

Cambridge University Press & Assessment

978-1-107-02438-0 — Political Conflict in Western Europe

Hanspeter Kriesi , Edgar Grande , Martin Dolezal , Marc Helbling ,
Dominic Höglinger , Swen Hutter , Bruno Wüest

Excerpt

[More Information](#)

PART I

Theory and methods

1 *The transformative power of globalization and the structure of political conflict in Western Europe*

EDGAR GRANDE AND HANSPETER KRIESI

Introduction

What are the consequences of globalization for the structure of political conflicts in Western Europe? How are political conflicts organized and articulated in the twenty-first century? And, more specifically, how does the transformation of territorial boundaries affect the scope and content of political conflicts?

For answering these questions we take as our starting point the political sociology framework of Stein Rokkan, which is firmly based on the assumption that the scope of political conflicts is defined and contained by national boundaries (Lipset and Rokkan 1967; see Rokkan 1999). In the process of nation-building, political conflicts are transformed from local or regional conflicts into national ones; and in those cases in which the former persist they are the basis of a new type of conflict between the national centre and the periphery. In modern democracies, electorates have become national electorates and the most relevant political parties are national parties constituting national party systems (Bartolini 2000a; Caramani 2004). In the present volume, we continue our endeavour to place the current process of globalization in such a Rokkanian perspective. We conceive of the contemporary transformation of territorial boundaries as a new ‘critical juncture’ which results in the formation of a new structural conflict between ‘winners’ and ‘losers’ of globalization or ‘denationalization’.

In a previous volume, we presented the results of our empirical research on six West European countries for the period from 1975 until 2002, clearly showing the transformative power of globalization (Kriesi *et al.* 2008). Globalization, we argued, has transformed the basis of politics in Western Europe by giving rise to what we have called a new ‘integration–demarcation’ cleavage. Processes of increasing economic, cultural, and political competition linked to globalization have created

latent structural potentials of globalization ‘winners’ and ‘losers’. According to our empirical analyses, the mobilization of the group of ‘losers’ by new challengers – parties of the new populist right – and transformed established parties of the liberal and conservative right has provided the key impetus for the transformation of the party systems in the six countries. As we also showed, the success of the new challengers was mainly due to their appeal to the cultural anxieties of the (real or potential) ‘losers’, which, given their heterogeneous economic interests, provided the lowest common denominator for their mobilization. In this process, the mobilization of the globalization ‘losers’ has not added a new dimension of conflict to the existing national political space but instead transformed above all the existing dimension(s) of cultural conflict. The new cleavage has thus far been embedded in the existing two-dimensional structure of political conflict, consisting of an economic and a cultural dimension.

In the present volume, we pick up the analysis where we left it in our previous study. We continue to analyse the same six countries as before, namely Austria, the UK, France, Germany, the Netherlands, and Switzerland. These countries do not represent the whole of Europe. Obviously, Scandinavia, southern Europe, and East European countries are missing. Therefore, we cannot properly generalize our findings to all of Western Europe or Europe. However, we assume that the countries examined represent ‘critical cases’. They include a group of economically highly developed countries with established and remarkably stable democracies. Because of the absence of other major political or institutional changes (such as the transition from authoritarian to democratic regimes in southern and eastern Europe), it is possible to identify the changes induced by globalization conflicts much more clearly although we assume its transformative power to be weaker than in other countries. If globalization should actually have a lasting effect on the structure of political conflict in these countries, it is quite likely that we would find such changes in other countries as well, although conflicts might be articulated in different ways.

In this volume, we mainly address three sets of questions. First of all, we are interested in the *stability and transformative power* of the new ‘integration–demarcation’ cleavage and its political manifestations. For this reason, we extend our previous analysis of political conflict structures in the national party systems from the early 2000s into the late 2000s. For our claim that this cleavage is transforming

national conflict structures, it is crucial to know whether the emerging structures are stable over time or whether we have been over-interpreting a temporary conjunction of the 1990s.

The second set of questions refers to the *territorial scope* of the new cleavage. How national is the new cleavage? Does it only affect national political systems or can it be observed at European or transnational levels as well? In our previous study we argued that there are good reasons to assume that the formation of political identities, the articulation of political preferences, and the organization of political activity mainly take place at the national level. Despite the establishment of powerful supranational, transnational, and international political institutions, the national level continues to exercise a strong influence on such processes. Of greatest importance is that citizens' political rights remain (almost) exclusively attached to the nation state. Except for the direct elections to the European Parliament, there are no institutionalized channels for citizen participation in political decision-making beyond the nation state. In addition, given the heterogeneity of the groups of 'winners' and 'losers' created by globalization, we assume that it is very difficult to organize their interests at supranational, transnational, or international levels. Indeed, the organization and articulation of political interests are characterized by what we have called the *political paradox of globalization*: due to their heterogeneity and the structure of the political opportunities for their articulation, the new political potentials of 'winners' and 'losers' created by the process of denationalization are most likely to be articulated and dealt with at the *national* level (Kriesi and Grande 2004).

In this volume we innovate by integrating the European level into our framework – that is, by studying the European election campaigns with the same empirical tools we applied to the study of national election campaigns. We do not assume that conflicts at different levels of the political system are identical, but we do assume that the relevant political conflicts in our country cases will manifest themselves at the level of both national and European election campaigns. We are well aware that national and European elections are not of equal relevance for most citizens. European elections are not the equivalent of national parliamentary or presidential elections, but they are by far the most important institutionalized opportunity for European citizens to participate in politics beyond the nation state. Compared to these elections,

electronic forms of political participation ('e-democracy') or open elections to administrative bodies for the internet (ICANN) are much more limited in scope and relevance.

Moreover, we analyse the transnational scope of protest events and the transnational dimension of public debates. In sum, we are now in the position to give an empirically based answer to the question of the territorial scope of the new demarcation–integration cleavage.

The third set of question refers to the political and organizational scope of the new cleavage. How relevant are political parties and the electoral arena in articulating and mobilizing political conflict? In our previous study, we studied electoral campaigns, and identified the driving force for forming the new cleavage in the new populist parties of the radical right. However, this is not to say that political parties are the only political actors capable of organizing the new cleavage or that the electoral arena – whether at the national or the European level – is necessarily the most relevant arena for mobilizing political conflicts. Spectacular protest events, such as demonstrations against WTO summits, G8 meetings, and the like or mass protests against the Iraq War, as well as the literature on new social movements in Western societies, suggest that all kinds of social movement actors forcefully articulate new cleavages. Moreover, new conflicts are not only articulated in institutionalized campaigns, political parties, and spectacular events, but also in everyday public debates that give large numbers of actors an opportunity to intervene and articulate political claims. In order to arrive at empirically based answers on the relative importance of the different arenas and organizations, we also extend the scope of our analysis with respect to the *actors and arenas* covered.

Our conceptual starting point is the concept of political *arena*, which can be defined as a *site of political structuring* (see also Ferree *et al.* 2002: 10). Each arena is characterized by a specific set of institutional rules which guide the articulation and processing of political conflicts. Electoral campaigns take place in the highly institutionalized electoral arena, where the most important actors are political parties that compete for the citizens' vote during a clearly circumscribed period and within relatively narrowly defined rules. Other arenas include the system of interest intermediation – the playground of interest groups, the state arenas (legislative, executive, and judicial) at both the domestic and international level, and the arena of public protest.

In this study we extend our analysis from the electoral arena at national and European levels to the arena of public protest as well as to public debates that take place in various arenas. We pay particular attention to *public protest* here, a much less institutionalized space than the other arenas, and one open to all kinds of political actors. Since access is easy, it has become the privileged battleground of social movements – in other words, of collective political actors who lack regular access to the electoral and state arenas. That means they need to organize protest campaigns addressed to the general public in order to draw attention to their cause and to reinforce their allies (political parties, interest groups, public officials) in the decision-making arenas.

We also include the study of *public debates* as a new way to analyse the structuring of political conflict. Since we define public debate as *all communication related to a particular issue*, it is independent of the arena in which it occurs but specific to that issue. This definition is close to what Ferree *et al.* (2002: 9) call ‘public discourse’; that is, ‘public communication about topics and actors related to either some particular policy domain or to the broader interests and values that are engaged’. Just as in protest politics, public debates are much less institutionalized and open than electoral campaigns. Cutting across arenas, public debates are even more inclusive than protest politics, since all types of actors may contribute to the public debate in one form or another – either in terms of a purely verbal making of claims or various forms of action that allow an actor to cross the threshold of public attention and gain access to the media, which is the key forum for public debate. Public debates also include a wider range of communication activities than do either electoral campaigns or protest politics, since the latter constitute extraordinary moments in politics, coming at either regular (electoral campaigns) or irregular (protest politics) intervals. Such moments imply an extraordinary intensification of political communication. Public debates also involve an ebb and flow of communications, depending on the ‘issue-attention cycle’ (Downs 1972), but are more inclusive to the extent that they occur with reference to ongoing, routine, ‘ordinary politics’ as well.

We examine three issue-specific debates that are closely related to the new cleavage: on immigration, economic liberalization, and European integration. The study of these debates allows us to analyse the political structuring of the new conflicts in greater detail. The inclusiveness of how we define public debate makes it possible to identify the

configuration of actors who articulate the claims of ‘winners’ and ‘losers’ in much greater detail than we could by studying only the electoral or the protest arena. The focus on debates allows us to study the role of state actors (the executive and public administration, the legislature, and the judiciary) and non-state actors (political parties, interest groups, and social movement or civil society organizations), as well as the role of individual business corporations, individual experts, or individual citizens. This focus makes it possible to identify the issue-specific positions and salience for each type of actor, and we can study the logic that governs the different issues in much more detail than we could previously. We are particularly interested in how the various actors frame the issues, as that gives cues for assessing to what extent the new cleavage is governed by an economic or a cultural logic.

The theoretical framework: an extended and dynamic concept of cleavage formation

The empirical analyses in this volume are inspired by Stein Rokkan’s analyses on political structuring in Europe (Bartolini 2005b; Kriesi 1998; Lipset and Rokkan 1967; Rokkan 1999). They are based on the assumption that modern societies can still be characterized by widespread and permanent ‘cleavages’, a specific structure of political conflict that profoundly shapes their political systems. Of course, political conflict does not always take the form of a cleavage, nor is every society structured in such a manner. In a comparative historical perspective, it was in particular West European countries where social conflicts took the form of ‘cleavages’.¹ As Stein Rokkan (1999) showed in his seminal work, West European societies have been profoundly shaped by a series of social and political ‘revolutions’ which resulted in a limited set of clearly identifiable, deep-seated conflicts. He also identified a number of social, political, and institutional factors which were responsible for significant variations in these conflicts between countries. Historically, these cleavages were most forcefully expressed through specific political parties and party families, and in the initial formulation the main objective of the cleavage concept was to explain cross-national similarities and differences in the formation of West European party systems (Lipset and Rokkan 1967).

¹ For a recent investigation of cleavages in the USA, see Manza and Brooks (1999).

In the 1970s and 1980s, the ‘cleavage’ concept was the object of major controversy, however. At the centre of the debate was how to properly conceptualize and operationalize cleavages, as well as what their relevance was to ‘post-industrial’ societies (Lipset and Rokkan 1967; Menahem 1992; Rae and Taylor 1970; Rose and Urwin 1969–70; Zuckerman 1975, 1982). Today, it is widely accepted in the scholarly literature that ‘cleavages’ should be conceptualized in a comprehensive way (Deegan-Krause 2007) and be neither reduced to social divides (‘social cleavages’) nor equated with political conflicts (‘political cleavages’). Bartolini (2005a) rightly insists that the concept of cleavages, properly understood, should come without adjectives.

Fully developed cleavages, according to Bartolini and Mair (1990), should include three elements: ‘empirical’, ‘normative’, and ‘institutional’ – that is, respectively, a distinct socio-structural basis, specific political values and beliefs, and a particular political organization of social groups and normative values. Only when these three components are (more or less) equally given, and tightly coupled, should we use the term ‘cleavage’. The cleavage concept thus combines the micro-level of political behaviour with macro-institutional aspects of political systems. It can neither be reduced to the analysis of ‘issue dimensions’, as we find it in Lijphart’s analyses of political conflicts in Western democracies (Lijphart 1982, 1999), nor be restricted to the empirical analysis of the political attitudes and behaviours of specific social groups and classes. In this conceptualization, a full ‘cleavage’ exists only if all three components can be shown to exist empirically. This implies we can use these three components as yardsticks to test whether there has been a restructuring, or a decline, of cleavages in contemporary West European societies.

However, this extended cleavage concept creates several problems for empirical research, which have been addressed in the present volume by conceptual innovations. The first and most important problem is identifying the various components of a cleavage. In the past, this consisted mainly in the proper conceptualizing and empirical measurement of social classes. Increasing dissatisfaction with the concept of ‘cleavage’ resulted from the fact that the ‘old’ social classes of industrial society have declined in importance, and it became difficult to establish links between social classes and political behaviour. The solution was to reconceptualize social classes (Kriesi 1989, 1998; Müller 1998, 1999; Oesch 2006a, 2006b). After applying more refined

concepts of social class, it became possible to demonstrate that the social basis of politics did not evaporate completely as a result of social modernization processes. Instead, social classes – in particular, the ‘middle class’ – were restructured in ‘post-industrial’ societies. This reconceptualization permitted us to interpret a new social division within the middle class between managers and technical experts, and a new group of ‘social-cultural specialists’ as leading to the establishment of a new ‘post-materialism–materialism’ cleavage.

Moreover, by distinguishing between a ‘territorial-electoral’ and a ‘corporate-functional’ channel of political representation and decision-making, Rokkan (1999) realized that the organization and institutionalization of a cleavage need not only occur in the form of political parties, and that the electoral arena is not the only ‘channel’ for the structuring of conflict. Following Rokkan, Bartolini (2005b: 100) distinguished between three separate channels of ‘political structure formation’ in Europe: the ‘electoral’, ‘corporate’, and ‘territorial’ channels, each of which can be related to specific kinds of actors with particular resources. Historically, the electoral channel was the most important of them for structuring political conflict in modern democracies, and despite major wars, regime changes, and economic and social modernization, the parties and party systems proved to be remarkably stable throughout most of the twentieth century (Mair 1993). However, focusing exclusively on political parties and the electoral arena limits the concept of ‘cleavage’ to a specific type of parliamentary democracy within nation states. Opening up the concept to analyse political organization in the ‘age of globalization’ more generally requires considering the much wider range of organizations that mobilize and engage in political conflict, including, in particular, interest groups and social movement organizations. In this volume, we included protest politics as an additional channel and also investigated the importance of ‘corporate’ actors in our analyses of public debates.

The second major conceptual challenge relates to the links between the empirical, normative, and institutional components. Simple cleavage models assume a linear and recursive relationship between them. In such an understanding, political values reflect social classes, and political organizations merely represent them. This approach can be traced back to the works of Marx (1960), Lukács (1970), and Dahrendorf (1965). An alternative approach, advocated

by Sartori (1969), Zuckerman (1975, 1982), Enyedi (2005), and Enyedi and Deegan-Krause (2010), emphasizes the importance of political elites, political entrepreneurs, and political agency in the formation of cleavages. ‘Political cleavages and divisions,’ as Zuckerman (1975: 248) has put it, ‘are not reflections of social divisions but may be formed and organized by political activists’. In this top-down perspective, political values are in part the product of deliberate political framing strategies and of underlying conflicts over framing. Moreover, the social groups on which cleavages are based are not given, but are to some extent constructed, in dynamic political processes. To understand these processes, it is crucial to analyse manifest political conflicts over issues constitutive of a cleavage. As our analysis of public debates demonstrates, one can only uncover the internal political logic and normative structure of these processes of cleavage formation through detailed investigations of this kind.

Thus, applying the cleavage concept to contemporary empirical analysis requires a framework for the formation of cleavages that is both extended and dynamic. It also requires integrating a bottom-up (demand-side) with a top-down (supply-side) perspective. An empirical analysis of cleavages must give particular weight to the strategies of political elites, their framing of issues, and their strategic reactions to new challengers. This permits generalizing the concept beyond the outdated concepts of ‘industrial society’ and the too narrow view of (national) parliamentary democracy.

The individual chapters of this volume are based on such an ‘extended and dynamic framework of cleavage formation’, although we did not investigate each aspect to the same extent. Since a shortage of knowledge on the ‘politics of cleavage formation’ still exists, we placed particular emphasis on examining the political organization of the new cleavage both in several political arenas and at different territorial levels. The most innovative contribution in this volume comes from including the dynamic political framing of conflicts in public debates across political arenas. The fact that we gave more weight to the supply side, that is, the politics of cleavage formation, in this volume is not to say that the demand side, that is, the socio-structural basis of the new integration–demarcation cleavage, is of minor importance in our theoretical framework. We also pay attention to the social basis of the new demarcation–integration cleavage in this study. In using the refined concept of social class, our analysis