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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  - One of the most generous systems of state funding in the world
  - 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’)
- $2^{1\frac{1}{2}}$ party system intuitive but arbitrary

\[ \text{ENP} = \frac{1}{\sum p_i^2} \tag{1} \]

- $p_i$ 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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- 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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\[ \uparrow \quad \uparrow \quad \uparrow \]

\[ \text{A (6)} \quad \text{B (4)} \quad \text{C (3)} \]

- 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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- 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?