

Parties, party systems, coalitions

Unified Germany in Perspective

Ye olde FRG

- ▶ Stable liberal democracy main objective of the 1949 constitutional settlement
- ▶ History → worries
 - ▶ Extreme parties
 - ▶ Citizenry
- ▶ FRG consciously designed as a representative party democracy (Parteienstaat?)
- ▶ Parties
 - ▶ Main channel for political input
 - ▶ Only channel for political recruitment
- ▶ Highly stable (boring) $2\frac{1}{2}$ party system one of the FRG's main achievements

Cartelisation

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 - ▶ Parties lose touch with the voters and members
 - ▶ They form a cartel to jointly exploit the resources of the state
 - ▶ Implications for parties ('top-heavy') and party systems (depolarisation)

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 - ▶ Partisan control of/influence on many institutions
 - ▶ No referenda at federal level
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- ▶ 'Party cartel, but no cartel parties'

Party system change

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- ▶ Consequences for
 - ▶ Voting behaviour
 - ▶ Government formation
 - ▶ Policy formulation

Party system

- ▶ Collection of parties
- ▶ *And their relationships/interactions*
- ▶ Important features:
 - ▶ (Effective) number of (relevant) parties: \approx Fragmentation
 - ▶ Number and salience of important political conflicts:
Polarisation
 - ▶ Patterns of coalition formation/co-operation: Segmentation
- ▶ Party systems \leftrightarrow electoral results
- ▶ Pre-structure and translate political decisions and outcomes

Effective number of parties

- ▶ Absolute number of parties not informative for fragmentation
- ▶ Often, parties of very unequal size (more than two parties in 'two party systems')
- ▶ $2\frac{1}{2}$ party system intuitive but arbitrary

$$\text{ENP} = \frac{1}{\sum p_i^2} \quad (1)$$

- ▶ p_i vote(seat) share for party i
- ▶ ENP = real number of parties if all parties have equal size
- ▶ Smaller if one or more parties dominant
 - ▶ A: 0.45, B:0.35, C: 0.10, D:0.06, E:0.04
 - ▶ ENP: 2.9

Coalitions

- ▶ Voluntary, temporary alliances of parliamentary parties (their members)
- ▶ Usually: government coalitions, portfolio allocation
- ▶ Can be ended any time, but usually intended to last for a parliamentary term
- ▶ (Not necessarily 'fair') compromise → joint legislative agenda
- ▶ Weaker variety: toleration of minority government
- ▶ Lots of theories on coalition formation (ideology, rationality + institutional constraints)

What to expect?

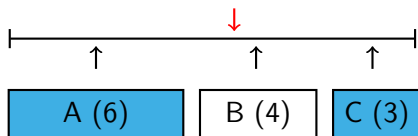
- ▶ Minimal assumptions:
 - ▶ Politicians (often) want political offices
 - ▶ They want to please their voters
 - ▶ They might be interested in their ideology/policies
 - ▶ They want to reduce transaction costs

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- ▶ Minimal assumptions:
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- ▶ So they go for '(connected) minimum winning coalitions'
 - ▶ Winning: majority of seats
 - ▶ Minimum: would lose majority if one party defected
 - ▶ (Minimal: as few seats as possible)
 - ▶ Connected: no ideological 'holes'

Connected Minimum Winning Coalition

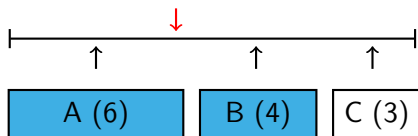
- ▶ 3 parties in parliament, 13 seats



- ▶ A & C: coalition is winning and minimum
- ▶ But not connected
- ▶ Policy outcome far from A and C's ideal points
- ▶ Voters and MPs unhappy
- ▶ (B gets its will outside coalition)

Connected Minimum Winning Coalition

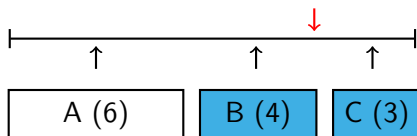
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- ▶ A & B: coalition is winning, minimum, connected
- ▶ Coalition slightly larger than A& C
- ▶ But policy outcome much more appreciable for A
- ▶ (Policy-wise, B slightly *worse off*)

Connected Minimum Winning Coalition

- ▶ 3 parties in parliament, 13 seats



- ▶ B & C: coalition is winning, minimum, connected *and minimal*
- ▶ Policy outcome closer to B's ideal point than under A&B
- ▶ B becomes the senior partner in a smaller coalition
- ▶ Plus A and C both prefer a coalition with B over a A&C
 - ▶ Excellent bargaining position
 - ▶ B might move policy even closer to ideal point
 - ▶ And gets (larger) share of cabinet seats

Bottomline

- ▶ Politicians have usually strong incentives to form small coalitions
 - ▶ Not more parties than strictly necessary
 - ▶ As few MPs as possible
- ▶ *If* there is a single, salient dimension of party competition . . .
 - ▶ Politicians have strong incentives to form connected coalitions
 - ▶ Connected winning coalitions will include the party that has the median legislator
 - ▶ Centrist parties often in a very strong bargaining position

Application to Germany

- ▶ *If* there is a single, salient dimension of party competition (Left – Greens – SPD – CD – FDP) ...
- ▶ And *if* the centre parties are still major players ...
- ▶ And *if* the Left is still isolated (segmentation) ...
- ▶ Disconnected coalitions unlikely ('Traffic Light', 'Jamaica')
- ▶ 'Great' coalitions unlikely (minimum, but not minimal)
- ▶ Anything including the Left unlikely (Left/CD, anyone?)
- ▶ But: We've seen a lot of funny coalitions!

Voting patterns in the 1990s: partition

- ▶ Bavaria: dominated by CSU
- ▶ Other Western states: 2 vs 2 competition like 1980s
- ▶ East
 - ▶ Strong PDS
 - ▶ CDU/SPD often rather weak
 - ▶ Very little support for FDP/Greens
 - ▶ *Voters highly mobile*
- ▶ Two/three regional party systems
- ▶ But Eastern vote sometimes decisive (2002)
- ▶ Occasional XR successes and local 'flash parties'

(Relatively) recent developments

- ▶ (Relative) decline of the CSU in Bavaria
- ▶ Greens and FDP gaining some ground in the East
- ▶ De facto split of the SPD vote and rise of the merged Left party on the national level
- ▶ National decline of SPD, losses for CDU (now reversed?)
- ▶ Voters more volatile, party system less stable and much more fragmented
- ▶ 'New' coalitions → 'fluid five party system'

The changing nature of 'grand coalitions' on the federal level

- ▶ In 1966
 - ▶ SPD/CD squeezed a tiny single-party opposition
 - ▶ SPD in federal government for the first time
- ▶ In 2005
 - ▶ Forced by the end of 2+2 system
 - ▶ Three sizable opposition parties controlling 27 pct of the seats
 - ▶ Both SPD and CD moving to the centre
 - ▶ Intent on reforming the system
- ▶ Now
 - ▶ Forced by exit of FDP
 - ▶ And SPD/Left split
- ▶ Possibly even less grand in the future!

Coalitions in the Länder

- ▶ State party systems quite different from national party system
- ▶ State parties not controlled by federal parties
- ▶ Communication and other relationships between both levels
- ▶ Länder as a laboratory for federal level ↔ regional conditions different
 - ▶ Black/Green coalition (Hamburg)
 - ▶ Coalitions involving flash parties (Hamburg)
 - ▶ 'Jamaica' (Saarland)
 - ▶ Surprising number of 'grand' coalitions
 - ▶ Minority governments (NRW, Sachsen-Anhalt, Hessen)
- ▶ But: problematic policy domains absent/less relevant (defence, foreign policy etc.)

Co-operative federalism as a permanent all-party coalition

- ▶ Every bill passes Bundesrat (suspensive/absolute veto power)
- ▶ Coalitions usually abstain if there's no agreement
- ▶ Abstentions count like nays under absolute veto procedures
- ▶ Majority of compatible coalitions exceptional
- ▶ State-level coalitions have mixed-motives (party loyalties, state interests, state-party interests . . .)

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- ▶ State-level coalitions have mixed-motives (party loyalties, state interests, state-party interests . . .)
- ▶ Situation much more complex after 1990
 - ▶ Regionalisation/fragmentation
 - ▶ More heterogeneous state interests
 - ▶ More veto players (votes)
 - ▶ More elections
- ▶ Highly complex bargains involving many state/federal parties

Example?

- ▶ Your turn!

Summary

- ▶ German party system profoundly changed from old FRG's
 - ▶ Unification
 - ▶ De-alignment
- ▶ Changes require(d) new patterns of co-operation, further changing the system
- ▶ Often, decisions require (informal) all/many party coalitions
 - ▶ Dispersion of power (consensus democracy)
 - ▶ Disproportionate influence

Class questions

- ▶ What are the implications of these developments for political representation in the New Germany?
- ▶ Again: Can you imagine a world where the PDS/Left could join a coalition after the Federal Election of 2017?