

2 Party Ideology

As it has been mentioned in the introductory chapter, partisan theory constitutes the main theoretical concept that is tested in this analysis. And for answering the question to which degree the partisanship of different governments influences policy content, an understanding of parties and their ideology is essential. Thus, some theoretical issues need to be pointed out: What is the ideology of different parties made of and where does it come from? What exactly are the concrete policy preferences that parties have?

In an attempt to answer these questions, this chapter briefly reviews the role of ideology for parties and the main types of party behaviour. Building on that, the development of the prevalent left-right divide in Western European party systems is explained subsequently. The following section then elaborates on the policy preferences of parties which is necessary for coding concrete policy measures as being either typical left or right when the dependent variable is created at a later stage.

2.1 Party Ideology and Party Objectives

In a democratic parliamentary system, parties carry out a wide range of tasks which are required for making it function smoothly. Following Key (1968), these can be broken down into three essential domains, namely the activities that parties carry out in the electorate, the tasks they perform as organizations and the

functions they have when in government.⁵ Party ideology plays a role in all of these domains.

Both *vis-à-vis* the electorate and as organizations, parties promote certain policies that constitute their individual party ideology. With their ideology, parties simplify the vote-choice and generate symbols of identification for the voters (cf. Schmitter, 2001: 72). As “repositories for ideologies”, party platforms or election programs possess a certain continuity from one election to another (Vassallo/Wilcox, 2006: 413) and their policy mixes “satisfy the general demands of their constituents” (Schmitter, 2001: 73).

When in government, parties try to push through policies which emanate from the respective ideological convictions advertised in their political programme (Rose, 1980: 13) – at least in a normative sense.⁶ However, it is unclear whether party ideology as expressed in these documents really influences policy-making or whether there is a gap between the advertised policies and those implemented when in office. Thus, does the vote choice at elections make “a real difference in how society is governed” (*ibid.*) after all?

This might depend on the dominant objective that individual parties have. The literature on party government mainly distinguishes between three basic party-objectives.⁷ They are expressed in different types of party behaviour which are nowadays generally referred to as *office-seeking*, *policy-seeking* and *vote-seeking*.

A vote-seeking party has the primary goal of maximizing votes, hence, its electoral success. Its secondary goal is gaining control of government (Strøm, 1990a: 566), but as the means by which the votes are maximized are not specified, ideological considerations are not necessarily playing a role. If parties are office-seeking, their main aim is to gain as much access as possible to parliamentary

⁵ For a detailed list of tasks for each domain see Dalton/Wattenberg (2002: 5). They list “organizing dissent and opposition” as a function of parties in government. As the opposition is not part of the government, this denotation is terminologically not fully correct. Thus, this domain should either be renamed so that it also comprises parties in parliament or a fourth domain for parties in opposition should be defined.

⁶ In Rose’s (1980: 10) opinion, this assumption goes “beyond the minimalist conception of a party” as the only necessary attributes are nominating candidates and contesting in elections.

⁷ cf. Ranney (1954); Budge/Laver (1986); Budge/Keman (1990); Schmidt (1996); Strøm (1990a); Müller/Strøm (1999).

seats and government office. By advocating policies that promise to appeal to a maximum number of voters at a given time, their policy positions are liable to constant change and a fixed ideology is only marginal.⁸

In contrast, the policy-seeking objective is closely connected with ideology. Parties want to implement policies that mirror “their ideas about how society ought to be directed by means of public goods” (Keman, 2006). These ideas are written down in their political programme and serve the interest of their social constituencies. Such parties neither maximize votes nor office, but their effect on public policy (Strøm, 1990a: 567).

Typically, individual parties do not give equal emphasis to these three party goals and often need to accept trade-offs between the goals and compromises (Müller/Strøm, 1999). For example, votes are not necessarily a goal *per se* as they are simply an instrument for either pursuing office or policies. Also, office-attainment can be used “for instrumental reasons, as a means toward policy influence” (Müller/Strøm, 1999: 8). In short, the three party goals cannot be separated from each other since they are all interdependently connected. Hence, ideology is not necessarily the driving force of governmental behaviour.

2.2 Party Ideology and the Left-Right Divide

When analysing the policy output of political parties with distinctive policy preferences, it is assumed that ideological differences are prevalent in the party system. Following the general notion of the social origins of parties, such differences are rooted in multiple divisions in society which have emerged historically along the conflict lines between different classes and the interest of societal groups. According to Key (1968: 167), industrialization went along with a “decline of agriculture, the rise of manufacturing, the growth of a labouring class, urbanization, and the concentration of economic power”. Together with other historical

⁸ According to Riker (1962: 33), such parties want to maximise their votes “only up to the point of subjective certainty of winning”. Of course, high numbers of votes are a prerequisite for attaining office. In fact, the vote-seeking and the office-seeking model are very similar and their main difference lies in diverging coalition preferences assumed by rational choice approaches of coalition theory.

developments,⁹ these socioeconomic changes have caused the deep, structural divisions in society that are still observable today (cf. Knutsen, 1988; Beyme, 2000).¹⁰

These so-called cleavages have translated from society to politics as the social divisions became “associated with a particular set of values or identities” (Mair, 2006: 373) which were then brought to the political scene by political parties. As a result, the European party systems basically still reflect the social conflicts from the 19th and early 20th century (cf. Beyme, 2000: 71) and the expression of cleavage structures in politics has persisted “strikingly similar to the past” (Siavelis, 2006: 367; Mair, 2006: 374).

On the basis of the dominant cleavages, Beyme (2000) identified ten different party families (*familles spirituelles*) that constitute a general pattern of Western European party systems and also serve as an ideological typology of parties.¹¹ Among them, the liberal, conservative, social-democratic and Christian/Christian-democratic party families have divided up the political power mainly amongst themselves in Western European countries and therefore constitute the main party families.¹² But only the cleavage between owners and workers – representing the class struggle between capital and labour – can be found in all countries (Beyme, 2000: 74) and this is why only social-democratic and conservative/liberal parties exist in practically all Western party systems.

The parties of a party family emerged in response to the same societal conflict and are, therefore, fighting for similar political goals that mainly serve the particular interest of their respective electorate. Some issues might be emphasized differently and some positions might diverge among the parties of the same party family (Vassallo/Wilcox, 2006: 417) but their political aims in respect to the main political issues – the socioeconomic ones – are usually similar or point into the

⁹ E.g. the reformation and its successional events or the national revolutions after 1789.

¹⁰ According to the cleavage model by Lipset and Rokkan (1967), with extensions by Inglehart (1977; 1990), the dominant social cleavages are: centre-periphery, state-church, land-industry, owner-worker, and postmaterialists-materialists.

¹¹ These party families are: Liberal, conservative, worker (social-democratic), agrarian, regional, Christian, communist, fascist, right-wing populist, ecological.

¹² See Ware (1996: 44) for an overview on the average share of votes for each of the party families in the 1980s.

same direction (cf. Ware, 1996).¹³ And sharing the same goals, values and visions means sharing the same ideology. It is a fundamental element and virtually the nucleus of parties (cf. Mair/Mudde, 1998: 220).

A classification of parties into party families is, hence, also a classification into “ideological groups” (Beyme, 1984b).¹⁴ Each of the main party families is characterized by a particular, superordinate ideology from which the political preferences for different policy areas can be derived from.¹⁵ This finding will later help to identify ideological positions and preferences of parties and governments.

As mentioned above, the dominant cleavage in Western European countries has traditionally been the conflict between workers and owners which has led to the antagonism of social-democratic and conservative/liberal parties since they represent the opposing sides of the workers-owners-cleavage. This underlying cleavage is obviously the one with the strongest impact on politics and is also referred to as the *left-right cleavage*. Depending on their political stance in regard to this cleavage, parties are usually labelled as being either on the left or on the right of the political party spectrum. The most relevant political issues for the positioning of parties on the left-right dimension are those in the field of economic and social policy.

The distinction between *left* and *right* is a handy simplification, reducing the complexity of the political world (Inglehart/Sidjanski, 1976: 225; Knutsen, 1995: 63), but it enables even less informed voters “to relate their own political preferences to the position they assign to parties in a one-dimensional left-right space” (Kitschelt/Helleman, 1990: 211). Also, *left* and *right* turned out to constitute “the only pervasive political division” (*ibid.* 211) that could be found in several analyses of party programmes, manifestos or expert observations (cf. Huber/Inglehart, 1995; Budge *et al.*, 1987; Laver/Budge, 1992).

However, critics have argued that the meaning of left and right politics has been hollowed out as parties have often shifted towards a decision-making style

¹³ An exceptional, very heterogeneous party family is that of regional and ethnic parties, as Ware (1996) demonstrates.

¹⁴ The original German term that Beyme uses is: “ideologische Familien”.

¹⁵ Beyme (1984b) and Ware (1996) provide extensive descriptions of the ideologies of the different party families.

which is more presidential instead of party-governmental (Poguntke/Webb, 2005; Katz/Mair, 2002) and strongly driven by office-seeking considerations. Other critics (e.g. Dalton, 2004; Mair, 2008) have brought forward the argument that partisan identities among voters have declined over the last 30 years in Europe and that voters nowadays behave more pragmatic at the ballots and are not forever tied to any particular party. This might increasingly blur the notion of *left* and *right* among the electorate and lead to a less meaningful role of the left-right divide.¹⁶ This opinion is challenged though by the findings of Corbetta *et al.* (2009: 638) who show “that the left-right dimension continues to be very meaningful for citizens and to perform decisive functions of political orientation”.

But as this study analyses the partisan performance of parties in government and not the behaviour of voters, this point of critique might not apply anyway. Thus, parties might actually still have identifiable partisan policy stances independent from the declining partisan identities of the electorate.

Although the left-right divide might not be a perfect concept and has possibly lost some of its meaning over time, it “still remains the most widely used short-hand term that is applied in the comparison of voters, parties, and leaders” (Mair, 2007: 217). It has also been confirmed that the left-right dimension is a common ideological dimension which can be compared across countries (Kim/Fording, 1998: 76).¹⁷

No other type of dimension has even been close to replacing the left-right dimension, rather the left-right semantics has been “capable of incorporating many types of conflict lines” so that new meanings of the terms *left* and *right* have been added to the traditional meanings (Knutsen, 1995: 87; cf. Fuchs/Klingemann, 1990).

And as the works of Huber and Stephens (2001), Castles (1982a) and many other studies have proven, the left-right dimension still works well for predicting party behaviour and electoral choice.¹⁸ As the distinction between left and right can therefore be considered to still be a relevant concept (Bobbio, 1996), the left-

¹⁶ See Mair (2007) for an extensive elaboration of these arguments.

¹⁷ See the article of Kim/Fording (1998) for an extensive list of references to prove this point.

¹⁸ See literature review in Chapter 3.3.

right dimension serves as the fundamental device for characterizing parties, governments and policies in this study.

2.3 Left & Right - The Political Preferences of Parties

In the previous paragraphs it has been argued that parties can be assumed to be policy-seeking and that it is possible to arrange parties in a one-dimensional left-right space according to their ideology. The open questions which are due to be answered at this point are: What do leftist and rightist ideologies look like? And what are the particular policy preferences of parties from different party families?

As already mentioned above, party families and parties have emerged alongside the fundamental cleavages in society among which the class struggle between owners and workers has been the most prominent one. This cleavage is about the unequal distribution of economic power and social status which brought out different interests for the segments of society at the opposing side of the cleavage. The association of *left* and *right* with this class struggle-cleavage is “the most stable denotation” (Mair, 2007: 213), even though there might be other connotations and meanings connected with these terms (cf. Fuchs/Klingemann, 1990). Therefore, the left-right conflict is mostly about socioeconomic issues.

In his rather politico-philosophical book *Left & Right*, Bobbio (1996) claims that the left-right divide is all about the distinction between equality and inequality. This corresponds with the definition of Lipset *et al.* (1959: 1135) who define *left* as “advocating social change in the direction of greater equality”, while *right* means “supporting a traditional, more or less hierarchical social order, and opposing change toward greater equality”. Following these definitions, the left-right cleavage would all be about the way goods and rights are distributed in a society.

This definition of *left* and *right* only describes one overarching socioeconomic issue which is very abstract and has a rather normative, social-philosophical notion. A more tangible understanding of the left-right dimension is reached by breaking down the socioeconomic issues associated with the left-right

cleavage into four dimensions, as listed by Lijphart (1984)¹⁹. These dimensions are:

- I. governmental vs. private ownership of the means of production
- II. a strong vs. a weak governmental role in economic planning
- III. support of vs. opposition to the redistribution of wealth from the rich to the poor
- IV. the expansion of vs. resistance to governmental social welfare programmes

The four dimensions describe the difference between *left* and *right* in a very fundamental way, and by tracing back to the historical roots of leftist movements they make the left positions sound very socialist. But even though left parties in Western democracies do mainly not anymore fight for comprehensive public ownership of the means of production or long-term economic plannings – with the exception of some parties on the very far left – the “left parts” of these dimensions can still serve as valid indicators of the general direction in which leftist parties are tending with their desired policies.

However, the principles denoted as *right* are not genuinely historical fundamentals, but have rather been constructed as the right counterpart by departing from the left positions (Seliger, 1976: 214). The policy stances of right parties have moved away from these extreme positions in the mid-20th century in a general trend of moderation (Lijphart, 1984: 131). Thus, a certain convergence of policy positions cannot be denied, but the end of ideology “did not materialize” (Inglehart/Klingemann, 1976: 243).²⁰ Instead, the widespread neoliberal ideas that started to spread in the 1980s might generally have caused parties to shift again closer to these fundamental right positions. Hence, these fundamental positions also provide a good starting point from which right policy preferences can be derived.

McDonald *et al.* (2007) build on these traditional policy preferences when defining contemporary left and right policies. According to them, the fundamental difference between them is the question to what degree goods and services

¹⁹ Lijphart draws on Harmel/Janda (1978) and Seliger (1976) for this set of socioeconomic left-right dimensions.

²⁰ See also Zohlnhöfer (2005: 51 ff.) for a similar conclusion.

should be public goods or not. Right parties see “little need for government involvement in the distribution of these goods” (*ibid.*: 64) while the left ones prefer a stronger role of government.

Thus, parties are left if they want the government to organize the economy. And they are on the right if they prefer that private enterprise organizes the national economy. In regard to the control over the economy, McDonald *et al.* differentiate between a far left position – the public ownership of industries – and a less radical left position which prefers strongly regulated private firms. Concerning economic distribution in terms of the welfare state, McDonald and his colleagues even distinguish between right (services only for those who have earned enough to buy them), centre-right (free services only for elderly), centre-left (services only for the poor without the sufficient means of purchasing them) and left policy preferences (free services to everyone). These preferences for economic distribution could be applied to almost any policy area.

Basically, these definitions of left and right policy preferences are very similar to those in Lijphart (1984). And as the literature review in the next chapter shows, countless other scholars have as well made hypotheses on the basis of these fundamental preferences.

In an attempt to find out if and how the difference between *left* and *right* is perceived by citizens, Fuchs and Klingemann (1990) conducted a study in which respondents in Germany, the Netherlands and the US had to locate themselves on a left-right scale and to answer open-ended questions about the meaning of *left* and *right*. The authors found out that an overwhelming majority of people in Germany and the Netherlands has at least a general understanding of *left* and *right* and by answering the open-ended questions the respondents expressed what they associate with these terms. It turned out that the *left* is generally connected with values such as equality and solidarity and – in respect to social groups – with workers, lower class and the poor. In contrast, *right* is rather connected with individualism, privileges and the social groups of the upper class, the rich and entrepreneurs.²¹ These findings show that the political preferences at-

²¹ However, there were some values and social groups that were connected with both left and right, such as freedom and justice. But once it would have been asked what these terms imply, people might have uttered different things, depending on whether they placed themselves left or right.

tributed to *left* and *right* seem to be shared universally in Western democracies. In addition, they correspond with the left and right policy preferences outlined above.

2.3.1 *The Policy Preferences of the Main Party Families*

As it has been demonstrated, the preferences of parties are closely connected with the founding history of the parties. Therefore, parties within one party family based on the same societal cleavage usually share similar policy preferences. The four dominating party families in Western Europe in the last decades have been the liberal, the conservative, the social-democratic and the Christian-democratic families. By analysing the historical development of these party families, further policy preferences that have survived until today can be discovered, as it has been done for instance by Ware (1996) or Beyme (1984b).

According to them, the liberal parties were the first political groupings that emerged with the intention to secure the interests of the bourgeoisie which was dominating trade and manufacturing against the land-owning nobility. Thus, they initially had the desire to abolish restrictions on trade and production and to have far-reaching citizens' rights. In fact, they wanted and still want to minimize the role of the state in society and economy and therefore disapproved public ownership. This implied that they argued against a redistribution of resources towards those without property as this would not be in the interest of the hard-working traders and entrepreneurs that they represented.

Advocating these socioeconomic preferences, liberal parties are located the furthest on the right of the four major party families. The conservative parties are usually located next to them, even though were initially found in opposition to the liberal parties (Beyme, 1984b: 70). Were they once supporters of the monarchy, objecting to liberal ideas, they have moved close to the liberals since the mid-1970s by getting incrementally rid of paternalistic ideas and appeals to the national interest that had justified state interventions (Ware, 1996: 33). Conservative parties are particularly strong in those countries where Christian democracy is weak or nonexistent. The most famous example of this type of conservative party is certainly the one in Britain, but also the *Gaullistes* in France, *Fianna*

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