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

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CHAPTER 7

ALIGNMENT, REALIGNMENT, OR DEALIGNMENT IN TWO MANIFESTATIONS – A COMBINED ANALYSIS

Chapters Five and Six dealt with the issue of alignment in two of its manifestations. Chapter Five presented the socio-psychological approach and examined partisan alignment as articulated by patterns of partisanship, and Chapter Six presented the socio-structural approach and tested voter alignments along the class and religious cleavages. The combined research of these manifestations provides an up-to-date assessment of the phenomenon of alignment. In each of these chapters, I have examined patterns of alignment and its possible disappearance, either through shifts into a new alignment or through dealignment. Indeed, the division of the empirical analysis into two separate chapters, each examining one manifestation of alignment, has assisted in this study of the possibility (and timing) of changes in each alignment's manifestations. However, the separation of the empirical research also conceals the broad picture of stability and change of alignment. Moreover, identifying a change in one or both manifestation(s) then raises the questions of how the realignment or dealignment process begins, how it develops over time, and what the possible links are between these processes and patterns of party system structure.

Addressing these questions will provide empirical insights into the phenomena of realignment and dealignment in a multi-party system, and thus the basis for developing theoretical and conceptual knowledge of these two phenomena. This chapter combines the findings of the previous empirical chapters and analyses alignment as it is articulated simultaneously by both of the selected manifestations. It begins by raising the question of the durability of alignment in both manifestations. In order to identify a transition between the two manifestations of alignment, the occurrence of realignment and the shift into a dealignment across the manifestations is then discussed. Since in all the cases, apart from Denmark, signs of dealignment

were found in one or both manifestations, the chapter finishes by presenting models of the development of the dealignment process.

7.1 Signs of Stability and Change of Partisan Alignment and Voter Alignment Along a Cleavage

This research studies the phenomenon of alignment by examining its two manifestations. Chapter Five examined partisan alignment as articulated by patterns of party identification and stable party support. The latter was measured by trends in the proportions of voters who reported supporting the same party in two consecutive elections, based on individual-level data and its equivalent estimation - the Electoral Total Partisans (ETP), based on aggregate data (for an explanation of this index, see Appendix A). Chapter Six tested patterns of voter alignments along two socio-structural cleavages – those of class and religion – the electoral closeness of which was measured by employing the Bloc-Weighted Cleavage Saliency index (WCS) (for an explanation of this index, see Appendix A).

Overall evidence for change is found through research into the two manifestations. Partisan dealignment was found in all cases except Luxembourg and Denmark. The transition into a situation of partisan dealignment occurred in two waves. The early and the major wave began in the mid 1960s and ended in the early 1970s, and included Finland (1970), Italy (1972), the Netherlands (1967), Norway (1973) and Wallonia (1965). The second, smaller wave occurred from the early 1980s to the early 1990s, affecting Austria (1983), Flanders (1991), Germany (1990) and Sweden (1982). In Luxembourg, no signs of partisanship erosion were found. In addition, signs of partisan critical realignment were identified in the 1973 Danish election.

The erosion of voter alignment along the class cleavage in predominantly Protestant countries began in the mid 1960s in Finland (1966) and Norway (1965). In predominantly Catholic and mixed countries it started slightly later, in the 1970s: Austria (1970), Flanders (1985), Luxembourg (1979) and Wallonia (1987). In two other cases it commenced in the 1990s: Italy (1994) and Sweden (1991). Alignment along the class cleavage weakened much earlier than the religious cleavage, which began diminishing from the mid 1980s onwards: Italy (1983), Germany (1987) and

Luxembourg (2004); it occurred earlier than this only in the Netherlands (1967). Evidence of persistence of voter alignment along the class cleavage was found in Denmark, and in Flanders a new voter alignment along the religious cleavage was created in the 1965 election.

The different time periods of each manifestation, per case, are presented in Table 7.1.

Alignment, realignment or dealignment in two manifestations

Table 7.1: Alignment, Realignment or Dealignment in the two manifestations of alignment, in every election year between 1950 and 2010, per case

Austria																									
Partisan Cleavage	1953	1956	1959	1962	1966	1970	1971	1975	1979	1983	1986	1990	1994	1995	1999	2002	2006	2008							
	Partisan alignment									Partisan dealignment															
	Voter alignment along class cleavage						Voter dealignment along class cleavage																		
Denmark																									
Partisan Cleavage	1950	1953	1953	1957	1960	1964	1966	1968	1971	1973	1975	1977	1979	1981	1984	1987	1988	1990	1994	1998	2001	2005	2007		
	Partisan alignment									Partisan critical realignment and a new alignment															
	Voter alignment along class cleavage																								
Finland																									
Partisan Cleavage	1951	1954	1958	1962	1966	1970	1972	1975	1979	1983	1987	1991	1995	1999	2003	2007									
	Partisan alignment						Partisan dealignment																		
	Voter alignment along class cleavage					Voter dealignment along class cleavage																			
Flanders																									
Partisan Cleavage	1950	1954	1958	1961	1965	1968	1971	1974	1977	1978	1981	1985	1987	1991	1995	1999	2003	2007							
	Partisan alignment									Partisan dealignment															
	Voter alignment along class cleavage				Voter alignment along class cleavage and a new alignment along the religious cleavages						Voter dealignment along class cleavage and a (new) alignment along the religious cleavage														
Germany																									
Partisan Cleavage	1957	1961	1965	1969	1972	1976	1980	1983	1987	1990	1994	1998	2002	2005	2009										
	Partisan alignment									Partisan dealignment															
	Voter alignment along religious cleavage									Voter dealignment along religious cleavage															
Italy (1 st & 2 nd Republics)																									
Partisan Cleavage	1953	1958	1963	1968	1972	1976	1979	1983	1987	1992	1994	1996	2001	2006	2008										
	Partisan alignment					Partisan dealignment																			
	Voter alignments along class and religious cleavages							Voter dealignment along religious cleavage and alignment along class cleavage				Voter dealignments along both cleavages													

Luxembourg

	1951	1954	1959	1964	1968	1974	1979	1984	1989	1994	1999	2004	2009
Partisan Cleavage	Partisan alignment												
	Voter alignments along religious and class cleavages						Voter dealignment along class cleavage and alignment along religious cleavage				Voter dealignments along both cleavages		

the Netherlands

	1952	1956	1959	1963	1967	1971	1972	1977	1981	1982	1986	1989	1994	1998	2002	2003	2006	2010
Partisan Cleavage	Partisan alignment					Partisan dealignment												
	Voter alignment along religious cleavage					Voter dealignment along religious cleavage												

Norway

	1953	1957	1961	1965	1969	1973	1977	1981	1985	1989	1993	1997	2001	2005	2009
Partisan Cleavage	Partisan alignment					Partisan dealignment									
	Voter alignment along class cleavage			Voter dealignment along class cleavage											

Sweden

	1952	1956	1958	1960	1964	1968	1970	1973	1976	1979	1982	1985	1988	1991	1994	1998	2002	2006
Partisan Cleavage	Partisan alignment										Partisan dealignment							
	Voter alignment along class cleavage										Voter dealignment along class cleavage							

Wallonia

	1950	1954	1958	1961	1965	1968	1971	1974	1977	1978	1981	1985	1987	1991	1995	1999	2003	2007
Partisan Cleavage	Partisan alignment					Partisan dealignment												
	Voter alignment along class cleavage										Voter dealignment along class cleavage							

Taking into account the evidence of alignment in both manifestations gives us a clear picture of the phenomenon of alignment and an indication of the durability of the alignment in these two manifestations. Table 7.2 specifies the findings of alignment, realignment and dealignment as found across the two manifestations for each case.

In almost half of the cases, alignment *in both manifestations* persisted only until the mid 1960s: Norway and Wallonia (until 1965), Finland (until 1966) and the Netherlands (until 1967). In other cases, it lasted into the 1970s: Austria (until 1970), Denmark (until 1973), Italy (until 1972), and Luxembourg (until 1979), and in Germany and Sweden it held until the mid 1980s (1987 and 1982, respectively).

In Flanders, a new voter alignment along the religious cleavage was created in the 1965 election, while alignment along the class cleavage continued. However, as I explained in Chapter Six, this realignment is explained by the supply aspect – the creation and institutionalisation of the sub-national Flemish party systems. The next shift in the Flemish party system is identified in 1985, when voter dealignment along the class cleavage began.

Overall, this demonstrates that the transition from alignment into dealignment or to a new alignment, as articulated by both manifestations of alignment, occurred in a period of twenty-two years, from 1965 to 1987. As of the late 1980s, none of the cases has displayed a situation of alignment in both manifestations.

The next question is a shift to what – was it a transition into dealignment, or was a new alignment between the electorate and parties created? In the previous two chapters, for each manifestation of alignment I established per case whether the alignment between voters and parties shifted into a new alignment (after a realignment) or eroded without the creation of a new alignment (dealignment). As I conducted the empirical research across both manifestations, evidence for any one of the three states (alignment, realignment or dealignment) could be found for each manifestation, at any time-point, in each case study. Therefore, theoretically, the separate analysis of the two manifestations of alignment could yield nine distinct situations or states, eight of which are a shift or transition from alignment in either or

both manifestations.¹ Table 7.2 depicts these states and their associated empirical results.

Table 7.2: States of Alignment, Realignment and Dealignment across the two manifestations			
<i>The first manifestation: partisan alignment</i>			
	<i>Alignment</i>	<i>Realignment and a new alignment</i>	<i>Dealignment</i>
<i>The second manifestation: voter alignment along the class and religious cleavages</i>	<i>Alignment</i>	Denmark (critical realignment and a new alignment, 1973-)	Italy (1972 -83) Sweden (1982-91) Wallonia (1965-87)
	<i>Realignment and a new alignment</i>		Flanders (1991-, along religious cleavage)
	<i>Dealignment</i>	Austria (1970-83) Finland (1966-70) Flanders (1985-91, along class cleavage) Germany (1987-90) Luxembourg (1979-2004 along class cleavage), (2004 - along both cleavages) Norway (1965-73)	Austria (1983-) Finland (1970-) Flanders (1991-, along class cleavage) Germany (1990-) Italy (1983-94, along religious), (1994-, along both cleavages) the Netherland (1967-) Norway (1973-) Sweden (1991-) Wallonia (1987-)

The empirical study, however, shows only six states that indicate a transition. Three of these states were seen in two cases: Denmark and Flanders. The remaining states concern an alignment (i.e. partisan alignment and/or voter alignment(s) along one or both cleavages) and/or a dealignment (i.e. partisan dealignment and/or the erosion of voter alignment(s) along one or both cleavages).

¹ There are eight states as alignment cannot transit into itself, therefore the combination of alignment in both manifestations is not counted.

One of these states occurs with a shift into partisan dealignment, while voter alignment(s) along one or both cleavages hold(s). This situation was found in Italy (between 1972 and 1983), Sweden (from 1982 until 1991) and Wallonia (between 1965 and 1987).

The opposite situation appears when voter dealignment(s) along one or both cleavages begin(s) while partisan alignment is maintained, as was seen in Austria (between 1970 and 1983), in Finland (between 1966 and 1970), in Germany (between 1987 and 1990), and in Luxembourg (between 1979 to 2004 along the class cleavage, and 2004 onwards along both cleavages). To this group we can also assign Flanders, as it experienced partisan alignment between 1985 and 1991, while a new voter alignment along the class cleavage eroded and a new alignment along the religious cleavage was maintained.

A state of dealignment across the two manifestations was found from the mid 1960s to the early 1970s only in Finland (since 1970), the Netherlands (since 1967), and Norway (since 1973). In the other cases, this occurred much later, in the 1980s and early 1990s: Austria (since 1983), Flanders (only along the class cleavage, since 1991), Italy (from 1983 onwards along the religious cleavage and since 1994 along both cleavages), Germany (since 1990), Sweden (since 1991) and in Wallonia (since 1987).

The situation in Denmark is unique and therefore it is the deviant case in this research. My analysis of patterns of partisanship indicates a transition into a situation of partisan critical realignment in the 1973 election that was followed by a new alignment. This occurred in combination with a voter alignment along the dominant cleavage – the class cleavage.

This state, which combines a realignment (and the creation of a new alignment) in one manifestation and an alignment in the other manifestation, was also identified in Flanders between 1965 and 1991. Here, a new voter alignment developed along the religious cleavage (together with continuity of voter alignment along the class cleavage), while the partisan alignment was maintained. In the cases of Denmark and Flanders, the state of realignment did not occur in both manifestations simultaneously.

In addition, in Flanders the partisan dealignment was found only 25 years after the new voter alignment along the religious cleavage was identified. This case, together with all the other cases, actually demonstrates that a state of realignment (and appearance of a new alignment) in one manifestation does not occur simultaneously or related to a state of dealignment in the other manifestation.

States of dealignment in one or both manifestations have been identified in all the cases except Denmark. The next question this raises deals with state transition, i.e. the shift into dealignment and its development. How does this begin and how has it developed over time?

In this research I employ a modular approach to the study of the two manifestations of alignment. Therefore, no theoretical or empirical restrictions were applied to any of the state transitions in the empirical study of these manifestations. A temporal examination of these transitions across both manifestations could yield an empirical and theoretical explication of two aspects of the development of the dealignment process:

- Origin: Did the transition start in both alignment manifestations simultaneously, or did it begin in only one of the manifestations?
- Process and Development: How does the dealignment process evolve, given its origin?

In ten out of eleven cases, states of dealignment have been identified in one or both manifestations. We can recognise two main state transition models or scenarios for the dealignment process's development. Figure 7.1 displays the state transition matrix of alignment and dealignment across manifestations.

Figure 7.1: State Transitions Matrix of Alignment and Dealignment across manifestations				
		TO STATE		
		<i>Voter dealignment along cleavages(s) & partisan alignment</i>	<i>Voter alignment along cleavages(s) & partisan dealignment</i>	<i>Voter dealignment along cleavages(s) & partisan dealignment</i>
FROM STATE	<i>Voter dealignment along cleavages(s) & partisan alignment</i>	Luxembourg		Austria Finland Flanders Germany Norway
	<i>Voter alignment along cleavages(s) & partisan dealignment</i>			Italy Sweden Wallonia
	<i>Voter dealignment along cleavages(s) & partisan dealignment</i>			the Netherlands

The first state transition is a shift that begins when the dividing line(s) of (both) cleavage(s) lose (some of) their relevancy (voter dealignment(s) along one or both cleavages), and continues when parties lose voters' durable support (partisan dealignment). In four cases, this occurred almost at the same time-point. In Finland and Germany the shift began as voter dealignment along the cleavage, and then spilled over in the next election, when a partisan dealignment began. In Flanders and Norway the shift occurred in the same direction and slightly later (with one election difference). In another case, Austria, the spill-over of the dealignment process commenced much later. Here the shift began as voter dealignment along the class cleavage in the 1970 election, and only after four election years (a period of 13 years), a partisan dealignment arose (in the 1983 election).

In Luxembourg, we see a different scenario: signs of voter dealignment were identified along the cleavage(s), while the partisan alignment remained intact at least until the 2009 election. A possible explanation for this is my finding that alignment along the religious cleavage held until very recently – the 2004 election. Therefore,

based on the empirical trends in all the other cases, I predict that Luxembourg will follow the other cases and, with the erosion of voter alignments along both cleavages, signs of partisan dealignment will also appear.

The second state transition is found in the other three cases, where the shift into dealignment began as partisan dealignment and only later affected voter alignment along the cleavage(s), after few election years. In Italy and Sweden this occurred after four and three election years (eleven and nine years difference) respectively, and in Wallonia after eight election years (a period of 22 years difference).

Only in the Netherlands did the state transition into dealignment commence in the two manifestations simultaneously during the same election year – the 1967 election. A possible explanation is the depillarisation (or in Dutch *ontzuiling*), when “the role of ideology or religion within the subcultures has declined” (Anderweg & Irwin, 2002:35). This was particularly true among Dutch Catholics. Bakvis (1981:521), for example, found that while in 1963 85 percent of Dutch Catholics voted for the Catholic People’s Party (KVP), in 1972 only 38 percent did so. He described these developments among the Dutch Catholic subculture and argued that the decline of Catholic support in the KVP is a result of “the transformation of the Dutch Catholic subculture into a much less cohesive body” (Bakvis, 1981:528).

This situation, together with a very low threshold (0.67 percent since 1956 (Andeweg, 2005:494; Farrell, 1997:70), has urged the electorate to move away not only from the parties that represent the main cleavage – the religious cleavage – but also from any established political party. This is illustrated by the same 1967 election in which the new progressive-liberal party, Democrats’ 66 (D66) achieved 4.5 percent of the valid votes in its first contested election. During this election, the Catholic People’s Party (KVP) and the Labour Party (PvdA) lost 5.4 and 4.4 percent of the votes respectively (my calculations).

These two state transitions into the dealignment process provide insights into the origin and development of the dealignment process. They demonstrate that the process can commence in either alignment manifestation. They also demonstrate that

the process will appear in one manifestation first and subsequently spill over into the other manifestation. Therefore, the dealignment process develops in two phases.

7.2 Conclusions

This chapter deals with the topic of alignment in its both manifestations – partisan alignment and voter alignment along the class and religious cleavages – and presents a combined analysis of the manifestations.

The empirical research indicates that the transition from alignment into dealignment or a new alignment, as articulated by either manifestation of alignment, occurred in a short period of twenty-two years, from 1965 to 1987. This is substantiated by the fact that as of the late 1980s, none of the cases has displayed a situation of alignment in both manifestations. Moreover, in the vast majority of the cases (eight out of eleven), diminishing of patterns of alignment occurred throughout the mid 1960s and mid 1970s. Erosion of alignment happened in the mid 1980s only in Flanders, Germany and Sweden. This verifies earlier arguments, according to which the alignment between voters and parties in most of the European multi-party systems diminished somewhere between the mid 1960s and mid 1970s (e.g. (Dalton, et al., 1984c; Sartori, 1994:50). The late erosion in the other three European multi-party systems can be explained as due to prominent political developments, which postponed the erosion. Flanders experienced the creation and establishment of new sub-national party system, and Germany dealt with reconstruction projects after the Second World War.

In all the cases except Denmark, signs of dealignment are evident in at least one of the alignment manifestations. Realignment in either one of the alignment manifestations is identified only in Denmark and Flanders. These two cases indicate that realignment (and new alignment) does not occur in both alignment manifestations. Similarly, realignment cannot occur simultaneously with dealignment, but only when alignment in the second manifestation is maintained. These last two arguments warrant further empirical examination.

The cases in which signs of dealignment have been identified in one or both manifestations draw a clear picture of how the dealignment process develops. The

empirical research proves that dealignment can start in either one of the manifestations. In addition, all the cases (apart from the Netherlands) show that the process is initially partial and begins as dealignment in one of the two manifestations. Subsequently, the erosion process is aggravated and becomes a full process of dealignment (identifiable when the signs of erosion appear in the second manifestation). This situation of full dealignment means that none of the mechanisms of alignment remain functional.

This empirical research (described in two separate chapters) of partisan alignment and voter alignments along cleavages is not only based on different scientific approaches to studying voting behaviour, but also taps into different articulations of alignment. Each articulation therefore interprets different implications for the party system in the case a change occurring in one of these two alignment manifestations.

Diminishing partisanship over time indicates an erosion of the allegiance of voters to any individual parties, but will not necessarily affect the parties that represent the salient cleavage(s), especially the dominant parties. By contrast, erosion of voter alignment(s) along one or both (the class and the religious) cleavages means that cleavage closure has decreased and the voters no longer vote according to class or religion, but this will not necessarily affect all parties. Having identified the origin and the development of the dealignment process, we will examine how its two phases – partial and full dealignment – tie in with the party system structure.