the class and religious cleavages). I differentiated between forced and voluntary change of party support. Forced change of party support occurs when parties merge, and is not considered as a change in this research. Therefore, if two or more parties merged I compared their (separate) shares in election T1 with their (collective) share in election T2. Regarding splits of parties, I assumed that when an individual moves to support the smaller fraction, this is a voluntary change of party support and treated the change accordingly: I compare the party share in election T1 with its largest splinter in election T2 and treat the smaller new splinter party as if it had no votes in election T1. This method differs from the volatility calculations of other scholars. Mainwaring and Torcal (2006) and Mainwaring and Zoco (2007), for example, assumed that if two or more parties merged, the party(ies) with fewer votes disappeared in election T2; thus, they gave zero value to this party in election T2. In Bartolini and Mair's (1990) research, when a party split into two or more parties, the volatility is computed by subtracting the combined vote of the new parties from that of the original party in

election T1.

In the case of a mixed electoral system, such as Italy (between 1994 and 2005) and Germany, the volatility is measured for the votes that were cast according to the proportional representation system, the so-called 'second vote'.

Since I am examining the (changes in) electoral behaviour within the whole electorate, I also used data regarding levels of turnout and invalid votes in this chapter. I measured turnout levels as the proportion of those who are entitled to vote (so called the electorate), regardless of their residence status.[6]

4.1.2 The second manifestation of alignment: voter alignments along class and religious cleavages

In this research I studied voter alignments, realignments and dealignments along the two most important socio-structural cleavages in West European politics – the class and religious cleavages. This was achieved by examining the strength of voter alignment with each of these cleavages over the time period selected, as is articulated by cleavage closure. Voter alignment strength was measured by estimating the proportion of voters who cross the line of the cleavage and vote for a party that does not represent the cleavage against the total number of voters who changed their party support in two successive elections. In other words, when only a small number of voters who change their party support cross the cleavage line, this indicates that the cleavage remains important and salient to the voters.

To measure the volatility across the cleavage line, I used the Bloc-Weighted Cleavage Salience (WCS) index. Bartolini and Mair invented the original Cleavage Salience (CS) index. It combines the level of Bloc Volatility (BV) – the number of people who cross the cleavage line to support the parties of the other side – with the Total Volatility, or Net Volatility (the aggregate volatility that is measured in a party system in one election year in comparison to the proceeding election year). This is done in order to make the trends comparable over the years and between cases. Dr. Meffert

[6] This is especially important as in some of the countries, voters who live abroad are entitle to vote, as is the case in Finland, Germany, Italy and the Netherlands.

and I modified the CS index by controlling for electoral support of the blocs of parties that represent the cleavage, as we discovered that the CS index is sensitive to this component (as will be explained further in Chapter Six) (For theoretical and empirical demonstration, see (Federer-Shtayer & Meffert, Forthcoming).

The WCS was calculated based on two types of datasets: individual-level datasets and aggregate data. While the former comes from national election surveys, the latter is based on official election results. A comment must be made regarding these two datasets. Unlike the empirical chapter (Chapter Five) on the partisan alignment where I examined the electoral behaviour of the whole electorate, in Chapter Six I take into account only those voters casting a valid vote. Put differently, the framework in each of these chapters is different. While in the chapter on the partisan alignment, the entire electorate is summed up to 100%, in the chapter on the voter alignment along cleavage(s), the total of valid votes is summed up to 100%.[7] There are two reasons for doing that. Firstly, I modified the original CS index by adding another component – the electoral support for the blocs of parties that represent the cleavage. Thus, it is preferable to have only one change at a time and to preserve comparability with the original CS index. Secondly, and more importantly, according to Bartolini and Mair the CS index can be calculated based on more than two blocs. However, it is not clear how the addition of a third bloc that includes data regarding de-mobilisation and abstentionism would affect the index's accuracy.

For calculation the WCS in each election year for each case, I identified two blocs of parties for each party system: parties that represent the class cleavage and parties that represent the religious cleavage. I assigned the parties to blocs on the basis of an ordinal ranking according to each party's core identity or genetic origin, as was done by Bartolini and Mair. All parties included in Bartolini and Mair's research (1990), along with those defined as "communist", "independent socialist", "socialist" or "social democratic" in Smith (1976; 1989b) and/or those which are members of the Socialist International organisation were assigned to the class bloc. To the religious bloc I assigned all parties defined as "Christian" in Smith (1976; 1989b) and/or parties that are members of the Centrist Democrat International. The parties'

[7] The Pearson correlation between TV and party support volatility (PS) (its equivalent at the individual-level data) is 0.79 and is statistically significant (at the 0.01 level, 2-tailed), N=86.

assignment to blocs along the two cleavages is specified in Appendix B.

4.1.3 The party system structure

As stated earlier, I examine the possible effects of realignment and dealignment along two manifestations of alignment. This is achieved by examining (possible) changes to the electoral party system structure. Two aspects of possible changes were taken into account: the supply aspect – parties' constellation and cooperation before national elections (such as alliances, cartels, etc.), and the demand aspect –voters' party support. To this end, I analysed election results and took into consideration parties which received at least 3 percent of the votes. Several components are studied: number of parties, relative electoral strength of the first two parties and (changes) in the identity of the dominant parties (the first two largest parties). Based on the first two criteria, I developed a typology for identifying the electoral party system structure after every national election. Combining this analysis with a close examination of the identity of the largest two parties provides an indication of the stability and change of the electoral party system structure. The empirical research includes all the cases where a realignment or dealignment was identified.

Two assumptions guide my analysis:

• First, I consider the period between 1950 and 1964 to be a period of alignment: voters were aligned to their parties along the most salient cleavages, and the party system structure was stable (for a similar argument, see Sartori (1994), Franklin, et al. (1992). This assumption is in line with Lipset and Rokkan's freezing hypothesis, according to which the party system was frozen until the 1960s. Consequently, I suspect that if a change occurred in either the alignment manifestation or the party system, it happened at some point in the period from 1965 onwards. This expectation is in line with most of the arguments regarding realignment and dealignment, which I presented in Chapter Three. It also follows Bartolini and Mair's (1990) argument that the freezing process ended in the postwar period, as they discovered that the Total Volatility from the 1950s to the late 1960s was much lower than in previous periods.

• In two empirical chapters – Chapters Five and Six – I used national election surveys to measure trends of electoral behaviour at the individual level. I treat each election

survey as a source of data for studying individuals' patterns of electoral behaviour between two adjacent elections. By presenting the trends of all the independent national surveys over the years, I used the surveys as if they were cohort study. This was based on the assumption that the surveys represent the trends well, although in each surveys different people were interviewed.

4.2 The Combination of Two Sorts of Datasets

In this research, I examined trends produced by individual-level and aggregate datasets: national election surveys and official election results.

There are practical reasons to combine these two sorts of datasets. Firstly, national election surveys are not available for all the countries included in this research (i.e. Austria and Luxembourg), and for most of the countries the national election survey has been conducted only since the 1960s or 1970s, or even later (for example in Finland since the 1990s). My research, however, begins in 1950.

Secondly, my main interest is to identify patterns of party support and I wish to examine these patterns for *all* the parties that participated in the elections. Sometimes, the national election surveys do not provide a breakdown of support for the very small parties. The official election results data, by contrast, covers all periods under investigation in this thesis, and incorporates data regarding electoral support for very small parties. Therefore, I decided to include in my research all the parties receiving at least 0.01 percentages of the valid votes. Thirdly, sometimes in survey data there is an under-representation of groups in the electorate that are excluded from the political arena, for example, those not casting ballots in elections. The official election results, however, give a good estimation of these groups and include information on turnout levels.

Appendix C specifies the different file numbers and sources of the surveys. The source for aggregate data over the period 1950-1989 is Mackie and Rose (1991, 1997); the remaining sources consist of official election results and the *European Journal of Political Research*. For the two sub-national regions in Belgium – Flanders

and Wallonia – I used Kris Deschouwer's database,[8] except for the 2010 election (which I calculated with Deschouwer's guidance). Table 4.1 displays the time span for each case. The same database was used for calculating turnout and invalid vote rates. For the two Belgian regions – Flanders and Wallonia – as turnout and invalid vote data is not available, I used self-calculated data (see Appendix E).

Yet as studies have already shown, examination of electoral behavior on the basis of respondents' reports may be problematic: people over-report of electoral participation because they either want to comply with the social norm or minimise cognitive dissonance or because of a result of short memory span of respondents (Belli, et al., 1999; 2001). In addition, voting choice is often misreported, with respondents reporting support for the winning party (the so-called post-election "bandwagon") (Traugott & Katosh, 1979; Weir, 1975; Wright, 1993).

Czesnik and Kotnarowsk (2011) who examined the problem of voters' over report of election participation for the CSES dataset, demonstrated that "[v]oter turnout weighting […] is a possible solution of voter turnout over-reporting problem".

Therefore, I improved my individual-level database by increasing the quality of representation of the different patterns of electoral behaviour. This was achieved by using political weight variables (for specification on these variables, see Appendix D). While in the Belgian, German and Danish surveys, the political weight variables already existed, I computed a new political weight variable for Finland, the Netherlands and for the last three German elections surveys, which was computed according to the official election results (including participation in the election, voters casting invalid votes and levels of party support).[9] Regarding the Italian, Norwegian and Swedish surveys, no political weight variable was used as those conducting the surveys discouraged their use.

Austria is the only case for which I used aggregate data in my analysis of partisan alignment. This data was produced from sub-national election results of

[8] I am grateful to Kris Deschouwer for generously making his data available to me.
[9] I used probability weights. These weights are calculated by taking the inverse of the sampling fraction.

municipalities, communities, wards, etc. as a supplement for the missing individual-level data. This data was calculated by Plasser and Ulram (2000). The idea of calculation is based on volatility between parties: if a party gains more votes in those constituencies in which another party lost votes at the previous election, it is interpreted as a vote transition between those parties. Following this logic, the scholars trace the results of the current election back to the results of the previous election and relate the party's current election result to the results of all parties of the comparable election.[10] (For more details on the voter transition data, see SORA's site: www.sora.at/en/topics/electoral-behavior/election-analyses/voter-transition-analysis).

Analysis of patterns of party volatility requires historical knowledge of all the party changes over the whole period under investigation (such as mergers, splits, electoral alliance, etc.). This information was collected from the sources of election results specified above, but was also based on other sources such as *The Political Parties of the World* books (Day, 2002; Day, et al., 1996; Szajkowski, 2005) and McHale's (1983) *Political Parties of Europe*.

4.3 Conclusions

This research is comparative, and prompts new empirical and conceptual conclusions regarding the realignment and dealignment processes in a multi-party system. It is based on repeated observations over long periods of time (or so-called longitudinal analysis), and examines individual-level and aggregate data in eleven European multi-party systems between 1950 and 2010.

[10] The equation of voter transition analysis is:
ÖVP t=B1*SPÖB t-1+B2*ÖVP t-1+B3FPÖ t-1+B4Ni t-1+B5non voters t-1, where Ni is any other party. For more details on the voter transition data, see website of the Institute for Social Research and Consulting (SORA) (http://www.sora.at/en/topics/electoral-behavior/election-analyses.html).