

COMMENTARY: The Cultural Determinants of Party System Change

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The purpose of this commentary piece is to uncover some of the key the cultural determinants of party systems change. Our basic claim is that the 1960s witnessed what we call the rise of the fluid self, of an individual who had complex, conflicting, and inconsistent preferences. We ground the pervasiveness of fluidity in this notion of the individual in key elements of popular culture (theater, popular music, Western film characters etc.) to show that cultural expressions reflect, but also shape, the culture of a society and transformation in its party system and public policy. We then link this to the crisis of parties, understood in diverse ways, that has faced European party systems and the success of their concomitant electoral policy offers for decades. We advance three related claims: first, that the rise of the fluid self created a conflict between structures and the individual; second, that this conflict made the previous/existing structures obsolete; and, third, that the obsolescence of such structures led to the unfreezing of Western European party systems and higher levels of party system fluidity, both of which have a bearing on policy making and policy studies.

Keywords: Cultural Determinants, Cultural Approach, Cultural Change, Explaining Party System Change, Political Parties, Political Science, Party Crisis, Democracy, Individuals, Structures, Western European Party Systems, Democratization, Party System Fluidity, Cleavage Structure, Cultural Studies.

Los determinantes culturales del cambio del sistema de partidos

El propósito de este artículo es descubrir los determinantes culturales del cambio en los sistemas de partidos. Nuestra afirmación básica a

este respecto es que la década de 1960 fue testigo de lo que llamamos el surgimiento del yo fluido, de un individuo que tenía preferencias complejas, conflictivas e inconsistentes. Fundamentamos la omnipresencia de la fluidez en elementos clave de la cultura popular (que incluyen teatro, música popular y personajes de películas occidentales) para mostrar que las expresiones culturales reflejan, pero también dan forma, a la cultura de una sociedad y la transformación en su sistema de partidos y política pública. Luego vinculamos esto con la crisis de los partidos, entendida de diversas maneras, que ha enfrentado los sistemas de partidos europeos y el éxito de las ofertas de política electoral durante décadas. Presentamos tres afirmaciones relacionadas: primero, que el surgimiento del yo fluido creó un conflicto entre las estructuras y el individuo; segundo, que este conflicto volvió obsoletas las estructuras anteriores/existentes y, tercero, que la obsolescencia de tales estructuras condujo al descongelamiento de los sistemas de partidos de Europa occidental y niveles más altos de fluidez del sistema de partidos, los cuales tienen relación con la formulación de políticas y estudios de política.

Palabras clave: Determinantes culturales, Enfoque cultural, Cambio cultural, Explicación del cambio del sistema de partidos, Partidos políticos, Ciencias políticas, Crisis de partidos, Democracia, Individuos, Estructuras, Teoría política, Sistemas de partidos de Europa occidental, Democratización, Fluidez del sistema de partidos, Estudios culturales.

黨制變革的文化決定因素

本文的目的是揭示政黨制度變革的文化決定因素。我們在這方面的基本主張是，1960 年代見證了我們所說的流動自我的興起，即具有復雜、衝突和不一致偏好的個人的興起。我們將流動性普遍存在於流行文化的關鍵要素（包括戲劇、流行音樂和西方電影人物）中，以表明文化表現形式反映並塑造了社會文化以及政黨制度和公共政策的轉變。然後，我們將其與政黨危機聯繫起來，以多種方式理解，幾十年來，歐洲政黨體系和選舉政策提議的成功都面臨著政黨危機。我們提出了三個相關的主張：第一，流動自我的興起在結構和個人之間造成了衝突；第二，這場衝突使以前/現有的結構過時，第三，這種結構的過時導致西歐政黨制度解凍，政黨制度流動性更高，這兩者都對政策制定和政策研究。

關鍵詞：文化決定因素、文化途徑、文化變革、解釋政黨制度變革、政黨、政治學、政黨危機、民主、個人、結構、政治理論、西歐政黨制度、民主化、政黨制度流動性、文化研究。

The cultural approach is one of the best-known approaches in the study of political science and, by extension, has a strong bearing on policy making and policy studies. Culture has been used to explain the rise of capitalism (Weber 2002), economic backwardness (Banfield 1965), the functioning of democratic regimes (Almond and Verba 1963), the consolidation and survival of democracy (Lipset 1959), and institutional performance (Putnam, Leonardi, and Nanetti 1993).

Little attention, however, has been paid to whether cultural conditions or factors were in some way responsible for the transformation of party systems or party system change. From Duverger (1954) onward, party systems were believed to be the product of history. Lipset and Rokkan (1967), building on Duverger, went on to say that the structure or the format of West European party systems reflected the number of cleavages that had emerged at various points in history and that were still salient when universal suffrage was granted in the first wave of democratization. The party system reflected what Lipset and Rokkan (1967) called the cleavage structure and, according to this line of inquiry, party system change would occur only as a result of the transformation of the cleavage structure.

Efforts to explain party system change, as evidenced by the emergence of new parties, in cultural terms was limited. Only the rise of the parties of the so-called New Left and, later, the rise of the new radical right parties were explained as a result of a cultural change. The appearance of post-materialist values created an electoral niche that parties of the New Left could exploit and the parties of the radical right could be regarded as a reaction against the New Left. As Ignazi (1992, 6) pointed out, the programs, the platforms, and the policy proposals of the new extreme right are inconsistent with, but not unrelated to, the post-material value system, because they represent “a reaction to it, a sort of ‘silent counterrevolution’”—a point further elaborated by Kitschelt and McGann (1997). Hence, a cultural explanation was invoked or adopted only to explain party system change in terms of the appearance of new parties (and, subordinately, the emergence of new cleavages and the transformation of the cleavage structure). However, to the best of our knowledge, it was never—or not consistently—employed to shed light on the transformation of the patterns of inter-party competition, which is how Sartori (1976) understood party system change, or on what Mair (1996) called party system closure.

The purpose of the present work is to uncover the cultural determinants of party systems change. Our basic claim is that the 1960s witnessed what we call the

‘rise of the fluid self’—a notion of an individual who had complex, conflicting, and inconsistent preferences. We extend this to argue that the rise of such an individual created a conflict between structures and the individual, that this conflict made the previous/existing structures obsolete, and the obsolescence of such structures led to the unfreezing of Western European party systems and higher levels of party system fluidity. The rest of this commentary article is organized as follows.

The first section deals with the notion of the fluid self. The rise of the fluid self is documented by analyzing the changes that popular (pop/mass) culture experienced in the period under consideration. A brief review of a seminal play of the theater of Absurd, of new vanguards such as Fluxus, of new comic heroes such as Corto Maltese, of the transformation of Western movie characters, of the role that pop music played in bringing down structures, such as racial barriers, and in promoting new, more fluid, gender roles reveals that the notion of fluidity pervaded all types of cultural manifestations. Insofar as cultural expressions reflect, but also shape, the culture of a society, the pervasiveness of fluidity in so many different forms of cultural expression testifies to the fact that the 1960s witnessed the rise of the fluid self. There are two reasons why we decided to explore cultural conditions in this way instead of solely relying, as most political cultural studies tend to do, on survey data. The first is that, in our view, most of the studies produced in the political culture tradition reduce culture to values and attitudes but neglect the extent to which the culture of a given polity is reflected but also shaped by its cultural manifestations; that is, by the products of mass and high culture. The second reason is that, with survey data, survey questions either provide the respondent with binary oppositions (unemployment v. inflation) or with an opportunity of indicating a fixed preference—yet the expression of fixed preferences as well as the supply of binary oppositions structure the respondent’s responses, thus preventing her from manifesting the fluidity of her preferences and stances. In order to avoid the twin trappings of neglect (of cultural products and manifestations) and structuring, we decided to adopt an approach closer to what is being used in cultural studies so that we could not only bring culture back in, but also and more importantly show the growing pervasiveness of fluidity in the culture of West European polities. Building on this discussion in the second section, we explore the relationship between the rise of the fluid self and the so-called party crisis. The notion of a party crisis can be understood in two different, though possibly related, ways. In one sense, the party crisis may refer to the crisis of a specific model of party organization; that is, the mass party of social integration (Katz and Mair 1995). With the advent of catch-all parties, the mass party entered a critical phase, and lost members and votes. The notion of a party crisis, however, can be understood in a second way. In this case, the notion of party crisis refers to the crisis of a party as an organization or institution. The evidence presented in this section shows that Western European parties lost members and votes. Parties, as structures, could no longer provide voters with a political offer or with policy offers that

could satisfy the demands of new, fluid, voters. The crisis of political parties is then the inevitable consequence of the tension/conflict between the fluidity of voters' demands and the structurally induced rigidity of the policy offers that political parties could provide. The mismatch between voters' demands and parties' policy/political offers has been documented by the literature on the so-called cartel party and it has generally been explained on the basis of parties' alleged unwillingness to satisfy voters' demands. This line of work attempted to find an explanation of such a mismatch by focusing on the supply side. The evidence we discuss here, however, suggests that the demands of a fluid electorate have changed in ways that could not possibly be satisfied by the political offer that political parties could supply. Building on this discussion, in the third section we show how the rise of the fluid self and the ensuing party crisis eventually translated into party system change. We show how, in the end, the emergence of a fluid self was responsible for rising levels of fluidity at the party-system level. In the final section we formulate, as is customary, some tentative conclusions.

The Rise of the Fluid Self

The Fluid Self in Popular Culture

Theater

In 2009 or 2010 Sir Ian McKellen came to Sydney to perform Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*. McKellen played the part of an Estragon who was, for the first part of the play, acting as a man affected by dementia. One of the authors of the present work recalls watching McKellen from a third-row seat, wondering whether McKellen had become a senile or whether that is how he felt he should characterize the character he was playing on stage—a doubt that was cleared up by the time the play came to an end. McKellen's performance was remarkable. Yet, that spectacular performance of *Waiting for Godot* in some, not insignificant, ways betrayed Beckett's text. There is a rich literature discussing tradition and betrayal, not to mention the tradition of betrayal. But each and every tradition is also always a betrayal in itself. In keeping up with a long tradition of the performance of *Waiting for Godot*, Beckett's script had been, once again, betrayed.

Possibly the single most important play in twentieth-century theater, *Waiting for Godot* is not just a story of two clochards waiting for someone who does not actually show up. The play is not just about the waiting. Neither is it merely about the power relations between Pozzo and Lucky. Likewise, it is not only an almost Nietzschean eternal return of the same as evidenced by the nearly perfect structural resemblance of the two acts. The play is, of course, all these things but it is more. *Waiting for Godot* is the first staging of fluidity.¹ That quasi-phenome-

1 As it will soon be clear, our discussion of the fluidity in *Waiting for Godot* has nothing to do with the kind of fluidity that Gupta (2005) thought was associated with this text. For Gupta (2005, 216) the fluidity of the text has to do with the fact that "the act of authorship appears to be an-ongoing pro-

nological infinite web of relations that Vladimir and Estragon enter into is insufficient to capture what is the true and truly innovative contribution of this play: the characters of Vladimir and Estragon are fluid and morph into one another and, as the play unfolds, take on each other's role.

Literature

Waiting for Godot is the first effort, to the best of our knowledge, to put on stage and give representation to the fluidity of roles, characters, and relationships. Seventeen years after the first representation, in Paris, of *Waiting for Godot*, Umberto Eco (1968) published *La Struttura Assente*. While Eco (1962) had already achieved a certain level of fame in cultural circles with the publication of *Opera Aperta* that documented the linguistic techniques and the ideological role of the artistic vanguards, *La Struttura Assente* represented an even more important contribution as it foreshadowed the crisis of structuralism that had been, up to the point, a quasi-hegemonic paradigm in the social sciences and humanities. Eco (1968) was not simply challenging the structuralist approach or paradigm or advocating the virtues of semiotics. Several pages in the book are actually devoted to the crisis, the absence, and eventually the self-destruction of the 'structure.'

Since the publication of Claude Lévi-Strauss's (1955) structural study of the myth, structuralists had focused on what Lévi-Strauss (1955, 431) called bundles of relations. These bundles juxtapose each other, as Eco (1965) noted in his analysis of Ian Fleming's narrative structures, characters, and values. In the Bond novels, relations between characters, values, and situations (and the novels themselves) are structured by the repetition of a formula which is well known to the reader. The role that the characters played in the myth(s) analyzed by Lévi-Strauss or in the novels of the mass/pop culture were structurally determined and, hence, fixed. They had the same juxtaposition of characters, values, and situations that one can detect in the John Ford/John Wayne movies (Wright 1977; Coëgnarts and Kravanja 2014; Yacavone 2018).

Film

By the mid-1960s, the structurally induced fixity of the characters—so clear in the Western movies directed by John Ford—came to be replaced by a new set of more fluid, morally ambiguous, Western movie characters. Sergio Leone's famous

cess over an extended period of time." For us, the fluidity of *Waiting for Godot* results from the fact that the two main characters, Vladimir and Estragon, engage not only in a wide phenomenology of relationships but appears in the ongoing inversion, conversion, and subversion of roles. Shahid (2018, 113) claimed that "The silence vigorously discerns the creative hushed revelation of post-modern aspiration for the unsayable and unspoken to proclaim the dissolution of meanings and its subsequent persuasion of plurality and fluidity of reality." We believe that the fluid nature of the roles that the two characters embody in their ever-changing relation provides a better indication of the fluidity of reality that Shahid (2018), correctly, refers to. Our view is, in this regard, much closer to Tait (2019).

1966 film *The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly* is emblematic in this respect. The good is not really that good and is often rather bad; the bad, besides being bad, is also at different points in time good and ugly; and the ugly is not that ugly and is both good and bad depending on the situation. Every character can turn into another. Once the structural determinism of the characters' rigidity/fixity is removed, characters are free to manifest their fluid self.

Graphic Novels

Graphic novels also witnessed the emergence of more fluid characters. Hugo Pratt's *Corto Maltese* is a perfect case in point. Recent studies, to some extent correctly, have suggested that "the politically subversive element of *Corto Maltese* comic books is not so much its manifest attention to the ideals of solidarity and affection for various marginalised groups... but rather the Deleuzo-Guattarian endless flows of meanings" (Stankovic 2019, 8) or what semioticians, Stankovic (2019) included, call endless or unlimited semiosis. Whether and to what extent unlimited semiosis is politically subversive is a question that extends beyond the remit of the present study. But reducing the subversive nature of *Corto Maltese* simply to the 'endless flows of meanings' leads one to neglect the equally important anarchic tendencies that *Corto*, with his allergies to hierarchy and authority, displays in each of the 29 adventures penned by Hugo Pratt. We do not wish to dispute either *Corto Maltese's* subversive tendencies or the unlimited semiosis that characterizes each of his adventures. We nevertheless get the impression that both accounts of what is subversive in *Corto Maltese* stories fail to capture what is truly subversive in the *Corto Maltese* saga: *Corto Maltese* is a fluid character and the *Corto Maltese* stories document the tension—one is tempted to say the *conflict*—between structure (and the structurally induced rigidity of roles) and the fluid self. There is no structural determinism in the *Corto Maltese* stories because *Corto Maltese* is not simply the product of structural conditions. His character is fluid because he is open or ready to do anything and its opposite. The fluid nature of *Corto Maltese* emerges with some clarity in his relation with Rasputin. Like the relationship between Vladimir and Estragon, the relationship between *Corto* and Rasputin is not static, it is dynamic and ever changing. Acts of great friendship alternate with egregious betrayals, efforts to save one another are intermixed with efforts to kill one another. The fluidity of this character (*Corto Maltese*) is subversive because the structures (not only of meaning)—upon which political order rests—no longer hold.

Art

In the realm of visual and plastic art, the movement Fluxus also provided an indication of the fact that our societies were becoming increasingly fluid. The movement was called Fluxus because it was expected to produce a tide or a wave. So while, in the intention of its founder(s), Fluxus was not necessarily intended to

represent a venue for the expression of a fluid self, Fluxus ended up nonetheless as an agent of fluidity. Fluxus changed or attempted to change what could be considered as ‘art.’ It created works that were never ending and hence constantly in flux and finally took steps to destroy the (structural) separation between the artist and the spectator: spectators were allowed, invited, and even encouraged to contribute to art work. In 1961 Yoko Ono created—we cannot say painted because the artwork required more than just painting—an artwork entitled “Painting to Hammer a Nail” and visitors/viewers were allowed to hammer a nail in the canvas; thus breaking down the structural division between art producers and art consumers. Art had become more fluid. It had become a manifestation of the growing fluidity in society; art broke down the structural barriers between artists and spectators, thus securing and displaying the greater fluidity of their roles.

Popular Music

Pop and rock music were also instrumental in the removal of structures and barriers that had defined roles and given them rigidity. While white middle-class teenagers in the United Kingdom in the mid-1960s discovered and promoted the Delta Blues, Mick Jagger’s sensuality challenged gender roles, identities, and orientations (Norman 1984). In the years in which Inglehart (1971) was writing about the rise of post-material values and the importance of self-realization, David Bowie legitimized the notion of what has alternatively been defined as gender transgression (Perrott 2017), gender bending (Coates 1997), gender variability (Halberstam 2017), or gender fluidity (Bradley and Page 2017).

The Rise of the Fluid Self and Political Science

Theater, movies, comics, art, and pop music to some extent reflected and to some extent promoted the rise of the fluid self and, conversely, the obsolescence of structure. The above brief and oversimplified review of how popular culture promoted the notion of fluidity has some obvious, yet important, implications for the social sciences in general, and political science in particular. First, it reminds us that political phenomena can only be understood in relation to, or in the context of, the cultural settings in which they manifest themselves (Morgan 2013). Second, and more specifically, it shows that the structures that had regulated the functioning of political systems and our lives, with the rise of the fluid self and fluid societies were (at risk of) becoming, or were about to become, outdated.

This transformation has not gone undetected. Bauman (2010), in what became an instant classic, noted that modernity had reached a new stage; that we had experienced a transition from solid to liquid modernity; that structures had become anachronistic because of their inability to provide adequate answers to the questions that liquid modernity brings with itself. The liquid modernity that Bauman theorized is a modernity characterized by an ubiquitous uncertainty, the separation of power from politics, by obsessively ongoing modernizing trends and

efforts. There are obvious similarities between the liquidity that Bauman (2010) so forcefully brought to our attention and the notion of fluidity that we present here. Like Bauman, we also believe that the old structures and solutions are unable to cope with the challenges of the current phase of modernity. Like Bauman, we also wonder whether the phase that we are living in is a transitional phase between what was before and what has not yet arrived or whether what we are experiencing is instead the new phase. And we also agree that the current phase is characterized by growing uncertainty.

But our notion of fluidity differs in significant ways from Bauman's (2010) liquidity. For Bauman, liquidity was/is connected with the liquidation of old structures whose obsolescence had been brought about by proximate causes, such as deregulation, and ultimate causes such as the consumerist tendencies of contemporary societies. Along with the marketization of society that Polanyi (1943) had already identified with the great (and pernicious) transformation, such causes are responsible for all the changes that, for Bauman (2010), and earlier for Deleuze and Guattari (2008), are so problematic. For Bauman, the source of change and the causes of liquidity are structural—as in the Marxian/Marxist sense of the term—and operate at the macro level. In Bauman's (2010) account, there is no room for agency and whatever room is granted to culture is not more than what, for example in the Marxist tradition, has been granted to superstructural conditions—which, when they experience some kind of change, do so as a result of a change at the structural level.

Our approach is in many ways antithetic to Bauman's (2010). The obsolescence of structures and institutions (at the macro level) is primarily the result of the cultural changes associated with the emergence of a liquid self. Unlike Bauman, we attempt to provide a micro-level foundation for macro-level changes: structures change and/or become obsolete because they no longer manage to satisfy the demands, the needs, and the preferences of the individuals whose lives and activities they are supposed to structure and regulate. Society changes and structures become obsolete because individuals changed.

From the Rise of the Fluid Self to the Crisis of Party

For Maslow (1943), and later for Inglehart (1971), there is a sort of a hierarchy of needs, such that once lower-level needs are satisfied, the individual seeks to find satisfaction for higher-order needs. In explaining the rise of post-material values, Inglehart (1971) noted that it had occurred as a result of a betterment in the material conditions that Western societies experienced in the postwar era and increasingly in the 1960s. Whether the emergence of the fluid self would have occurred in the West if it had failed to achieve the kind of material wellbeing that it enjoyed in the 1960s (and more so in the following decades) or not is a question beyond the scope of the present analysis and for which we do not have a response.

But what is clear is that, with the rise of the fluid self—that is, with the emergence of a fluid individual with complex, possibly contradictory, or conflicting desires and with greater levels of instability and/or changeability that the rise of those complex conflicting desires had brought about—the old structures were no longer properly equipped to satisfy in an adequate manner the demands of these new individuals. The case of political parties was, and is, in this respect, rather emblematic.

Struck by the fact that the party systems of the 1960s were virtually identical to those of the 1920s in spite of all that happened in between, Lipset and Rokkan (1967) suggested that the stability of party systems was a byproduct of the stability of the cleavage structure. Lipset and Rokkan (1967) argued that, at several critical junctures, specific revolutions had occurred and that these revolutions had created politically divisive social cleavages. They likewise claimed that the format of the various party systems depended on and reflected the number of cleavages that were still salient when universal suffrage was granted and that the resemblance between the party systems of the 1920s and the 1960s was (or could be) explained by the fact that, in that timeframe, the cleavage structure had not changed. Writing in the 1960s, Lipset and Rokkan could not see or foresee how the emergence of the fluid self and the resulting transformation of Western societies in the 1960s would eventually transform the format of Western party systems. But, with the emergence of the fluid self, parties and party systems were set on their path toward greater change.

The appeal of parties to their prospective members declined. Katz and others (1992, 334) reported that the ratio between (party) Members and Voters (M/E) in the first election of the 1960s was 14.6 percent, by the last election in the 1980s the percentage had declined to 10.5 percent. Mair and van Biezen (2001) showed that, by the end of the 1990s, the M/E ratio had dropped to 4.99 percent, while van Biezen, Mair, and Poguntke (2012, 28) showed that the downward trend had continued in the following decade in such a way that, at the end of the first decade of the new millennium, the M/E ratio had reached a modest 4.65 percent.

The first reason why party membership had declined so significantly was that the historical parties had lost their appeal. In the first election of the 1960s, the British Labor Party and the Conservative Party won, respectively, 44.1 and 43.4 percent of the vote and combined for a total of 87.5 percent of the vote. In the last elections held in the 1980s, the Conservative Party and the Labor Party won, respectively, 42.2 and 30.8 percent of the British vote and combined for a total of 73 percent of the vote. In the 23 years from the 1964 to the 1987 elections, Britain's main parties had lost 14.5 percent of the valid votes cast.

Moving to the Netherlands, in the 1989 elections the Labor Party (PvdA) and the Christian Democratic Appeal (CDA) won, respectively, 31.91 and 35.32 percent of the vote for a combined 67.23 percent. The performance of the PvdA in the 1989 elections was a little bit better than it had been in the first election of the 1960s, but the performance of the CDA was dramatically improved. In the 1963

elections the Catholic People's Party, the Anti-Revolutionary Party, and the Christian Historical Union, which would join forces in 1977 to form the CDA, had won, respectively, 31.88, 8.72, and 8.58 percent of the vote. This means that the electoral performance of CDA and PvdA in 1989 was 9.96 percent lower than it had been 26 years earlier.

In the 1961-89 period the combined electoral returns of the two largest parties in Norway (Labor and Conservative) declined by 9.6 percent from 66.1 to 56.5 percent. In the 1962-88 period the share of the vote of the two largest electoral blocs (Left and Right) in France declined from 99.12 to 89.39.

In Germany there was virtually no change in the electoral strength of its two major parties, the Christian Democratic Union-Christian Social Union (CDU-CSU) and the Social Democratic Party (SPD) from 1961 to 1987. In 1961 they won a combined 81.5 percent of the vote and 26 years later they won a combined 81.2 percent of the vote.

In Italy the electoral strength of the two main parties, the Italian Communist Party (PCI) and the Christian Democracy (DC) decreased by a mere 2.7 percent from 1963 to 1987. The DC and the PCI, which had won a combined 63.6 percent of the vote in 1963, won 60.9 percent of the valid votes cast in 1987. But, in 1992, following the transformation of the PCI into the Democratic Party of the Left (PDS)—and the split of the Communist Refoundation Party or PRC and the beginning of the Tangentopoli scandal that put an end to the party system of the so-called First Republic—the DC and the PDS combined for a mere 45.8 percent of the vote—a decrease of 17.8 percent in 29 years.

This evidence appears to sustain the claim that traditional/historical parties, to a lesser or greater extent, had lost some appeal. And the loss of electoral appeal could make party membership less appealing. But the loss of appeal of the historical parties was not compensated by the growing popularity of the newly emerged parties. The emergence of the parties of the New Left, most notably the Greens, the rise of the parties of what has alternatively been called the new radical right or the new extreme right, and the appearance of new regionalist parties failed to boost party membership in Western European polities. Parties had lost their appeal to members and, conversely, members had lost some appeal to the political parties.

According to Katz (1990) the decline in the number of party members was due to the fact that the benefits of party membership had decreased while the costs had increased for both parties and prospective members. Due to the introduction of state subventions to party finance, parties no longer valued as much as they once did the revenue that party membership could provide. Likewise, in the absence of a widespread, highly ideologized membership base, they could no longer enjoy a greater freedom of movement. Members, Katz (1990, 151) showed, were no longer the most loyal group of voters for a party. For members, the benefits such as the ability to influence policy making had decreased while the costs of party membership were magnified by the fact that, with the emergence of new

forms of participation, prospective members had other and better opportunities to be politically active.

The analysis of the costs and benefits that parties may enjoy or incur because of party membership provides a compelling explanation for why party membership had become less attractive for political parties. Yet, the analysis of the costs and benefits that perspective members may enjoy or incur because of party membership, however convincing, is somewhat incomplete since it has largely neglected the fact that Western European voters and societies were significantly transformed by the rise of the fluid self. The rise of the fluid self created, if not a conflict, then at least a clear tension between structure and fluidity—and the decline in party membership levels and political parties' vanishing appeal were an inevitable byproduct of such tension.

The Rise of the Fluid Self and the Impossible Equilibrium between Supply and Demand

For many years since the publication of *An Economic Theory of Democracy* (Downs 1957), patterns of electoral competition and electoral choice came to be increasingly analyzed in spatial analytic terms. Downs (1957) famously suggested that, in a unidimensional political space, a voter would vote for the party closer to her position. The utility that a voter attached to a political party—and, subordinately, the decision to vote for that party—was a function of the proximity between the voter's and the party's position. The idea was quite simply that in political systems or in party systems there is a sort of super dimension, the left-right dimension, and voters' and parties' positions on that dimension provide an indication of all that voters and parties stand for. The preferences of voters and parties were, or at least were believed to be, consistent or homogeneous. Voters of the Left were (believed to) prefer a macroeconomic configuration characterized by lower unemployment and higher inflation to a macroeconomic configuration characterized by higher unemployment and lower inflation. Believing in or assuming a party's desire to provide proper representation to the demands and the preferences of their voters, Hibbs Jr. (1977) suggested that, once in government, parties of the Left would attempt to reduce unemployment while allowing inflation to rise, while parties of the Right would attempt to reduce inflation while tolerating higher levels of unemployment. The results of the static and the dynamic analysis presented by Hibbs Jr. showed that the Left reduced unemployment and the Right allowed unemployment to increase.

In the wake of the oil shocks, stagflation obviously constrained the ability of parties to manufacture macroeconomic policy. Instead, and for lack of a better word, they manipulated the government macroeconomic performance to maximize their electoral returns in the following election. By contrast, Sargent and Wallace (1976) suggested that, while parties may have wanted to manufac-

ture macroeconomic outcomes, their ability to do so was constrained, reduced, neutralized, and nullified by the fact that voters and firms may anticipate their efforts. Stagflation, the manipulation of macroeconomic conditions, and the anticipation of government efforts to manufacture macroeconomic outputs called into question the ability of parties to give proper representation to their voters' macroeconomic preferences. But the emergence of the fluid self and societies reduced even more their ability to match voter preferences. This is because, while parties—especially parties in government—could only translate a macroeconomic preference into a single macro-economic intervention, the preferences of the voters were fluid, unstable, ever changing, and often self-contradictory and inconsistent. They therefore could not possibly be satisfied by the policy and political offers of governments and parties.

The emergence of the fluid self is, or was, a silent revolution that even Inglehart had failed to fully appreciate. For Inglehart (1971), materialist demands were replaced by higher-order demands, but the new demands were as univocal and single-peaked as the old ones. In Inglehart's (1971) framework for analysis, someone holding materialist values would prefer employment and economic growth to environmental protection, whereas someone holding post-materialist values would prefer environmental protection to employment and economic growth. Inglehart thought that the silent revolution occurred because new values and preferences replaced the previous ones, that such preferences could be pitted against one another or be depicted in oppositional terms. However, with the rise of the fluid self, voters rejected such dichotomies and oppositions. The fluid voter did not want either growth/employment or environmental protection; the fluid voter wanted growth/employment *and* environmental protection. The 1998 Dutch Parliamentary Election Survey (see Aarts, van der Kolk, and Kamp 2006) offers some support for the claims we have advanced so far. Dutch voters were asked to indicate on a 10-point scale (1 = unimportant, 10 = very important) the importance of 15 issues. The mean response for the importance of unemployment (materialist demand) was 8.01, while the mean response for the importance of pollution (post-materialist concern) was 7.87.

What we have said so far has an obvious implication. Since policies inevitably reflect priorities and/or create trade-offs as well as winners and losers (Gourevitch 1986), no policy offer and no policy making could come close to satisfying the (inconsistent) demands of the new, fluid voter. Parties' inability to come up with policy offers that could satisfy voters' demands reduced their appeal in the eyes of the voters, was responsible for a weakening (if not vanishing) of the voters' allegiances, and created the conditions for party system change.

From Party Crisis to Party System Change

The literature has discussed several ways in which party system change could be conceptualized and measured. Party system change has been associat-

ed with party change, electoral change, change in the cleavage structure (Lispet and Rokkan 1967), change in the patterns of inter-party competition (Sartori 1976) and, more recently, in the related patterns of alternation in office, access to government, and government formulae (Mair 1996).

One of the most recent proposals to better capture the changeability of party systems is represented by the Index of Party System Fluidity (Nwokora and Pelizzo 2018; Pelizzo and Nwokora 2016, 2018). This index computes the fluidity of a party system by combining the frequency, the scope, and the magnitude of party system change. The frequency of a party system change is calculated by dividing the number of party system changes by the number of elections held in a given country. The scope of party system change is estimated by computing the distance between the two most different types of party systems that a country experiences in the course of its political history, while the variety of party system change tracks the number of party systems that the analyst can detect in a country's history. The index of party system fluidity is computed on the basis of the following formula:

$$\text{Fluidity} = \text{Frequency} * (\text{scope} * \text{variety})$$

As we have noted in previous work (see Nwokora and Pelizzo 2018; Pelizzo and Nwokora 2016, 2018; see also Katz *et al.* 1992; van Biezen, Mair, and Poguntke 2012), party system fluidity has been evident.

In Austria, the fluidity of the party system increased from 0.67 in the 1962 elections to 2.29 in 1990 and to 2.9 in 2017.

In Belgium, the fluidity of the party system increased from 0 (in the 1919, 1921, and 1925 elections) to 2.4 in 2019 with party system changes occurring in 1961, 1968, 1974, 1987, and 1991.

In France, the fluidity of the party system increased from 0 in the 1945 (and 1946) elections to 2.12 in the 2017 elections.

In Germany, the fluidity of the party system increased from 2.81 in 1961 to 5 in the 1990 election and dropped to 4.52 in the 2017 elections.

In the 32 elections held in Great Britain from 1906 to 2019, there were 11 party system changes and the computation of the index of volatility reveals that the fluidity of the British party system increased from 1 in 1906 to 2.06 in 2019. In the 53 years between the 1906 and the 1959 elections, the index of fluidity registered an increase of 0.5 while in the 60 years from 1959 to 2019 it recorded an increase of .56.

In Ireland, there was one party system change in the elections held in the 1938-52 period (the party system change occurred in the 1945 elections) while there were six party system changes in the 11 elections held in the 1959-2018 period.

In Italy, the highly fragmented and ideologically polarized party system lasted for 11 consecutive elections and was replaced by a moderate pluralist party

system in 1994. The fluidity of the Italian party system increased from 0 in the 1948 elections to .16 in the 1994 elections and in the 2018 election was of about .11.

In Portugal, in the 40 years since democracy was restored and from the first democratic elections, there were three party system changes (in 1986, 1991, and 2016) and the fluidity of the party system increased from 0 in the 1976 elections to 1.33 in the 1986 elections, to 2 in the 1991 and 2016 elections.

In Spain, in the aftermath of Franco's authoritarian rule, there were 14 elections, five party system changes, and a growing scope and variety of party systems which resulted in higher levels of fluidity. Fluidity in Spain increased from 0 in the 1976 elections to 0.4 in the 1993 elections, to .66 in the 1996 elections, and to 2.14 in the 2019 elections.

The upward trend of party system fluidity, that we have just documented for a selection of West European countries, can also be detected in other Western democracies. From 1961 to 2019, Australia held 23 elections and experienced eight party system changes (1972, 1980, 1983, 1987, 1996, 2001, 2007, and 2019). The level of volatility increased from 0 in 1961 to .66 in 1996 and to .69 in 2019.

From 1960 to 2017, New Zealand held 20 elections and experienced nine party system changes (1966, 1972, 1981, 1984, 1996, 2008, 2011, 2014, and 2017). The level of fluidity increased from 0 in 1960 to 1.45 in the 1990 elections to 2.4 in the 2017 elections.

From 1962 to 2015, Canada held 18 elections and experienced seven party system changes (1963, 1968, 1979, 2000, 2006, 2011, and 2015). The level of fluidity increased from 0 in 1962 to .54 in the 1993 elections, and to .77 in the 2015 elections.

Even in the otherwise fairly stable U.S. party system, one can detect a modest increase in the level of volatility. From 1960 to 2016 the United States held 15 elections and experienced one party system change (in 1988). Volatility increased from 0 in 1960 to .25 in 1988 and was .13 in the 2016 elections.

The evidence presented here sustains the claim that, to different extents, and at very different paces, fluidity has increased in Western European and other Western settings. By the end of the second decade of the new millennium, the level of fluidity was still reasonably low; that is, below one in a handful of countries (.11 in Italy, .13 in the United States, .56 in the UK, .69 in Australia, and .77 in Canada). It was considerably higher—that is, above 2—in the other settings (2.12 in France, 2.14 in Spain, 2.4 in Belgium and New Zealand, 2.9 in Austria, and 4.52 in Germany).

The emergence of the fluid self was, ultimately, responsible for higher levels of party system fluidity and for the unfreezing of party systems that, according to Lipset and Rokkan (1967) had been stable or frozen for several decades. One of the claims we advanced in these pages was that the rise of the fluid self was responsible for the vanishing appeal of political parties (as evidenced by a marked

decline in party membership levels) and that the vanishing appeal of parties was responsible for the increase in the levels of party-system volatility we have just documented. To test whether and to what extent our intuition was correct, we now correlate the levels of fluidity that West European party systems had reached in the new millennium with the decline in party membership levels from the early 1960s (Katz *et al.* 1992) to the first decade in the new millennium (van Biezen, Mair, and Poguntke 2012). By computing the difference in M/E levels from the first election held in 1960, for which Katz and others (1992) reported the data, to the levels from the elections held in the first decade of the new millennium (as reported by van Biezen, Mair, and Poguntke 2012), we find that M/E declined by .2 in Germany, by 2.28 in Belgium, by 7.12 in Italy, by 8.19 in Great Britain, and by 8.93 in Austria. By correlating these values with the levels of fluidity reported above, we find that the correlation yields a strong negative coefficient ($r = -.76$)—which suggests, *prima facie*, that the level of fluidity is inversely related to the magnitude of the decline in party membership figures. Visual inspection of the scatterplot in Figure 1 suggests instead that the relationship between party membership decline and party system fluidity is actually curvilinear—a finding that partially supports our claim that party membership decline and the fluidity of the party system go hand-in-hand.

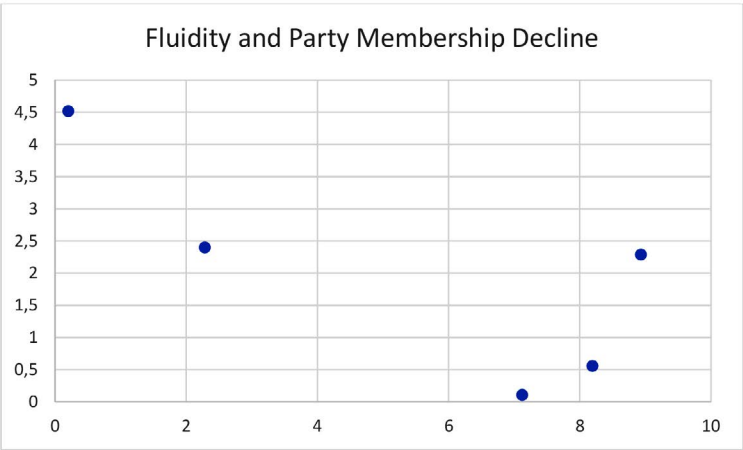


Figure 1. Fluidity and Party Membership Decline

Conclusions

The purpose of the present work was to explore whether and to what extent cultural change has been responsible for the increase in the level of fluidity of West European party systems. Our argument was that the rise of the fluid self reduced parties’ appeal (as evidenced by the decline in party-membership levels) and that political parties’ vanishing appeal had contributed to the destabilization of West European party systems. In the aggregate, the evidence presented here sustains our claim: 1960 witnessed the rise of the fluid self, parties lost voters

and members, and the fluidity of party systems increased in each of the polities included in our analysis.

When we move, however, from the analysis at highly aggregate levels—that is, from what happens at the continental level—to what happens at the country level, the evidence in support of our claim is not as straightforward. Votes for the two largest declined in some cases (e.g., in the United Kingdom), but not in others (e.g., Germany). Party-membership levels declined considerably in some cases (Austria, Italy, the United Kingdom) but not so in others (Germany, and, to a lesser extent, Belgium). Furthermore, the analysis of the relationship between party membership levels and the fluidity of the party system reveals that the two variables are in a sort of curvilinear relation. In other words, above certain levels of party membership decline, the relationship between party membership decline and fluidity is as hypothesized—higher levels of party membership decline go hand-in-hand with higher levels of fluidity of the party system. Below a certain level of party membership decline, the relationship between party membership decline and the fluidity of the party system is antithetical with the claims that we advanced earlier on.

Concretely, this means that, while in some settings the vanishing appeal of political parties had a destabilizing effect at the party-system level, in other settings (Germany) the party system achieved high levels of instability (or fluidity) in spite of the fairly stable parties' appeal to prospective members or remained fairly stable in spite of a sizeable decline in membership figures (Italy). Be that as it may, the findings presented here show that, while party system change (and stability) can also be affected by cultural factors, cultural factors or conditions are not the sole determinant of party system change—either by themselves or through the mediation of some intervening variables such as party membership. Other factors do matter. And a comprehensive review of party system change and instability should attempt to identify as comprehensively as possible what exactly such factors may consist of.

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