

PARTY ELITES IN DIVIDED SOCIETIES

Political parties in consociational democracy



Edited by
Kurt Richard Luther and Kris Deschouwer

Routledge/ECPR Studies in European Political Science

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Party Elites in Divided Societies

The stability of divided societies often depends on whether the elites of rival subcultures are willing and able to reject confrontation in favour of compromise. This was demonstrated in 1968 by Arend Lijphart's seminal work on 'consociational democracies', or societies characterized by both subcultural segmentation and elite accommodation. This volume offers a new comparative analysis of such societies thirty years on.

It combines Lijphart's original model of consociational democracy with the most recent literature on political parties to examine the pivotal role played by 'pillar' parties within and between divided societies. A comparative framework for the analysis of the parties' roles is advanced and applied in turn to the cases of Austria, Belgium, the Netherlands, Switzerland and Israel. Comparative chapters shed further light on the nature of the modern consociational democracy and the amount of change since Lijphart's 1968 study.

Party Elites in Divided Societies reveals not only changes but also the extent to which consociational democracy has been promoted or hindered by the behaviour of party elites. This authoritative work will be valued by anyone seeking a fuller understanding of the roles which political parties can and do play in divided societies.

Kurt Richard Luther lectures Politics at Keele University, UK. He has published widely on political parties, consociational democracy and federalism, especially in the German-speaking states.

Kris Deschouwer is Professor of Politics at the Vrije Universiteit Brussel. He has published on Belgian politics, parties and party systems and on consociational democracy. His current research areas are comparative federalism, regionalism and local parties.

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Party Elites in Divided Societies

Political Parties in Consociational
Democracy

**Kurt Richard Luther and
Kris Deschouwer**



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Series editor's preface

Older concepts in political science may (seem to) fade away, but (it appears) they never die. This may well be an apt description of the 'history' of consociationalism. Its intellectual life started in the 1960s, when Lijphart, Lehmbruch, Lorwin, Daalder, Steiner and others described the apparent deviant working of parliamentary democracy in a number of smaller West European nations: the Netherlands, Belgium, Austria, Switzerland and Luxembourg. These descriptions revealed that the contemporary dominant explanation of political stability could be contested. This dominant explanation was that a blend of sociopolitical prerequisites, such as a homogeneous political culture and pluralist modes of interest intermediation, would—if and when prevalent—promote stable government. If this were not the case democracies would be characterized by centrifugal or centripetal tendencies in which party competition and interest confrontation would hamper stable democracy. This Anglo-Saxon view of the democratic world was convincingly challenged by the above-mentioned authors by means of case-study analysis. Yet, a question that remained unsolved was whether or not these deviant cases were in the final analysis only temporary and geographical idiosyncrasies and thus (more or less) exceptions to the rule.

During the 1970s and 1980s one can observe a muted debate around this issue. In part, this was because it appeared obvious that the archetypal consociational democracies were going through dramatic social and political changes, which were making them either more 'depoliticized' and thereby causing them to converge to, for instance, the Scandinavian style of democratic performance or less stable, like Belgium. On the other hand, some academics were attempting to 'export' the consociational type of democracy as a third way to (re) democratize nations that were characterized by segmentation of the population, emerging sociocultural cleavages and a fragmented political elite. The proposition that consociationalism no longer existed and the notion that consociationalism was a genuine theoretical model that could describe, or even prescribe, other (emerging) polities, both proved to be inconclusive. Yet for many, consociationalism as a specific type of democracy appeared to have become obsolete, whilst as a 'model' of democracy, consociationalism seemed too limited.

Yet, in my view, these critical views and subsequent verdicts are not wholly correct. Admittedly, most original consociational democracies do not fit their erstwhile description explaining the existing stability (like Austria and the Netherlands, whereas Belgium went through a period of governmental instability and institutional reorganization). Only Switzerland appears to remain a consociational and thus a stable democracy throughout but as Hug and Sciarini make clear in this volume, this may well have to do with the comparatively different institutional framework of the Swiss Federation. However, it should be noticed that the vertical relations between civil society and political community did indeed alter over time; this is not so much the case with respect to the horizontal interactions within these political systems. Hence, I would argue that the main actors in this respect, i.e., political parties and their 'elites' appeared to have been able to maintain their pivotal role within the party system and coalition government. Although the practices and resources of parties changed, they nevertheless remained the central actors in a depillarized society in which the traditional cleavages are no longer political assets, nor are they that divisive any more. In summary—and this is also one of the many strong points of this book—political parties are still the key players that produce government stability. These central players have not only shown a remarkable capacity to adapt to new sociopolitical realities, but also demonstrated a high degree of versatility in making use of existing or new political institutions (see, for instance, the chapters on the Netherlands by Andeweg and on Belgium by Deschouwer). Hence, understanding change and perseverance of democratic stability in erstwhile consociational democracies means understanding how political parties can and will adapt to a changing environment. Furthermore, explaining this apparently peculiar process also implies the analysis of the multifarious working of political institutions. Institutions not only shape political behaviour but can also be instrumentalized for new types of political action by parties and related elites.

Exactly these observations regarding the working of parties and institutions in European democracies make this volume in the ECPR Studies in European Political Science an important contribution to the contemporary debates about the present role and functions of political parties and the democratic quality of the older parliamentary democracies in Western Europe. That debates on the one hand often revolves around the notion that we are witnessing the 'end of political parties', whilst on the other hand, it more often than not leads to proposals for institutional changes. In my view the contributions to this edited volume demonstrate that political parties are not only crucial actors in a process of institutional change and social adaptation, but also are powerful players that will remain dominant in most European democracies.

Professor Hans Keman
Series Editor
Weesp

Editors' preface

Political parties and consociational democracy are subjects which we have both been researching for some considerable time. Over the course of a number of discussions about our separate work on these matters, as they pertain to Austria and to Belgium, we found we shared a number of empirical and theoretical interests. Moreover, we also quickly established that we were both equally frustrated by the fact that the consociational and party literatures had not yet been brought together and applied in a truly comparative perspective. Rather than continuing merely to bemoan that situation, we decided to collaborate to try to fill that gap in the existing literature.

We used as our point of departure ideas contained in a 1992 special issue of the journal *West European Politics* (vol. 15, no. 1) devoted to whether Austria was 'Still a Case of Consociationalism'. It was co-edited by one of us, who also contributed a lengthy article structured around an analytical framework specifically developed to assess change in the role which political parties perform both within and between the traditionally fragmented subcultures of Austrian consociational democracy during and since the period of 'classic consociationalism'. In 1995, we used that framework to organize an ECPR workshop on 'Consociationalism, Parties and Party Systems', which we co-directed at the Institut d'études politiques de Bordeaux. We had an intellectually stimulating week, made all the more enjoyable by IEP's proximity to some of Europe's best vineyards! A central theme of our discussions was the extent to which an approach developed to analyse the Austrian case could serve as the basis of a comparative study of the role of political parties in a range of consociational democracies. By the end of the week it was clear to us that it could, and a number of our fellow participants resolved to join us in a project that would seek to apply it both via case studies of individual consociational democracies and in thematic contributions.

The outcome of our endeavour is contained in this volume. Though it has taken longer than originally planned for the book to appear, we are very pleased that its publication will now coincide with the thirtieth anniversary of the birth of consociational theory. The analytical framework underpinning this volume constitutes a novel combination of Lijphart's original model of consociational democracy and the insights of some of the most recent literature on political parties.

We hope that it has not only enabled us to provide a detailed assessment of how many of the archetypal consociational democracies have developed during recent decades, but has also enhanced our understanding of the pivotal role which political parties can play in divided societies.

We have a number of people whom we would like to thank for helping bring this project to a successful conclusion. First, we would like to express our appreciation to the ECPR for approving our workshop proposal, as well as to all the workshop participants for making the week in Bordeaux not only academically very interesting, but also a pleasant experience. Second, we should like to thank all those participants who agreed to contribute to this volume for their collaboration and patience. Since not all the workshop participants were able to join the book project, however, we had to find additional colleagues willing and able to come on board. Our third round of thanks therefore go to Rudy Andeweg, Simon Hug and Pascal Sciarini, who faithfully applied a framework discussed at a workshop they had not been able to attend. Fourth, once the initial draft manuscript had been finalized, we benefited from the encouragement and helpful suggestions of Arend Lijphart, Peter Mair, Jürg Steiner, Rosemary O’Kane and John Barry, to all of whom we are very grateful. Fifth, in May 1998, we were both invited by Harvard University’s Center for European Studies to a fascinating conference on ‘Consociationalism Thirty Years On’. We would like to thank the organizers for their invitation and the conference participants for their useful comments. Sixth, when it came to the production of the final manuscript, we were fortunate in being able to rely upon the diligent assistance of Iain Ogilvie who helped with both editorial and substantive matters.

Finally, we would like to thank our respective partners, Janet and Ruth, for putting up with so much talk of pillar parties, intra-subcultural linkage and overarching elite co-operation, and to dedicate this volume to them and to our children.

Kurt Richard Luther, Keele University
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Party abbreviations

AdI	(Swiss) Alliance of Independents (1936–)
AGALEV	(Flemish) Greens (1982–)
AMADA	All Power to the Workers (Belgium) (Trotskyist splinter from PCB/KPB) (1928/1981–)
AN	National Alliance for People and Homeland (Swiss right-wing populists) (1961–90, then DS)
ARP	(Dutch) Anti-Revolutionary Party (Protestant) (1879–1980, then CDA)
BP	(Dutch) Farmers Party (poujadist) (1958–)
BSP/PSB	Belgian Socialist Party (until 1978)
BWP/POB	Belgian Workers' Party (until 1945)
CD	(Dutch) Centre Democrats (extreme right) (1980–)
CDA	(Dutch) Christian Democratic Appeal (1980–)
CHU	(Dutch) Christian Historical Union (Protestant) (1908–80, then CDA)
CPN	Communist Party of the Netherlands (1909/1917–80, then GL)
CSP	(Swiss) Christian-social Party (national umbrella from 1976 for cantonal parties; failed and relaunched 1997)
CVP	(Flemish) Christian People's Party (1968–)
CVP/PSC	(Belgian) Christian People's Party/Christian Social Party (until 1968)
D'66	(Dutch) Democrats'66 (liberal-progressive) (1966–)
DACH	The Other Switzerland (green-alternative electoral alliance) (1991–)
Dém	(Swiss) Democrats (c. 1890–1971)
DS	Swiss Democrats (right-wing populist) (AN until 1990)
DS'70	(Dutch) Democratic Socialists '70 (short-lived 1970 PvdA splinter party)
ECOLO	(Francophone) Greens (1980–)
EDU	(Swiss) Federal Democratic Union (extreme right Protestant) (1975–)
EVP	(Dutch) Evangelical People's Party (progressive Protestant) (1981–89, then GL)

FDF	Democratic Front of Francophones (Brussels Francophone regionalists) (1965–)
FDP	(see PRO)
FN	(Belgian) National Front (1985–)
FPÖ	Freedom Party of Austria (1956–)
FPS	Swiss Freedom Party (populist; Car Party from 1985) (1994–)
G	(Austrian) Greens—The Green Alternative (ca. 1987–)
GBS	Green Federation of Switzerland (1983–86)
GL	(Dutch) Green Left (1989—from PSP, PPR and CPN)
GPV	(Dutch) Reformed Political League (orthodox Protestant) (1948–)
KNP	(Dutch) Catholic National Party (1948–)
KP	(Flemish) Communist Party (1982–)
KPÖ	Communist Party of Austria
KVP	(Dutch) Catholic People’s Party (1946–80, then CDA)
LEGA	League of the Tessins (1991–)
LiF	(Austrian) Liberal Forum (split from FPÖ) (1993–)
LP/PL	(Belgian) Liberal Party (until 1961)
NRP	(Israeli) National Religious Party
ÖVP	Austrian People’s Party (1945–)
PC	(Francophone) Communist Party (1982–)
PCB/KPB	Belgian Communist Party (until 1982)
PDC	(Swiss) Christian-democratic Party (1912–)
PdT	(Swiss) Party of Labour (communist) (1921–)
PEP	(Swiss) Protestant People’s Party (1919–)
PES	(Swiss) Green Party (1986–)
PL/LP	<i>see</i> LP/PL
PLP	(Francophone) Liberal Party (1971–76)
PLS	Swiss Liberal Party (old liberal) (1913–)
POCH	Progressive Organisations of Switzerland (new left) (1971–93)
PPR	(Dutch) Political Party of Radicals (1968–90; then GL)
PRD	(Swiss) Radical-democratic Party (1894–)
PRL	(Francophone) Party of Liberal Reform (1979–)
PRLW	Party for Wallonian Reform and Liberty (1976–79)
PS	(Francophone) Socialist Party (1978–)
PSA	Socialist-autonomous Party (canton of Tessin)
PSC	(Francophone) Social Christian Party (1968–)
PSP	(Dutch) Pacifist Socialist Party (1957–90, then GL)
PSS	Swiss Social-democratic Party (1888–)

PSU	(Swiss) Unified Socialist Party (canton of Tessin)
PvdA	(Dutch) Party of Labour (socialdemocratic) (1946–)
PVV	(Flemish) Party of Freedom and Progress (1971–92)
PVV/PLP	(Belgian) Party for Freedom and Progress (1961–71)
RAD-UDRT	(Belgian) Democratic Union for the Respect of Work (anti-tax) (1978–c.91)
Rép	(Swiss) Republican Movement (split from AN) (1971–89)
RKPN	Roman Catholic Party of the Netherlands (1972–)
RPF	(Dutch) Reformed Political Federation (orthodox Protestant) (1975–)
RW	Walloon Rally (Walloon regionalists) (1965–ca.84)
SGP	(Dutch) Political Reformed Party (orthodox Protestant) (1918–)
SP	(Dutch) Socialist Party (radical left) (1972–)
SP	(Flemish) Socialist Party (1978–)
SPÖ	Socialist (since 1991 Social Democratic) Party of Austria (1889–)
UDB	Democratic Union of Belgians (CVP/PSC splinter) (1944–49)
UDC	Swiss People's Party (becoming populist) (Agrarian Party until 1971)
UDRT	<i>see</i> RAD-UDRT
VB	<i>(Vlaams Blok)</i> Flemish Blok (right-wing populist) (1978–)
VdU	(Austrian) League of Independents (1949–55)
VLD	Flemish Liberals and Democrats (PVV until 1992)
VU	<i>(Volksunie)</i> People's Union (Flemish nationalist) (1954–)
VVD	(Dutch) People's Party for Freedom and Democracy (conservative-liberal) (1948–)

Part I

Introduction: the significance of party elites

1

A framework for the comparative analysis of political parties and party systems in consociational democracy

Kurt Richard Luther

Consociational and party theory

The theory of consociational democracy was developed some thirty years ago, principally as a result of the simultaneous and yet initially largely independent work of Lijphart (1968a, 1968b, 1969, 1975, 1977, 1981), Daalder (1971, 1974), Lorwin (1971), Lehmbruch (1967a, 1967b, 1968) and Steiner (1969a, 1969b, 1971, 1974). At its simplest, consociational theory seeks to explain the existence of political stability in certain countries with deeply fragmented political cultures. It comprises a set of propositions concerning in the main two aspects of such political systems: their political sociology and the nature of their political elites' behaviour. In respect of the first, consociational theory emphasises sociopolitical segmentation, i.e. the existence of vertically encapsulated and mutually hostile political subcultures. For its part, elite political behaviour is seen as characterised above all by co-operation and accommodation, by means of which a metaphorical bridge (or 'arch') is built over the gulf separating the political subcultures (or 'pillars') and thus the political system's stability is ensured. Consociational theory undeniably constitutes one of the most influential post-war contributions to the comparative study of West European politics. It generated considerable academic debate, not least regarding its own theoretical status and explanatory power (e.g. Barry 1975a, 1975b; Daalder 1974; Halpern 1987; Kieve 1981; Lustick 1979; Pappalardo 1981; Van Schendelen 1985; Steiner 1981a and 1981b). In addition, it spawned numerous studies of one or more of the West European countries originally considered archetypal consociational democracies, namely, Austria, Belgium, the Netherlands, Luxembourg and Switzerland. The inclusion of Switzerland in the universe of consociational democracy though has long been disputed (e.g. Henderson 1981, Steiner and Obler 1977). [Chapter 6](#) will obviously address this debate.

However, the theoretical status of the consociational literature is not my primary concern here. Instead, I shall regard it as offering a model with strong heuristic power. My prime goal is to demonstrate that one very important set of political actors has so far been underemphasised in the model: political parties. I would like to make this role explicit, and to show that by looking in a systematic manner at the

role of political parties in consociational democracies, one can produce greater insight into the functioning and into the strategies and procedures of political decision-making of this type of democracy. I shall return to aspects of the theoretical status of the consociational literature later. For now, it will suffice to note that the problem of causality is especially important, and cannot be avoided when looking at the role of parties in consociational democracies. Did the (party) elites introduce accommodating devices and subcultural autonomy as a result of societal pressures (the mobilising power of the subcultures), or is the extent of subcultural encapsulation of society at least in some measure the result of attempts by (party) elites to organise society in a manner that maximises their potential to exercise political control over it?¹

Such considerations have led me to decide to raise an important terminological issue at this point. The literature has employed two concepts to refer to the societal divisions of consociational democracies: 'segmentation' and 'pillarization'. We propose to differentiate clearly between them throughout this volume. 'Segmentation' will be taken to refer to the visible and permanent cleavage lines in society, while 'pillarization' will be used to denote rival organisational networks that share the identity of their respective subcultures. This distinction helps highlight two important issues: the sequence of segmentation and pillarization and the nature of what causal relationship, if any, exists between them. Did pillarization precede the adoption of accommodative techniques and can the former thus be regarded as constituting a threat to political stability which consociationalism was designed to overcome? Alternatively, were the societies of countries that became consociational democracies originally merely segmented, and was pillarization a consequence of consociational devices, such as proportionality and granting autonomy to the segments? This is one of the central questions of this book and is picked up in several chapters.

If one compares early case studies of consociationalism in action (e.g. Dunn 1970, 1972; Engelmann and Schwarz 1974a and 1974b; Houska 1985; Huyse 1971; Lijphart 1968b; Powell 1970; Steiner and Obler 1977; Stiefbold 1974b) with more recent accounts (e.g. Daalder 1987a; Huyse 1987; Deschouwer 1994a; Luther and Müller 1992a; Van Schendelen 1984), it appears that since the 1960s there has in each country been a decline in the political salience of structures and practices traditionally associated with consociationalism and a trend towards depillarization, instability and protest. Thus many studies have found a reduction in the affective orientation towards the subcultures, an atrophying of the organisational networks supporting the latter and a concomitant decrease in their size and impermeability. Combined with a decline in the frequency of subject orientations within the countries' political cultures, these changes have contributed to challenging the autonomy of the subcultural elites. Previously unquestioned consociational practices have in part come under severe pressure, as can be seen from the success of political movements and parties that challenge the manner in which political power has traditionally been exercised in these systems. The literature on these

countries has therefore shifted its focus from explaining stability to explaining change, or resistance, to reform.

At the time consociational theory was developed, the academic literature on West European parties and party systems was also mainly concerned to explain stability and continuity (e.g. Lipset and Rokkan 1967a). Since the mid 1970s, however, there has been a marked shift of emphasis towards the analysis of change in many different aspects of parties and party systems. A generation of political scientists has produced an immense amount of literature on topics such as the internal articulation of parties (mass parties' transformation into catch-all parties); the evolution of ideologies and the breakthrough of 'new values'; the subsequent growth and development of new parties (e.g. 'new polities', 'regionalists', 'right-wing populists'); relations between parties and pressure groups; pressure groups' assumption of functions previously performed by political parties (see especially the literature on neo-corporatism); changing campaign styles (e.g. professionalisation, the importance of personalities, the use of the new electronic media); relations between parties, parliaments and governments; patterns of competition; the increasing reliance on state resources; volatility and increasing fractionalisation; as well as dealignment and realignment. A useful recent summary of the state of the art in party research is provided by the volume edited by LeDuc, Niemi and Norris (1996), which summarises the work of this generation of scholars.

Amongst the most important of recent research into West European parties has been the work of the research group led by Richard Katz and Peter Mair (Katz and Mair 1992, 1994, 1995, 1996), which has devoted its attention not only to party organisational change, but also to changes in parties' relationship to the state. The insights of such recent party theorising have of course already been applied to Belgium (e.g. Deschouwer 1992, 1994a), the Netherlands (e.g. Koole 1994) and Austria (e.g. Müller 1994). They also underpin a new research project on Switzerland. The findings of these various studies demonstrate that each of the above-mentioned changes also obviously pertain—albeit in varying degrees—to consociational democracies. Moreover, it may well be that the Katz and Mair (1995) notion of a 'cartel party' or a 'cartel party system' is especially relevant to consociational polities. It is interesting to note that the concept of 'cartel democracy' was put forward by Arend Lijphart (1975:201–3; 1984a; see also Koole, 1996). He used the Dutch word '*kartel*' to refer to a depoliticised democracy, that is to say, a democracy still characterised by elite accommodation, despite now having a more homogeneous political culture. The link between the idea of a 'cartel party' and Lijphart's 'cartel democracy' is very obvious, in the sense that both are highlighting parties' reduced societal linkage, as well as their use of state resources and state services to defend or promote their status as central political actors.

Whilst the literature on consociationalism and parties has recently been focusing on change, I was struck by the fact that there has to date been no attempt on the part of those concerned with the comparative study of political parties to undertake a systematic examination of the operation of parties and party systems in

consociational politics. Nor has consociational theory itself ever paid much attention to what I believe to be the central role within consociational democracies of political parties and party systems. To be sure, parties are mentioned in Lijphart's early work, where at one stage he even argues in respect of the four Dutch blocs that 'The political parties play the most significant role in tying the elites together...' and are thus 'the central and most influential organs' (Lijphart 1968b: 67). However, neither here, nor in his later writings (where he moves away from the notion of consociational democracy to the wider concept of 'consensus democracy'), does Lijphart undertake a systematic examination of the role of political parties. As discussed in the following chapter, only one of the indicators of 'consensus democracy' which Lijphart advances in that later work is directly concerned with political parties: the effective number of parties (Lijphart 1984a:116-23). Nor is the role of political parties in consociational democracy the focus of subsequent empirical studies. Exceptions include Dunn (1970) and Gerlich (1987), but even here the link is implicit, rather than explicit, or the focus is not comparative. In other words, consociational theory and party theory have not yet been brought together in a truly comparative perspective. It was not done during the period when the academic literature on political parties was concerned with 'stability', nor has it been the subject of the more recent phase, which has focused on 'change'.

Yet as I argued some time ago (Luther 1992 and 1997b), a detailed consideration of, above all, Lijphart's (early and original) theory of consociational democracy allows one to deduce the crucial role which political parties might be expected to perform in respect of both the political sociology and the overarching elite behaviour of consociational democracy. First, it is reasonable to suppose that the prime responsibility for mobilising the rival subcultures, aggregating subcultural interests and recruiting the subcultural political elite would rest in modern party democracies with political parties. Second, it is above all between the party elites of the various subcultures that the overarching accommodation would be likely to occur. Moreover, that accommodation would of necessity have to embrace not only the policy-making, but also the policy-implementation process, for unless the subcultural political elites were capable of ensuring that their subcultural organisations 'deliver' the side of the bargain which had been struck at the elite level, accommodative policy-making would be meaningless. Accordingly, in the highly segmented world of consociational politics, the party-political writ of one or other of the main subcultures would be assumed to run not only in the key socioeconomic interest groups, but also within many of the formal policy-implementation structures. In sum, it is my contention that political parties are likely to be the key actors that provide the two-way linking mechanism between the mass and the elite of the encapsulated subcultures, as well as the personnel and policy-implementation structures that enable binding elite accommodation to take place.

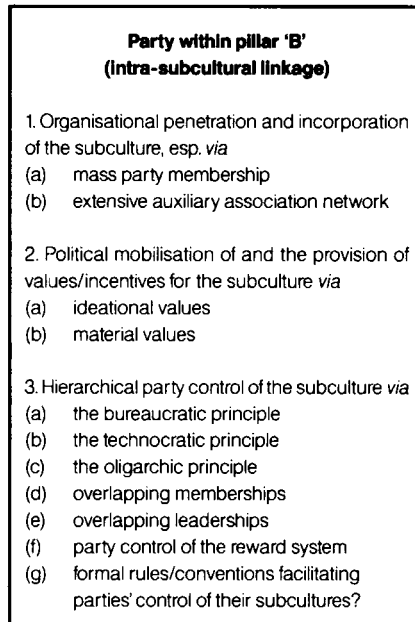
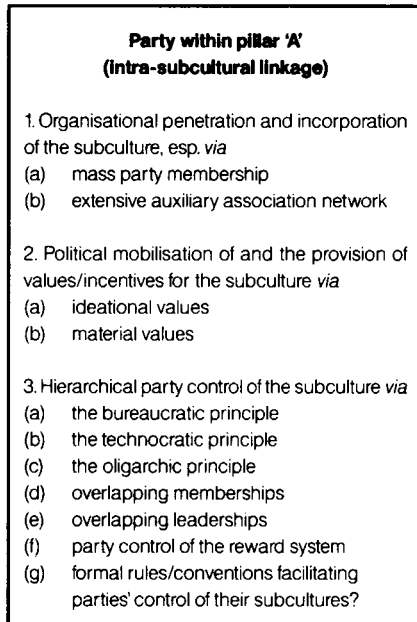
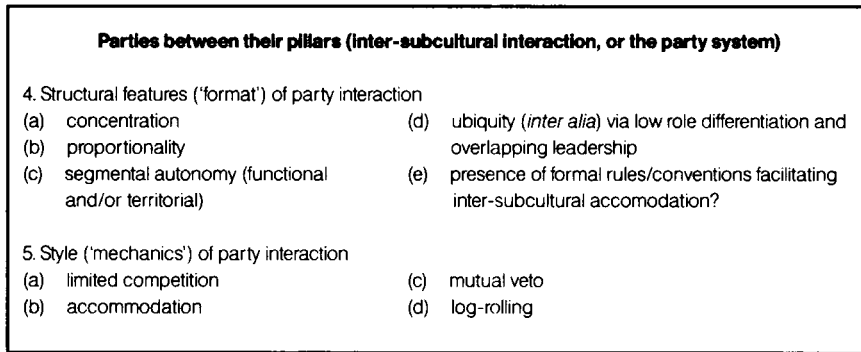


Figure 1.1 Pillar parties and party systems in consociational democracy: a framework for comparative analysis

Proposed framework for comparative analysis

My reading of consociational theory led me to deduce a number of roles which political parties might be expected to perform in consociational democracies and these will now be discussed in detail. They are identified in [Figure 1.1](#), which presents those roles in a manner that reflects the architectural metaphor used in Lijphart's work. It thus identifies not only the three main roles which political parties might be assumed to exercise within their respective 'pillars', but also the structure and style of the inter-subcultural elite accommodation that provides the 'arch' which bridges the divide between the subcultures and thus consolidates the

consociational political structure. [Figure 1.1](#) therefore represents the framework I have developed for the analysis in this volume of parties and party systems in Austria, Belgium, the Netherlands and Switzerland both during what might be termed their period of ‘classic consociationalism’ (Luther and Müller 1992b:10) and since.

Before proceeding to elucidate that framework and the assumptions underpinning it, it is worth emphasising that the roles I have identified are essentially those one would expect of ‘pillar’ parties, i.e. those that could be considered to be ‘playing the consociational game’². There will of course always be political parties that are ‘outsiders’ and as such cannot or do not wish to play that game. However, that should not detract from the utility of examining the party politics of consociational democracies in this way. For one, the extent to which the key party actors in a country deemed consociational do operate in the predicted manner will be a useful indicator of whether that country does merit, at least at that point in time, the designation consociational. Furthermore, to the extent that a consociational polity experiences fundamental changes such as, for example, depillarization or a departure from accommodative interaction, one would expect even erstwhile consociational actors gradually to cease to exercise the roles I have posited. Indeed, such changes in party behaviour may in themselves constitute a good indicator that, notwithstanding possible continuity in formal institutional features (see [Chapter 2](#)), there has in reality been a move away from consociational practice. Alternatively, consociational practices might continue despite the gradual atrophying of the pillarized subcultures upon which the consociational actors are based. In short, I believe this framework focuses upon the role of the crucial political actors in consociational systems and as such will make it easier to identify how and with what success they seek to maintain their position *vis-à-vis* their subculture and within the party system.

Parties within their segments: intra-subcultural linkage

Consociational theory sets considerable store upon segmentation and upon the capacity of subcultural elites to ensure—in large measure through the technique of pillarization—a level of segmental cohesion sufficient to support overarching elite accommodation. A central focus of any analysis of the role of political parties in consociational systems must thus be upon the structures and techniques of parties’ intra-subcultural linkages, which can be expected to perform three main roles. The first relates to the *organisational penetration*, or *incorporation* of their subculture (1). Consociational polities might be expected to include *political parties with exceptionally high levels of organisational density* (1a). If the parties provide one of the main organisational bases of subcultural political penetration, then *their extensive networks of auxiliary associations* (1b) would provide the other, though it might in some cases be difficult to distinguish between party and auxiliary association. The latter are likely to vary *inter alia* in terms of their closeness to their

subcultural party and the (in)formality of their membership arrangements, but also in respect of the kinds of services (e.g. economic representation, social events and leisure activities) which they provide to those members and in the scope of their activities, some of which might well constitute (quasi-)statist functions, especially in the area of policy implementation. The systemic significance of the networks of auxiliary associations would lie in the fact that their size and scope could facilitate the subcultural incorporation of an even larger number of individuals than suggested by the (albeit often already very high) party membership figures alone. They would thus assist the subcultural parties in their efforts at vertical subcultural integration and are a manifestation of the subcultures' capacity to incorporate not only the politically committed, but also persons whose political identification with the subculture would of itself not normally be strong enough to entice them to participate in purely party activities.

The single-country studies in this volume will thus compare and contrast the role which political parties have played (in their own right and in conjunction with their auxiliary associations) in the organisational penetration and incorporation of their respective subcultures. They will also chart changes in the nature and degree of incorporation and penetration and identify the success and durability of the different types of structures that have been established. In other words, there will be an attempt to identify the location, timing, causes, and extent of possible depillarization.

Political mobilisation and values/incentives (2): Whilst consociational systems would be expected to exhibit high levels of political participation, the latter is likely often to be of an essentially symbolic, or acclamatory nature. The high premium which such systems place upon the quantitative, as opposed to the qualitative aspects of participation has much to do with the fact that the bargaining strength of the elites is likely to be greatly affected by the perception, on the part of opposing subculture, of the size of their subculture and the extent to which they are able to mobilise it politically. It would thus hardly be surprising if the mobilisational efforts of subcultural elites were often intended to elicit from their respective subcultural masses political behaviour that did not challenge those elites' control of their subculture, but were instead mainly confined to ritual demonstrations of subcultural loyalty. A key question is what incentives political parties employ in order to mobilise their subcultures. Though they clearly overlap, it may be useful to consider their mobilisational efforts by reference to two broad types of values that have a specific mobilising effect.

The ideational values (2a): which political parties utilise in their attempts at subcultural mobilisation can be couched either in positive terms, (i.e. as an appeal to ostensibly shared subcultural norms), or negatively (i.e. by pointing to the threat allegedly posed by a rival subculture). A further potentially important consideration is the degree of ideological cohesion within different subcultures, since one might *prima facie* assume that the greater the ideological dissent within a subculture, the more difficult it would be for political parties to mobilise on the basis of an appeal to

ideological values. It can in fact be argued (Deschouwer 1990) that ideological values are intrinsically problematic as a long-term basis for subcultural mobilisation and that instrumental incentives are likely to prove more effective. One might in this respect distinguish between an action-orientated ideology which might have been an important incentive at the original phase of mobilisation and of consociationalism (purposive incentives—Clark and Wilson, 1961), and affective values of social belonging (solidary incentives), which can become stronger over time and which can provide a more solid, and long-term basis for partisanship. Indeed, once rival elites have established long-lasting co-operative behaviour, the efficacy and legitimacy of purely ideological, or purposive values is likely to decline significantly, since the highly conflictual nature of much action-orientated ideological language might be expected to reduce their scope for entering into the compromises which such accommodation requires. Moreover, in the more homogenised political culture which might ultimately develop, purely ideological values will be even less legitimate and less stabilising than solidary incentives, that is to say, incentives based on affective values of social belonging.

Material or instrumental values (2b): The mobilisational capacity of ideational values is of course likely to be closely related to individuals' expectations of the impact of policies associated with those values upon their material well-being. But material values also play a direct role in parties' attempts to attract and reward voters and members. Probable targets of such material values are likely to be identifiable subcultural client groups and prominent amongst the vehicles used to deliver such values are social and economic policy. Further targets would be individuals, whose political support could be rewarded by direct political intervention on their behalf. Though it has to date not been the subject of detailed empirical and comparative investigation, there is a widespread perception amongst observers of consociational politics that both policy-based patronage and individual patronage have indeed played a key role in maintaining subcultural loyalty (De Winter and Janssens 1988; Müller 1989). Moreover, individual patronage has arguably been a major factor in the mobilisation strategies of the main subcultural parties. Their scope for exercising such patronage has been predicated in the main upon the utilisation of the principles of proportionality and of segmental autonomy (see points 4 (b) and (c) below).

An important question is the extent to which these allocational principles continue to enjoy popular acceptance. Individual services offered to citizens are likely to undermine severely the collective perspective of politics. When popular acceptance declines, one would expect a decline in the efficacy of this mobilisation technique and possibly also a popular protest against what would then be likely to be perceived as political corruption. Disputes over political patronage could conceivably generate a populist backlash against the political class as a whole. In turn, the generation of such a 'horizontal' conflict could not only threaten the vertical subcultural encapsulation upon which subcultural loyalty is based, but could lead to a crisis of legitimacy in the very structures and techniques of

consociationalism. Consociational democracies have indeed witnessed the rise and success of parties protesting against both the vertical encapsulation and the clientelist logic of consociationalism. Examples include the Freedom Party of Austria (*Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs*, or FPÖ); the Belgian *Volksunie*, Greens and *Vlaams Blok* and the Democrats' 66 (D'66) in the Netherlands.

Hierarchical party control of the subculture (3): As has been argued above, the organisational plurality of a subculture could promote the latter's penetration and incorporation. However, the multiplicity of potentially competing power centres which this implies could also pose a threat to subcultural political cohesion and thereby militate against the maintenance of a level of hierarchical control sufficient to enable the subculture to appear as a single and decisive political actor externally. How and with what success consociational political parties seek on the one hand to maximise subcultural penetration and on the other to assert hierarchical party control over their subcultures will vary between subcultures and over time. Amongst the many techniques available to promote their capacity to meet the twin challenges of cohesion and control and thus to keep at bay latent centrifugal pressures within the subculture is: *the bureaucratic principle* (3a). This implies *inter alia* the predominance of seniority and bureaucratic loyalty as the criteria governing the operation of—and advancement decisions within—all major subcultural organisations, including the political parties themselves.³ *The technocratic principle* (3b) is apt to figure prominently, since consociational political parties and their allied auxiliary associations are likely to be closely involved not only in the key socioeconomic interest groups, but also in the formal policy-making and policy-implementation processes. Moreover, as has been argued above, the maintenance of a high ideological temperature is likely to be destabilising in the long term and thus one might expect a shift in the political discourse of political activists towards the articulation of policy options in more legal and technocratic terms. Indeed, Lijphart (1968b:141) himself pointed to the existence in the Dutch case of 'a high degree of pragmatism and moderation at the top' of the subculture. *The oligarchic principle* (3c) can be regarded as both a cause and a consequence of the deferential, subject political culture commonly associated with consociational democracies (Lijphart 1968b:144–62). Organisational oligarchy is also encouraged by structural factors, such as the aforementioned dependence of party and auxiliary association functionaries upon the bureaucratic hierarchies of their respective organisations. Together, such attitudinal and structural factors could result in the disciplined nature of subcultural organisations, their tendency for centralised decision making and the pre-eminence within them of what Panebianco (1988:30–2) terms 'horizontal', as opposed to 'vertical' power games. Two other important techniques for maintaining cohesion within a given subculture are *overlapping memberships* (3d) and *overlapping leaderships* (3e)—referred to by Lijphart (1968b:60–7) as 'interlocking directorates'. The combined effect of subcultural encapsulation and membership of multiple subcultural organisations would be to ensure both partisan attachment and, by means of cross-cutting loyalties to subcultural organisations, a

dampening of intra-subcultural conflict. Overlapping membership and leadership should thus clearly help reinforce subcultural cohesion.

However, our concern is not with subcultural cohesion alone, but with the question of the role which political parties exercise within the subcultures of consociational systems. Whether political primacy within the subculture is exercised by the subcultural party, or by one of the other subcultural organisations is likely to be greatly influenced by two related factors. The first concerns the organisation of party membership. Where this is direct, subcultural loyalty might be expected to be orientated primarily to the party. Conversely, where party membership is indirect, the loyalty of many members of the parties' constituent associations may remain directed mainly to the latter, rather than to the party as a whole, with the result that the party might continue to be beset by problems of factionalism. Second, the relative political strength of the various subcultural organisations could be expected to be critically influenced by the extent to which *the party controls the subcultural reward structure* (3f). One obvious factor would be the extent to which state finance and the allocation of state resources (and patronage opportunities) are channelled through the political party, as opposed to through other subcultural organisations. Finally, it is important to identify *any formal rules or conventions which facilitate parties' control of their subcultures* (3g). As I have argued above, the external bargaining capacity of the subcultures will be significantly influenced by the extent to which they are perceived externally as cohesive blocks, the members and constituent organisations of which can be mobilised not only to articulate political demands, but also to 'deliver' their part of any agreements struck with their political rivals. The political elites therefore have considerable incentives to institute formal rules or conventions which facilitate parties' control over their individual subcultures. A good example of such a formal rule would be the legal obligation placed upon Austrian farmers, employers and employees to be members of the corporatist socioeconomic interest groups which for their part are constituted by the auxiliary associations of the Austrian *Lager*. Another example is the Belgians' quasi-obligation to join one or other of the health insurance organisations linked with the major subcultural parties.

Parties between the segments: inter-subcultural interaction (or the party system)

Inasmuch as the inter-subcultural interaction within consociational states is undertaken primarily by political parties, to investigate overarching elite accommodation is to investigate these states' party systems. It may be helpful to organise such an investigation in accordance with the distinction advanced by Sartori (1976:128f) between the 'format', or 'structure' of a party system and its pattern of interactions, or 'mechanics'.

An investigation of *the 'format', or structure of consociational party systems* (4) would be likely to show that in their 'classic' phase they were typically characterised

by *concentration* (4a). That is to say that between them, the consociational parties would, by virtue of their control of a high proportion of votes, parliamentary seats, and governmental portfolios constitute a *de facto* political cartel. They define the rules of the game, they produce and reproduce the 'language of politics' (Mair 1997: 15). Possible indicators of consociational parties' control of the party system include the extent of their dominance of electoral outcomes, but above all the proportion of relevant party actors in what Dahl (1966:338–40) refers to as the 'site of decisive encounters'. Obvious sites are parliament and government, but one should not neglect the possibility that other sites (such as, for example, the neo-corporatist arena) could also be important. Of particular relevance as an indicator of a decline in concentration would be the proportion of party actors who are not only excluded from, but fundamentally opposed to, the accommodative practices of consociational politics. Moreover, even if concentration ends or declines in one arena, this does not necessarily mean the end of the consociational concentration of the party system. One should always investigate here which arenas are the sites of *decisive* encounters.

Proportionality (4b) is the principle according to which the political parties which form the consociational cartel would typically agree to distribute amongst themselves and their subcultural allies the majority of public-sector posts and other state-controlled resources according to a ratio (albeit not necessarily an unchanging one) which reflects the relative weight of the subcultures. Though this is an important structural feature of inter-subcultural interaction in consociational democracies, it is often difficult to quantify, especially since details of the distribution of posts and resources are not made public. It will therefore probably be necessary to assess (changes to) the scope of the proportionality principle in an *ad hoc* manner by reference to, for example, symbolic or high-visibility appointments or funding decisions.

The principle of segmental autonomy (4c) can be regarded as a form of oligopolistic collusion whereby individual members of the cartel are permitted to monopolise selective areas of the political market (Huyse 1987). It thus constitutes a variation of the proportionality principle, in that it establishes functional or territorial areas in which it is agreed between the rival subcultural party elites that one or other of the segments will exercise substantial autonomy. At the risk of oversimplification, it means that the subcultural elites will agree to permit—on a reciprocal basis—if not an exclusive subcultural party fiefdom, then at least (near) monopoly control by one or other segment of certain localities, organisations, or activities. Inasmuch as it denotes self-regulation by the subcultures of their own sphere of the socioeconomic system, segmental autonomy is of course the *raison d'être* of neo-corporatism. It could be used to justify subcultural involvement in not only the initiation, formulation and making of policy, but also in its implementation. Indicators of segmental autonomy might usefully also include subcultural hegemony amongst the staff of specific ministries or public-sector organisations and within organisations that constitute key actors in neo-corporatist decision making. Examples would

include policy-implementation structures, including state bureaucracies, but also 'para-state' institutions such as those typically linked to subcultural auxiliary associations and or the subculture's client group.

One likely consequence of the successful application of proportionality and segmental autonomy is *the ubiquity of political parties* (4d), i.e. the penetration of the party system into areas of economic and social life elsewhere normally beyond the realm of party politics. This feature of the party system has significant similarities with the system of 'partitocracy', as associated above all with Italy, though also applied to political systems such as Belgium (Deschouwer *et al.* 1996).

Prominent among the practices which foster such party-political penetration of the socioeconomic realm are of course overlapping leadership and (partly as a consequence) a relatively low degree of role differentiation. Assessments of (changes to) the scope of the party system would of course be difficult and are again likely to have to be based on *ad hoc* criteria, or expert judgements. However, it is also worth considering the extent to which there have been changes in the 'site of decisive encounters' (Dahl 1966:338–40) of the party system. One reason could be a general public policy trend for the state's role to be reduced. Since some of the main auxiliary associations of subcultural parties function not only as interest groups, but also as agents of the state, the rolling back of the state implies a narrowing scope for neo-corporatist and party intervention and a concomitant reduction in segmental autonomy. European Union membership might also force decision-makers to reduce the amount of money available for redistribution, to stop policies that distort the market, or to prevent the funding of projects which are aimed at favouring the subcultural parties' own clienteles. Another reason could be a decline in the legitimacy, or (perceived) efficiency of one or more sites. An example would be a decline in the efficacy or political acceptance of the 'corporate channel' as opposed to the 'electoral channel' (Heisler and Kvavik 1970).

Finally, it is worth investigating whether the party systems contain *formal rules, or conventions that effectively promote inter-subcultural accommodation* (4e). Put another way, have the consociational parties institutionalised procedures designed to maintain their cartel's control over the party system, or that have at least helped attenuate the impact of changes to the structure of party cartellisation/competition? One technique which cartel parties might use to this end is to use the state as 'an institutionalised structure of support sustaining insiders while excluding outsiders' (Katz and Mair 1995:16). That would typically involve the selective allocation of state subventions and privileged access to state-regulated channels of communication. In addition, parties might also have instituted rules such as qualified majority voting for a wider range of issues than might be expected to pertain in other systems.

The second aspect of the parties' role in inter-subcultural accommodation which can be deduced from consociational theory concerns the '*style, or mechanics of party interaction*' (5). The first feature one would expect is *limited competition* (5a). Where political systems are characterised by encapsulated and mutually hostile subcultures, it is likely that subcultural interaction in the electoral arena will be

characterised by highly emotional propaganda battles. However, competition between consociational parties would be limited in the main to the mobilisation of their own subcultures. Only where the electorate contained a significant proportion of voters not allied to a segment (perhaps because depillarization had resulted in a decline in partisan attachment, i.e. the ‘consociational concentration’ of the party system has declined), would the electoral arena become more competitive. One might expect this to be expressed first in a change in the direction of competition, with consociational parties starting to extend their electoral appeal initially to floating voters and then possibly to the voters of rival subcultures also. Second, elections would then become more competitive, in the sense that volatility would be expected to increase and political parties become more vulnerable, as the predictability of electoral outcomes declines. Furthermore, whilst an electorally largely unthreatened consociational cartel might well be conducive to a party system in which there was no fundamental challenge to the manner in which politics was conducted, heightened competition might well result in the introduction, as a significant dimension of competition, of conflict over the structures and techniques of consociational political accommodation.

A quintessential characteristic of the style of party inter-subcultural interaction in a consociational system would of course be *accommodation* (5b). In terms of the decision-making process, this would typically be expressed in the practice of seeking to include party elites from all the subcultures in key policy decisions, though it is worth noting that such inclusion would not necessarily require all the actors to be in government. Accommodation could take place in extra-governmental arenas such as, for example, the neo-corporatist system, or in other extra-constitutional negotiating fora. One would expect the formal outcomes of the decision-making process to be ratified by all the parties concerned.

Amongst the perhaps most distinctive techniques of accommodation one would expect parties to utilise in consociational states would thus be *mutual veto* (5c). In practice, this usually means an explicit, or implicit requirement for unanimity in decision making. In the absence of information on the process of policy formulation, a useful indicator of the accommodative style of inter-subcultural interaction could be the frequency with which the consociational parties engage in (near) unanimous parliamentary ratification of important decisions. A second characteristic technique of consociational decision making is the practice of *log-rolling* (5d)—referred to in Austria as *Junktim*—in two substantively unconnected areas of policy and can be regarded as a technique for resolving, by the reciprocal sacrifice of ‘holy cows’, stalemates brought about by the rigid application of the mutual veto principle.

Structure and focus of this volume

To summarise, this volume proposes to utilise the above framework in order to examine the role of political parties within and between the subcultures of, in the main, the four West European states that have conventionally been deemed

consociational (i.e. Austria, Belgium, the Netherlands and Switzerland).⁴ This will enable us to ascertain on the one hand the extent to which political parties in these countries really did operate in the manner which I have argued that consociational theory would lead one to expect. On the other hand, it will also allow us to assess how and why their roles might subsequently have changed. We are particularly interested in investigating the relationship between specific consociational structures and techniques on the one hand and party and party system change on the other. In this way, we would hope to cast some light on a number of issues. One pertains to the role which political parties have exercised in the initiation, maintenance and reform of consociational politics. The second concerns whether the in part seemingly profound changes recently witnessed in the parties and party systems of consociational states are to be seen as symptomatic of party failure, or, conversely, as indicative of the parties' success in overcoming the problems posed by the existence of vertically encapsulated and mutually hostile subcultures.

In this chapter, I have outlined how and why applying some of the insights of the party literature to Lijphart's original consociational theory might help extend our understanding of the dynamics of consociational democracy. In the next chapter of this volume, Paul Pennings extends that argument by reference to the concept of 'consensus democracy' advanced in Lijphart's later work. Pennings demonstrates that the predominantly institutional indicators proposed in Lijphart's more recent work do not allow one to measure change in the behaviour of political actors, and of political parties in particular. Instead, Pennings proposes the use of non-institutional indicators such as policy distance between parties, or electoral volatility. He shows how the use of such additional indicators not only provides a fuller picture of what is happening, but also helps one identify and capture change. Inasmuch as Pennings strongly defends the inclusion of forms of party competition and co-operation into the analysis of consociational democracy, he supports this volume's plea for a party-orientated approach.

In *Part II*, the comparative framework outlined in this chapter is applied to five country studies. The first deals with the 'classic' consociational democracies. My own analysis of the Austrian case documents the exceptionally high degree of organisational penetration and political mobilisation of their respective subcultures achieved during the period of 'classic' consociationalism by the pillar parties and their allied auxiliary associations. It then shows how the parties' decision in the 1970s and 1980s to switch from a strategy of intensifying encapsulation to maximising their 'catchment' exacerbated declining partisanship and promoted a further contraction in the number of 'believers'. Meanwhile, the loyalty of 'careerists' was undermined by their reduced dependence upon the subcultural organisations for the material incentives that had hitherto attracted and retained their support. Moving on to the role of the parties in inter-subcultural accommodation, I argue that for much of the post-war period, the structure and mechanics of the interaction of the Austrian parties playing the 'consociational game' did indeed reflect that predicted by the model advanced above. Moreover, in recent years, party interaction

in the electoral and parliamentary arenas has undergone significant change but as yet, the government arena has largely remained the preserve of the pillar parties, as have the neo-corporatist and bureaucratic arenas. Accordingly, examining the Austrian case from the prism offered by the framework advanced in this volume highlights not only how the pillar parties were able to exercise their predicted role in respect of the political sociology and elite behaviour typical of consociational democracy but also the extent to which, notwithstanding a decline in ‘*Lager mentality*’, many of the organisational and behavioural features of Austrian consociationalism have demonstrated a capacity to persist.

In his study of the Belgian case ([Chapter 4](#)), Kris Deschouwer illustrates the important role which Belgium’s parties continue to play in the daily lives of the members of their respective subcultures. He shows that the degree of subcultural pillarization remains very high, but the degree of centrality of parties within their pillars varies between the pillars and between the two major linguistic regions of the country. The position in respect of the parties’ role in inter-subcultural interaction is very different, however. For one, accommodative, consociational techniques are not permanent, but merely episodic elements that can be explained by reference to crisis management. The earliest such crisis related to the 1918 introduction of universal male suffrage. The latest has revolved around the linguistic conflict, which from the 1960s became the dominant cleavage. It was ‘pacified’ in a typically consociational manner which involved reforming the state into a markedly federal system which has itself many in-built consociational devices. This reform of the state and especially the bifurcation of the party system into what are to all intents and purposes separate, uni-lingual party systems, allowed the old parties not only to sustain, but even to reinforce pillarization and clientelism.

Rudy Andeweg ([Chapter 5](#)) explores the role of the political parties in the Netherlands, and concludes that they were and are fairly weak. Except for the PvdA, there does not seem to be a very high level of party control over the pillars. As far as decision making is concerned, the Netherlands can hardly be considered to be ‘partitocratic’. Yet exactly this weakness of the parties in general and of each individual party—the inability to create or even approach a majority—still obliges them to stick to the logic of consociational decision making in the governmental arena.

Pascal Sciarini and Simon Hug ([Chapter 6](#)) look at the ‘odd fellow’: Switzerland. They assert that of the four classic cases, Switzerland probably fits the consociational model the least. Especially problematic is the lack of subcultural segmentation and the consequent absence of pillarization. Swiss parties are thus not the ‘leaders’ of subcultural segments. Nor can the territorial units of the federation and the associated cantonal subcultures really be regarded as functional equivalents. Moving on from the dimension of political sociology to that of elite behaviour, Sciarini and Hug nonetheless provide a considerable amount of evidence to back up their conclusion that the logic of Swiss decision making is similar to that underpinning the logic of the classic consociational ‘game’. Moreover, they show

that it is a game in which the Swiss parties do play a central role, which can be characterised by the words concentration, accommodation and proportionality.

Moving on from the 'classic' cases of West European consociational democracy, Reuven Hazan ([Chapter 7](#)) offers an interesting and slightly counter-intuitive analysis of Israel, which he considers to have been a case of consociationalism. He describes the political sociology of Israel, the behaviour of its elites and the Israeli party system. These aspects of the country and their mutual relations have been changing, in the sense that one can say that Israel has recently completed a transition from consociational democracy via consensus democracy to majoritarian democracy. By analysing a country belonging to what he calls (referring to Lijphart) the political-cultural extension of Europe, and by doing this in a truly comparative way, he offers not only interesting insights into the operation of Israeli politics, but also into the structures and techniques of consociationalism and to the role of parties in this type of democracy.

[Part III](#) of this volume commences with Mónica Méndez-Lago's analysis of the 'vertical' aspect of consociationalism in Belgium, the Netherlands and Austria. She first discusses the nature of segmentation and pillarization and then proceeds to explore the effect of pillarization on electoral stability. That involves her in looking at a number of possible electoral indicators to measure this stability and the decline of pillarization. Amongst other things, this leads her to analyse indicators such as the total share of the vote achieved by pillar parties, and to develop and discuss the concept of 'pillar volatility' as an indicator of the decline of pillarization. By contrast, Steven Wolinetz ([Chapter 9](#)) is concerned with the 'horizontal' aspect of consociational democracy, namely, changes in the pattern of inter-subcultural party interaction. He explores whether patterns of party system change in consociational democracies differ from those in other West European countries. His analysis leads him to a negative conclusion. He asserts that there is not a single pattern of change, common to consociational systems, and that differences among consociational systems are very striking. He thus concludes that changes in the party systems of consociational democracies are best analysed as part of broader processes of change in liberal democracies.

The final chapter, returns to the above comparative framework and seeks to arrive at an overall assessment of its utility. It not only reviews the findings of the individual chapters, but also introduces a consideration of additional comparative dimensions, directed especially at the kind of changes in parties and party systems associated with the decline, or disappearance, of consociational democracy. Although it agrees with Wolinetz that the four consociational democracies exhibit not only similarities, but also differences in the development of their party systems, it uses the framework underpinning this book to demonstrate the existence of a number of elements which these developments have in common, not least in terms of their implications for the distinctive architecture of consociational democracy. It thus appears that the above framework does indeed help to capture the dynamics of change and continuity in consociational systems and to explain the similarities and

differences in the timing and extent of change in the four archetypal consociational countries. Accordingly, I believe that this volume succeeds in demonstrating that a party approach to the analysis of consociational democracy does enhance our analytic and comparative understanding of these countries.

Notes

- 1 I am of course not suggesting that, in deeply divided societies, subcultural autonomy is nothing more than a device which the elites use for their own selfish purposes. However, since subcultural autonomy enhances the elites' potential to exercise political power, there is clearly a *prima facie* incentive for them to ensure that such devices are strengthened.
- 2 The individual country chapters of this volume will discuss which parties are deemed to have been playing the 'consociational game'. However, it may at this point be useful to identify those in the four West European states we shall examine: Austria: SPÖ and ÖVP; Belgium: CVP/PSC, BSP/PSB (SP/PS), PVV/ PLP (VLD/PRL); the Netherlands: KVP, CHU, ARP (now all merged into the CDA), PvdA and VVD; and Switzerland: PRD, PDG, UDC and PSS. (For their full names, see the list of abbreviations on pages xix-xx.)
- 3 It is of course not being suggested that merit (as defined, for example, by efficiency) plays no role whatsoever.
- 4 Though Luxembourg is a fifth West European country to which the consociational model has been applied, it will not be considered in this volume, not least because of the paucity of scholarly literature on this small country. For a recent article on the Luxembourg case, see Govaret (1997).

2

The utility of party and institutional indicators of change in consociational democracies¹

Paul Pennings

Introduction

The bulk of this volume is concerned with the degree and nature of change in the four West European countries which have figured prominently in the literature on consociationalism. Using as his point of departure Lijphart's early theory (Lijphart 1968a, 1968b and 1969), Luther (1992, 1997b and [Chapter 1](#) of this volume) has deduced the role which parties and party systems might be expected to play in consociational democracies. These roles are then examined in five single-country studies and three comparative chapters. Luther explicitly rules out Lijphart's later work, in which he extended his focus to embrace a much wider range of countries and of political phenomena and developed a distinction between 'majoritarian' and 'consensus' democracies (Lijphart 1984a:1-36 and 207-22).

However, the aim of this chapter is to examine specifically the latest manifestation of Lijphart's theory and to seek to establish the extent to which it is useful in determining the degree and nature of political change. Such an examination offers a useful addition to this volume, since the precise operationalisation of the concept of consensus democracy which Lijphart offers should facilitate the analysis of change. The main research question of this chapter is whether Lijphart's operationalisation of consensus democracy can be improved by introducing indicators that are related to party behaviour.

Consensus democracy is the term that Lijphart uses for democracies in which power-sharing is the main institutional feature of long-term politics (Lijphart 1984a). Lijphart insists on distinguishing between the newer term 'consensus democracy' and the older term 'consociationalism'. The latter term focuses on the societal structure that allegedly necessitates coalescent behaviour for effective political decision-making and that can be explained as a form of sociological functionalism.² Consensus democracy, on the other hand, focuses on the political institutions *per se* which facilitate effective decision-making under adversarial societal conditions and can be viewed as a form of institutional engineering (Keman 1996:212). In his suggestions as to how to operationalise consensus democracy, Lijphart is more explicit than he was when outlining the nature of consociationalism.

He argues that the latter refers to four general mechanisms and characteristics of consensus building: grand coalitions, segmental autonomy, proportionality and minority veto (Lijphart 1984a:xiiiif). The term consensus democracy, on the other hand, is operationalised by Lijphart by reference to eight defining criteria. In this chapter, the term ‘consociationalism’ will be used to refer to Austria, Belgium, the Netherlands and Switzerland. These countries are a subset of the wider group of non-majoritarian countries that are characterised by at least some degree of power-sharing and which in this chapter will, in keeping with Lijphart’s terminology, be referred to as ‘consensus democracies’.

The main concern of this chapter is to determine the degree and nature of change in consociational democracies. In order to be able to do so, several indicators of change have to be operationalised. The literature suggests two major categories of indicators. The first consists of the actor-orientated indicators, especially those related to the behaviour, ideology and electoral support of political parties. The second refers to institutional indicators, being the formal and informal rules that shape the behaviour of parties and other political actors. Examples include electoral systems and rules for coalition building. The goal is thus to analyse institutional change in relation to the behaviour of actors.

In the first part of this chapter, I will explore the usefulness of the institutional indicators of change, using Lijphart’s seminal work on consensus democracy as my point of departure (Lijphart 1984a). Lijphart proposed a whole range of indicators of the degree and nature of consensus building in politics. By measuring these indicators at more than one point in time we get an impression of institutional change, that is to say, change in constitutional design and change in institutional practices. But Lijphart’s indicators appear to be only partly suited to the measurement of change. What is missing most are indicators of changing party behaviour.

The second part of the chapter therefore moves on to consider party-related indicators. These include party system features such as centre space occupation (i.e. the proportional count of times that parties are in the centre space of the party system), and parties’ positions on the left-right scale. This will allow us to identify the extent to which party behaviour in consociational democracies is changing. The answer to this question is important for an assessment of whether consociationalism remains viable. For the issue at hand is whether consociationalism continues to characterise the political decision-making process, or whether accommodation is an outdated phenomenon that is less and less supported by party behaviour. The claim which Lijphart makes in several publications, namely, that consociationalism is more vibrant than ever in terms of problem-solving (Lijphart 1985) and democratic performance (Lijphart 1994), needs to be tested by looking at actual party behaviour. If Lijphart is correct, we should be able to find evidence indicating that parties in general still exhibit the expected accommodating behaviour. However, as empirical evidence has shown thus far, a more differentiated picture of both

instances of maintenance and abandonment of accommodating practices is more likely (Luther 1992; Keman 1996).

By looking at both party-related and institutional indicators, we will try to obtain a comprehensive picture of the degree and nature of change in consociationalism. Both types of indicators of change appear to be complementary and not exclusive. The inclusion of both and the study of the interaction between them seems to be paramount in future research on changing consociational systems.

Institutional indicators of consociationalism

Lijphart uses a set of eight variables to distinguish between two main types of parliamentary democracy in the post-1945 period: majoritarian and consensus democracies (Lijphart 1984a:212–13; 1989a:146–47). One of the most typical characteristics of consensus democracies is power-sharing in the context of a plural society, where no single majority party can impose its will on other groups. In majoritarian systems, on the other hand, the winner takes all. Lijphart's variables are highly institutional and do not vary significantly from election to election. Below, I shall discuss Lijphart's operationalisation of the eight variables he uses to characterise consensus democracy, and thus also the consociational subset, and will add some empirical improvements and adjustments in order to enable these variables to be scored for two periods: before and after 1970. This year has been chosen because it divides the post-war period into halves and because there are empirical grounds to expect the degree of polarisation and consensus building to differ in these periods. By comparing these time periods, it will be possible to examine the degree and nature of institutional change. (For the Israeli case, see [Chapter 7](#).)

1

Executive dominance

This indicator is operationalised by the average durability of cabinets (Lijphart 1984a: [Table 5.3](#)). According to Lijphart, stable systems are characterised by relatively long cabinet duration. Since Lijphart identifies consociationalism with the accommodating behaviour of political elites, he assumes that the durability of their cabinets will be high. On the other hand, since accommodating strategies are not always effective, consociationalism is also potentially unstable. Everything depends on the effectiveness of the coalescent strategies. The overall conclusion about the durability of cabinets in consociational democracies is therefore not univocal.³ The assumed cabinet stability of consociational systems is only partially confirmed by the empirical data (Budge and Keman 1990; Laver and Schofield 1990). [Table 2.1](#) demonstrates that most consociational democracies are characterised by relatively durable cabinets, with Belgium as the most notable exception. The relatively high average score of the consociational democracies is mainly caused by the exceptional

score of Switzerland. However, cabinet duration in Switzerland is of course hardly comparable to the other countries, since its stability is more or less institutionalised, as the governing committee is elected by parliament but cannot be dismissed during the parliamentary period (see [Chapter 6](#)). In general, therefore, consociational democracies are characterised by less durable cabinets than majoritarian countries.

2

Minimal winning cabinets

This indicator refers to the percentage of time that the country in question was governed by minimal winning coalitions (based on power concentration) instead of oversized cabinets (indicating the extent of power sharing).⁴ According to Lijphart's reasoning, consociational systems should be characterised by an above-average propensity for oversized cabinets, that is to say, cabinets comprising more parties than strictly necessary for a parliamentary majority. In more competitive systems, parties tend to exclude all 'unnecessary' partners and form minimal winning coalitions. A high percentage of minimal winning coalitions indicates the absence of one favourable condition for consociationalism. [Table 2.1](#) partly supports this assumption, as Austria, the Netherlands and Switzerland all have low MWC-scores, compared to majoritarian countries. At the same time, the table reveals that there are significant differences between the consociational democracies. Belgium does not fit into the pattern that is assumed by Lijphart, as it has a relatively high percentage of MWC-cabinets. Moreover, it should be noted that these findings are based on the assumption of the primacy of the governmental arena. But there are also other sites where power-sharing takes place, such as the neo-corporatist arena. These sites should also be included in the analysis in order to be able to make a generalisable statement about the degree, nature and change in power-sharing (see [Chapters 1](#) and [10](#)).

3

Effective number of parties

According to Lijphart, the high plurality of consociational democracies means they will be characterised by a high number of effective parties. This number is computed with the help of the Laakso-Taagepera-index (Lijphart 1984a:120 and his [Table 8.1](#)), which takes 1 and divides it by the sum of all squared percentages of parliamentary seats. [Table 2.1](#) in this chapter shows that most consociational democracies do indeed have a relatively high number of parties, but again there is an exception, namely, Austria. The high number of effective parties implies that the formation of coalitions is a standard practice in consociational democracies, as no party is able to reach a majority position. However, this emphasis on the (effective) number of parties is rather one-sided. It neglects the crucial role of pivotal parties in many

Table 2.1 The average scores of Lijphart's institutional indicators (1945–90.) (N=22)

Country/category	Duration	MWC	NOP	Issues	Disprop	Centristn.	Unicam.	Const.flex.
Austria	870.2	22.2	2.3	2.3	1.9	77.5	3	0
Belgium	487.3	66.7	4.7	3.3	2.3	95.3	1	1
Netherlands	791	41.2	4.6	1.8	1.1	98.3	1	1
Switzerland	1460	8.9	5.1	1.9	1.6	59.7	0	1
Consociational ^a	902.1	34.8	4.2	2.3	1.7	82.7	1.3	0.8
Consensus ^b	635.0	26.5	4.1	2.7	3.0	83.4	2.2	1.1
Majoritarian ^c	801.0	74.8	2.7	2.0	4.5	78.7	2.2	0.8
Total	718.1	50.7	3.4	2.4	3.7	80.9	2.2	1.0

Legends: duration=average cabinet duration in days, as defined by Woldendorp *et al.* (1993:4–6); the beginning of a government encompasses (with a few restrictions) any administration that is formed after an election; the ending of a government coincides with the installation of a new government; MWC=the percentage of MWC-cabinets; NOP=the average number of effective parties; Issues=the average number of issues (Lane and Ersson 1994); Disprop=the degree of disproportionality; Centristn.=the degree of centralised government; Unicam.=Unicameralism indicator (1=congruent and symmetrical; 3=congruent and asymmetrical); Const.flex. constitutional flexibility.

Source: own calculations on the basis of Woldendorp, Keman & Budge (1993) and Mackie & Rose (1991).

Notes:

a Consociational democracies are Austria, Belgium, the Netherlands and Switzerland.

b Consensus democracies are the non-majoritarian countries: Israel, Denmark, Finland, France IV, Iceland, Switzerland, Belgium, the Netherlands, Italy, France V, Austria.

c Majoritarian countries are New Zealand, UK, Ireland, Luxembourg, Sweden, Norway, US, Canada, Germany, Australia, Japan.

party systems. In many cases, it is not the (effective) number of parties as such that invokes accommodating practices, but the presence and size of a centre party and its dominance of government formation (Keman 1994). Moreover, consociationalism does not necessarily imply a high number of effective parties. More important is the relationship between the number of dominant cleavages and the number of parties.

4

Number of issue-dimensions

According to Lijphart's theory, a high number of issue-dimensions indicates a high level of consociationalism, as societal cleavages in plural societies are apt to produce many corresponding issue-dimensions (see his [Table 8.1](#)). Lijphart assumes that two-party systems are characterised by 1 or 1.5 issue-dimensions (a half means a medium-salience dimension), whereas most of the multi-party systems are characterised by two or more dimensions. The correlation between the number of issue-dimensions and the number of effective parties is 0.7. This strong relationship is not so obvious as Lijphart implicitly assumes. Lijphart's number of issue dimensions is not based on empirical research, but on rough estimates that derive from various (inter-) subjective sources. In [Table 2.1](#), I opt for the operationalisation of the number of issue-dimensions that is provided by Lane and Ersson, primarily because it is based on more recent data and because the data are divided into pre-1970 and post-1970 scores (Lane and Ersson 1994: 291). These figures show that only Belgium has more issue dimensions than the bulk of the other OECD countries. The other consociational democracies do not exceed the overall average of 2.4.

5

Plurality vs. proportional representation

This indicator refers to the type of electoral system and Lijphart operationalises it by the average deviation between the vote and seat shares of the two largest parties in each election (electoral disproportionality or 'wasted votes'). Lijphart assumes (following Rokkan) that PR-systems favour multi-partism and accommodating practices, whereas the majoritarian systems are mostly characterised by first-past-the-post systems. The assumption is confirmed by [Table 2.1](#), which shows that the four consociational democracies have relatively low scores on electoral disproportionality (variable 'disprop').

6

Centralised versus decentralised government

This indicator is operationalised by reference to the central government's share of total central and non-central receipts of the general government (see: [Table 10.2](#) in Lijphart's *Democracies*). Lijphart presumes that a high degree of centralisation

corresponds with a high degree of majoritarianism and a low degree of consociationalism. This assumption is not supported by [Table 2.1](#), the data for which are provided by the revenue statistics of the OECD after 1973. Belgium and the Netherlands are highly centralised systems. Austria is only slightly below the overall average. Switzerland is the only true decentralised system. These findings strongly suggest that decentralisation is not a necessary condition for consociationalism and therefore contradicts one assumption of Lijphart's theory.

7

Unicameralism vs. bicameralism

This refers to the number of chambers in parliament. In Lijphart's view, unicameralism and asymmetrical bicameralism correspond to a high degree of majoritarianism. The underlying reasoning is that in majoritarian systems there is only one ruling democratic party and all the opposition parties are left without any real influence on the policy-formation process. In consociational democracies, on the other hand, minorities are not structurally overruled by the governing majority. Lijphart argues that bicameralism is a form of power-sharing that is characteristic for consociationalism and that unicameralism places legislative power into one hand. The dichotomy of unicameralism versus bicameralism is thus seen as a measure of 'monism' versus 'dualism'. Lijphart's assumptions are quite theoretical. In practice, however, the existence of a unicameral, or bicameral parliament is a heritage (of the past) without a strong influence on the outcomes of the policy-making process. The effects of bicameralism depend on the congruence and symmetry between the two chambers and on whether the government is dominant or not. [Table 2.1](#) again shows considerable variations between the four consociational democracies and it therefore seems inappropriate to conclude that bicameralism is a generally favourable condition for consociationalism.

8

Constitutional flexibility

The scores for this variable range from 3 (for a flexible, unwritten constitution) to 0 (for a rigid, written constitution). Lijphart's criteria are the existence of a written constitution, a rigid constitution with a minority veto and an active judicial review. In Lijphart's view, a high degree of constitutional flexibility corresponds with a high degree of majoritarianism, as it enables an actor to bend, develop or to ignore (new) rules, and therefore it secures the status of the ruling majority as a relatively powerful party that is not restricted by many rules of the game that restrict the room to manoeuvre of all political actors, as is the case in most consociational democracies. [Table 2.1](#) shows that three of the four consociational democracies score 1, which is equal to the overall mean score. It seems that consociational democracies are not very different in this respect. It may of course be the case that constitutional flexibility is perhaps wrongly operationalised.

Overall, the empirical evidence suggests that not all indicators are favourable conditions for consociationalism. The four consociational democracies have rather different scores on most of the eight indicators. They are not very alike. There are two major objections to the selection of the eight indicators. First, the last three institutional indicators are not appropriate proxies for the degree of consociationalism. Lijphart does not advance theoretical arguments that convincingly demonstrate the necessary relationship of these factors to the phenomenon under study. Moreover, most of the eight variables are highly biased towards the formalised, or constitutional features of the political system. This selection therefore excludes variables that may well indicate the behaviour of actors. The implication of these criticisms is that it will be hard to find substantial changes in the institutional features upon which Lijphart bases his categorisation of majoritarian and consensus democracies. This will be elaborated and evidenced in the next section.

Measuring institutional change

On the basis of Lijphart's operationalisations and my own adaptations (as indicated in the previous section), I have computed the scores of the eight variables for the period before and after 1970. One factor score is computed on the basis of the three indicators that are theoretically most transparent and empirically most convincing: electoral disproportionality, the effective number of parties, and the type of government. These indicators and the resulting factor scores do not measure the functioning of consensus democracy (and or of consociationalism), but only the conditions that favour it. This implies, for example, that favourable conditions for consociationalism do not automatically invoke the consociational practice itself. In Lijphart's view, factors like 'prudent leadership' are essential in order to transform abstract conditional circumstances into lasting institutionalised practices (Lijphart 1968c).

The degree of institutional change between the period 1945–70 on the one hand and the period 1970–90 on the other can be visualised with the help of a plot of the factor scores of the three indicators ([Figure 2.1](#)). If there was no change at all, the countries would remain on the diagonal line. Countries that are remote from the diagonal line have witnessed changes in the constitutional roles and institutional practices either in the direction of consensus democracy or towards majoritarianism. Countries above the diagonal line have moved towards conditions favourable for consensus democracy. Countries below that line move away from those conditions. The tendency towards consensus democracy seems to be stronger than the tendency away from it. The plot clearly shows two clusters of countries: those with negative factor scores (which includes the majoritarian countries) and those with positive scores (which includes the consociational democracies). As might be expected, these changes are not all that large. In this respect, the plot shows three

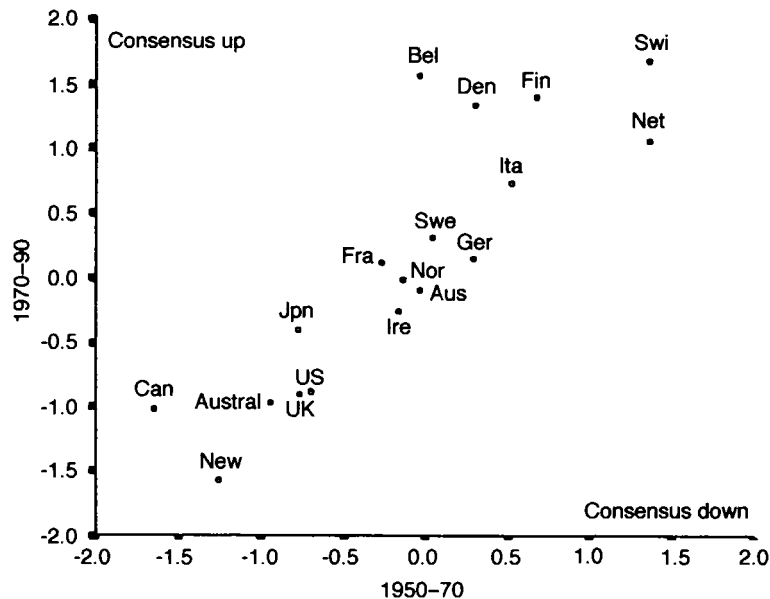


Figure 2.1 Conditions for consensus democracy before and after 1970 (factor scores)

categories: stable countries (no change), in-between countries (moderate change) and unstable countries (considerable change). The latter category is clearly the smallest in size.

The most striking result from Figure 2.1 is that the amount of change is marginal. Whereas Lijphart concludes that the amount of change in the Netherlands is marginal and that the Netherlands should therefore still be regarded as a special case (Lijphart 1989a), I contend that the changes are moderate in most of the studied countries. The stable pattern is most probably a product of the fact that Lijphart's variables are biased towards the formal institutions of liberal democracy. This is illustrated by the high correlation scores of these variables with the cross-national features of party systems (see Pennings and Keman 1994). But there is, of course, room for an alternative interpretation. Assuming that the Netherlands has been an example of a high degree of consociationalism, one could also conclude, from the small differences between the countries in the period after 1970, that the degree of consociationalism in the Netherlands has decreased dramatically in comparison to other countries. This is the main conclusion reached by Peter Mair in a recent article on changes in Dutch politics (Mair 1994). In general, this is a tenable hypothesis that is worth testing. My results also confirm this conclusion, since the Netherlands have a near zero score of consensus democracy, which indicates that the consensus and majoritarian aspects of the Dutch polity are in balance. This may be a dramatic change since the early 1950s and 1960s, but Lijphart's data and operationalisations are unsuited to illustrate these changes. In

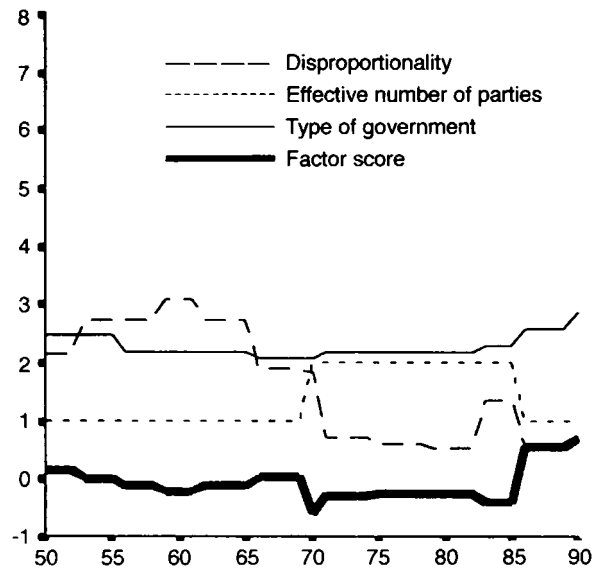


Figure 2.2 Conditions for consociationalism in Austria before and after 1970 (factor scores)

addition, in most cases these aspects do not change in a radical way (the only cases that come to mind in this respect are Belgium and France). However, since my investigation ends in 1990, it may well be that in the near future more change will occur.

It can be concluded that, although the later Lijphart model being discussed here is useful as a starting point, it is strongly driven by static elements of democracies. At the same time it can be noticed that, even then, change still occurs. Yet these changes may well have different causes, depending on the unit of analysis (system features versus behavioural aspects), on the one hand, and on the type and occurrence of societal conflict that permeate the various political systems by means of issues, on the other.

Figures 2.2–2.5 give a more detailed overview of the changing conditions for consociationalism in Austria, Belgium, the Netherlands and Switzerland.⁵ It is, again, based on a factor analysis of the three basic institutional conditions: the degree of electoral disproportionality, the number of effective parties and the type of government (coalitions versus one-party governments). Note that the factor scores in the four plots range from -1 to $+8$, meaning that the four countries remain (more or less) consociational. The two stable countries are Austria (with a relatively low level of consociationalism) and Switzerland (with a relatively high level). Belgium and the Netherlands, on the other hand, are two opposites. The conditions for consociationalism in both countries are changing rapidly, but in different directions. In Belgium, the conditions seem to be moving toward consociationalism. This is primarily a consequence of the rise in the number of effective parties since the 1970s, when several parties split into Francophone and Flemish parts. In the

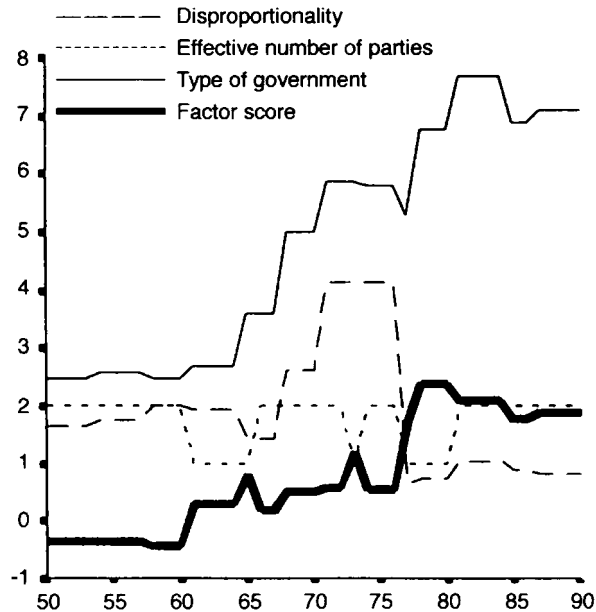


Figure 2.3 Conditions for consociationalism in Belgium before and after 1970 (factor scores)

Netherlands, there is a movement away from consociationalism, primarily because the number of effective parties is decreasing. In the period since 1970, three left-wing and three Christian democratic parties have merged into two new parties, which has brought about a reduction of some four parties! Since the 1970s, the factor scores for the Netherlands are near zero, meaning that the majoritarian and consociational forces are kept in balance.

It must be admitted that the figures presented here provide a limited picture of trends in the conditions for consociationalism. The figures suggest that the structure and format of the party systems determine these conditions. But consociationalism is of course a more encompassing phenomenon. What is lacking in the numerical approach of Lijphart, and therefore also in Figures 2.1–2.5 and in Table 2.1, is the mechanics of interaction between the main political and societal actors. In this sense, it is not just the number of actors that matter, but the various ways these actors are playing the consociational game and the extent to which they dominate the party system. This aspect will get more attention in the next section.

Party-related indicators of change

The institutional conditions for consociationalism have not changed radically in the post-war period if, and only if, we accept the predominantly institutional and thus inherently static operationalisations proposed by Lijphart. In order to scrutinise whether the traditional consociational democracies are still special cases, we have to

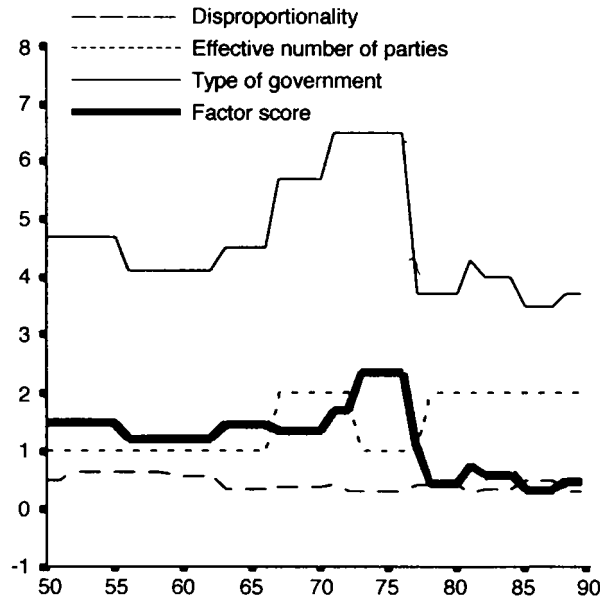


Figure 2.4 Conditions for consociationalism in the Netherlands before and after 1970 (factor scores)

examine to what extent the main party-related features of these states are still the same and differ from the other countries.

The degree and direction of party system change can be assessed by an examination of the evolving policy distances between parties and the changing direction of party competition. One important device to determine these changes is offered by the left-right scale, which is linked to the important socioeconomic cleavage in western societies. There are several left-right scales that could be used for our purpose (Laver and Schofield 1990: Appendix B). Most of them are so-called expert scales. The major disadvantage of expert scales is that they are available only for one point in time. This makes it impossible to analyse party system change. For this one needs at least two points in time.

A major source of information on (changes to) parties' policy positions and the changing direction of party competition are party manifestos. The party manifestos of western countries have been coded by an international research group into fifty-four categories.⁶ If we were able to determine what the left and right issues are among these fifty-four categories, then we would also be able to construct a left-right scale.

The left-right scale is constructed as follows. The starting point is the ten-point expert scale of Castles and Mair (1984), which enables one to place parties on a left-right scale. The Pearson correlation coefficients between the left-right scores and the means of the fifty-four categories are computed. If this correlation is higher than 0.4 (this is an arbitrary criterion) then issues are characterised as being either left or right. Typical left issues are a negative attitude towards the military and favourable

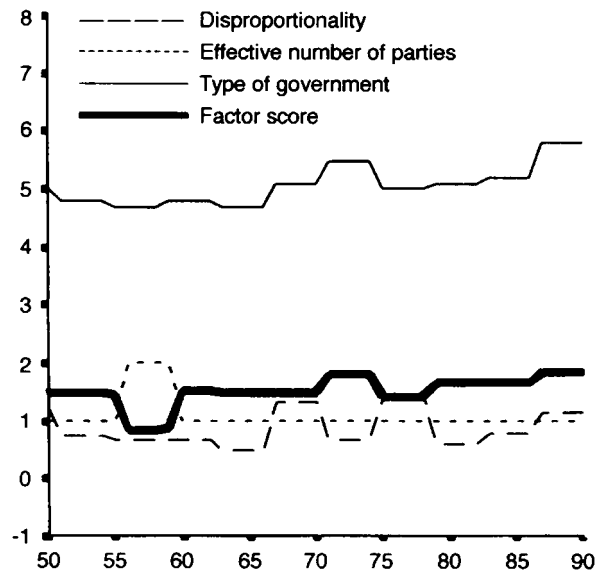


Figure 2.5 Conditions for consociationalism in Switzerland before and after 1970 (factor scores)

mentions of peace, democracy, nationalisation, social justice and labour groups. In sum, these issues are directed towards the enlargement of the public sector. Typical right issues are favourable mentions of the military, governmental and administrative efficiency, free enterprise, economic incentives, economic orthodoxy, welfare-state limitation, education limitation and law and order. These right issues focus on the private sector and favour a limitation of the public sector. The minimum score of the scale is -100, meaning that all emphases in the manifestos are on the right issues. The maximum score on the scale is 100, meaning that all the emphasis is put on the left issues. The final scale is computed by subtracting the sum of left issues from the sum of right issues.

The advantage of this scale is that it is truly comparative; it is the result of a comparison of the programmes of parties in all western democracies. An impression of the characteristics of the scale is given by Figures 2.6–2.10. These figures show the directions of party competition in four consociational democracies in the post-war period. Several conclusions may be drawn. Most parties are very systematic in their policy stance; there are left-wing, right-wing and centre parties (the rare exception being the Austrian FPÖ, which changes from the most left position in 1960 toward the most right position in 1990). Parties do not shift strongly from the left to the right. They tend to be rigid in their main policy orientations in order to maintain their credibility towards the voters (Budge 1993).

The figures also show a recent tendency towards convergence, but not for all countries and not to the same extent. It seems that the whole of the post-war period is characterised by both convergence and divergence of policy positions (Pennings and Keman 1994). The most stable policy positions are found in Switzerland, where

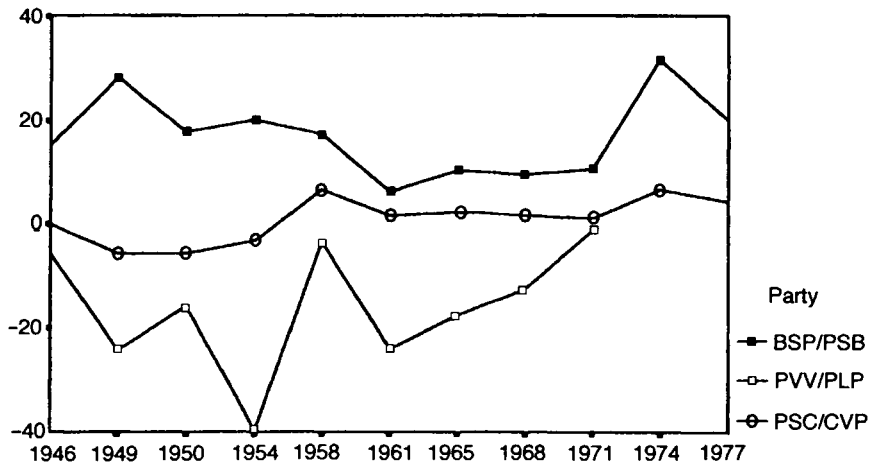


Figure 2.6 Movement of the Belgian parties on the left-right scale (1946–77)

Note: For party abbreviations see list on pages xix–xx.

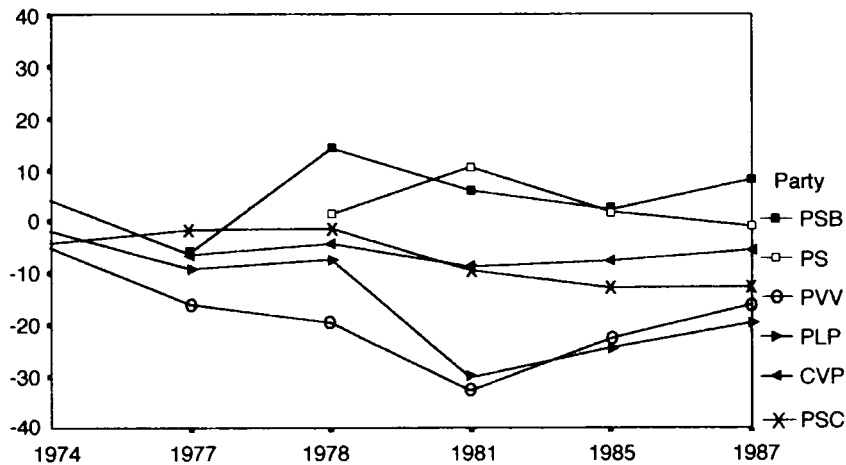


Figure 2.7 Movement of the Belgian parties on the left-right scale (1974–87)

Note: For party abbreviations see list on pages xix–xx.

the range of party competition is clearly focused in the middle. Nevertheless, it is striking that in the 1980s and 1990s, many if not most parties are moving to the centre. This movement of party competition towards the centre has major consequences for electoral volatility and strength of parties. The Dutch elections of 1994 are a clear example of this. Due to the successful appearance of D'66 in the centre, the pivotal role of the Christian Democrats is seriously challenged. For the first time in modern Dutch history, the Christian Democrats have become an opposition party. The convergence of the parties on the left–right scale enables this major shift in Dutch politics. One reason for this is that, due to convergence, all

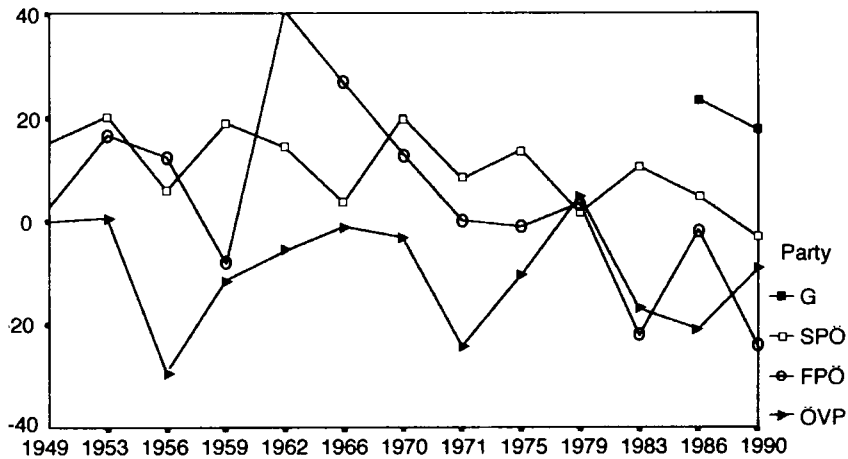


Figure 2.8 Movement of the Austrian parties on the left-right scale (1949–90)

Note: For party abbreviations see list on pages xix–xx.

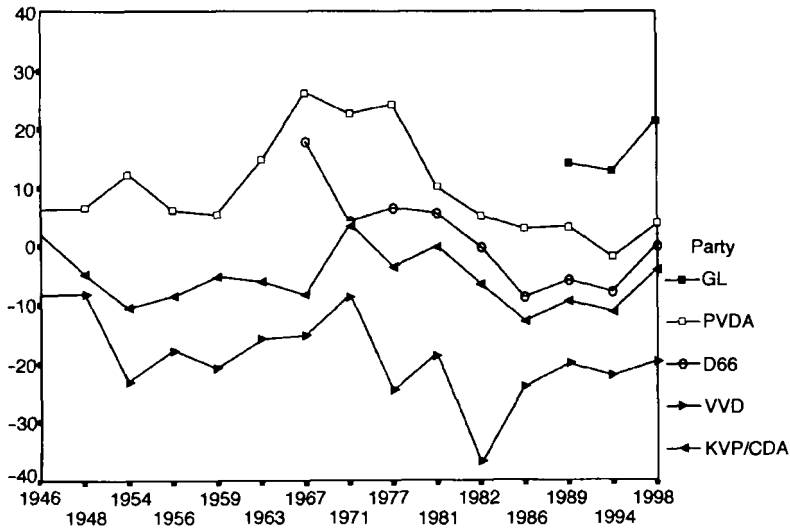


Figure 2.9 Movement of the Dutch parties on the left-right scale (1946–98)

Note: For party abbreviations see list on pages xix–xx.

parties become more or less parties of the middle. As a consequence, the CDA is no longer the main party of the middle, but has become one of the four ‘middle’ parties. Thus, the pivotal role of the CDA has become redundant. This transformation in Dutch politics is enhanced by increased electoral volatility (see [Chapter 4](#)).

A movement of parties on the left-right scale is an indicator of the degree of polarisation. If it is correct that consociational democracies are characterised by low levels of polarisation and by recent trends toward convergence, these patterns

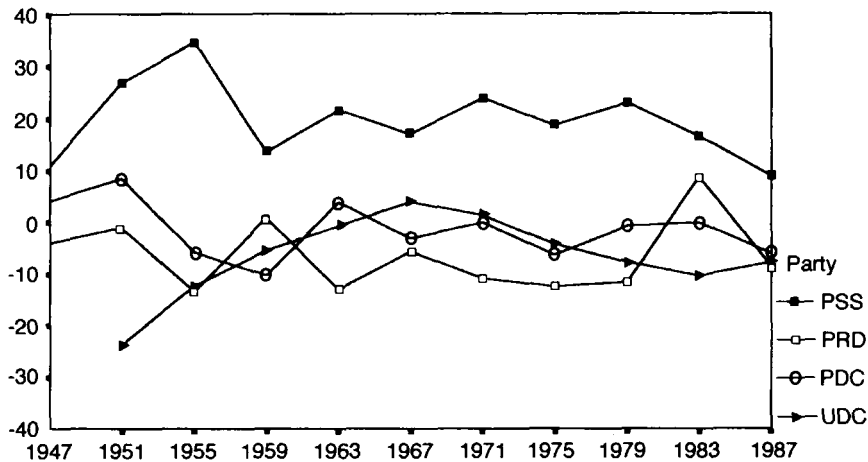


Figure 2.10 Movement of the Swiss parties on the left-right scale (1947–87)

Note: For party abbreviations see list on pages xix–xx.

should also be confirmed by alternative measures of polarisation. Lane and Ersson (1994:185) have measured polarisation for West European countries by means of an index that is sensitive to the ideological distance between parties, as well as to the shares of the extremist parties of the electorate. The trends in polarisation are plotted in Figure 2.11, which confirms that three of the four consociational countries are indeed less polarised than West European countries in general. The Netherlands has been an exception to this ‘rule’ until the mid-1980s. The figure also confirms the recent trends towards convergence in the Netherlands, Belgium and Switzerland. In Austria this trend is more pronounced in the 1950s and 1960s. In Belgium, the recent convergence seems to end a period of steadily increasing polarisation. Switzerland continues to be the least polarised Western country for decades. Finally, Figure 2.11 shows that convergence is not an overall trend: in most West European countries the polarisation goes up slightly in the 1980s. These opposite trends in consociational and non-consociational democracies suggest that the former maintain their distinctiveness in terms of party distances and levels of polarisation.

As the range of the party systems of consociational democracies is approximately the same (between -40 and +40), the centre space may be defined as one-third of the total range (between -13.34 and 13.34). Table 2.2 shows how consistently parties have occupied positions in the centre.

Table 2.2 seems to confirm the same absence of change as was found earlier on the basis of Lijphart’s indicators. All countries are characterised by one or more centre parties that remain in the centre both in the period before and after 1970. What Table 2.2 does not reveal are the dramatic changes in the electoral support of the parties that are traditionally in the centre of the party system. The genuine pivot

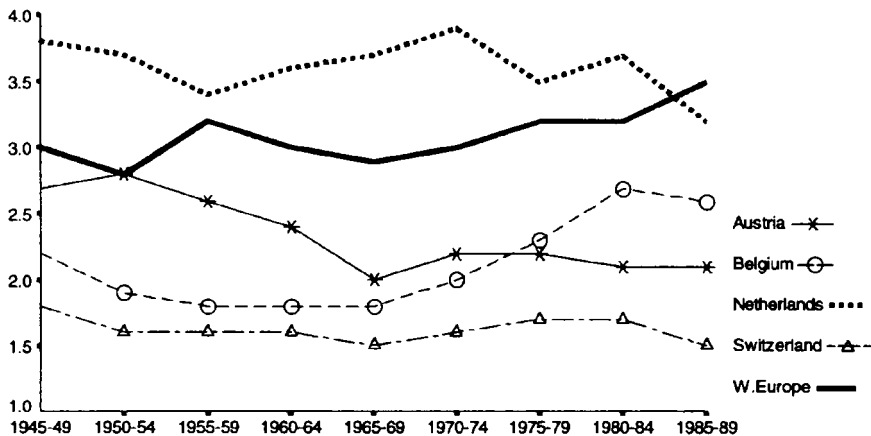


Figure 2.11 Polarisation in consociational democracies (1945–89) (Source: Lane and Ersson (1994: 185))

parties are the Belgian CVP/CSP, the Dutch CDA and the Swiss PRD (Keman 1994: 139). Although these parties seem to remain in the centre, they are rapidly losing votes. This may imply a crisis of consociational politics, as it undermines the dominance of the traditional centre and pivot parties in consociational democracies.

The parties with more or less collectivist ideologies, namely the Christian Democrats, the Social Democrats and the Communists, are suffering electoral losses to a greater or lesser extent. This is shown by Table 2.3. The anti-collectivistic Liberal parties and the new protest parties (especially the Greens) are gaining votes. The increase in total volatility is highest in the Netherlands and Switzerland. In Belgium and Switzerland new major parties do arise. Additionally, in Belgium the degree of fractionalisation increased drastically. These party volatilities may have significant consequences for the political process in consociational democracies. According to Keman (1994), one-third of all European parties are centre parties and 81 per cent of these parties belong to either the liberal or the religious party family. The centrality and dominance of Christian democratic parties will diminish due to increasing volatility and electoral losses. If the latter continue, the pivotal role of Christian democratic parties will decline rapidly. This may be the beginning of a secular type of consociational politics on the basis of socioliberal instead of Christian values and issues.

The pivotal role of liberal parties seems to be becoming more important. This may imply that the four consociational democracies will be directed towards a more competitive course and will become more diverse. Both the electoral decline of the Christian democrats and the electoral rise of the liberals in the 1990s are impressive. Moreover, the average electoral size of the liberal parties is becoming comparable to that of the Christian democratic and social democratic parties.

Table 2.2 Parties' centre space occupation (1945-90) (%)

<i>Period</i>	<i>Belgium</i>			<i>Netherlands</i>				<i>VVD</i>	<i>GDA</i>
	<i>PSB</i>	<i>Lib</i>	<i>PSC</i>	<i>RW</i>	<i>FDf</i>	<i>VU</i>	<i>GL</i>	<i>PvdA</i>	<i>D'66</i>
1945-70	40.0	36.0	100	-	100	100	-	65.4	-
1970-90	66.7	21.1	100	100	100	90.5	14.3	52.4	100
	<i>Austria</i>			<i>Switzerland</i>				<i>UDC</i>	
	<i>G</i>	<i>SPÖ</i>	<i>FPÖ</i>	<i>ÖVP</i>	<i>PSS</i>	<i>PRD</i>	<i>PDC</i>		
1945-70	-	26.9	50.0	86.4	16.7	100	100	80	
1970-90	0	81.0	76.2	47.6	23.8	100	100	100	

Note:

For example, the PSB occupies a position in the centre space of the Belgian party system for 40% of all the years between 1945 and 1970, which increases to 66.7 in the period 1970-90; for party abbreviations see list on pages xix-xx.

Table 2.3 Party volatilities in consociational democracies

	<i>Volatility</i>					<i>Parties</i>		
	<i>Total</i>	<i>CD</i>	<i>Lib.</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Com.</i>	<i>Env.</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Effective number</i>
Austria	1945-70	-5.1	5.5	7.1	-4.4	-	5	4
	1970-90	-12.9	11.1	-5.6	-0.4	8.2	4	3
Belgium	1945-70	-10.7	12.2	-3.3	-9.4	0.5	8	5
	1970-90	-4.3	0.2	3.2	-2.5	2.6	10	7
Netherlands	1945-70	-6.2	8.8	-4.7	-7.0	-	10	8
	1970-90	-2.1	7.3	-4.5	-3.0	0.4	13	7
Switzerland	1945-70	2.5	1.4	-5.1	2.9	-	11	8
	1970-90	-1.6	-6.2	-4.1	-2.1	5.0	13	10

Source: Bartolini and Mair (1990)

Explanation: CD=Christian Democratic parties; Lib.=Liberal parties; SD=Social Democratic parties; Com.=Communist parties; Env.= Environmental parties

Conclusions

The degree of institutional change in consociational and majoritarian democracies is mostly small. By and large, this seems to be a consequence of Lijphart's selection and operationalisation of variables, which focus mainly on the formal institutionalisation of democracies. Important aspects of the behaviour of actors that may change the functioning of institutions are not taken into account. Examples are electoral volatility and changing party positions on the left-right scale (Mair 1994; Pennings and Keman 1994).

The main characteristics of consensus democracies identified by Lijphart do not therefore appear to be indicators appropriate to the measurement of change. His variables are primarily orientated towards formal institutions and neglect how institutions work and the way they interact with actors. Additionally, the eight variables in his operationalisation result in a non-parsimonious typology with non-exclusive categories. Most democratic systems contain institutional arrangements and elements of political practice that Lijphart identifies with either consensus or majoritarian democracy. This implies that the dichotomy of consensus versus majoritarian democracies is becoming outdated. The same goes for the party system typology of Lijphart in which Austria, Belgium, the Netherlands and Switzerland are grouped into one separate category (Lijphart 1977:106). The empirical evidence demonstrates that these four countries are quite different from each other. They certainly do not form a unique group of countries (any longer).

The amount of institutional change depends on the relative emphasis upon institutions and actors in one's model. If, like Lijphart, one stresses the role of institutions and structural factors, one will find stability. If one stresses the importance of party-related indicators, one will find relatively more evidence for change. The best way to analyse change in consociational democracies is to focus on both actors and institutions. This emphasis implies that consociational politics mainly refers to the mechanics of interaction within the party system, and not just to the structure or format of the party system as in the work of Lijphart. The room to manoeuvre as defined by the party system and the electoral system, the way parties use this room (resulting in policy distances between parties) and the electoral consequences of this use (as indicated by electoral volatility and party switching) are related matters that can be studied for longer and for shorter periods (e.g., during elections). This chapter gives an empirical overview of several of these factors: the effective number of parties (party system), electoral disproportionality (electoral systems), policy distances and volatility. By including a wider range of variables we get a varied picture of consociational democracies and the various ways these are changing. There is no empirical ground any more for characterising consociational countries, as we know them today, as one unvaried group. Their distinctiveness does not make them necessarily uniform.

By linking consociationalism to parties, party systems and to the structure and mechanics of competition it has become possible to analyse both the distinctiveness and internal variety of consociational systems. The Lijphart model is 'party blind'

and therefore hardly able to distinguish between consociational democracies. By including the forms of party competition and co-operation into the analysis, it becomes possible to define path-dependent forms of consociational change. For example, Austria and Switzerland are characterised by a highly co-operative consociationalism (given the low and stable levels of polarisation), whereas the Netherlands and Belgium know more competitive forms of consociationalism. This means that the conditions for consociational change are better in the latter than in the former two countries. Another example is formed by the recent trends toward convergence which are undermining the pivotal role of Christian democratic parties in classic consociationalism. In order to analyse and understand these changes in consociationalism, we need a party-orientated approach to consociationalism.

It can be concluded that the concept of consociationalism is linked to the behaviour of political actors, whereas the concept of consensus democracy is based on the rules that regulate this behaviour. By switching from consociationalism to consensus democracy, Lijphart has switched from an actor perspective to a formal-institutional perspective. By linking consensus democracy to party behaviour it is possible to reintroduce the actor perspective. This new perspective reveals more change in practices than when the analysis of change is solely based on the institutional indicators.

Notes

- 1 This chapter is based on Paul Pennings, *Consociationalism and Party System Change. Towards a Comparative Operationalisation*. Paper presented at the ECPR Joint sessions in 1995. I wish to thank Hans Keman and the editors of this volume for their useful suggestions and criticism.
- 2 Lijphart's assumption that the coalescent elite behaviour is a product of societal fragmentation has of course been challenged. Some critics assert that the causal relationship, if any, in fact operates the other way round. That is to say, political elites motivated by maximising their political power have utilised social diversity to create pillars that then serve to underpin their political power. (See Chapters 5 and 8.)
- 3 Following Lijphart (1984a:213, note 2), the highest value is given to the majoritarian characteristic.
- 4 See Table 4.2 in Lijphart (1984a). This percentage is computed with the help of the data in *Party Government in 20 Democracies* (Woldendorp *et al.* 1993). I merged the categories 1 and 2 of the Types of Government variable (see Table 4 in Woldendorp *et al.* 1993:113) and also excluded Caretaker Governments from the computations.
- 5 The remainder of this section is concerned solely with the four countries that constitute the consociational subset of consensus democracies. To measure the extent to which the three institutional indicators are present thus in effect measures the existence of conditions for consociationalism.
- 6 The most recent publication on these data is by Klingemann *et al.* (1994).

Part II

Case studies in comparative perspective

3

Must what goes up always come down?

Of pillars and arches in Austria's political architecture

Kurt Richard Luther

Introduction

In essence, the consociational model seeks to elucidate two aspects of the political architecture of democracies with deeply divided societies. The first relates to the political sociology of these societies, which the model characterises as comprising vertically encapsulated and mutually hostile political subcultures (or 'pillars'). The second focus of the model is upon the accommodating behaviour of the subcultural political elites, whose co-operation provides a metaphorical 'arch', which spans the divide between the pillars and thus helps ensure the political system's stability. The introductory chapter to this volume spells out the framework for the analysis of parties and party systems in consociational democracies which the author has deduced from Lijphart's initial model. The aim of this chapter is to use the Austrian case to test the value of that framework.¹

The next section of this chapter will examine the role which Austria's pillar parties have played within their respective subcultures, or '*Lager*'² This will be done by first identifying the main characteristics of pillar party organisation and behaviour during the period from 1945–66, when the country was widely held to exhibit both pillarized segmentation and elite accommodation (Secher 1958; Engelmann 1966; Lehbruch 1967a; Pulzer 1969; Powell 1970; Engelmann and Schwarz 1974a; Stiefbold 1974a and 1974b; Houska 1985). Second, we will consider changes in these aspects since this period of 'classic' consociationalism (Luther and Müller 1992b:10). Similarly, the third section of this chapter will use the author's framework to assess the extent of change since the 1960s in the overarching accommodation between the party political elite of the rival subcultures. This will be done by means of a consecutive analysis of the 'format' and 'mechanics' (Sartori 1976:128f) of party interaction in the five main arenas of party competition.

Throughout, the main focus will be upon Austria's three traditional *Lager* parties: the *Sozialistische* (since 1991 *Sozialdemokratische*) *Partei Österreichs*, or SPÖ, the *Österrichische Volkspartei*, or ÖVP and the *Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs*, or FPÖ. It is the first two of these that have in Austria constituted what the opening chapter of this volume has referred to as 'pillar parties', or as the parties 'playing

the consociational game'. Where appropriate, reference will also be made to other parties: the *Kommunistische Partei Österreichs*, or KPÖ, as well as to the Greens (*die Grüne Alternative*) and the Liberal Forum (*Liberates Forum*, or Lif).

The parties within their pillars

Subcultural penetration and incorporation

The period of 'classic' consociationalism

Between 1949 and 1966, Austria had an average of only 4.66 million voters, but total party membership stood at between 1.27 and 1.36 million persons, which constituted some 27 to 29 per cent of the national electorate (see [Table 3.1](#)). Membership was dominated by two mass parties: SPÖ membership averaged *circa* 680,000, whilst that of the ÖVP stood at between 500,000 and 580,000. Accordingly, on average, a total of between 1.17 and 1.26 million Austrians were incorporated into these two pillar parties. Moreover, the absolute membership of the latter was continuing to grow, as was the proportion of total Austrian party membership made up by their memberships: it increased from 88 per cent in 1949 to over 95 per cent in 1966. Meanwhile, the trend in the KPÖ—which itself initially boasted a very healthy membership of about 150,000—was one of rapid decline. By the late 1960s, KPÖ membership was virtually the size of that of the FPÖ, the latest party-political manifestation of Austria's so-called 'Third Lager', which was traditionally represented by parties approximating to the 'cadre party' type identified by Duverger (1964:63–71).³

However interesting the absolute size of the two pillar parties' membership and their share of total party membership might be, our prime concern here is the extent to which they penetrated Austrian society in general and their respective segments in particular. Two possible rough measures of this are contained in [Table 3.2](#).⁴ The two pillar parties' overall penetration of Austrian society is suggested by the ratio of their joint total membership to the electorate (M/E) (see the two right-hand columns of [Table 3.2](#)). This indicator shows that during the phase of 'classic' consociationalism, the number of Austrians who were members of one or other of the two parties playing the consociational game was equivalent to between 25 and 27 per cent of the total electorate. The M/E figures for the individual parties show that during 1949 to 1966, the SPÖ was more successful than the ÖVP at incorporating Austrians into party membership. Whilst ÖVP membership averaged the equivalent of between 10.6 and 12.5 per cent of the total electorate, the analogous figure for the SPÖ was 14.6 per cent. [Table 3.2](#) contains a second measure of membership density: the ratio of party members to voters (M/V). Despite its limitations (see Katz and Mair *et al.* 1992a and below), it offers a useful measure of the parties' ability to incorporate their respective subcultures in this period. What it shows is that between 1949 and 1966, the Catholic-conservative and socialist Lager were each

able to convince large numbers of their electoral supporters to join the subcultural party. It was again the SPÖ that was the most successful at this, proving able to mobilise an average of nearly 37 per cent of their voters, whilst the ÖVP figure stood at between 25 and 30 per cent.

During the period of 'classic' consociationalism, the organisational incorporation of Austria's subcultures was undertaken not only by political parties, but also by a host of linked auxiliary associations. For our purposes, they can be divided into two broad types. The function of the politically most significant was representing the socioeconomic interests of its occupation-based membership within Austria's neo-corporatist 'chambers'. Many were constituent elements of one or other of the pillar parties and/or run by intra-party groupings, which made them a form of party/interest-group hybrid. The degree of party-group overlap was virtually complete in the Catholic-conservative *Lager*, represented in the chambers by the three associations that simultaneously formed the main functional 'leagues' of the ÖVP and provided almost all the party's membership. The socialist chamber factions were less crucial in intra-party terms, but were the dominant grouping in the chamber of labour and the SPÖ's minority groupings in the chambers of business and of agriculture. As the chambers between them covered the complete spectrum of occupational groupings and chamber membership was obligatory for all in the relevant employment categories, the size of this type of auxiliary association was very high. Moreover, Austria assigned important rule-making and rule-implementation functions to the chambers, each of which was dominated by a single faction, so the working lives of employees were significantly influenced by the faction of the socialist *Lager*, whilst those of the self-employed and of farmers were similarly organised by those of the Catholic-conservative *Lager*.

The remaining auxiliary associations were characterised by voluntary membership and most had no formal role in the political process. Whilst some were affiliated to 'their' pillar party, for most, official links took the form of overlapping leadership and financial support, rather than direct incorporation, and for the remainder the bond was merely a shared *Weltanschauung*. The proportion of party members in each association varied, but is unlikely to have exceeded 50 per cent, which demonstrates the subcultures' capacity to incorporate persons whose identification with the *Lager* would of itself not normally be strong enough to entice them to participate in purely party activities. The main *Lager* duplicated not only the occupation-based auxiliary associations, but also those seeking to organise, for example, women, the youth and pensioners. Their role included supporting members' material concerns, but also organising cultural, or leisure-time activities. There was an enormous variety, ranging from the Catholic-conservative 'Austrian Club for Automobilists, Motorbikers and Cyclists' to the socialist 'Central Association of Austria's Allotment Holders and Pet Breeders'. Precise figures are not available, but this wider category of association probably embraced a total of well over two million members, many of whom will have had multiple memberships.

Table 3.1 Members and voters of the SPÖ, ÖVP, KPÖ and FPÖ in election years from 1949 to 1995^a

	SPÖ		ÖVP ^b		FPÖ (VdU)		KPÖ		Austria ^b		
	Members	Voters	Members (Max)	Members (Min)	Voters	Members	Voters	Members	Voters	Members (Max)	Members (Min)
1949	614,366	1,623,524	485,000	439,000	1,846,581	489,273	150,000	213,066	4,391,815	1,249,366	1,203,366
1953	657,042	1,818,517	505,000	441,000	1,781,777	472,866	<i>114,000</i>	228,159	4,586,870	1,276,042	1,212,042
1956	687,972	1,873,295	565,000	498,000	1,999,986	283,749	<i>87,000</i>	192,438	4,614,464	1,350,572	1,283,572
1959	721,737	1,953,935	590,000	509,000	1,928,043	20,068	<i>60,000</i>	142,578	4,696,603	1,391,805	1,310,805
1962	698,705	1,960,685	655,000	532,000	2,024,501	26,949	<i>40,556</i>	135,520	4,805,351	1,421,210	1,298,210
1966	699,432	1,928,985	700,000	543,000	2,191,109	27,334	<i>34,778</i>	18,636	4,886,818	1,461,544	1,304,544
Av 49–66	679,876	1,859,823	583,333	493,667	1,962,000	21,238	<i>81,056</i>	155,900	4,663,654	1,358,423	1,268,757
1970	719,389	2,221,981	720,000	561,000	2,051,012	27,913	<i>29,000</i>	44,750	5,045,841	1,496,302	1,337,302
1971	703,093	2,280,168	715,000	564,000	1,964,173	28,850	<i>27,500</i>	61,762	4,984,448	1,474,443	1,323,443
1975	693,156	2,326,201	715,000	562,000	1,981,291	31,808	<i>21,500</i>	55,032	5,019,277	1,461,464	1,308,464
1979	721,262	2,413,226	720,000	560,000	1,981,739	37,288	<i>15,500</i>	45,280	5,186,735	1,494,050	1,334,050
1983	694,598	2,312,529	720,000	552,000	2,097,808	37,233	<i>12,500</i>	31,912	5,316,436	1,464,330	1,296,330
1986	669,906	2,092,024	695,000	528,000	2,003,663	36,683	<i>11,000</i>	35,104	5,461,414	1,412,831	1,245,831
1990	597,426	2,012,787	670,000	488,000	1,508,600	42,413	<i>9,000</i>	25,682	5,628,912	1,318,839	1,136,839
1994	512,838	1,617,804	579,000	433,000	1,281,846	43,764	<i>4,900</i>	11,919	5,774,000	1,140,302	994,502
1995	487,490	1,843,679	<i>552,000</i>	<i>419,250</i>	1,370,497	44,153	<i>4,200</i>	13,939	5,768,099	1,087,843	955,093
Av 70–95	644,351	2,124,489	676,222	518,583	1,804,514	36,705	<i>15,011</i>	36,153	5,353,907	1,372,289	1,214,650

Sources: Party membership data: Müller (1992b:40–9 and 1997c:272); Ueakar (1997:259); Luther (1997a:293 and 1999b:23); Ehmer (1997:328) and FPÖ headquarters. Electoral data: Bundesministerium für Inneres (1996).

Notes

a Italicisation denotes figures based on estimated party membership, calculated on the assumption of an even trend between years for which membership figures were available. This has proved necessary mainly in respect of the KPÖ. As KPÖ membership has since at least the 1960s constituted only a small proportion of total Austrian party membership, the impact of any inaccuracies on the overall membership figure will be relatively marginal.

b Given the indirect nature of ÖVP membership, the figures for the ÖVP are susceptible to double counting and we have thus cited both the maximum and minimum membership figures calculated by Müller (1992b).

Table 3.2 Organisational density (M/V and M/E)^a of Austria's pillar parties in election years from 1949 to 1995

	SPÖ			ÖVP ^b			Pillar parties overall ^b							
	M/V	M/E	M/V (Max)	M/V (Min)	M/E (Max)	M/E (Min)	M/V (Max)	M/V (Min)	M/E (Max)	M/E (Min)	M/V (Max)	M/V (Min)	M/E (Max)	M/E (Min)
1949	37.8	14.0	26.3	23.8	11.0	10.0	31.7	30.4	25.0	25.0	31.7	30.4	25.0	24.0
1953	36.1	14.3	28.3	24.8	11.0	9.6	32.3	30.5	25.3	25.3	32.3	30.5	25.3	23.9
1956	36.7	14.9	28.3	24.9	12.2	10.8	32.3	30.6	27.2	27.2	32.3	30.6	27.2	25.7
1959	36.9	15.4	30.6	26.4	12.6	10.8	33.8	31.7	27.9	27.9	33.8	31.7	27.9	26.2
1962	35.6	14.5	32.4	26.3	13.6	11.1	34.0	30.9	28.2	28.2	34.0	30.9	28.2	25.6
1966	36.3	14.3	31.9	24.8	14.3	11.1	34.0	30.2	28.6	28.6	34.0	30.2	28.6	25.4
Av 49–66	36.6	14.6	29.7	25.2	12.5	10.6	33.1	30.7	27.0	27.0	33.1	30.7	27.0	25.2
1970	32.4	14.3	35.1	27.4	14.3	11.1	33.7	30.0	28.5	28.5	33.7	30.0	28.5	25.4
1971	30.8	14.1	36.4	28.7	14.3	11.3	33.4	29.9	28.5	28.5	33.4	29.9	28.5	25.4
1975	29.8	13.8	36.1	28.4	14.2	11.2	32.7	29.1	28.1	28.1	32.7	29.1	28.1	25.0
1979	29.9	13.9	36.3	28.3	13.9	10.8	32.8	29.2	27.8	27.8	32.8	29.2	27.8	24.7
1983	30.0	13.1	34.3	26.3	13.5	10.4	32.1	28.3	26.6	26.6	32.1	28.3	26.6	23.4
1986	32.0	12.3	34.7	26.4	12.7	9.7	33.3	29.2	25.0	25.0	33.3	29.2	25.0	21.9
1990	29.7	10.6	44.4	32.3	11.9	8.7	36.0	30.8	22.5	22.5	36.0	30.8	22.5	19.3
1994	31.7	8.9	45.2	33.8	10.0	7.5	37.7	32.6	18.9	18.9	37.7	32.6	18.9	16.4
1995	26.4	8.5	40.3	30.6	9.6	7.3	32.3	28.2	18.0	18.0	32.3	28.2	18.0	15.7
Av 70–95	30.3	12.0	37.5	28.7	12.6	9.7	33.6	29.6	24.9	24.9	33.6	29.6	24.9	21.9

Sources: Own calculations, based on sources of Table 3.1. ÖVP membership figures for 1995 were not available and the figures that appear are based on the assumption of an even trend since 1990. Calculations based on estimated membership figures are italicised.

Notes:

Their number, size and scope helped ensure that the lives of *Lager* members were encapsulated ‘from womb to tomb’ within their own subcultural milieu.

Changes since the mid-1960s

There have been significant changes since the period of ‘classic’ consociationalism in the organisational penetration of Austria’s subcultures. In terms of the level of absolute party membership, two phases are visible. The first was characterised by further growth in what were already very large parties and lasted until 1979, when membership of both the SPÖ and ÖVP peaked (at *circa* 720,000 each). Though still very high by international standards, membership has since fallen significantly. When one compares the 1995 figures with the 1979 peak, one finds a drop of 233,772 members in the SPÖ and 168,000 in the ÖVP. Those changes amount to a decline of 32 per cent and 23 per cent respectively and that trend has since continued.⁵ For example, by the end of 1997, SPÖ membership had gone down by a further 50,000 and stood at only 434,281 (Luther 1998d:23). Accordingly, when compared to their 1979 peak, the SPÖ and ÖVP have together now probably lost between 450,000 and 500,000 members.⁶

This is of course reflected in the indicators of party organisational density (see [Table 3.2](#)). If one looks at the M/V values of the SPÖ and the ÖVP (max.), one might be tempted to conclude in the case of the ÖVP that, with the exception of the early 1980s, the overall trend between 1970 and 1994 was one of increasing subcultural penetration. A roughly similar conclusion might be drawn from an examination of the SPÖ’s values, whilst the overall M/V levels appear to be relatively stable or (in the case of M/V max.), to have been generally on the rise until 1994. Yet such impressions are deceptive. The M/V indicator is useful where party shares of the vote remain relatively constant, but that was not the case in the period under examination (see [Tables 3.1](#) and [3.3](#)). The years 1970 to 1983 were characterised by considerable electoral success on the part of the SPÖ, and by concomitant ÖVP weakness. This led to their respective M/V values being ‘artificially’ deflated and inflated. From 1986 to 1994, the ÖVP continued to lose votes (and its M/V value thus rose), whilst in 1995 both parties experienced modest electoral revivals (and their M/V values thus declined again). A more clear-cut and accurate picture of the development of these two parties’ organisational penetration of their respective subcultures since the period of ‘classic’ consociationalism is provided by the M/E values (see [Table 3.2](#)). They show that the SPÖ’s organisational penetration of Austrian society has greatly declined; in 1979, its party membership was the equivalent of 13.9 per cent of the electorate, but by 1995, that figure had dropped to 8.5 per cent. An analogous trend is visible in the ÖVP, where depending on which membership figures one uses, the party’s M/E value has dropped from 13.9 to 9.6 per cent, or from 10.8 to 7.3 per cent. The values for the overall penetration of Austrian society by the two major pillar parties have of course also dropped from 1970 to 1995 (from 28.5 to 18.0, or from 25.4 to 15.7 per cent) and are still falling.

Put another way, Austria's party-politically organised subcultures represent a much smaller proportion of Austria's total electorate than was the case during 'classic' consociationalism.

To be sure, between 1966 and 1995 there has been an 18 per cent increase in the size of the electorate, but that is in itself not an adequate explanation of the pillar parties' declining mobilisational capacity. One major cause of this decreased level of party-political organisation has been socioeconomic and sociocultural change (Plasser, Ulram and Grausgruber 1992). This has reduced the proportion of the population living within encapsulated subcultures, and led to a decline in solidary incentives and thus in ideological attachment (see below).

For the first two post-war decades, Austria's political cleavages were 'frozen' (see the discussion of voting behaviour change below) and the parties' membership sociology reflected that of their inter-war antecedents. Research from the late 1980s and early 1990s (Haerpfer 1989; Gehmacher 1990; Müller 1996b:318-22; but also Baumgartner 1983; Gerlich 1987) shows the typical SPÖ member still to be a male, blue-collar worker who has undergone an apprenticeship, though there has since the 1970s been a sizeable growth in white-collar members, who by the early 1990s constituted nearly 30 per cent of members. Information on the ÖVP is more patchy, but its membership appears still to contain a disproportionately high number of farmers, with basic levels of education, as well as significant numbers of self-employed and of persons with intermediate, or higher education. Both parties' memberships are ageing and overall their social profiles have not kept pace with the changes since the 1960s in Austria's social structure, prominent amongst which have been a radical decline in the number of farmers and a substantial decrease in the proportion of blue-collar workers (Plasser, Ulram, Grausgruber 1992: tables 2-4). Finally, the data appear to suggest that the sociological profiles of the two main parties' functionaries differ more than those of their rank and file. That accords with the widely held perception that hostility between their mid-level functionaries has always been higher than between their subcultural 'masses', or between their party elite. The profiles of the latter were always much less distinct than those of other levels of the rival subcultures (Engelmann 1966:277).

That is not to deny that their long-standing differences continue to be important; the ÖVP party elite still exhibits higher than average levels of religiosity, whilst their SPÖ counterparts are likely to be secular, if not atheistic. In recent years, however, religious distinctiveness has been primarily at an individual level and policy issues with an intrinsically religious, or clerical dimension have rarely figured on the political agenda. Whilst purposive ideational differences also remain, years of political co-operation has significantly reduced the levels of distrust between the party elites. Examinations of key SPO and ÖVP party elite groups such as members of parliament and government, as well as of the members of the parties' highest organs, show that their occupational and educational profiles are if anything even more alike than during 'classic' consociationalism. Whilst Austria's demographic change since the 1960s has in many ways passed the parties' mass memberships

Table 3.3 Austrian national election results (1945–1995): votes and seats

	1945	1949	1953	1956	1959	1962	1966	1970	1971	1975	1979	1983	1986	1990	1994	1995
SPÖ	44.6 (vote) 76 (seats)	38.7 67 73	42.1 73 41.3	43.0 74 46.0	44.8 81 44.2	44.0 76 45.4	42.6 74 48.3	48.4 81 44.7	50.0 93 43.1	50.4 93 42.9	51.0 95 41.9	47.6 90 43.2	43.1 80 41.3	42.8 80 32.1	34.9 65 27.7	38.1 71 28.3
ÖVP	49.8 (vote) 85 (seats)	44.0 77 74	41.3 74 82	46.0 82 79	44.2 81 77	45.4 81 85	48.3 85 78	44.7 78 80	43.1 80 80	42.9 80 80	41.9 77 61	43.2 81 5.0	41.3 77 9.7	32.1 60 16.6	27.7 52 22.5	28.3 53 ^c 21.9
FPÖ (VdU)	11.7 (vote) 16 (seats)	10.9 16 14	10.9 14 8	6.5 6 8	7.7 8 8	7.0 8 6	5.4 6 6	5.5 6 6	5.5 10 10	5.4 10 10	6.1 11 12	5.0 12 12	9.7 18 4.8	16.6 33 ^a 4.8	22.5 42 7.3	21.9 40 ^e 4.8
Greens																
LiF																
Others	5.6 (vote) 4 (seats)	5.6 5 4	5.7 4 3	4.5 3 3	3.3 3.5 3.7	3.5 3.7 3.7	1.4 1.4 1.4	1.4 1.4 1.4	1.4 1.4 1.4	1.2 1.2 1.2	1.0 1.0 1.0	4.1 4.1 4.1	1.0 1.0 1.0	3.7 3.7 3.7	1.6 1.6 1.6	1.4 1.4 1.4
Turnout																
SPÖ + ÖVP	94.3 vote	96.8 82.7	95.8 83.4	96.0 89.0	94.2 89.0	93.8 89.4	93.8 90.9	91.8 93.1	92.4 93.2	92.9 93.4	92.2 92.9	92.6 90.9	90.5 84.4	86.1 74.9	81.9 62.6	86.0 66.4
SPÖ + ÖVP	97.6 seats	87.3 89.1	89.1 94.5	94.5 95.2	95.2 95.2	96.4 96.4	96.4 96.4	96.4 96.4	94.5 94.5	94.5 94.5	94.0 94.0	93.4 93.4	85.8 85.8	76.5 76.5	63.9 63.9	67.8 67.8
Fractionalisation ^b	0.55	0.64	0.64	0.60	0.60	0.59	0.58	0.56	0.56	0.56	0.56	0.58	0.63	0.68	0.74	0.72
(Rae index)	0.52	0.61	0.60	0.55	0.54	0.54	0.53	0.53	0.55	0.55	0.55	0.56	0.62	0.67	0.74	0.72
Effective no. of parties ^c	2.22	2.78	2.76	2.48	2.48	2.46	2.39	2.29	2.28	2.26	2.27	2.40	2.72	3.16	3.87	3.59
Net volatility ^d	2.09	2.54	2.47	2.22	2.20	2.20	2.14	2.15	2.21	2.21	2.22	2.26	2.63	2.99	3.78	3.51
		12.17	4.00	5.69	2.97	1.72	6.24	6.65	2.04	0.42	1.31	4.81	9.95	10.09	15.51	3.88

Source: Bundesministerium für Inneres (1996)

Notes:

a On 4 February 1993, five of the 33 FPÖ MPs elected in 1990 broke away to form the Liberal Forum.

b Own calculations of index of electoral (F_e) and parliamentary (F_p) fractionalisation (Rae, 1967).c Own calculations of Laakso and Taagepera's (1979) index of effective number of parties at the level of votes (N_v) and of seats (N_s).d Own calculations of Pedersen (1979:4) index (i.e. cumulated gains for *all* winning parties standing at the election).

e Since December 1995, the FPÖ has gained 2 seats, 1 via a Lifdefection and 1 from the ÖVP as a result of a re-run ballot in Burgenlan and.

by, the profile of the parties' highest elites has if anything become more socially representative. As Gerlich (1987:71) says of Austrian MPs, 'parliament has not so much become more representative of society, but...society has become more akin to parliament'.

The second organisational 'leg' of subcultural penetration in Austria has been made up by the parties' auxiliary associations. Considering their size and significance, there has been surprisingly little detailed research on them,⁷ but it is possible to discern some trends since 'classic' consociationalism. On the one hand, absolute auxiliary association membership has increased. In the socialist *Lager*, it rose from about 1.5 million in the mid-1960s to *circa* 2.4 million by the early 1990s, whilst Catholic-conservative associations directed at the youth, women and pensioners have seen comparable growth, albeit from a smaller base. On the other hand, the greatest increases have been amongst the least politicised associations. In the socialist *Lager*, for example, the 'Workers' Sport and Fitness Association' (in 1971 renamed the 'Working Group...') grew by *circa* 150 per cent, and the 'Workers' Automobile and Cyclists' League' (which in 1962 also ditched the label 'Workers' and in 1968 disaffiliated from the SPÖ) increased by over 500 per cent to about 1.2 million members. When these two largest socialist associations are discounted, gross membership peaked at *circa* 1.2 million in 1975 and has since declined to under 1 million.

It seems reasonable to conclude that since 'classic' consociationalism, the organisational rationale of many *Lager* auxiliary associations has shifted from enhancing the intensity of encapsulation for subcultural loyalists, to expanding the subculture's 'catchment' (Houska 1985: ch.7) by mobilising persons only slightly (if at all) linked to the *Lager*. This can be problematic, since the mobilisational incentives traditionally used for *Lager* loyalists may prove counter-productive for recruiting support from the wider catchment and vice versa.

Mobilisation and values

Nature and extent of participation

The bargaining strength of subcultural elites is related to their capacity to convince rival *Lager* of the size of their subculture and the extent to which it can be mobilised politically. *Lager* elites thus seek to elicit from their subcultures mass political behaviour that does not challenge those elites' control of their *Lager*, but is limited in the main to ritual demonstrations of *Lager* loyalty. Since 'classic' consociationalism, *Lager* success in mobilising the uncritical support of their rank and file has declined. We have already pointed to reduced membership in parties and 'political' auxiliary associations. There has also been a fall in voter turnout, which averaged 95 per cent between 1945–66, but only 85 per cent at the last three elections (see [Table 3.3](#)). Partisan attachment to the two main *Lager* is now also much lower; for example, between 1969 and 1990, the proportion of Austrians

expressing unconditional party support fell from 65 to 34 per cent (Plasser, Ulram, Grausgruber 1992: tables 11f and 15f). Finally, from 1953 to 1966 inclusive, net volatility averaged 4.1 per cent and was thus one of the lowest in West Europe (Pedersen 1983; Bartolini and Mair 1990). With the exception of 1970, it remained very low, until rising steeply in the 1980s and peaking at 15.5 per cent in 1994.

To date, explanations for these changes have rightly pointed to socioeconomic, or sociocultural factors (e.g. Plasser, Ulram, Grausgruber 1992; Birk and Traar 1987; Ulram 1990; Luther 1989), but have tended to underemphasise the responsibility of the pillar parties themselves and the declining efficacy of the values they have traditionally employed to mobilise their subcultures. As suggested in the opening chapter of this volume, it may be useful to consider those efforts by reference to two broad types of values that have a specific mobilising effect, namely, ideational values and material, or instrumental values.

Mobilisation via ideational values

Qualitative and quantitative analyses of formal party programmes (Kadan and Pelinka 1979; Müller, Philipp and Jenny 1995; Horner 1997) both show a trend for the ideological distinctiveness of the two main *Lager* to decline in favour of a more catch-all appeal. Symptomatic of this change in respect of purposive incentives was the development of a bipartisan approach to foreign and economic policy during the period of 'classic' consociationalism. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, electoral considerations caused the ÖVP to seek to enhance its ideological distinctiveness, but the 1986 re-establishment of grand coalition government resulted in its moral conservatism being placed on the back-burner, whilst its commitment to economic liberalism has been all but matched by that of the SPÖ. In foreign policy, the SPÖ eventually backed the ÖVP's push for Austria to join the EU and whilst the post-1989 changes in Eastern Europe have led to significant differences between the parties regarding security policy—with the ÖVP advocating NATO membership and the SPÖ much more sceptical—the ideational divisions between the parties are nowhere near as profound as they used to be.⁸ The late 1980s thus witnessed the re-establishment, albeit on the basis of a revised economic policy, of substantial similarities in the *de facto* policy goals pursued by the SPÖ and ÖVP. Indeed, at the time of writing, the SPÖ looks as though it will finally replace its 1978 party programme, which it has been seeking to renew since the 1980s. If the current draft programme is approved as planned in October 1998, it will mark a significant departure from the SPÖ's classic ideological profile, moving the party's rhetoric closer to its actual policy stance. For one, the draft abandons the SPÖ's traditional aspiration to a classless society. Second, rather than seeking to 'overcome' capitalism, it accepts the market as a wealth-creation mechanism and limits itself to promoting a more equitable distribution of wealth. Third, it abandons the notion that labour and capital are 'irreconcilable' classes, arguing instead that it is

necessary to support in particular small and medium-sized businesses, which help generate jobs.

But change in solidary and purposive incentives has not been confined to the two major parties. Traditionally, the ideational profile of the Third *Lager* had been based on solidary incentives related to anti-clericalism, German nationalism and a sense of exclusion in a form of political 'ghetto' (Luther 1997a). The Third *Lager* party's policies were clearly related to these affective values, but were dominated by demands for the reform of the structures and techniques of Austria's system of consociational decision-making, which it regarded as constituting an elite political cartel. From the mid-1960s, the FPÖ deliberately reformed its conservative, German-national ideational profile, placing more emphasis upon liberalism, as articulated most clearly in its 1985 party programme, and by becoming less confrontational. Haider's election as party chairman in September 1986 led to a significant *de facto* reduction in the FPÖ's emphasis on liberalism and the party's opposition has again been much more strident and accompanied by vehement attacks on bureaucratisation, as well as on various categories of 'social parasites'. This has helped ensure that despite similarities in economic policy *vis-à-vis* the two pillar parties, the FPÖ has become even more confrontational and protest-orientated than it used to be. The FPÖ's critics saw this as a reassertion of the party's German-national and authoritarian values. Yet the FPÖ's ideational development could be regarded as indicative of a break in ideological traditions. First, in due course, Haider publically rejected the party's tradition of parochial German nationalism (*Deuschtümelei*) as outdated and replaced it with strident Austrian nationalism. At least as dramatic a shift came with the party's new programme of October 1997, when the traditionally strongly anticlerical FPÖ asserted that it now not only supports Christian values, but in fact constitutes a better defender of those values than the Catholic-conservative ÖVP. To be sure, Haider has often been accused by his critics of shameless political opportunism motivated by vote maximisation and this is certainly what some believe underpins these changes. Be that as it may, the very fact that such ideational volte-faces could take place is a significant indicator of the declining hold of ideational values in Austria since 'classic' consociationalism.

For its part, the Catholic-conservative *Lager* has always been plagued by ideational conflict, especially between its social and liberal wings, represented respectively in its League of Workers and Salaried Employees and its Business League. In the early 1960s, the ÖVP's ideological factionalism was sufficiently pronounced for Engelmann (1966:269f) to cite it as one of the major features of political opposition in Austria. If anything, internal dissent over purposive incentives has since intensified and poses a severe problem for the ÖVP's bargaining capacity.

During 'classic' consociationalism, the two pillar parties' exhortations to subcultural solidarity typically emphasised the threat to the political system allegedly posed by the rival *Lager* (Hölzl 1974 and below under 'mobilisation and material values'). However, the credibility of attempts at ideational mobilisation predicated upon such claims was increasingly undermined by over two decades of

grand coalition government, as well as the single party governments of 1966–83, which patently did not abuse their position to bring about a fundamental change of the rules of the game. The two pillar parties now therefore rely much less upon solidary incentives, and especially those of ‘negative’ type. By contrast, the FPÖ’s post-1986 populism signalled a return to a political style that is at least as confrontational as during ‘classic’ consociationalism. Key targets of the FPÖ’s attack are the material values which the ‘players of the consociational game’ have traditionally used to mobilise and retain subcultural support.

Mobilisation and material values

The mobilisational capacity of purposive incentives is closely related to individuals’ perceptions of the likely impact of the policies associated with those values upon their material well-being. Material values also play a direct role in parties’ attempts to attract and reward voters and members and it can be argued that they provide a more enduring basis for mobilisation.⁹ Though it has not been the subject of detailed empirical investigation, there is a widespread perception that both policy-based group patronage and individual patronage have played a key role in maintaining *Lager* loyalty (Müller 1989; Deiser and Winkler 1982:237).

During ‘classic’ consociationalism, policy patronage was an important tool for political mobilisation of the two main *Lager*, whose parties not only shared power in a government which provided high levels of economic growth, full employment and social welfare benefits, but also delivered to their respective client groups specific material rewards. In the case of the Catholic-conservative *Lager*, this included farming subsidies and regulative outputs designed to ensure restricted access to certain categories of trade and commerce, whilst the socialists *inter alia* provided job security and advantageous pension rights to ‘their’ workers in the nationalised industries. Among the effects of the economic downturn since the 1980s have been substantial redundancies in public-sector enterprises, cuts in public subsidies and the abolition of various targeted tax concessions. These developments and EU regulations against sectoral preferment have significantly reduced the scope for policy patronage.

Individual patronage has also been a major factor in the mobilisation strategies of the two main *Lager*. Their scope for exercising such patronage has been predicated in the main upon the introduction, soon after the war, of the principles of *Proporz* and segmental autonomy,¹⁰ the main aims of which were to avoid the crises of distribution and legitimation of the First Republic, by ensuring that both major *Lager* would consider themselves equal beneficiaries of the new state and be permitted the greatest possible latitude in the regulation of their own affairs. These practices increased *Lager* mobilisation, since the distribution of the material values allocated to the subcultures was largely undertaken autonomously within the *Lager*, where the beneficiaries were chosen above all from amongst those persons who could demonstrate their *Lager* commitment through, for example, active party

or auxiliary association membership. The kind of material rewards such people could expect included preferential treatment in the allocation of housing, jobs and promotion, as well as in the granting of individual licences to trade.

Both policy-based material rewards and individual patronage are costly and limited in their capacity to ensure *Lager* support. The main disadvantages of the former relate to macro-economic costs and the impossibility of preventing 'free-riders'. With individual patronage, free-riding is much reduced, but problems still remain. Allocating posts on the basis of *Lager* loyalty fosters inefficiency. Moreover, for individual patronage to be effective in recruiting and retaining *Lager* support, there must be a clear relationship between *Lager* loyalty and material rewards. Yet such clarity can be counter-productive, as has become increasingly evident in Austria, where clientelism now causes widespread public resentment. The well-documented recent rise in 'party weariness' appears strongly related to the public's dissatisfaction over what it increasingly perceives as a practice associated with political corruption. This development is potentially serious for Austria's traditional *Lager* structure, since it delegitimises not only the two pillar parties as such, but the political class as a whole. In that this increases the salience of 'horizontal' divisions between elites and the masses, political patronage threatens, rather than supports, the vertical subcultural encapsulation upon which *Lager* loyalty has been based.

Hierarchical control and political cohesion

Introduction

As we have seen, organisational plurality within Austria's *Lager* has facilitated subcultural penetration and formed the basis of pillarization. However, it could *prima facie* militate against a level of intra-*Lager* hierarchical control sufficient to enable the subculture to appear as a single and decisive political actor externally. Of considerable significance is thus how and with what success the Austrian *Lager* have sought to ensure the hierarchical control of their subcultural organisations and the overall political cohesion of their *Lager*.

Hierarchical control

During 'classic' consociationalism, the internal structure and operation of the parties and major auxiliary associations of the two main *Lager* shared three key characteristics. First, their sheer size placed inexorable pressure on them to adopt hierarchical, bureaucratic structures and operating styles. These were reinforced by the criteria governing career progression, namely, seniority and bureaucratic loyalty. Pillar parties and auxiliary associations were thus staffed in the main not by politically committed amateurs, but by professional bureaucrats, whose values were often orientated inwards to the organisations themselves, leaving them increasingly

distant from their subculture's grass roots. The gap between the parties and their members was exacerbated by the 1976 law on party finance. It reduced parties' reliance upon membership dues in favour of state subsidies, thereby lowering incentives to recruit and retain individual members. This may help explain the subsequent decline of the SPÖ and ÖVP's membership levels.

Second, the internal operation of the most significant organisations of the two main *Lager* was governed more by technocratic values than by ideational incentives. This resulted in part from bureaucratisation, but was also related to the specialist role of the large, occupation-based auxiliary associations. Indeed, the chambers constituted in many respects a more significant source of expert advice than the state bureaucracies and since the socialist and Catholic-conservative subcultures exercised a virtual monopoly of control over access to the expertise of 'their' chambers, this put them in a politically very powerful position in the policy formulation and implementation processes.

Third, all subcultural organisations had a tradition of oligarchic decision-making that has been regarded as both a cause and a consequence of Austria's well-documented subject political culture. As long as political outputs were perceived to be satisfactory, most Austrians appear to have been content to leave 'real' politics to a more or less professional class of politicians (Deiser and Winkler 1982; Plasser and Ulram 1991). Many of the activists and functionaries of key *Lager* organisations shared a largely deferential role culture. For example, in the mid-1970s, it was estimated that only about 3 per cent of SPÖ members exercised significant influence upon important aspects of intra-party decision-making (Pelinka 1977:39). Moreover, a more detailed account has recently suggested that whilst the level of SPÖ members' activism is comparable with that of parties in many other countries, it has declined (Müller 1996b: esp. 261–98). Organisational oligarchy was also promoted by the aforementioned dependence of the functionaries and office holders of subcultural organisations upon their bureaucratic hierarchies. Together, such attitudinal and structural factors help explain the disciplined nature of subcultural organisations, their tendency for centralised decision-making and the predominance of 'horizontal' power games, strongly biased in favour of the leaders (Panebianco 1988:30–2).

Subcultural political cohesion

Subcultural political cohesion was promoted by a number of structures and techniques. Some have already been discussed and they include appeals to purposive and solidary incentives, as well as to material values. Partisan *Lager* attachment and a dampening of intra-subcultural conflict (e.g. Powell 1970; Stiefbold 1974b) was also ensured by *Lager* encapsulation and membership of a multiplicity of organisations within a given *Lager*.¹¹ Of considerable significance was the fact that *Lager* organisations also overlapped in respect of their leaderships ('interlocking directorates' (Lijphart 1968b:60–7)).

However, we are interested not only in the bases and extent of *Lager* cohesion, but also in whether subcultural political primacy has been exercised by the respective pillar party. Where the organisation of party membership was direct, as in the KPÖ, SPÖ and FPÖ, subcultural loyalty was orientated primarily to the party. Conversely, in the ÖVP, where party membership was indirect, the loyalty of many members of the party's constituent 'Leagues' remained directed mainly to the latter, rather than to the party as a whole, with the result that the party continued to be beset by problems of factionalism. A second key factor concerned the location of control over the subculture's reward structure. Though occupational auxiliary associations always played an important role in dispensing rewards, in the communist and socialist subcultures, the party retained a significant degree of control over these associations, thus ensuring the primacy within those *Lager* of the party organisation. By contrast, the experience of the Catholic-conservative subculture was of much greater auxiliary association independence and a concomitant relative weakness of the *Lager* party *vis-à-vis* the Leagues.

At first glance, there appears to have been little change since 'classic' consociationalism in the internal character of Austria's subcultural organisations, or in *Lager* cohesion. Many *Lager* organisations are still highly bureaucratised. The most centralised and oligarchic of the three traditional *Lager* parties has historically been the SPÖ, where long-running debates on internal democratisation, decentralisation and reducing the party's oligarchic decision-making processes have met with only limited success. The persistence of oligarchic practices within the SPÖ and its hierarchical control of the socialist *Lager* may well be related to the fact that the party has been in government for forty-nine of the fifty-three post-war years, resulting in what Müller and Philipp (1987:277–302) have described as the 'governmentness' of the party. By contrast, the Catholic-conservative *Lager* continues to be characterised by a much greater degree of decentralisation (see below). For its part, the FPÖ was traditionally a party of notables, in which political power was shared between the leaders of its largest provincial organisations. Internal party conflicts were often presented as disputes between national and liberal orientations, but in reality tended to derive from power struggles based upon personalities and regional interests, for which ideology often provided a useful rationalisation. A recent study of the leadership selection processes in the SPÖ, ÖVP and FPÖ (Müller and Meth-Cohn 1991) has documented the persistence of oligarchic decision-making. Moreover, it argues that it is greatest within the two key consociational 'players'.

Despite such evidence of continuity, there have in recent years been some quite significant changes. First, in part as a result of public resentment of role accumulation by 'multi-functionaries', there has been a decline in overlapping leadership. This was intended to curtail the political power of individuals and to promote the role within *Lager* organisations of formal structures and ordinary members, but has not succeeded because of a second trend, a shift in the location of power within political parties from their official organs to party leaders. This has

been most pronounced in the SPO and the FPÖ, which have in recent years both been led by strong individuals. In Haider's FPÖ, for example, the power of the party leader has greatly increased (Luther 1997a), as illustrated by a significant growth in his involvement in staffing decisions at both the *Land* and the federal level. The FPÖ had always relied much less than the other *Lager* parties upon seniority and bureaucratic loyalty as principles governing promotion. However, many key posts are now allocated to people with little or no previous service in the *Lager*, who all owe their positions directly to the party chairman. Their loyalty thus naturally tends to be orientated more to him than to the subculture as such.

A third significant trend, and one to some extent contrary to that just outlined, has been for the importance of the territorial dimension of Austrian politics to increase. This is caused in part by a revitalisation of federalism, but also by a tendency for elections to the provincial parliaments to become national elections. As a consequence, the territorial subunits of the subcultural associations of the two main *Lager* have become more powerful, as have provincial party leaders. During the ÖVP's lengthy period of opposition at the federal level (1970–87), party decentralisation became even more pronounced, as successful *Land* party organisations pursued strategies independent of the central party (e.g. Lower Austria and Tyrol) and made individual deals with SPÖ federal governments. Especially where they are simultaneously the head of the provincial government, the leaders of both ÖVP and SPÖ provincial party organisations now exercise a considerable amount of control over the territorial subdivisions of the party.

Fourth, there has been a trend for some of the auxiliary associations to seek to maximise membership of their own organisation by de-emphasising their partisan political character (see above). This does not so much threaten party primacy within the subculture, as indicate a decline of subcultural identity and cohesion in favour of a more catch-all strategy. Finally, notwithstanding the previous point, levels of *Lager* unity and control have generally remained relatively high within the socialist subculture and in the case of the 'Third *Lager*' have even increased. By contrast, the problems of disunity within the Catholic-conservative subculture have become acute. There is every reason to be cautious about the potential of recent internal party reforms for resolving the ÖVP's chronic problems. There is a real threat to not only the present unity of the *Lager*, but to its very survival, with one possible scenario being a fractionalisation of the party into its constituent functional, or even territorial units. Were that to occur, it would not only spell the end of the Catholic-conservative *Lager* as we have known it, but would in all probability have a dramatic impact on the nature of Austrian politics, which was for so long conducted on the basis of interaction between hierarchically controlled and politically cohesive *Lager* blocks.

Parties between their pillars: overarching elite accommodation¹²

Introduction

We lack survey data from the first two post-war decades, but other evidence strongly suggests that during ‘classic’ consociationalism and for many years thereafter, Austrian voters were extremely loyal and voting largely predicated upon the traditional cleavages of class and religion, which in 1969, for example, still accounted for 46 and 36 per cent of variation (Haerpfer and Gehmacher 1984:28). Though narrowing of subcultural divisions and gradual depillarization steadily expanded the previously extremely small pool of floating voters, individual volatility flows largely cancelled each other out and aggregate electoral volatility thus remained low (Table 3.3). Between 1953 and 1979, it was merely 3.49 per cent and in 1975 dropped as low as 0.42 per cent. At each of the last three elections, however, it was unusually high. Even comparing 1995 with 1986, rather than with the 1960s, when the *Lager* parties still dominated their respective sociodemographic strongholds, there has been a transformation in the party-political profile of different social groups (Table 3.4). Some of the ÖVP’s greatest losses have been amongst its traditional *Lager* supporters: the self-employed (–21 per cent); farmers (–21 per cent); and unemployed women (–18 per cent). The only social group amongst which it still retains a clear majority support is farmers, but they account for only approximately 7 per cent of the working population. The SPÖ too has suffered especially badly in its subcultural heartland. For many years, it had obtained over two thirds of the blue-collar vote and even in 1986, its support amongst skilled workers lay at 56 per cent and amongst the unskilled or semi-skilled it comprised 59 per cent. In 1995, the SPÖ was only able to muster the votes of 40 and 43 per cent respectively. A very worrying development for both the SPÖ and ÖVP is the ageing of their electorates. For its part, the FPÖ has increased its support most amongst blue-collar voters of both categories and amongst the youngest age cohort.

The capacity of sociostructural variables to predict voter choice has been much reduced. Religiosity is still important, with 59 per cent of all religiously active Austrians voting for the ÖVP, whilst union membership predisposes voters to support the SPÖ. Living in a blue-collar household has the same, albeit less pronounced, effect (Plasser, Ulram, Neuwirth and Sommer 1995:45). Yet between 1969 and 1995, the Alford index of class voting declined from 26 to a mere 9 points, but applied to the FPÖ, it registers 12 (Plasser, Ulram, Seeber 1996:183). Indeed, if one looks not at the political profile of sociodemographic groups, but at the sociodemographic profile of party support (see Table 3.5), one finds that blue-collar voters now comprise only 24 per cent of the SPÖ’s electorate, but 35 per cent of the FPÖ’s. In other words, the SPÖ’s traditional role as the party of the working class is now shared with the FPÖ.

Table 3.4 Voting profile of selected Austrian sociodemographic groups in 1986 and 1995 (%)

	1986						1995						Change 1986-95					
	SPÖ	ÖVP	FPÖ	G	SPÖ	G	SPÖ	ÖVP	FPÖ	G	LiF	SPÖ	ÖVP	FPÖ	G			
<i>Men</i>	42	38	12	4	35	26	27	27	4	5	-7	-12	+15	0				
employed	41	38	13	4	34	24	30	30	4	4	-7	-14	+17	0				
unemployed	44	37	11	5	29	25	9	15	15	19	-15	-12	-2	+10				
<i>Women</i>	43	43	7	5	40	29	16	23	0	3	-3	-14	+9	0				
employed	46	37	7	7	35	26	20	7	7	8	-11	-11	+13	0				
unemployed	34	49	8	7	38	31	14	14	7	6	+4	-18	+6	0				
pensioners	49	44	5	0	50	31	10	10	1	2	+1	-13	+5	+1				
<i>Age</i>																		
First-time voters	37	35	14	12	30	18	29	29	10	9	-9	-15	+17	-1				
18-29 years old	39	33	12	11	36	25	24	5	5	5	-7	-12	+13	0				
30-44 years old	43	37	11	5	39	33	19	2	2	5	-3	-15	+13	+1				
45-59 years old	42	48	6	1	42	36	14	1	1	3	-2	-9	+6	0				
60-69 years old	44	45	8	1	46	32	16	16	0	1	0	-11	+7	-1				
70 and over	46	43	9	1														
<i>Occupation</i>																		
self-employed/																		
professionals	14	60	15	6	18	39	28	28	7	5	+4	-21	+13	+1				
farmers	1	93	5	1	4	72	18	18	1	1	+3	-21	+13	0				
civil servants	49	32	9	6	48	20	17	6	6	6	-1	-12	+8	0				
white-collar	40	36	13	7	32	28	22	7	7	8	-8	-8	+9	0				
blue-collar skilled	56	26	11	4	40	14	35	4	4	4	-16	-12	+24	0				
b-c un/semi-skilled	59	28	8	3	43	11	33	3	3	3	-16	-17	+25	0				
housewives	36	52	8	4	42	34	12	3	3	4	+6	-18	+4	-1				
pensioners	49	41	7	1	45	32	16	16	1	3	-4	-9	+9	0				
in schooling	19	38	9	23	25	22	15	15	19	18	+6	-16	+6	-4				
Overall	43	41	17	5	38	28	22	22	5	6	-5	-13	+5	0				

Sources: Fesse!+GfK, Exit Polls; 1986 (n=2, 149); Plasser and Ulram (1988:84); 1995 (n=2, 333); Plasser et al. (1995:31)
 Note: For party abbreviations see list on pages xix-xx.

Table 3.5 Social structure of Austrian party electorates 1986 and 1995 (%)

	1986				1995				Change 1986-96				
	SPÖ	ÖVP	FPÖ	G	SPÖ	ÖVP	FPÖ	G	LiF	SPÖ	ÖVP	FPÖ	G
<i>Sex</i>													
Men	46	44	61	40	45	46	62	39	41	-1	+2	+1	-1
Women	54	56	39	60	55	54	38	61	59	+1	-2	-1	+1
<i>Age</i>													
18-29 years old	22	20	31	58	18	15	31	52	39	-4	-5	0	-6
20-44 years old	28	25	32	32	27	25	31	34	28	-1	0	-1	+2
45-59 years old	23	27	15	6	23	27	20	11	21	0	0	+5	+5
60-69 years old	12	13	10	2	15	17	9	2	9	+3	+4	-1	0
70 and over	15	15	12	3	16	15	10	1	4	+1	0	-2	-2
<i>Occupation</i>													
self-employed/													
professionals	2	7	7	6	2	6	6	7	4	0	-1	-1	+1
farmers	0	9	2	1	1	10	3	1	1	+1	+1	+1	0
civil servants	7	5	6	8	9	5	5	9	8	+2	0	-1	+1
white-collar	18	17	27	29	18	21	22	33	34	0	+4	-5	+4
blue-collar	30	14	22	17	24	10	35	17	15	-6	-4	+13	0
housewives	12	18	12	12	12	13	6	6	8	0	-5	-6	-6
pensioners	28	25	19	4	31	30	19	3	13	+3	+5	0	-1
<i>Education</i>													
obligatory	32	30	18	15	29	24	20	12	5	-3	-6	+2	-3
vocational	52	45	56	31	47	41	58	30	33	-5	-4	+2	-1
qualified for													
university entrance/													
graduates	16	25	26	54	24	35	22	58	62	+8	+10	-4	+4

Sources: Fessel+GfK, Exit Polls; 1986 (n=2, 149); Plasser and Ulram (1988:85); 1995 (n=2, 333) Plasser *et al.* (1995:41).

Note: For party abbreviations see list on pages xix-xx.

The electoral arena

These voting behaviour changes have radically altered the structure of party competition in the electoral arena. The appearance of the Greens in 1986 and the Liberal Forum (by the defection of five FPÖ MPs) in 1993 has increased the number of relevant parties from three to five. Two-party ‘consociational’ concentration of the national vote (see [Chapter 10](#)) has dropped from an average of 88 per cent and rising from 1953–66 inclusive, to 66 per cent in 1995. The ‘effective number of parties’ has jumped from two for most of the post-war period to nearly four now (see F_e and N_v in [Table 3.3](#)). The relatively weak electoral position of the party of the *Third Lager* has been transformed since Haider took over in 1986. Its vote immediately doubled (to 9.7 per cent) and by 1994 reached 22.5 per cent. In 1995, the party experienced a marginal fall (0.6 per cent) in its proportion of the national vote. However, its absolute number of votes increased and opinion polls have since placed it in second place, ahead of the ÖVP. Moreover, at a number of *Land*-level elections, the FPÖ has relegated one or other of the pillar parties to third place and thus contributed greatly to ending the hegemonic position hitherto occupied by the ÖVP or SPÖ in most of the *Land* electoral arenas. The significance of this for Austrian consociationalism is that as the geographical concentration of *Lager* support declines, so too does their capacity to sustain their territorially based segmental autonomy.

The style of the pillar parties’ behaviour in the electoral arena was never accommodative, but took the form of highly emotional ‘propaganda battles’ (Hölzl 1974)¹³ designed to mobilise mutually exclusive voter segments. As the decline of ‘*Lager* mentality’ (Plasser *et al.* 1995)—and of pillarization—gradually lowered the psychological and sociostructural barriers to genuine electoral competition, the parties first sought to appeal to the new group of floating voters. Kreisky’s SPÖ was the most successful at this and his electoral victories during the 1970s were in large measure predicated upon the party’s ability to convince them to ‘go part of the way’ with the SPÖ. From the 1980s, the pillar parties then started redirecting their appeals at supporters of rival *Lager*. This has required a radical alteration to the language of competition. Traditional exhortations to *Lager* solidarity have been muzzled, as have attempts to promote or maintain fear of the rival *Lager*. Electoral competition is now less inclined to be based upon appeals to solidary incentives and is not only more orientated to promoting the image of key party candidates, but is slicker and more expensive.

For the first two post-war decades, both pillar parties claimed their electoral goal was a balance of power and accused its rival of aspiring to an absolute majority. The widespread fear of absolute majorities is understandable, for Austrians still had vivid memories, deliberately sustained by *Lager* propaganda, of civil war and fascism. The 1966–79 ÖVP government and the SPÖ’s successful aspiration in the 1970s to form single-party governments can perhaps be regarded as indicative of Austrians’ growing confidence in the two major parties’ democratic credentials. In turn, this

could be attributed at least in part to the success of the politics of accommodation in reducing *Lager* distrust.

However, it would be wrong to neglect the role which protest and anti-system orientations continue to play in the Austrian electoral arena. At least since the 1949 emergence of the VdU, strong criticism of central features of elite accommodation (e.g. segmental autonomy, *Proporz*, overlapping leadership, mutual veto, patronage and party ubiquity) has been firmly located on the agenda of electoral competition. In recent years, its frequency, vehemence and currency have increased. It is no longer the preserve of the FPÖ, but also advanced by, for example, the Greens and the Liberal Forum. The widespread acceptance of such criticisms could be regarded as symptomatic of a certain malaise in Austrian politics, which appears to be becoming more susceptible to protest and anti-system parties. Alternatively, it may be regarded as demonstrating the political maturity of Austrian voters, who are now less willing to be governed by a political system organised around oligarchic political structures predicated upon mass deference to assumed elite wisdom.

The parliamentary arena

Given Austria's weak electoral system, changes to the format of party competition in the parliamentary arena closely mirror those in the electoral arena.¹⁴ Indeed, in 1970 the SPO introduced a reform of the electoral system that served to further enhance its fairness (Müller 1996a). New actors have since emerged; there has been deconcentration analogous to that in the electoral arena (see F_p and N_s figures in Table 3.3); FPÖ representation has increased and the former SPÖ, or ÖVP hegemonies in the nine *Land* parliaments have ended.

The style of party interaction is now much less quiescent (Fischer 1997; Kathrein 1986; Widder 1986; Nevlacsil 1983, 1986, 1990; *Österreichische Parlamentarische Gesellschaft* 1994). Parliament has greatly increased the frequency with which it uses procedures designed to hold government and administration to account. Some committees of investigation, for example, have for the first time been held in public and many have not shirked from challenging the conduct of in part very prominent *Lager* politicians. Second, there has been an increase in unorthodox parliamentary behaviour, notably amongst the FPÖ and the Greens, who regard many parliamentary procedures as based on a cosy, but corrupt system of accommodation established by and for the interests of the two major *Lager*. Third, up to as late as the early 1980s, 70–80 per cent of acts were regularly passed unanimously, but in the 1992–93 session, for example, this was the case in only 22 per cent of laws. Finally, levels of party discipline have declined. During 1986–90, MPs failed to follow the party whip in 10 per cent of the laws that were passed. Whilst this level of dissent is low by international standards, it was by far the highest level in post-war Austria. In 1993, the first ever creation of a new parliamentary party occurred, when the Liberal Forum split from the FPÖ and in 1996, one of the Forum MPs crossed the floor to return to the FPÖ, another novel event in Austrian parliamentary history.

In the dying days of the parliament prorogued by the snap election called for December 1995, the outgoing governing parties (SPÖ and ÖVP) lost all semblance of control over parliamentary business. Bills were passed and opposed by virtually every conceivable voting combination of the five parliamentary parties. Though the 1995 election restored the government's two-thirds majority and thus weakened the parliamentary opposition, the latter has not taken attempts to stifle parliament's new-found freedoms lying down. In June 1997, for example, all three opposition parties co-operated in a boycott of parliamentary committee work designed to force the government to agree to a specific committee of enquiry and more generally to strengthen minority parliamentary rights.

In sum, though it still has some way to go until it truly becomes an actor in its own right, parliament has without doubt become a site for more significant levels of confrontation than used to be the case during 'classic' consociationalism and has thus started to shed its role as a primarily symbolic arena, in which the representatives of the two pillar parties controlled over 90 per cent of seats and obediently rubber-stamped decisions made elsewhere.

The governmental arena

As [Table 3.6](#) demonstrates, from 1947 to 1966, access to national government was restricted to the two pillar parties. Between them, they were usually able to rely on the support of over 90 per cent of MPs (see [Table 3.3](#)) and formed the 'grand coalitions' so emblematic of 'classic' consociationalism. Portfolio allocation was broadly proportionate to the parties' relative share of the vote at the preceding election. Meanwhile, segmental autonomy permitted them to nominate their own ministerial teams, which in turn mirrored the power of intra-*Lager* groups, and it was also reflected in the principle of ministerial autonomy, though the latter was qualified by the custom of allocating to key ministries a secretary of state of the opposing party to monitor activities. The mechanics of party interaction were predominantly consensual, with cabinet decision-making governed by mutual veto and log-rolling.¹⁵

Grand coalition government ended in 1966. Between then and its re-establishment in 1987, Austria was ruled by five single-party governments and an SPÖ/FPÖ coalition. Accordingly, neither the structure nor the mechanics of the national government arena corresponded to what one would expect of a consociational democracy. Leaving aside the issue of whether coalitions that control a much lower proportion of parliamentary seats still merit the designation 'grand', a comparison between the old and new SPÖ/ÖVP coalitions reveals a number of interesting points. First, portfolio allocation is again governed by *Proporz* and segmental autonomy. Indeed, the latter has revived the power of especially the ÖVP Leagues to determine government composition and thus in part reversed the post-1966 trend for the recruitment power of the chancellor to increase. On the other hand, the first three post-1987 governments each had only one state secretary attached to a

Table 3.6 Austrian governments and pillar party dominance (1945–98)

<i>Date installed</i>	<i>Prime Minister</i>	<i>Duration (years)</i>	<i>Party composition (Chancellor party named first)</i>	<i>Cabinet seats held by pillar parties (%)</i>
27 Apr 45	Renner	0.6	SPÖ-ÖVP-KPÖ	100
20 Dec 45	Figl (I)	1.9	ÖVP-SPÖ-KPÖ	100
20 Nov 47	Figl (II)	2.0	ÖVP-SPÖ	100
08 Nov 49	Figl (III)	3.4	ÖVP-SPÖ	100
02 April 53	Raab (I)	3.2	ÖVP-SPÖ	100
29 Jun 56	Raab (II)	3.0	ÖVP-SPÖ	100
16 Jul 59	Raab (III)	1.7	ÖVP-SPÖ	100
11 Apr 61	Gorbach (I)	2.0	ÖVP-SPÖ	100
27 Mar 63	Gorbach (II)	1.0	ÖVP-SPÖ	100
02 Apr 64	Klaus (I)	2.0	ÖVP-SPÖ	100
19 Apr 66	Klaus (II)	4.0	ÖVP	100
21 Apr 70	Kreisky (I)	1.5	SPÖ	100
04 Nov 71	Kreisky (II)	4.0	SPÖ	100
28 Oct 75	Kreisky (III)	3.6	SPÖ	100
05 Jun 79	Kreisky (IV)	4.0	SPÖ	100
24 May 83	Sinowatz	3.0	SPÖ-FPÖ	79
16 Jun 86	Vranitzky (I)	0.6	SPÖ-FPÖ	79
21 Jan 87	Vranitzky (II)	4.0	SPÖ-ÖVP	100
17 Dec 90	Vranitzky (III)	4.0	SPÖ-ÖVP	100
29 Nov 94	Vranitzky (IV)	1.3	SPÖ-ÖVP	100
12 Mar 96	Vranitzky (V)	0.9	SPÖ-ÖVP	100
28 Jan 97	Klima	?	SPÖ-ÖVP	100

Notes:

To define a cabinet, the criteria ‘same chancellor’, ‘same party composition’ and ‘between parliamentary elections’ were used; for party abbreviations see list on pages xix–xx.

ministry controlled by another party and though the significance of that department (the finance ministry) makes their role important, monitoring has clearly declined overall. Indeed, all five state secretaries appointed by the last two governments have been allocated to departments headed by a minister from their own party. Second, the style of party interaction remains consensual; though log-rolling is less prevalent, cabinet decision-making is accommodative and mutual veto still applies. Official cabinet sessions are if anything even more meticulously prepared in prior meetings, where any item unlikely to receive unanimous approval is deferred. Accordingly, formal cabinet meetings remain quite ritualised events, at which decisions previously arrived at are formally ratified. There have, however, been important changes in respect of how and by whom those prior decisions are made. They used to be undertaken primarily in extra-constitutional fora such as the neo-corporatist arena (to which we shall return below), but above all the coalition committee, composed of the key political elites of the rival *Lager*, many of whom were not members of the cabinet itself (Rudzio 1971). The post-1987 coalition committee is a very different political animal. Its membership does not include the

chancellor, or the vice-chancellor and so it lacks the political clout of its predecessor. It also has only two members (the chairmen of the SPÖ and ÖVP parliamentary parties) who are not full members of the government. There has thus been a marked decline in the extent to which government decision-making is pre-determined by inter-subcultural agreements in extra-constitutional fora (Müller 1992a).

Party interaction in *Land* governmental arenas has always been different. Relatively high (albeit declining) levels of two-party concentration persist and SPÖ and or ÖVP-dominated all-party government remains the norm. In seven (of nine) *Länder*, all parties with a significant level of representation in the *Landtag* have consistently had a legal entitlement to be represented in government, though that is not always as significant as might appear. For one, many are allocated rather insignificant ministries. In addition, the dominant party always holds the post of governor, thus retaining control over crucial budgetary and staffing decisions. Finally, decision-making in *Land* cabinets operates on the basis of majority voting and not mutual veto, so the political reality has usually been one-party dominance and thus a degree of territorial autonomy for the relevant subculture. However, the declining electoral and parliamentary strength of ÖVP and SPÖ *Land* parties has required greater concessions to minor parties and in 1989 resulted in the appointment of Austria's first ever governor not from the SPÖ, or ÖVP: Jörg Haider. Though his term came to an abrupt end following his remarks about the Third Reich employment policies, it demonstrated the new vulnerability of *Land* governmental arenas. In response, the two major parties have since 1997 been giving serious consideration to changing the existing legal framework with a view to abolishing the minor parties' rights of governmental representation in favour of majority governments. Moves in this direction are well under way in Salzburg and other *Länder* are likely to follow suit. This is an interesting example of how a set of rules initially designed to guarantee the players of the 'consociational game' privileged access to the spoils of office have developed a perverse, or unintended effect and are now being reconsidered in order to maintain the predominance of the traditional party cartel.

As we have demonstrated elsewhere (Luther 1999a), access to the national government formation process remains low, as does alternation and innovation within it. With the exception of 1983–87, the governmental arena has since 1947 remained the preserve of the SPÖ and ÖVP. Third *Lager* parties have been excluded for all but 3.6 years, which means that regardless of whether the FPÖ has merited (or continues to merit) the label anti-system party, it has for most of its existence certainly been an excluded, or isolated party. Moreover, the SPÖ and/or ÖVP, still dominate at the *Land* level. Accordingly, when compared to the electoral and parliamentary arenas, the governmental arena shows many elements of continuity. Given the significance which the consociational model attaches to grand coalition government, it is of course understandable that many observers focus on 1966, which has often been cited as marking the end of Austrian consociational democracy. However, not only has grand coalition government returned, but the

SPÖ's exclusion from national government between 1966 and 1970 and that of the ÖVP from 1970–87 does not mark a decisive end to consociational practices. First, both pillar parties continued to exercise significant segmental autonomy within their provincial heartlands through their domination of *Land* governments. More important, however, is the fact that single-party national governments did not mean the abandonment of accommodative decision-making and mutual veto in crucial policy areas. In the absence of an SPÖ/ÖVP coalition, these practices could of course not be continued within government. Instead, they were largely transferred to the neo-corporatist arena, where grand coalition government was continued in an alternative form.

The neo-corporatist arena

Lager party interaction in the neo-corporatist arena has always been mediated through the five 'social partners': the Federal Chamber of Business (BWK), the Austrian Trade Union Federation (ÖGB), the Chamber of Labour (AK), the Chambers of Agriculture (LWK) and the Association of Austrian Industrialists (VÖI).¹⁶ Party competition within the social partners has been most pronounced in the BWK, ÖGB, AK and LWK, the internal politics of which have been dominated by one or other of the two pillar parties. For example, at AK elections up to and including 1964, the average SPÖ share of the vote was 67 per cent. Though internal elections to the LWK still regularly return 80 per cent ÖVP majorities, there has elsewhere been a decline in the dominant party's representation within 'its' Chamber. Thus in 1994, the SPÖ *Fraktion* could muster only 54.5 per cent of the vote. Turnout for chamber elections has also dropped. In the BWK, it fell from 79 per cent in 1975 to 62 per cent in 1990, whilst AK turnout plummeted from an average of 71 per cent between 1949–64 to 31 per cent in 1994. These trends are indicators of declining vertical interest group integration. Yet these changes to the strengths of party groups within the social partners have to date had very little impact upon the interaction between them. This is above all a consequence of the latter's highly centralised and oligarchic internal structure. Moreover, positions of authority within those organisations are not allocated on the basis of *Proporz*, but segmental autonomy and so the internal hegemony of the dominant party grouping persists.

The structure of interaction between the main actors in the neo-corporatist arena was traditionally characterised by two-party concentration, proportionality, interconnectedness with other arenas and segmental autonomy. There has been little or no significant change since the 1960s in respect of the first two aspects. The two major *Lager*'s monopoly of the highest levels of neo-corporatist interaction remains intact and *Proporz*. still governs organs of social partnership such as the influential Joint Commission and its three main sub-committees, as well as the hundreds of advisory bodies, which have legal rights of consultation regarding the detailed application of legislation.

However, there have been changes to the interconnectedness of the neo-corporatist arena with other arenas of subcultural interaction. There undoubtedly remains a fair degree of functional overlap with the governmental arena. Thus the social partners are still regularly involved in policy initiation and formulation, often through the Joint Commission, which is attended by federal ministers and chaired by the Federal Chancellor. However, that forum is nothing like as influential as it was in the 1960s, when it was widely referred to as a second cabinet. Moreover, there is evidence to suggest that whilst the social partners remain an important source of technical expertise, their involvement in policy-making is of late neither as frequently sought, nor as seriously taken as it once was (Gerlich, Grande and Müller 1985; Bischof and Pelinka 1996). Second, one of the key practices which kept the neo-corporatist arena so closely intertwined with the wider processes of inter-subcultural accommodation was overlapping leadership. The leaders of social partner organisations continue to be highly placed within their respective party hierarchies and thus inescapably involved in other arenas of the party system, but there has been a decline in the practice of holding multiple public office.

Inasmuch as it denotes self-regulation by the subcultures of their own sphere of the socioeconomic system, segmental autonomy is of course an essential element of neo-corporatism. It justified the *Lager* organisations' involvement in the initiation, formulation and making of policy, and in its implementation. However, since the mid-1980s, the commitment to segmental autonomy has declined. This is primarily a result of a general trend for the role of the state to be reduced. Since the neo-corporatist actors also function as agents of the state, this implies a narrowing of the scope for neo-corporatist intervention and a concomitant reduction in segmental autonomy. Pressure to reduce the regulatory role of the social partners *vis-à-vis* their *Lager* also comes from growing public resentment over both the structure and the operating style of the neo-corporatist arena (Tálos 1997). Last but not least, Austria's membership of the European Union will impact upon segmental autonomy. For instance, EU single market rules on sectoral preferment will restrict the capacity of the segments to provide subsidies designed to help 'shelter' the branches of the economy in which their client groups are located, or to play a gatekeeper role that effectively restricts access to those areas to members of their segment. Examples include the nationalised industries (a traditional stronghold of the socialist subculture), as well as the regulation of farming and small business activity (areas in which the ÖVP and allied auxiliary associations have hitherto been very influential).

The style of party interaction remains characterised by mutual veto and log-rolling. Though the latter is not popular, it is not these operating principles that have caused the neo-corporatist arena to come under attack, but other aspects of the social partners' behaviour. First, the secret decision-making typical of the first two or three post-war decades was then largely uncontested, but processes not amenable to public scrutiny are now much less acceptable. Second, decision-making appears to have been conducted in an extremely oligarchic manner, with

many of the most important decisions apparently having been made between just two key individuals: the ÖGB and BWK presidents. Third, the chambers are widely perceived as bureaucracies more concerned with self-preservation, rather than with improving the lot of their members, whose interests they were nominally established to promote. Demands for reform vary from calls for the chambers to be scrapped to suggestions for promoting their public accountability. A very popular demand is abolishing compulsory membership in the AK, BWK and LWK. Should it be acted upon, the result would be likely to be at least a radical restructuring of *Lager* interaction in the neo-corporatist arena and possibly even the wholesale abandonment of the corporatist structures and practices that so distinguished 'classic' consociationalism. A hitherto symbolic, but potentially serious recent challenge has been the establishment in 1997 by the FPÖ of its own trade union to challenge the role of the ÖGB, which the FPÖ accuses of having been too party-politically partisan.

The bureaucratic arena

During the ill-fated First Republic, the socialist subculture was largely excluded from posts in the state administration and wider public sector, which were staffed predominantly by Catholic-conservatives. After the war, the political elite of the two main *Lager* agreed that for the socialists to be reassured about the new state's neutrality, appointments to the bureaucracy and Austria's extensive range of public sector enterprises would need to be undertaken according to the principle of *Proporz*. This commitment was spelled out in their various coalition agreements and made the bureaucratic arena an important site of party interaction (Secher 1958; Engelmann 1966; Neisser 1977 and 1997; Gugler 1987; Engelmayr 1977; Müller 1989). Within the civil service, proportionality mainly took the form of segmental autonomy, with departments coming to assume the political 'colour' of their ministers. In public-sector enterprises such as the *Österreichische Nationalbank*, equal proportions of employees of the rival *Lager* were appointed at every level of an organisation. Elsewhere, enterprises were largely independently run by 'their' *Lager*. Examples include the Catholic-conservative *Länderbank* as well as the socialist *Bank Austria*.

It is very difficult to quantify the impact of *Proporz* and segmental autonomy on the political profile of public-sector employment, particularly as regards the myriad of public-sector enterprises and the following comments will thus be restricted to the state administration. One rough indicator of the impact on the federal civil service are the results of elections held since 1967 to the federal civil servants' representative body (Luther 1992:89). They show a high concentration of support (90–5 per cent) for the groupings representing the two main *Lager*, with the Catholic-conservative groups polling between 52 and 60 per cent of the vote, though their lead over the socialists has declined since the mid-1980s. These aggregate figures mask considerable variations between the different ministries and federal agencies, which predictably mirror the party-political 'colour' of the relevant department. A

closer examination of the results also reveals movements of support that shadow changes in political control from the ÖVP to the SPÖ and vice versa. Moreover, at the 1987 election, the level of support for FPÖ lists in ministries which had had an FPÖ minister or state secretary during the 1983–86 FPÖ/SPÖ coalition increased by a factor of between two and three, albeit from a very low level.

These results must be treated with considerable caution, however. First, since one person has one vote, but a few persons have disproportionately high influence, they cannot reveal the relative degree of party influence within the bureaucratic arena. The general consensus amongst informed observers is that they underestimate the extent of influence which the SPÖ has been able to build up, especially during its period of single-party governments, when it was able to place its supporters in many strategic positions. Second, the results exclude the large numbers of *Land* civil servants, where political considerations have traditionally also been important in staffing decisions and where the ÖVP has dominated.

We also lack the detailed research necessary to permit precise statements about the extent to which party considerations have governed actual behaviour in the bureaucratic arena. Informed opinion suggests that party considerations have traditionally been quite important, though *Proporz* never succeeded in eradicating situations where civil servants' loyalty to any party affiliation they might have had was mitigated by departmental loyalty, or a commitment to the principle of a non-partisan civil service. Since the 1970s, there has been growing emphasis on the notion of appointment on merit, rather than on the basis of party membership, as well as upon expertise, efficiency and (particularly in the case of public-sector enterprises) upon the market. Although this discourse is in part rhetorical, there appears since the late 1980s to have been a modest decline in the politicisation of the bureaucracy. Moreover, decisions on the staffing of the bureaucratic arena are certainly no longer made with a view to their implication for system stability and the need to be seen to incorporate previously excluded political groups. The legitimacy deficit which the bureaucracy had in the eyes of the socialist *Lager* during the immediate post-war years has largely disappeared. The recent shift of attention to its efficiency deficit can be regarded as symptomatic in at least some respect of the success of the consociational techniques of *Proporz* and segmental autonomy.

On the other hand, there is evidence of a certain reluctance on the part of the political elite to give up the advantages that accrue to them via the strategies of segmental autonomy and *Proporz*. A recent and dramatic illustration of this occurred in late 1996 and early 1997. As part of a programme of deregulation and privatisation that was not unrelated to achieving the Maastricht criteria for membership of the single currency, the government had finally agreed that it would sell the Republic's stake in the *Creditanstalt* bank. This is an institution which had hitherto been located firmly within the ÖVP's domain of influence and a 1993 proposal that it be taken over by another conservative-dominated bank (the *Raiffeisenbank*) had been rejected, not least as a result of the SPÖ's reluctance to see the conservative-dominated banking sector strengthened. This helps explain the

fury of the ÖVP when it heard that the SPÖ Finance Minister responsible for deciding on the privatisation bids (Viktor Klima) was to opt for that submitted by the *Bank Austria*, which lay firmly within the influence of the SPÖ. Though some concessions were subsequently made to assuage ÖVP anger, the *Creditanstalt* was bought by *Bank Austria*. What this issue demonstrates, is that once they have gained positions of influence in the political, economic or social realm via principles such as *Proporz* and segmental autonomy, the players of the consociational game are very reluctant to relinquish them and instead seek to utilise the position they have achieved to expand their institutional power base. Accordingly, the pillarized structures underpinning elite accommodation may well outlast the social divisions which the consociational model considers to have been the original rationale for their creation.

Conclusion

During ‘classic’ consociationalism, Austria’s pillar parties and its party system exhibited all the features predicted by the framework which [Chapter 1](#) deduced from Lijphart’s original model. The pillar party elites ‘playing the consociational game’ exercised a key role in penetrating their respective subculture, in mobilising its members and in seeking to ensure its political cohesion and hierarchical control. They were also the main actors in Austria’s overarching elite accommodation. The domain of that elite cartel ranged from a virtual monopoly of federal and regional government, to duopolistic control over the neo-corporatist system, as well as over large parts of the civil service and public-sector enterprises.

The framework underpinning this volume also helped highlight the location, degree and sequence of change in Austria’s political sociology and elite behaviour. First, it showed how the decision of the pillar parties and their auxiliary associations to switch from a strategy of intensifying encapsulation to maximising their ‘catchment’ exacerbated the decline that was already under way in the affective ties that bound the members of each subculture together. This de-ideologisation meant a further contraction in the number of ‘believers’, whilst the loyalty of ‘careerists’ was undermined by their reduced dependence upon the *Lager* for the material incentives that had hitherto attracted and retained their support. For some time, these developments did not militate against the organisational penetration of Austrian society. On the contrary, throughout the 1970s, party and auxiliary association membership increased. This appears to support the proposition that, even if elite accommodation was preceded by a large amount of subcultural fragmentation and pillarization, the latter was certainly extended after the advent of elite accommodation, presumably as a technique for consolidating the rival subcultural elites’ political power. From the 1980s, however, we can see a clear decline in both measures of penetration and especially in the more politically partisan forms of participation. Notwithstanding these latter changes, by

international standards, Austria remains a society with a relatively high degree of political organisation.

Second, analysing the interaction of pillar party elites through the prism of the framework shows considerable change in the structure and mechanics of the electoral and parliamentary arenas of competition. By comparison, the governmental arena has remained a preserve of the two main pillar parties, as have the neo-corporatist and bureaucratic arenas, though the political influence of the former has of late waned somewhat. Indeed, this examination of subcultural elite interaction in the various arenas of party competition helped highlight how, notwithstanding the absence of national grand coalition government between 1966 and 1987, both major parties continued to be involved in accommodative decision-making in key policy areas via the neo-corporatist arena. In sum, there has been a considerable dilution of the partisan orientations that characterised the political sociology of Austrian consociational democracy, but pillar party elite accommodation shows a high degree of continuity.

In sum, the preceding analysis suggests that when extended to include the crucial role of parties, Lijphart's model still provides useful insights into the establishment and maintenance of democracies characterised by fragmented political cultures and overarching elite behaviour. However, as the essence of consociational democracy lies in the concurrence of both elements, declining '*Lager* mentality' means Austria has for some time been moving out of this type. For the findings of this chapter suggest that there has been asymmetrical change to the roles of the pillar parties in respect of, on the one hand, Austria's political sociology and on the other, their 'overarching' elite behaviour.¹⁷

Reverting to the metaphor of political architecture introduced at the start of this chapter, it is clear that Austria's political architects deliberately strengthened the pillars supporting the structure of consociational democracy by the reinforcing rods of organisational penetration, or pillarization. This enhanced the intensity of subcultural encapsulation. Meanwhile, elite accommodation was expanded to form not only a single arch spanning the pillars, but an all-embracing 'dome', by means of which party interaction encompassed broad areas of the political, economic and social system. The result has been a remarkably solid edifice. The arch (or dome) may well be outlasting (or indeed itself have undermined) the purpose for which it was originally erected. However, it has so far withstood the 'tremors' emanating from the processes of socioeconomic change, which have reduced segmentation. To be sure, there has been some de-pillarization, as party and auxiliary association membership has declined. But the complex and pervasive web of organisational reinforcing rods which the subcultures have erected since 1945 still significantly shape the context and nature of political action in Austria. Accordingly, whilst everything that goes up may well eventually have to come down, the nature and timing of the deconstruction of Austria's consociational architecture and the way in which the building blocks might subsequently be reassembled will have much to do

with the strategies and behaviour of the pillar party elites, who have to date exercised so crucial a role in Austrian consociationalism.

Notes

- 1 Since I initially formulated and applied the framework (Luther 1992), I have published on it in French (Luther 1997b). The present chapter constitutes a substantially updated and expanded version of those earlier publications.
- 2 The term *Lager* denotes an (armed) camp, a not altogether inappropriate term, given the parties' inter-war establishment of armed paramilitary organisations. The originator of the '*Lager* theory' is Wandruszka, who argued one could justifiably speak of a 'natural, or divinely-ordained tripartite division of Austria' into three *Lager* (1954, p. 291). For a criticism of the *Lager* theory, see Fritzl and Uitz (1975).
- 3 On the FPÖ and the Third *Lager*, see Luther (1987a; 1995a; 1996a; 1996b; 1997a).
- 4 For a detailed discussion of the relative merits of indicators of absolute membership, the ratio of members to voters (M/V) and of members to the electorate (M/E), see Katz and Mair *et al.* (1992a).
- 5 For the sake of clarity, the calculations in the text will be based only on the maximum ÖVP membership figures (see Tables 3.1 and 3.2). The analogous calculations based on the minimum ÖVP membership figures are 560,000, 140,750 and 25 per cent respectively.
- 6 As for the minor parties, the early and dramatic decline of the KPÖ has already been alluded to above. By 1996, the party had merely 3,000 and 4,000 members (Ehmer, 1997:328). By contrast, the albeit very small number of party members which the FPÖ had in the period up to 1966 has since more than doubled and in June 1998 stood at 51,038. However, the dramatic increase in the FPÖ's vote since 1986 means that the disparity between its membership density and that of the two major parties has actually increased.
- 7 The following figures derive mainly from Müller (1992b), but also from Gottweis (1984); Houska (1985); Powell (1970) and Pelinka and Steger (1988).
- 8 On the links between the Austrian elite's approach to on the one hand bridging domestic divisions and on the other its self-ascribed role of bridging geo-political divisions, see Luther (1998a).
- 9 See, for example, the discussion on 'incentives' by Panebianco (1988) and pages 9–10 of this volume.
- 10 *Proporz* denotes the proportional distribution of posts in the state bureaucracy and public-sector industries, as well as of public resources, between the two major parties in proportion to their relative strength, as defined primarily in terms of their relative share of the vote at the most recent national election.
- 11 Intra-subcultural conflict was of course not completely avoided, especially in the Catholic-conservative *Lager*, as will be discussed below.
- 12 For recent analyses of the Austrian party system, see Luther (1998b and 1999a) and Müller (1997b).
- 13 On campaigning in the more recent period, see Gerlich and Müller (1983); Plasser and Ulram (1983, 1986 and 1990), as well as Luther (1987b and 1995b); Müller (1990) and Müller and Plasser (1992).
- 14 Indeed, in 1970 the SPÖ introduced a reform of the electoral system that served to further enhance its fairness (Müller 1996a).
- 15 On the governmental arena during 'classic consociationalism', see Secher (1958); Ruzio (1971); and Dreijmanis (1982). For more recent developments, see Müller (1988 and 1997a).

- 16 This volume is predicated upon the primacy of party, as opposed to interest group control of the political process. For the argument that in consociational democracies such as Austria up to the late 1960s, the parties had been 'colonised' by the interest groups of their respective subculture, see Scholten (1987 a). More recent developments suggest the (renewed) primacy of the political over the corporatist channel (Gerlich 1992; Luther and Müller 1992a).
- 17 On this asymmetrical change during the period of Vranitzky's Chancellorship (1986–97), see Luther (1999c).

4

From consociation to federation

How the Belgian parties won

Kris Deschouwer

Introduction

When Luc Huyse tried in 1971 to apply Lijphart's model of consociational democracy to Belgium, he initially looked at the period between 1944 and 1961. He had very good reasons to finish his analysis in 1961, because that marked the end of a long period of political stability. After 1961, and especially after the critical elections of 1965, the Belgian political system went through radical changes. Many have therefore assumed that 1961 or 1965 marked the end of Belgian consociational democracy (Deschouwer, 1994a). The most striking change in the Belgian political system since the 1960s has been the reform of Belgium's unitary state into a federal one, and yet an examination of both the way in which this task was undertaken and the manner in which the federal state functions, allows one to recognise some typical features of consociationalism, which would thus appear to have been reintroduced through the back door.

The aim of this chapter is to examine the role of Belgium's pillar parties, with a view to establishing the extent to which they constitute central actors in the country's particular version of consociational democracy. We will show how central and crucial the role of the pillar parties has been. Furthermore, we will demonstrate that the way in which these parties reacted to regionalist tensions in the 1960s led inexorably to state reform. We will also describe how this federal state reform has a very distinctive consociational flavour, by maintaining and reinforcing the position of the pillar parties at the heart of the political arena.

This chapter will consist of three parts. First, we will give a short overview of the growth and development of Belgium's subcultures and pillar parties, as well as of the structures and techniques of overarching consociational accommodation. Second, we will assess the changing role of the pillar parties within Belgium's consociational democracy. Following Luther's framework, as laid out in [Chapter 1](#) of this volume, we will look both at the pillar parties' role of 'vertical' linkage within their respective subcultures, and at their 'horizontal' role in inter-subcultural interaction. Finally, we will look at the process of institutional reform, which resulted in the establishment of a federal state, and will outline both its consociational aspects and

the role which the pillar parties have adopted within it. This third section will illustrate the manner in which Belgium's party-centred consociational system was 'transformed' into a new type of consociationalism, in which the parties have, however, maintained their central role.

History of Belgian consociationalism

Interwar period

The contours of Belgium's pillar parties can be traced back to developments between 1893, when a form of universal male suffrage was introduced, and 1918. Although some male citizens could still cast two or three votes, this reform of the electoral system meant the arrival in parliament of thirteen representatives of the socialist Belgian Workers' Party (BWP/POB). The entrance of a third parliamentary party put an end to the 'format' and 'mechanics' (Sartori 1976: 128f) of the preceding party system, which had been bipolar, with the conservative Catholic Party on the one hand and the Liberal Party on the other. The politicisation of the labour-capital cleavage also changed the two existing parties. The Liberals defended not only a modern, secular state, but also the free-market economy. For its part, the Catholic Party was soon to be confronted with the internal rebellion of a Christian labour movement, pushing the party in a more Christian-democratic direction.

Towards the end of the century, this new political landscape slowly 'froze' (Lipset and Rokkan 1967b). The introduction of proportional representation, designed to save the shrinking Liberal Party, in fact helped to reproduce an electoral balance that survived until the 1960s. Belgium became a very typical example of what Blondel (1968) calls a 'two and a half party system'. The First World War did not really change this party landscape, but laid the foundations for its future disintegration. The war itself had brought to the fore the problematic position of the Dutch-speaking majority of the country, which had to date been governed mainly in French. Indeed, Dutch-speaking elites had collaborated with the German occupying administration in order to obtain the right to teach a number of courses at the state University of Ghent in Dutch, something which the Belgian state had not previously wanted to allow. Furthermore, the anomaly of Dutch-speaking Belgian soldiers being commanded in French at the front, added to the frustration of Dutch-speaking Belgians.

At the end of the war, it was very clear that a rather explosive cocktail of problems was making its way onto the political agenda. Both socioeconomic and linguistic tensions needed to be taken into account, in order to avert the possibility of the Belgian political system losing legitimacy and thus being seriously destabilised. The awareness of this threat brought the leaders of the three major political forces, Catholics, socialists and liberals together. On the initiative of King Albert, they agreed to introduce universal (male) suffrage at once, even though the constitution at that time did not yet allow for this change. This 1918 agreement can be

considered as the starting point of the elite accommodation that was to characterise Belgian consociationalism.¹

Yet one cannot say that the whole political system was immediately permeated by the accommodative style implicit in the 1918 agreement, which constituted only a temporary agreement, albeit an important one, designed to reduce existing tensions. What did develop, however, was the 'vertical' integration of the subcultures. This process of integration occurred principally within the Catholic and socialist subcultures, which created and incorporated a whole range of auxiliary organisations. In due course, the latter constituted the key elements of the Catholic and the socialist 'pillars'. It is important to note at this point that the real organisational integration of the two largest subcultures took place only after the first consociational agreement had been reached. It is very difficult therefore to find confirmation for the idea that the post-First World War accommodative behaviour of the political elites was a response to the societal segmentation, or institutionalisation, of the subcultures, as is suggested in the theories of Lijphart. On the contrary, it appears to have been a reaction to the mere presence, or potential presence, of conflict. And it is only after the initial accommodative agreement that the real institutionalisation, or pillarization, of the subcultures took off. However, the sequence of events in Belgium does not support the opposite causal relationship either, according to which elite accommodation caused pillarization, since elite accommodation had not yet become a normal and permanent feature of the system. This is because in Belgium, the territorial division consistently hindered the creation of strongly integrated pillars. This territorial division has had a twofold effect. In the first place, it was responsible for the uneven degree of pillar integration. The Catholic pillar has traditionally been strong in Flanders, but much weaker in the more industrialised and secular region of Wallonia. The opposite is true for the socialist pillar, which is mainly a Walloon phenomenon. So we might say that two strong pillars were built, but both strong pillars have one much weaker regional wing. In sum, when one examines the subcultural bases of Belgian consociational democracy, one has to bear in mind this important territorial dimension.

The second and related effect of Belgium's territorial division has been of a more direct kind. The fact that the pillars developed differently in the two regions is further reinforced by the fact that the pillar parties themselves are internally divided. In the case of the Catholic Party, this was already visible between 1920 and 1945, when it was hardly able to function as a single party, but was instead more akin to a federation of two relatively independent unilingual parties (Gerard 1985). The Flemish wing of the Catholic pillar party was integrated within the stronger Flemish wing of the Catholic pillar, while the Walloon Catholic party had looser ties with a pillar which was itself less firmly integrated. The opposite was true for the socialist pillar party, although the socialists were—at least in this interwar period—able to keep their party well united. The socialist party felt less pressure to take into account regional differences, since the demands to do so came mainly from

Flanders, where the socialist party was weak, and the Catholic party very strong. In sum, the link between Belgian parties and pillars is thus problematic, or is at least regionally differentiated.

In order to assess the degree to which consociational structures and techniques were present in these early days, we will look first at the format and mechanics of the government arena. Before the First World War, and especially before the turn of the century, the two-party system and the majoritarian electoral system had always produced one-party governments. An important change in this respect was introduced during the war, when the coalition was extended to incorporate the BWP/POB. This move produced an all-party grand coalition, which was of course primarily inspired by the external pressure of the war. But the change is nevertheless significant, because the grand coalition did more than just manage the war period. After the war, the principle of keeping the three major ideological families together for major decisions was continued by virtue of agreements such as the aforementioned 1918 'Pact of Loppem'. And the grand coalition itself formally persisted until late 1921.

In the following fifteen years, there was only a very short period of grand coalition government (eighteen months in 1926–27). Much more significant, however, is the fact that the BWP/POB had not yet become a fully accepted partner in government. The Catholic Party governed throughout this period, but always in coalition with the Liberals. There was only one exception: a Catholic-BWP/POB coalition of eleven months in 1925–26, followed by a short period of grand coalition government (see [Table 4.1](#)). One cannot therefore say that consociational devices such as proportionality and grand coalition were completely developed during the interwar period. The composition of government coalitions is of course only one indicator of the extent to which consociational devices were present, but it is a significant one, and it suggests that the BWP/POB and its auxiliary organisations were not treated as a full third partner.

The grand coalition of the First World War was a typical crisis management phenomenon. The war itself and the potential instability of the post-war period made the elites accept the idea that co-operation might be profitable for all concerned. However, as soon as the crisis period was over, the political system reverted to a predominant role for the Catholic and liberal pillar parties. However, the situation was somewhat different, in that a third party was now present, albeit one as yet not fully incorporated into the structures of accommodative power sharing.

Yet in the second half of the 1930s, things began to change. We are again to a certain extent looking at a crisis phenomenon, when economic conditions were bad, unemployment was rising and the Belgian Franc had to be devalued. Meanwhile, the socialist party campaigned with a 'Labour Plan', a rather pragmatic programme for employment. In 1935 therefore, one week after the devaluation of the currency, a new grand coalition was formed. It continued after the elections of 1936, in which

Table 4.1 Composition of Belgian governments (1917–39)

<i>Date installed</i>	<i>Prime Minister</i>	<i>Party composition</i>
4 August 1917	De Broqueville	Cath–Lib–Soc
1 June 1918	Cooreman	Cath–Lib–Soc
21 November 1918	Delacroix	Cath–Lib–Soc
20 November 1920	Carton de Wiart	Cath–Lib–Soc
16 December 1921	Theunis	Cath–Lib
13 May 1925	Van de Vyvere	Cath
17 June 1925	Poullet	Cath–Soc
20 May 1926	Jaspar	Cath–Lib–Soc
22 November 1927	Jaspar	Cath–Lib
5 June 1932	Renkin	Cath–Lib
22 October 1932	De Broqueville	Cath–Lib
20 November 1934	Theunis	Cath–Lib
25 March 1935	Van Zeeland	Cath–Lib–Soc
13 June 1936	Van Zeeland	Cath–Lib–Soc
23 November 1937	Janson	Cath–Lib–Soc
15 May 1938	Spaak	Cath–Lib–Soc
21 February 1939	Pierlot	Cath–Soc
18 April 1939	Pierlot	Cath–Lib
3 September 1939	Pierlot	Cath–Lib–Soc

Source: Luyckx and Platel (1985:927ff)

Table 4.2 Results of elections to the Belgian House of Representatives (1919–39)

<i>Year</i>	<i>Catholics</i>	<i>Liberals</i>	<i>Socialists</i>	<i>Fl. Nation.</i>	<i>Comm.</i>	<i>REX</i>
1919	38.8	17.6	36.6	2.6		
1921	41.3	17.8	34.8	3.0		
1925	38.6	14.6	39.4	3.9	1.6	
1929	38.5	16.6	36.0	6.3	1.9	
1932	38.6	14.3	37.1	5.9	2.8	
1936	28.8	12.4	32.1	7.1	6.1	11.5
1939	32.7	17.2	30.2	8.3	5.4	4.4

all three major parties lost, while the Communists (6 per cent), the Flemish nationalists (7 per cent) and especially the extreme right-wing party REX (11 per cent) scored fairly highly. This grand coalition survived until 1945. (Full electoral results for the interwar period are in [Table 4.2](#).)

Post-war period

The German occupation and the way in which resistance to it was organised, had clear effects on post-war Belgian politics. Amongst other things, they meant that it was possible to rely on a fairly comprehensive consensus between the representatives of workers and of employers, especially in social and economic policy matters. The immediate post-war period was characterised by rapid

economic reconstruction, the building of the solid foundations of a modern social security system, and the development of permanent negotiation structures between workers and employers. This culminated in the establishment of a well-oiled system of neo-corporatist decision-making. These are all indicators of a fairly accommodative attitudinal environment and of consensus-orientated procedures and institutions (Luyten 1995), at least as far as the class cleavage is concerned.

Yet post-war politics were at the same time very competitive and it is thus rather difficult to decide whether the period between 1945 and 1958 merits the label 'consociational'. Except for its approach to the socioeconomic cleavage, the Belgian political system seems to have functioned in a quite majoritarian fashion. Yet it was exactly these majoritarian strategies which led to political tensions, which could only have been resolved by the adoption of classic consociational strategies. This point is also stressed by Seiler (1997) who states that Belgium is an 'exemplary' case of consociational democracy, but who then also asserts that it displays some 'French' or southern characteristics, with strong ideological competition and a majoritarian logic (see also Frogner 1988b). Thus, one might even say that in Belgium, consociational structures and techniques have been adopted in waves. They were used to pacify only one problem at a time, leaving other cleavages subject to more competitive strategies of decision-making. After the Second World War, the social and economic cleavage was gradually 'pacified' and was to a large extent transferred to the neo-corporatist arena. However, conflict around the 'Royal Question', the 'school war' and the linguistic-regionalist tensions followed each other in rapid succession. In each case, what appears to have happened is that, after a period during which the relevant issue was the subject of considerable politicisation, the ensuing conflict was perceived as serious and thus consociational techniques were in due course employed to help 'pacify' it.

The way in which the so-called 'Royal Question' was resolved is our first example and is very illustrative. At the beginning of the war, King Leopold III and the government strongly disagreed on the strategy to be followed. The King remained in Belgium and considered himself a prisoner of the Germans, while the government went to France and later to London. The King's attempts to form a new government under German occupation in Belgium, and his visit to Hitler in Berchtesgaden, certainly did not reduce this tension. Yet things seemed to have cooled down towards the end of the war. By the time Belgium was liberated, however, the King had been taken to Germany and later to Austria by the German army. His brother Charles acted as Regent, while a public debate on the possible return of the King took place. The King himself insisted on receiving an apology from the pre-war government, which again did not facilitate the finding of a solution.

The Christian-democratic CVP/PSC—the successors to the old Catholic Party—advocated a return of the King, while the Liberals, the renamed Belgian Socialist Party (BSP/PSB) and the then important Belgian Communist Party (PCB/KPB) rejected it. The CVP/PSC won an absolute majority of the seats in 1950—the last time this would happen—and decided to organise a referendum on the question of

the King's return. The referendum produced a very mixed outcome. The return of the King was supported by 57 per cent of voters, but only 48 per cent of the Brussels voters said yes and only 46 per cent of the Walloon voters. The majoritarian device thus failed to provide a solution, but merely reinforced the problem. The King was brought back by the government, but riots and the threat of a massive and potentially violent march on Brussels, to be organised by the Walloon PSB, finally led to an agreement between the three traditional political families. They decided to ask the King to abdicate in favour of his son Baudoin, which he duly did. In the PSC/CVP, this bitter defeat went down rather badly. The Prime Minister—Gaston Eyskens—who decided to acquiesce in this 'defeat', was blamed for it and temporarily disappeared from the political scene. However, his party went on governing alone between 1950 and 1954.

At the elections of 1954, the PSC/CVP lost their majority, and a coalition of Liberals and BSP/PSB took over. This was the result of a purely majoritarian logic. Even though there were not many issues on which Liberals and Socialists agreed, they did agree on the school issue, and of course on the desire to remove the Christian-democrats from office. The subsequent 'leftist' government tried hard to introduce a number of laws promoting secular state-run secondary education to the disadvantage of Catholic schools. Yet the Catholic subculture and its pillar party mobilised strongly against the government's plans. The strength of this protest finally led to the ending of the conflict by the classical consociational technique of granting segmental autonomy. The 1958 'school pact' was signed by the three traditional parties and 'pacified' Belgium's long-standing church-state cleavage by granting the two school systems more or less the same rights and financial resources (Tyssens 1997). With the labour-capital cleavage having already been pacified by the system of neo-corporatist intermediation, only the regional-linguistic issue remained salient and it is that issue which dominated Belgian politics in the 1960s and 1970s.

This introduction has demonstrated that in Belgium, the adoption of consociational structures and techniques has historically occurred in the context of crisis management. This happened for the first time in 1918, but did not initially become a permanent feature, since one of the major partners, the BWP/POB, was clearly not accepted by the established elite as a governing party. We have also stressed the absence of a clear causal relationship between pillarization and the need to pacify cleavages, since—as in the Netherlands—the pillars were built up to their full height and strength only after the first accommodative 'Pact'. Yet we need to qualify this absence of causality between pillarization and accommodation, because the major religious issue (the school war) was only pacified in 1958, indeed after a tremendous mobilisation by the whole Catholic pillar. Before that date, there were surely segments and pillars, but—as far as the school issue is concerned—hardly any accommodation.

Parties in Belgian consociational democracy

Parties within their pillars

This section will undertake a consecutive exploration of the pillar parties' relations to their subcultures. Following Luther's analytical framework, as presented in [Chapter 1](#) of this volume, we will therefore pay attention to the nature and extent of each pillar's network, to the mobilisational incentives used, and to the degree to which the party controls the pillarized network.

This latter feature can immediately be introduced comparatively with some pillar party membership figures (see [Table 4.3](#); for a listing of party names, see the list of abbreviations on pages xix–xx). As will be discussed in greater detail below, whilst the Catholic pillar is a very broad, rather loose and not very party-centred pillar, the socialist pillar is less extensive and much more party-centred. The organisational density of these two pillar parties (which subsequently each split to form four parties) is therefore different, with the socialist pillar party (parties) showing a distinctively higher membership/voter ratio. The liberal pillar is very small and loose, and is not really to be compared with the other pillars, which encompass broad networks of social and political organisation. The organisational density of the liberal pillar parties is thus clearly lower.

The breakdown of the figures per pillar party after the split show another important element that we will deal with in our discussion. The organisational density of the pillar parties differs between their Dutch- and French-speaking parts. The density of the Christian-democrats is higher in Flanders, while the density of the socialists is higher in Wallonia. The organisational density of the Walloon socialists is also higher than the density of the Flemish Christian-democrats.

Before 1991, there was no recurrent election survey in Belgium, which makes it difficult to provide good and reliable data about the real vertical integration of the pillars, and about the degree to which the parties were able to mobilise their 'own' segment of the electorate. The discussion of the vertical aspect of pillar party behaviour in Belgian consociationalism will therefore have to be rather impressionistic, relying mostly on secondary sources.

The Catholic pillar

The Catholic pillar is undoubtedly the largest, and also the best-researched pillar in Belgium (Billiet 1988; Hellemans 1990). Its size and variety did not however contribute to its internal coherence. The Catholic pillar is in fact a network of several pillar-like Catholic worlds. The Christian labour movement, the Christian farmers and the Christian middle classes are the three main components. But each of them consists in turn of a large number of organisations. The labour movement is especially differentiated, with *inter alia* a trade union, a health insurance organisation ('mutuality'), women and youth organisations and a federation of co-

operatives, including a bank and an insurance company. All these organisations came to full maturity during the interwar period, a time when the Catholic Party did not exercise hierarchical control over the pillar. The party was little more than an electoral alliance of its different subgroups. In 1921, the old 'Federation of Catholic and Conservative Circles' had been formally united with the labour movement, the farmers and the middle classes. But within this union, the four *standen* (estates) went their own way, and only entered into an electoral alliance where necessary (Hellemans 1990:111). At that time, the Catholic Party had no direct membership either, and it is important not to forget that the two linguistic wings of the party were almost independent of each other.

Things changed after the Second World War. The Catholic Party was recreated as a Christian-democratic party and 'unitary party' (Gerard 1995). That meant that the party now had direct membership, and that the *standen* lost their official status of founding members of the party. Yet the *standen* continued to organise independent activities. In all the party organs, and especially on the party's electoral lists, a delicate balance had to be found in order to maintain the representation of the different currents. The new CVP/PSC party thus played a more central role, but this role could not be labelled 'real leadership' of the pillar, let alone 'hierarchical control' over it. The pillar was mainly a societal pillar, with sub-pillars remaining autonomous.

After the Second World War, the pillar expanded even further, as it became involved in the welfare state. Many old and new state functions were organised and executed by organisations belonging to the pillar. This had the effect of both strengthening and weakening the pillar. It became stronger in the sense that the number of organisations multiplied and extended their activities, controlling more money and resources. But this expansion of the pillar into the welfare state also meant that the pillar organisations faced the need to become more professionalised. They performed tasks for which highly educated personnel were needed. These new elites were different, because their loyalty were not necessarily orientated solely to the pillar's values. Their professional education also gave them a professional loyalty, aimed at performing the functions of their organisations in a technocratic and efficient manner. This professional loyalty can rapidly replace, or even become more important than, subcultural loyalty (Ellemers 1984). These kinds of role conflict could often be witnessed in the educational system, where Christian teachers wanted to be good teachers and wanted to be evaluated on their capacity as a teacher, rather than on their commitment to the Christian values of the school system.

The value system also tended to change when the Catholic pillar got involved in the welfare state. Its church-orientated Catholicism was gradually replaced by a 'softer' so-called 'social-cultural Christianity' (Billiet 1981). This stressed less the relationship with the official church, and more the social values of Christian commitment which can be translated in the many services offered by the pillar's

Table 4.3 Organisational density of pillar parties (M/V) (1960-95)

	1961	1965	1968	1971	1974	1977	1978	1981	1985	1987	1991	1995
CVP				8.9	9.4	9.0	8.7	10.7	9.0	11.7	12.7	10.4
CVP/PSC	9.6	8.5	8.5	11.8	9.9	10.3	10.9	12.8	8.8	8.2	6.6	6.6
PSC												
SP				16.4	18.2	16.8	16.3	15.7	12.3	11.6	13.4	11.5
BSP/PSB	10.2	14.0	13.9				20.5	21.8	18.1	15.1	18.5	16.2
PS												
VLD				6.0	7.1	11.5	10.0	7.8	12.0	10.4	10.2	10.1
PVV/PLP	7.3	7.7	9.1	9.6	13.8	12.8	14.5	9.2	11.8	13.2	8.0	7.1
PRL												

Source: Maes (1988) and *Res Publica* yearbooks

Note: For party abbreviations see list on pages xix-xx.

network. The broader value system enabled the Catholic pillar to retain its subcultural base, while church attendance and formal association with Catholicism declined rapidly (Dobbelaere 1988).

The post-war evolution of the Christian-democratic party (parties) has been very different from that of the Catholic pillar. While the pillar expanded and grew, the party lost votes in a fairly dramatic way (see the electoral results in Tables 4.7 and 4.9). The peak of its success was in 1950, when it reached an absolute majority, but after that, the general trend was down, especially after the critical elections of 1961. Yet it is from the 1960s on that the label ‘CVP state’ (Coenjaarts *et al.* 1979) is used to describe the grip of that party on society.² The situation was therefore paradoxical: the party representing the Catholic world was unable to maintain its electoral strength, yet a very large (and growing) segment of the population used the services provided by the Catholic pillar organisations. This process has been labelled ‘depillarization of the minds’, a description which stresses that pillar organisations are not chosen for their ideological or religious meaning, but for the value of the services they offer. The Christian pillar is indeed known for its efficient services, and actually often defends the right of pillarized organisations to offer state services with this argument of efficiency (Billiet and Huyse, 1984; Huyse, 1987). And furthermore, as explained above, the value system displayed by the pillar organisations is much more diffuse than the old church-related Catholicism.

While there is this depillarization of the minds—together with a general decline of church attendance—the pillar as a set of state-linked organisations has survived very well. It survived precisely because it was so closely linked with the state. The decline of the Catholic vote never brought the central and pivotal role of the Christian-democrats into question. One might even say that its pivotal role was strengthened, but that this was then a result both of the split of the party into two separate unilingual parties in 1968 and of the reform of the state into a federation of ‘Regions and Communities’. We will come back to this in the third part of the chapter.

The pillar organisations have kept their formal link with the party. The *standen* still claim their places on electoral lists and they proclaim without hesitation that they want to exercise political influence through the Christian-democratic party (parties). This is true of the Flemish CVP, but to a much lesser extent of the Francophone PSC, as the PSC is considerably weaker and the Francophone Catholic pillar far less important. Thus at the Francophone side, one can clearly see how the pillar organisations have loosened their ties with the party. There was even, in the 1970s, an attempt to create a new ‘Christian Workers’ Party’. The attempt was not successful, but was a clear illustration of the fact that the PSC was not considered to be the ‘natural’ partner of the Christian trade union in the Francophone part of the country. On the Flemish side, the Christian labour movement is a large and above all a very loyal partner of the CVP.

The conclusions for the ‘vertical’ aspects of the Catholic pillar are now clear. The pillar is strong, and became gradually stronger when the welfare state was

developed. The pillar is large, but lacks internal cohesion. The pillar contains a multitude of organisations, all more or less grouped along the lines of the four *standen*. The party acts as the place where all these subgroups meet and compete. The party as such does not really lead the pillar, but when the party declines electorally, the pillar remains strong because of its integration within the state. This strength of the Catholic pillar is perceived as a CVP mechanism of control over society, because the permanent presence of the CVP in government helps to keep the pillar organisations alive, and their services vital for their clientele. It must also again be stressed that this account of the Catholic pillar is primarily based upon the situation of the Catholic pillar in Flanders. In the Francophone part of the country the pillar was less important, the Catholic party is weaker, and the link between the two almost completely disappeared.

The Socialist pillar

The evolution of the socialist pillar of course exhibits some similarities with that of the Catholic pillar, but there are a number of striking differences. The major difference is undoubtedly in the role of the party. Contrary to the Catholic pillar, which has many components and has originated from a number of 'sponsors' (among which of course is the Catholic Church), the socialist pillar is much more party-centred. It faces less intra-subcultural competition, in the sense that no other cleavage (except of course the linguistic one) cuts across the socialist world. That helps to keep both the party and the pillar more united. Yet the pillar is also fairly broad: it includes trade unions, a health insurance organisation, co-operative organisations, youth organisations, leisure organisations, and so on. It allows members of the socialist pillar to be taken care of 'from cradle to grave'.

The other difference is the importance of the socialist pillar in the more industrialised south of the country. That also means that where the pillar is strong, its trade union orientation is very pronounced. The link between the party (parties) and the socialist trade unions is therefore a very central feature. Trade union activists and leaders are elected on socialist lists, and trade union leaders are members of the central party organs (Deschouwer 1992). Yet it is difficult to say that a leading role in this relationship is played by the party (parties). Both trade unions and the party (parties) have distinctive internal structures and decision-making procedures. The trade unions are very active in the neo-corporatist arena, while the focus of the party (parties) is on government and legislation. In periods of crisis or tension—when the union strikes against the government for instance—the different attitudes of party and trade union become very clear. Both sides will try not to exaggerate the differences, but will not be able to hide them either.

However, parties are much more important here than in the Catholic pillar and are certainly the main pillar actors. The socialist pillar does not have quasi-independent components like the Catholic *standen*. If organisations exist in the pillar, they have been directly created by, or are directly linked to, the party

(parties). The large variety of associations belonging to the socialist subculture all share the designation 'socialist', which clearly identifies them with the socialist pillar party (parties) represented in parliament and government.

The recent evolution of the socialist pillar is somewhat similar to that of the Catholic pillar. It has become very much a network of service organisations, offering to the rank and file the political outputs of the welfare state. The pillar has become more a 'political concern' (Huysse 1987) than an ideological subculture. This is especially true for the Walloon region. The socialist party is very strong there at all levels, and has been able to control the political arena almost completely, especially in local politics. The party has to a large extent become inextricably linked with the state. This has of course led to a number of corruption scandals, the most important being in the city of Liège in the 1980s. Just as in the Catholic pillar, we see that the network of socialist auxiliary associations survives such challenges easily, but, thanks to the easy and secure access of the party to power at all levels, it survives mainly as a channel to offer state services. To be precise, the pillar parties are able to offer state services predominantly in their respective regions: for the Socialist Party in the Walloon and for the CVP in the Flemish region.

The value system of the party and the pillar is not that easy to describe, again mainly because of regional differences. Given the pillar party's close links to the trade unions, socialism in the Walloon region is certainly more radical and working-class orientated than in Flanders. Yet that value system is only important for the party (and the trade unions), as long as the services offered by the pillar organisations do not stress ideological values. The important socialist health insurance organisation, to give only one example, carries socialism in its name, but offers no ideological values to its patients. It sometimes refers to its socialist affiliation when it functions at the political level, when it is involved in negotiations with the state and with other organisations and pressure groups in the health-service sector, but that is far removed from direct contact with its members and clients.

The liberal pillar

The liberal pillar has differed both qualitatively and quantitatively from the other two pillars. First, the liberal parties and pillar are much smaller. Prior to its bifurcation in the 1960s, the Belgian party system was a 'two and a half system, in which the Liberal Party was the 'half party. Second, however, things are also qualitatively different. Liberalism was not and is not a broad popular movement. There was never any need to unite the movement in strong and mutually linked organisations in order to gain or to retain power.

Yet there certainly has been a liberal pillar: for one, the Liberal Party had privileged links with a large number of liberal auxiliary associations:³ there is a (small) liberal trade union, a liberal health insurance organisation, and many liberal cultural and philosophical organisations. These organisations were formally linked

to the party, links which were even more institutionalised than is the case in the two other pillar parties. The statutes of the Liberal Party explicitly recognised a long list of liberal organisations as having the right to be represented in the party (Deschouwer 1992). In the socialist and Christian-democratic parties these links have not been so formalised, although the leaders of the main pillar organisations are indeed present at the meetings of the respective party executives. The role of the party in the liberal pillar is important, not least because of the relative weakness of the liberal pillar. The liberal world is thus mainly represented by the party.

In 1961, a major change took place in the Liberal Party. It not only changed its name, but announced that it would no longer be the vehicle for anti-clerical ideas. This was now considered to be an outdated conflict (the School Pact had been concluded in 1958). Since 1961 the liberal parties have wanted to promote a modern liberalism: one that is free-market orientated and which defends liberal freedoms. Thus Catholics who embrace these values are welcome. This strategy was indeed successful: the Liberal Party scored very highly in the general elections of 1965, and its successors have since slowly but surely lost the status of a 'half' party. At the 1995 elections, the three main ideological families each polled more or less one-quarter of the total votes (the remaining 25 per cent going to Greens, nationalists and right-wing populists). But while the three families are now of approximately equal size, the Catholic family is still clearly the largest in Flanders and the socialist family is the largest in Wallonia.

Just like the other two pillar parties, the Liberal Party split into two autonomous unilingual parties in 1971. This split did not immediately have profound implications. It was only in the early 1990s that the Flemish Liberal Party (PVV) went through a fundamental change. Being confronted with the fact that the liberal family almost always came second or third in each region, and is therefore more and more excluded from government participation (the 'natural' coalition being the one between socialists and Christian-democrats), the PVV became much more an 'anti-system' party. It started to criticise heavily the grip of the two other parties and pillars on the state and on state services. It criticised the tight control on economic policy exercised by the two large trade unions. It thus provided a critique of pillarization and especially of the way in which the pillars had become instruments of the state. The liberal parties now challenge the 'cartel' of Christian-democrats and socialists, a cartel which has become even more apparent after the regionalisation of the Belgian state.

The internal reform of the parties was also very significant. They refused to be considered as the political representative of a pillar. The privileged links with the organisations of the liberal world were completely severed. Even the major and erstwhile very important auxiliary associations of the liberal subculture, such as the trade union and the health insurance organisation, no longer have a place in the parties.

Pillar parties and intra-subcultural linkage: some conclusions

The preceding discussion of organisational penetration and incorporation within the Belgian pillars has highlighted a number of common features, as well as some changes since what might be called the period of ‘classic’ Belgian consociationalism. Before moving on to consider the overarching relations between the pillar parties, we will summarise the major insights that our analysis has offered regarding the ‘vertical’ role which pillar parties have played in Belgian consociational democracy.

First, we have shown that the Catholic pillar is in general broader and less coherent than the smaller socialist pillar. The *standen* of the Catholic subculture actually act as pillars in their own right, with the party (parties) not being very central in this ‘network of networks’. By contrast, the parties are much more central in the socialist pillar, and their links with the trade unions constitute the core of the pillar. In sum, when we apply Luther’s framework (see [Chapter 1](#) of this volume), we find that the two major pillars differ in respect of the two main indicators of subcultural organisational penetration and incorporation: party and auxiliary association membership.

Second, we have highlighted important differences in pillar strength between the Flemish and the Walloon regions of the country. The former is the stronghold of the Catholic pillar, whilst the latter is that of the socialist pillar. As the pillar organisation of these two ideological families has been shown to exhibit significant differences, this means that the two main regions are also characterised by differences in the nature and degree of subcultural organisational penetration and incorporation. In short, the pillarization of the two regions of Belgium is asymmetrical and clearly reflects the major ethno-linguistic cleavage. This territorial divide should not be ignored and will be returned to in the following sections, where we will show that such regional differentiation also has a strong effect on the party system.

Third, the pillars have survived the decline of their ideological appeal. A key strategy employed to this end has been becoming more state-orientated, and more central in the provision of the services of the welfare state. In a nutshell, they have become more output-orientated than mobilisation-orientated or, in the terminology of Luther’s framework, they rely for the mobilisation of the rank-and-file members of their respective subcultures much less on ideational values linked to purposive and solidary incentives, than on material incentives. Party membership figures in Belgium are not excessively high, but contrary to most other European countries, the numbers have hardly declined (Katz, Mair *et. al.* 1992a). This is illustrated by the figures in [Table 4.4](#), but they also show that party membership decline has of late also started in Belgium, where the losses are greatest within the two major pillar parties. The fact that party membership decline has come significantly later in Belgium than in most other countries covered by the Katz and Mair study supports the idea that the pillar parties were able to maintain their membership levels by virtue of the many state and semi-state services they have been able to offer. Yet there has of late been growing criticism within Belgium of the many clientelist

practices associated with Belgian consociational democracy (see also below). Together with the reduced capacity of the state (and thus of the pillar parties which control it) to be very generous, this may help account for the recent and—in comparative terms—belated decline of membership numbers.

Table 4.5 presents the membership figures in a slightly different way, namely in terms of the proportion of the total electorate mobilised per party (M/E). This table demonstrates that the pillar parties are still the major mobilising actors in the Belgian party system, though this may well be the case mainly because—with the exception of the *Volkspartij* in the 1970s—the new political parties never managed to attract high membership numbers. Seen from a different perspective, this means that the overwhelming majority of the 7–9 per cent or so of the Belgian electorate that are members of a political party belongs to one or other of the three (six) pillar parties. Accordingly, the recent decline of party membership as a proportion of the electorate is one that has taken place overwhelmingly at the cost of precisely those pillar parties. The timing of this decline is interesting. Electorally, the pillar parties lost their quasi-monopoly during the 1960s, but that did not really affect their membership numbers. Membership decline only set in two decades later, during which time the pillars had survived—in Huysse's terminology—as 'political concerns'.

Pillar parties and subcultural interaction: the party system

Introduction

The preceding analysis of the Vertical' role exercised by the pillar parties has revealed a survival of the features typically associated with consociational democracy: social segmentation and, via the organisational penetration, incorporation and encapsulation of those segments, a high degree of pillarization of Belgian society. Indeed, at least in their organisational aspects, there has even been some reinforcement of the pillars. Firmly linked to the state, the Belgian pillars have thus been able to outlive the erosion of the social appeal of their religious and ideological values.

Since this section will deal with the 'horizontal' relations of 'overarching accommodation' exercised between the Belgian pillar parties, it will in essence be an examination of the operation of the party system of Belgium's consociational democracy. Whilst the pillar parties' 'vertical' role within their pillars has largely remained the same, that cannot be said in respect of their 'horizontal' role, where we find what amounts to a decline of consociational structures and techniques (see also Deschouwer 1994a). But this decline is certainly not present in all spheres of party interaction. If we examine the electoral, governmental and parliamentary arenas in which the pillar parties interact, we do not see a predominance of a consociational decision-making style, but then again, that never has been the case. Earlier in this chapter, we described how consociational decision-making at the governmental and

Table 4.4 Absolute Belgian pillar (party) membership (1960–95)

	1960	1965	1970	1975	1980	1985	1990	1995
CVP	213,751	132,396	103,158	120,730	125,141	114,716	131,719	108,616
CVP/PSC								
PSC			39,366	52,042	57,904	43,372	43,372	30,941
SP			225,073	253,993	113,922	108,223	99,112	80,582
BSP/PSB	199,000	205,485						
PS				43,794	154,798	140,462	153,400	117,553
VLD					58,625	73,631	71,051	82,804
PVV/PLP	48,200	86,250	77,654					
PRL				42,237	45,000	70,154	40,000	33,050
VU	2,500	12,630	36,326	52,420	49,563	50,890	40,779	19,833
FDF		?	?	19,990	10,000	10,200	10,000	?
AGALEV						925	2,130	2,376
ECOLO						1,248	1,280	2,096
VB					1,231	3,698	6,500	?

Source: Maes (1998) and *Res Publica* yearbooks.

Note: For party abbreviations see list on pages xix-xx.

Table 4.5 Belgian (pillar) party membership as a proportion of the total electorate (M/E) (1961-95)

	CVP	CVP PSC	PSC	SP	BSP PSB	PS	VLD	PVV PLP	PRL	VU	FDF	ECOLO	AGALEV	VB	Total	Total pillar parties
1961		3.6			3.4			0.8		0.0					8.0	8.0
1965		2.3			3.5			1.5		0.2					7.7	7.5
1968	2.0		0.5		3.5			1.7		0.4					8.3	7.9
1971	1.7		0.8		4.0			1.1		0.7					8.4	7.7
1974	1.9		0.8		4.2		0.6		0.7	0.8	0.2				9.6	8.6
1977	2.0		1.0		4.0		0.9		0.6	0.8	0.2			0.0	9.8	8.8
1978	1.9		0.9	1.7		2.3	0.9		0.7	0.8	0.2			0.0	9.9	8.9
1981	1.8		0.8	1.7		2.4	0.9		0.7	0.7	0.2			0.0	9.6	8.7
1985	1.7		0.8	1.5		2.0	1.0		1.0	0.7	0.2	0.0	0.0	0.0	9.1	8.2
1987	2.0		0.6	1.5		2.1	1.1		1.1	0.7	0.2	0.0	0.0	0.0	9.5	8.6
1991	1.8		0.6	1.4		2.2	1.0		0.7	0.6	0.2	0.0	0.0	0.1	8.8	7.9
1995	1.7		0.4	1.2		1.8	1.2		0.5	0.3	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	7.4	6.8

Source: Maes (1998) and *Res Publica* yearbooks.

Note: For party abbreviations see list on pages xix-xx.

parliamentary level was to a very large extent a technique of crisis management rather than a continuous pattern of behaviour.

Before proceeding, we need to recall that by 1960, two major cleavages in Belgian politics had been successfully ‘pacified’, in that the major actors had accepted a general framework for permanent negotiations (e.g. the neo-corporatist arena for social and economical matters), or the principle of segmental autonomy and permanent mutual control (for the school issue). This clearly moved the negotiation and decision-making process away from the parliamentary and governmental arenas, and entrenched it elsewhere, where the parties and/or their auxiliary associations co-operated on a daily basis.

The erstwhile most salient issues having been largely removed from the parliamentary and governmental arenas, the parties were free to adopt a much more competitive—even majoritarian—style in these arenas. We have seen that, between the wars, grand coalitions were exceptional. They were even more exceptional after the Second World War, as the information in [Table 4.6](#) reveals. From August 1945, governments take the form of normal winning coalitions, or even (1950–54) of one-party governments. In 1973, there was a short-lived grand coalition government which embraced the three major ideological families and another government of the same composition for five months in 1980. Both were attempts to bring together the two-thirds majority required to change the constitution in order to take into account the Flemish and Walloon desires for more regional autonomy. The first attempt failed, but the second (1980) was in fact able to produce one of the major constitutional reforms. What this indicates is that on the relatively rare occasions that the parties decide that all-party co-operation in government is essential, what are at stake are not the old issues of ‘classic’ Belgian consociational democracy, but the now fully politicised ethno-linguistic cleavage.

Electoral arena

Electoral change since 1945 is interesting for a number of reasons. First, there is the sudden decline in ‘consociational concentration’. Until 1961, the three pillar parties controlled almost all the votes,⁴ yet in 1965, the pillar parties’ joint share of the vote declined to 84.4 per cent and in 1971 dropped further to 71.5 per cent. That is the level at which the joint share of the vote obtained by the three (and later six) pillar parties more or less stabilised. The electoral results since 1945 are presented in [Table 4.7](#) and also show—again starting in 1965—a number of high-volatility elections such as, for example, those of 1965, 1981 and 1991. Even if one ignores the bifurcation of the three bilingual pillar parties into six unilingual parties, these developments of course correlate with increasing fractionalisation of the party system.

It is also useful to look at the strength of each of the three major political families separately, which is done in [Table 4.8](#). The total decline is only due to the losses of the Christian-democrats and—to a lesser extent—of the socialists. The Liberal Party

Table 4.6 Belgian governments and pillar party dominance (1945–98)

<i>Date installed</i>	<i>Prime Minister</i>	<i>Party composition</i> ^a	<i>Pillar parties'</i> <i>cabinet seats</i> <i>(%)</i> ^b
12 Feb 45	Van Acker I	CVP/PSC; PL/LP; <i>BSP/PSB</i> ; KPB/PCB	89
2 Aug 45	Van Acker II	<i>CVP/PSC</i> ; PL/LP; <i>BSP/PSB</i> ; KPB/PCB; UDB; np	83
13 Mar 46	Spaak I	<i>BSP/PSB</i> ; np	81
31 Mar 46	Van Acker III	<i>BSP/PSB</i> ; PL/LP; KPB/PCB; np	68
3 Aug 46	Huysmans	<i>BSP/PSB</i> ; PL/LP; KPB/PCB; np	68
20 Mar 47	Spaak II	<i>BSP/PSB</i> ; CVP/PSC; np	89
11 Aug 49	Eyskens, G. I	<i>CVP/PSC</i> ; PL/LP	100
8 Jun 50	Duvieusart	<i>CVP/PSC</i>	100
16 Aug 50	Pholien	<i>CVP/PSC</i> ; np	94
15 Jan 52	Van Houtte	<i>CVP/PSC</i> ; np	94
22 Apr 54	Van Acker IV	<i>BSP/PSB</i> ; LP/PL	100
23 Jun 58	Eyskens, G. II	<i>CVP/PSC</i> ; np	94
6 Nov 58	Eyskens, III	<i>CVP/PSC</i> ; LP/PL	100
25 Apr 61	Lefèvre	<i>CVP/PSC</i> ; BSP/PSB	100
27 Jul 65	Harmel	<i>CVP/PSC</i> ; BSP/PSB	100
19 Mar 66	V. d. Boeynants I	<i>CVP/PSC</i> ; PVV/PLP	100
17 Jun 68	Eyskens, G. IV	<i>CVP</i> ; PSC; BSP/PSB	100
20 Jan 72	Eyskens, G. V	<i>CVP</i> ; PSC; BSP/PSB	100
26 Jan 73	Leburton	<i>CVP</i> ; PSC; BSP; <i>PSB</i> ; PVV; PLP	100
25 Apr 74	Tindemans I	<i>CVP</i> ; PSC; PVV; PLP	100
11 Jun 74	Tindemans II	<i>CVP</i> ; PSC; PVV; PLP; RW	92
4 Mar 77	Tindemans III	<i>CVP</i> ; PSC; PVV; PRLW	100
3 Jun 77	Tindemans IV	<i>CVP</i> ; PSC; BSP/PSB; VU; FDF	87
20 Oct 78	V. d. Boeynants II	<i>CVP</i> ; PSC; BSP/PSB; VU; FDF	86
3 Apr 79	Martens I	<i>CVP</i> ; PSC; SP; PS; FDF	96
23 Jan 80	Martens II	<i>CVP</i> ; PSC; SP; PS	100
18 May 80	Martens III	<i>CVP</i> ; PSC; SP; PS; PVV; PRL	100
22 Oct 80	Martens IV	<i>CVP</i> ; PSC; SP; PS	100
6 Apr 81	Eyskens, M. I	<i>CVP</i> ; PSC; SP; PS	100
17 Dec 81	Martens V	<i>CVP</i> ; PSC; PVV; PRL	100
28 Nov 85	Martens VI	<i>CVP</i> ; PSC; PVV; PRL	100
9 May 88	Martens VII	<i>CVP</i> ; PSC; SP; PS; VU	89
4 Oct 91	Martens VIII	<i>CVP</i> ; PSC; SP; PS	100
7 Mar 92	Dehaene I	<i>CVP</i> ; PSC; SP; PS	100
23 Jun 95	Dehaene II	<i>CVP</i> ; PSC; SP; PS	100

Source

Luyekx and Platel (1985) and *Res Publica* yearbooks

Notes

^a Prime Minister's party in italics; np=non-party; once the hitherto united 'spiritual families' had split, their regional manifestations are presented separately.

^b Some nominally non-party or non-pillar ministers are deemed to have *de facto* been allied to pillar parties. See notes to Table 10.1 for details.

For party abbreviations see list on pages xix–xx.

improved its score in 1965 and its successors were able, after some fluctuations, to

stay at this higher level. In 1995, the size of the three major ideological families' joint vote is more or less the same. The 'two and a half' party system has become a genuine three-party system. Yet the three parties no longer exist in the form they used to.

This 'disappearance' of the national Belgian parties and the creation thereby of two new electoral party systems, one in which the Francophone parties compete and one in which the Flemish parties compete, completely changes the logic of party interaction (Deschouwer 1996). The conclusions one would reach by looking at the utterly misleading aggregate Belgian figures are simply wrong, because the electoral developments differ significantly between the linguistic communities. This changes the way in which the parties themselves perceive their position, as well as the way in which they perceive their relations with their competitors (Deschouwer 1997a).

The differences between north and south are of course not new. The north has always been more Catholic, or Christian-democratic, and the south has always been more socialist. But that only meant that one regional wing of the respective pillar party was stronger in one of the regions (and that the pillars developed in an uneven way). Now that party competition has itself been divided, the perception and the real political meaning of these differences are significantly enhanced. [Table 4.9](#) provides data on post-1961 electoral trends in the Flemish and Walloon regions. Separating the data out in this way reveals that there has indeed been a decline in the two largest pillar parties, but that this decline has not been univocal. The Christian-democratic decline in Flanders is breathtaking, whilst the socialists in Wallonia resist decline much better. Yet in Flanders, the electoral predominance of the Christian-democrats is never in danger, which ensures that they remain the major party in terms of political power. The Walloon Socialists and the Flemish Christian-democrats are both parties that enjoy a position of predominance, but they do so in separate electoral arenas. The bottom line of this is that from a (misleading) national perspective, the parties representing the two major subcultures have both declined to a point where they are no larger than the electorally growing liberal parties. However, the national level of the party system at which the liberal family has nominally become a genuine third party no longer exists. Where it really matters—namely, at the level of the regional party systems—the liberal parties are in second or third place. Unlike the two main pillar parties, they do not enjoy the status of a 'largest party' at either the federal, or regional level of the political system and are therefore politically still as much a 'half' party as they were during the period of 'classic' Belgian consociationalism which preceded the bifurcation of the party system. As a result, they increasingly perceive themselves to be outside the cartelised Belgian party system. They point to the two other groups as being the ones who desperately want to stick to their old status in the old consociational game. The liberals have been pushed out of the system by the splitting up of the party system, and have taken that position to start challenging the system and the closed nature of consociational democracy.

Table 4.7 Elections to the Belgian House of Representatives (1946-95)

	1946	1949	1950	1954	1958	1961	1965	1968	1971	1974	1977	1978	1981	1985	1987	1991	1995
CVP-PSC	42.5	43.6	47.7	41.1	46.5	42.3	34.8				26.2	26.1	19.7	21.3	19.5	16.8	17.2
CVP								22.3	21.9	23.3	26.2						
PSC								9.4	9.0	9.1	9.8	10.1	6.7	8.0	8.0	7.7	7.7
BSP-PSB	31.6	29.8	34.5	37.3	35.8	36.7	28.2	28.0	27.2	26.7	27.1						
SP												12.4	12.6	14.5	14.9	12.0	12.6
PS												13.0	12.6	13.8	15.7	13.5	11.9
PVV-PLP	8.9	15.3	11.3	12.2	11.1	12.3	21.6	20.9	16.5								
VLD										9.6	8.5	10.3	13.1	10.7	11.5	12.0	13.2
PRL										5.6	7.0	6.0	8.2	10.2	9.4	8.1	10.3
KPB-PCB	12.7	7.5	4.7	3.6	1.9	3.1	4.6	3.3	3.1	3.2	2.1	3.3	2.3	1.2	0.8	0.1	0.1
VU				2.2	2.0	3.5	6.4	9.8	11.1	10.2	10.0	7.0	9.9	8.0	8.0	5.9	4.7
FDF							1.3	2.5	4.5	5.1	4.3	4.2	2.5	1.2	1.2	1.5	—
RW							1.1	3.5	6.7	5.9	3.0	2.9	1.7	0.2	0.2	0.1	—
AGALEV													2.3	3.7	4.5	4.9	4.4
ECOLO													2.2	2.5	2.6	5.1	4.0
VB												1.4	1.1	1.4	1.9	6.6	7.8
FN																0.5	2.3
RAD-UDRT												0.9	2.7	1.1			
ROSSEM																3.2	
OTHERS						2.1	2.1	0.3	0.0	1.3	2.0	2.4	2.4	2.2	1.7	2.0	3.8

Note: For party abbreviations see list on pages xix-xx.

Table 4.8 The joint electoral strength of the three consociational 'families' (1961–95)

	<i>Christian-democrats</i>	<i>Socialists</i>	<i>Liberals</i>	<i>Total of 'pillar' parties</i>
1961	41.5	36.7	12.4	90.5
1965	34.5	28.3	21.6	84.4
1968	31.7	28.0	20.9	80.6
1971	30.0	27.2	16.8	72.4
1974	32.3	26.7	15.2	74.3
1977	36.0	27.0	15.5	77.4
1978	36.3	25.4	16.6	77.2
1981	26.5	25.1	21.5	73.1
1985	29.8	28.3	21.0	78.1
1987	27.5	30.5	20.1	79.1
1991	24.6	25.3	20.1	70.1
1995	25.9	24.7	23.4 ^a	72.7

Note:

a These are the results for both liberal parties and for the Francophone FDF, which formed an electoral alliance with the PRL.

Throughout the post-war period, the electoral arena(s) remained fairly competitive. That competition focused first on the Royal Question, and then on the school issue. The ending (or 'pacification') of the latter issue led to an interesting change in the Liberal Party. It renamed itself in 1961 and explicitly left its old '*classe gardée*', by trying to attract Catholic voters. This attempt by the Liberal Party to 'enlarge' its electorate is the first, but certainly not the only, example of parties trying to break into the electorate of their competitors. There have also been several attempts by the socialist party (parties) to convince the Catholic workers to leave the Christian-democrats in order to produce a broader working-class movement. The incentive to do so was of course the declining salience of the religious cleavage. Yet all these attempts more or less failed, or were at least limited to the transfer of a few not very significant individuals. And one should of course not forget the rise and success of the new parties since the 1960s, which added to the sharpening of electoral competition.

The strategy of electoral enlargement was tried more recently. In an attempt to challenge the CVP's dominant position in Flanders, the Flemish PVV was in 1992 able to recruit a number of important former *Volksunie* politicians and its thereby enhanced nationalist profile was reflected in the party's new name: Flemish Liberals and Democrats (VLD). For its part, the Francophone PRL in 1995 forged an electoral alliance with the Brussels (Francophone) regionalist party, the FDF. This made the PRL-FDF the largest party in the Brussels Region and brought them into the regional government coalition.

The electoral arena has in recent years thus seen a number of important changes. There was the breakthrough of new parties, the falling apart of the Belgian party system and the attempts by both liberals and socialists to challenge the Christian-democrats by openly 'hunting' on their grounds. Today, the party systems are very

Table 4.9 Election results in the Flanders and Wallonia regions (1961-95)

	1961	1965	1968	1971	1974	1977	1978	1981	1985	1987	1991	1995
<i>Flanders</i>												
CVP	50.9	43.8	39.1	37.8	39.7	43.8	43.5	32.3	34.6	31.4	27.0	27.8
SP	29.7	24.6	25.7	24.2	22.0	22.3	20.9	20.6	23.7	24.2	19.6	20.3
VLD	11.6	16.6	16.2	16.3	17.2	14.4	17.2	21.1	17.4	18.5	19.1	21.1
VU	6.0	11.3	16.9	18.8	17.8	16.3	11.5	16.0	12.7	12.9	9.4	9.0
AGALEV								3.9	6.1	7.3	1.9	7.0
VB							1.4	1.8	2.2	3.0	10.4	12.7
<i>Wallonia</i>												
PS	47.0	35.7	34.5	34.4	36.8	37.2	36.7	36.2	39.5	43.9	39.2	33.7
PSC	30.5	23.7	20.9	20.5	22.6	25.8	26.9	19.6	22.6	23.2	22.5	22.5
PRL	11.7	25.5	26.7	17.7	15.1	18.8	17.5	21.7	24.1	22.2	19.8	23.9
PCB	6.3	10.5	6.9	5.8	5.7	5.4	5.9	4.2	2.5	1.6	0.3	
RW	0.2	3.4	10.5	20.9	18.5	9.0	9.2	7.1	0.6	0.8	1.2	
EGOLO						0.5	1.2	6.1	6.2	6.5	13.5	10.3
Ext. right											2.4	6.4

Note: For party abbreviations see list on pages xix-xx.

fragmented and high-volatility elections are a regular occurrence. This also adds to the parties' basic electoral vulnerability, and helps to explain the high degree of competition in this arena.

The governmental arena

As noted above, grand coalitions of all three (or six) pillar parties remain very exceptional phenomena. The idea of a grand coalition is occasionally advanced as a possible way out of a major crisis, after the very critical elections of 1991, for instance. This confirms the original status of the grand coalition; it is not a normal phenomenon, but can perhaps be regarded as a crisis-management device.

The normal practice in Belgian government formation is for the establishment of coalitions that are both majoritarian and—at least from the perspective of the country's peculiar party system—minimal winning. To be sure, if one counts the parties formed as a result of the pillar parties' linguistic splits as single parties, some coalitions might well appear to be oversized, yet the generally accepted principle to date has been 'symmetry', which means that the two parties of the same family always remain together, either inside the government, or in opposition. That is to say, for the purposes of coalition formation, they assume the status of single actors. The logic of minimal winning thus functions at the level of the party families, not of the single parties.

There are mainly two basic types of coalition: centre-left (Christian-democrats and socialists) and centre-right (Christian-democrats and liberals). Except for the 1954–58 period, the Christian-democrats have always been in government (see [Table 4.6](#)). They have as a rule also provided the prime minister. These possible coalitions are all made up exclusively of pillar parties. A few governments in the 1970s and one in the 1980s, however, contained the regionalist, non-pillar parties. Greens and right-wing populists have to date never participated in government, neither at the national (federal) level, nor at the regional level. With the main exception of coalition innovations introduced to produce the two-third majorities needed to reform the state institutions, the Belgian governmental arenas have overall remained fairly closed to non-pillar parties.

Government formation is never an easy task. It takes several weeks, or even months. At least since the 1960s, one of the major problems to overcome has been the regional-linguistic issue and most governments have fallen as a result of conflict over this problem (Deschouwer 1994b). The formation of a subsequent government first requires a cooling-off period—possibly accompanied by elections—and then a long period of negotiations, before a solution for the problem that caused the previous government to collapse is found. It necessitates an agreement between the two linguistic wings of two party families, that is to say, between at least four parties. Such agreements need to be detailed and subtly constructed, with numerous package deals and examples of log-rolling. Thereafter, a loyal attitude to the agreement on the part of all the governing parties is necessary. The government

always decides by consensus, and assumes that the parliamentary groups will conform to this consensus (De Winter 1993; Frogner 1988a).

The corollary of this latter point is that parliament's substantive role is very much reduced. In order not to endanger the subtle agreements contained in the coalition pact, the government parties must be strictly loyal to the agreement. The opposition parties are kept out of governmental decision-making, and therefore largely adopt a role of outright opposition in parliament. Accordingly, parliament is certainly an arena for considerable conflict between the government and opposition. The party composition of government and of the opposition can change significantly between governments, however, though one player is always on the government side of this relationship, namely, the Christian-democrats.

At least from the 1960s, the government's strictly majoritarian format and style has constituted a fundamental problem, as the Belgian political system has since that time been trying to reform its unitary structure—first by means of decentralisation and then into a federal state. Such institutional reforms necessitate a reform of the constitution, which in turn requires a two-thirds majority in both houses of parliament and—since the first reform of 1970—also a majority in each linguistic group. In the early 1960s, these requirements could still be met by a centre-left coalition, but ever since 1965—when the regionalist tensions became really serious—this has no longer been possible. That explains why the Belgian pillar parties have resorted to other coalition formulas. One example is the regionalist parties' governmental participation between 1974 and 1980 and again between 1987 and 1991. This constituted a major innovation, albeit not a very effective one, since these new governing parties appeared to be unwilling to play the coalition game in the manner expected of them. Second, other 'unconventional' governments formed to help resolve the issue of constitutional reform were the grand coalition governments of 1973 and 1980. Third, in 1993, the centre-left government was enabled to realise the latest reform of the Belgian state by dint of the extra-governmental, parliamentary support provided by the *Volkspartij* and of the Greens.

In sum, an examination of the Belgian governmental and parliamentary arenas does not uncover many practices that one could regard as consociational. Accommodative elements—such as the manner in which governmental decision-making is structured and the strict discipline of the parliamentary party groups—are related less to social segmentation than to the fragmentation of the party system. To be sure, the latter is to a large extent of course due to the linguistic issue, which also directly produces the need for accommodative decision-making. The consociational element of post-1965 Belgium is thus clearly a new sort of consociationalism, related to a newly politicised cleavage, as will be discussed in greater detail in the third part of this chapter.

First, however, it is necessary to mention again the way in which the role of the liberal parties has changed since 'classic' Belgian consociationalism, for this change has had a fundamental impact upon the format and style of Belgian politics. The introduction of universal suffrage in 1918 had reduced the size of the Liberal Party,

which henceforth assumed the role of a half party in the electoral arena. However, its significance in the governmental arena hardly declined, since throughout the inter-war period, it remained the preferred partner of the Catholic Party. After the war, its position was threatened, because the socialists became a full government partner and even provided the Belgian prime minister between 1945 and 1949. During the ‘school war’ of the 1950s, the liberals fully mobilised their subculture on this issue, before deciding in 1961 that for them, the old religious cleavage was no longer relevant. They explicitly wanted to break out of the old mould and give a new impetus to the political debates in Belgium. This move was electorally rewarding, but did not in fact break the old mould of consociational accommodation completely.

To an increasing extent, the system of consociational accommodation became the ‘system’ of Christian-democrat and socialist co-operation. In the neo-corporatist arena, their major social and economic auxiliary associations governed the state together. In the governmental arena, the ‘normal’ or ‘natural’ coalition became the centre-left coalition. For their part, liberal parties have been in national government for only twelve of the thirty-eight years since 1961, and have never provided a prime minister. The bifurcation of Belgium’s pillar parties and party system made their distance from the government even greater. Today, in 1999, the ‘natural’ centre-left coalition has been in power for twelve years, in itself a record.

Yet the two major pillar party families are losing votes. After 1999, they may no longer command enough seats to be able to govern together, but by then, any other two-family alternative might also have become impossible. That will mean that either new parties—the Greens being the first candidates—will have to be added to the list of ‘*koalitionsfähige*’ (coalitionable) partners, or that a grand coalition will have to be formed. In the latter case, the liberals will reluctantly have to re-enter the system, the structures and techniques of which they oppose and wish to bring down.

Other arenas of pillar party competition

If we look at party interaction elsewhere than in the electoral, governmental and parliamentary arenas, what we find is a rather different picture, one characterised by continuity rather than by change. This is a consequence of the survival of the pillar parties’ traditional role in respect of intra-subcultural linkage (or the ‘vertical aspect’) within Belgian consociational democracy. The pillar parties and their numerous auxiliary associations providing state, or state-sponsored, services are here still intact. The pillar parties’ clients might no longer be the well-defined ‘*classe gardée*’ they once were, but the organisations persist because they claim to represent society, albeit a rather idealised and outdated image of society as it used to be, rather than how it actually is today (Billiet and Huyse 1984).

The high degree of ‘partyness’ in government is more than matched by the ubiquity of parties throughout the Belgian state and Belgian society, many sectors of which are divided between the pillar parties and their allied auxiliary associations. Belgium can thus be regarded as a fully fledged ‘partitocracy’ (Dewachter 1987;

Deschouwer *et al.* 1996). Perhaps the most important instrument of pillar party control of the state and para-state sectors is the control which the pillar parties exercise over the reward structure in respect of the recruitment and promotion of personnel. There are many ways in which they are able to circumvent strictly objective, exclusively merit-based recruitment criteria. One technique, for example, is to appoint subcultural loyalists as temporary personnel to posts which are subsequently made permanent ('regularised'). Another is to create new services, access to the benefits of which the pillar parties and their auxiliary associations again seek to control in their interests and those of their client groups (Deschouwer and De Winter 1998).

Rules for the appointment and promotion of lower-level civil servants are fairly strict, but since the 1950s, personnel decisions in respect of university qualified civil servants have been the exclusive domain of pillar party patronage. Since the early 1960s, this patronage has been more or less institutionalised, and therefore also to a certain extent 'pacified'. When parties conclude a coalition pact, they include an agreement on the distribution of the spoils of office, based on their respective strength in the parliament. This means that for the duration of its exclusion from government, an opposition party will lose a lot of its opportunities to exercise patronage. However, there is enough alternation in power to allow for a fair distribution over time, especially because the Christian-democrats, who are always in government, allow their coalition partners to 'make up' for the period during which they were in opposition. A special commission controls the correct implementation of this patronage agreement, which illustrates the centralisation and thus also the direct party control over these activities. The same happens of course in the provinces and in the local municipalities. It is only since the second half of the 1980s—and initially at the national level—that civil service promotion procedures became somewhat less party-political.

The grip of the parties on Belgian society is certainly not limited to direct state services. The personnel of the public radio and television services is divided among the parties (Burgelman 1987). The same goes for the education sector and for the many autonomous or quasi-autonomous public enterprises. Public works are another sector in which considerable clientelism and patronage is possible, and in which the spoils can be effectively and yet discreetly distributed between the various pillars. Occasionally, this system results in public investments that are not justified solely by objective criteria of need, but by the political requirement to maintain balance in terms of the pillars' shares of the spoils of office. This principle is especially important for the maintenance of regional balance: thus a public investment in Wallonia, for example, has to be compensated for by an equal investment in Flanders. This system of proportionality is referred to as the 'waffle iron' policy.

We can conclude then that the extreme ubiquity of the pillar parties did not disappear after 1960. The relative pacification of both the socioeconomic and especially the religious cleavage broadly institutionalised the presence of the pillar

parties, which had mobilised around these ‘old’ issues. The two largest pillars are the clear winners of this, especially since the linguistic-regional issue has become salient. It facilitates access to power at the federal level for the two largest parties, and it gives them both a region in which they are the largest party. This too explains why the Flemish liberal parties not only tried to become larger and stronger, but also started from 1990 to promote an identity as opposed to not only the structures and techniques of elite accommodation utilised in Belgian consociational democracy, but also—and especially—to pillarization (Deschouwer 1997b).

From ‘classic’ to federal consociationalism

Introduction

It is impossible to understand current Belgian politics, and *a fortiori* to understand the evolution of pillarization and overarching consociational decision-making, without a detailed consideration of the effects of the country’s linguistic divide. We need to discuss them here, to highlight the way in which Belgium’s traditional system of consociational democracy has been supplanted by a new one. This process involved the utilisation of consociational techniques to transform Belgium into a federal state, which itself now functions in a manner which corresponds to many of the key structures and techniques of consociational democracy. This change has far-reaching consequences for the pillar parties. We have already illustrated how the regional divide led to the formation of a double party system and the strengthening of the Walloon socialists and the Flemish Christian-democrats, and of their respective pillar organisations. Yet the parties have in general a very central role to play in Belgium’s consociational federation.

Consociational path to federalism

Belgium did not become a federal state overnight. The transformation of the old unitary state was a long and painful operation. The start of the reforms can be situated in 1963, when the linguistic borderline was legally defined. Further landmarks are the constitutional reforms of 1970, 1980, 1988 and 1993. The first constitutional reform of 1970 was important because it established the consociational principles that would govern subsequent reforms. The 1970 constitution introduced the obligation to have an equal number of French-speaking and Dutch-speaking ministers in the Government (with the exception of the Prime Minister and State Secretaries). It also introduced the principle of the ‘double majority’ for all further institutional reforms and for all laws implementing institutional reforms. The double majority means an overall majority of two-thirds (the normal requirement for all constitutional reforms) and a simple majority in each language group. This requirement means that it has become impossible for the

Flemish majority to use its numerical superiority, since a simple majority is no longer enough.

The threshold for future reforms was thus fairly high, which has on the one hand certainly slowed the implementation of reforms, but has on the other hand in the end helped to solve outstanding problems. There were many attempts to expedite the reforms, but many attempts also failed, because the thresholds were so high. After a few years, therefore, a lot of unsolved problems and tensions remained, and occasionally resulted in severe political crises. These occurred principally when new governments had to be formed. As discussed earlier, most governments since the 1960s collapsed because of stresses related to the linguistic divide. But after each governmental crisis, a new government has to be formed, and it needs to be formed by parties of both sides of the linguistic divide. When things really became troublesome, the risk of a total deadlock of the political system actually helped to produce an awareness that a solution had to be found. In turn, this awareness led to compromise and an eventual solution being reached—a process which we have referred to above as Belgian ‘crisis consociationalism’.

The major actors in this process were of course the political parties. Problems always had to be faced at the level of the central government, which could not avoid being split by the linguistic divide (for a more detailed account of this mechanism, see Deschouwer 1996). The pillar parties therefore either had to negotiate in order to keep the existing government alive, or they had to negotiate to form a new one. Either way, it was the pillar parties which in the end had to do the job. The Christian-democrats and socialists were much more active in this process, because of their size and because of their position in their respective regions. Thus, the agreement of 1963 on the linguistic borderline was produced by a centre-left government, and the reform of 1970 was also passed by a centre-left coalition led by Gaston Eyskens, who had already settled the Royal Question in 1950 and the school issue in 1958. A major reform plan (which finally failed) was presented in 1977 by a centre-left coalition in which both *Volksunie* and FDF participated. The agreement (called the ‘Egmont Pact’) was so complicated that the party leaders constantly had to renegotiate it. Their frequent meetings were referred to as the ‘junta’ of party presidents. The prime minister Leo Tindemans got so annoyed by the central role which the pillar parties and their presidents played in this process that in October 1978 he resigned.

In 1980, both liberal parties joined the government for a period of just five months and this helped ensure that the majority required for a second constitutional reform was available. This was the only occasion on which they participated in the process leading to the federalisation of Belgium. In 1988, a further constitutional reform was passed, again by a centre-left government, in which the *Volksunie* this time helped to provide the necessary qualified majorities. The latest constitutional reform was approved in 1993 and was once again the work of a centre-left government, which now had to seek the support of the *Volksunie* and of the Greens. This chronicle of thirty years of piecemeal constitutional change offers another illustration of how,

despite the fact that their overall electoral strength is growing, the political importance of the liberal pillar parties is in decline.

The Belgian federation is based upon a fairly pronounced kind of federalism. In terms of competencies, the federal level has been almost completely ‘emptied’, and most of the powers have been given to the linguistic communities and to the regions. This design is a clear result of the country’s double party system, as all the parties are regional parties, represent only one part of the country and compete only with the parties of their own linguistic group. This produces a very centrifugal pattern of party competition, because there is simply nobody left to defend the centre. All parties want, in varying degrees, greater autonomy for their region and/or community. Yet it falls to these same parties to bridge the gap when they form a Belgian coalition government. The way to do that is by waiting until there are a lot of problems to be solved, before producing an agreement which essentially consists of institutionalising the fact that they disagree, by letting both sides deal with their own policy. In terms of the language of consociational democracy, this could be described as granting segmental autonomy, and that is precisely what the Belgian federal state does.

Consociational structures and techniques in Belgian federalism

The road to the fully fledged federal structures of 1993 was long and painful. It has been littered by a succession of crises and episodes of consociational crisis management. However, most observers believe that the agreement reached in 1993 will not constitute the last major reform, and that the next crisis will occur within the next few years.

The solution produced by Belgium’s consociational crisis management is a federal state that is replete with checks and balances, with power-sharing arrangements and with various powers of mutual veto; in short, it is a consociational federal state. Perhaps the most obviously consociational feature is the granting of segmental autonomy, as discussed above. But there is more. We have already mentioned the constitutional obligation for power sharing in the federal government. If there is to be a government at all, it has to be one in which parties of both sides of Belgium’s linguistic divide have reached an agreement and govern together. The decision-making style in the federal government is characterised by accommodation, and by the fact that both sides retain a veto power. This is politically much more important than the rather symbolic obligation for the government to be composed of equal numbers of ministers from the two language groups.

The principle of veto also applies in the parliamentary arena, where it operates as follows: if two-thirds of the MPs of one linguistic group declares a proposal is potentially damaging to their language group, this activates the so-called ‘alarm bell’ procedure. What that means is that the relevant proposal is referred to the federal government, which has thirty days to produce an alternative, consensual, proposal. This system of minority guarantee—together with equal number of

ministers and accommodative decision-making—is also present in the Brussels region, but its function there is to protect the Dutch-speaking minority in that region.

Modern Belgian society is both extremely segmented and pillarized; both language groups have their own systems of extensive subcultural organisation, their own parties and party system, their own political system, their own communication system, and their own education system. The members of these segments can have all their social, economic and political needs and desires fulfilled without them having to leave their respective subculture. Belgium's pillar parties neatly follow the demarcation lines of these territorially defined subcultures. Each of the latter has more than one party (which makes the picture somewhat different from the system of pillarized segmentation that pertained during 'classic' Belgian consociationalism, but no pillar party represents more than one subculture. Accordingly, the pillar parties still need to fulfil both of the roles outlined in Luther's framework: that of vertical linkage within their own subculture, as well as that of engaging in overarching accommodation to bridge the gap between the pillars. In other words, they are concerned both with on the one hand maximising organisational penetration, political mobilisation and hierarchical control within their own subculture and, on the other hand, with producing the overarching accommodation at the federal level, by means of which the Belgian state is maintained. Belgium thus constitutes a copybook example of societal segmentation (and pillarization), combined with consociational decision-making between the rival pillar party elites.

It is difficult to find another consociational democracy that operates in precisely the same manner as Belgium. Neither the Netherlands nor Austria have these clear-cut territorial divisions between their subcultures. The concentration of Dutch Catholics in the south and the east-west (urban/rural) division between conservatives and socialists in Austria is not of the same kind. Though Switzerland too is a federal state, elite accommodation at the federal level is not one that takes place between representatives of the territorial sub-units, because the federal parties are not at the same time only regional parties, as in Belgium. The only case that comes close to the federal-consociational institutional setting that has developed in Belgium is the short-lived post-communist federal republic of Czechoslovakia, which was also characterised by a dual structure and no federal party system (Henderson 1995; Lijphart 1992), though neither federalism nor consociationalism proved able to keep that country together. As yet, Belgium does not appear to be on the eve of a final collapse. However, its now markedly bipolar system, with encapsulated and territorially defined subcultures and the absence of federal parties, certainly creates a level of political tension which is perhaps unlikely to be contained indefinitely.

Conclusion: pillar parties and federal-consociational tensions

In terms of its structure and of the principles governing its operation, Belgian federalism is—as we have shown—very clearly consociational. To that extent, the federal institutions can perhaps be considered to have replaced Belgium’s ‘classic’ consociational system. On the other hand, we must recall that key aspects of ‘classic’ Belgian consociationalism have not disappeared. If one considers, for example, the organisations of the traditional pillars, one finds that they are still alive, albeit not so much as ideological, or religious subcultures, but as networks of service-providing organisations. The growth of the welfare state has in fact further reinforced the pillars, whilst Belgium’s transformation into a federal state has in addition strengthened the importance and the power of the (mainly Flemish) Christian-democrats and the (mainly Walloon) socialists. Accordingly, contemporary Belgium should not be regarded as characterised solely by its new system of federal consociationalism, but as a country that contains elements of both ‘classic’ and ‘new’ consociationalism, in which elements of the latter have reinforced surviving characteristics of ‘classic’ consociationalism. Belgium’s pillar parties are still fated to play a very important role in this changed political system. They and their auxiliary associations carry the weight of the system, which in turn constrains their room to manoeuvre. Moreover, the pillar parties share much of the responsibility for the cartel-type behaviour of the system—and this is especially true of the dominant socialist and Christian-democratic parties.

There are also a number of further issues which we will briefly explore in these concluding remarks. First, there is the challenge which the pillar parties face in seeking to be responsive to the electorate. There is a widespread expectation that, irrespective of electoral fluctuations, coalition governments will always be formed by the ‘natural’ combination of the two (four) largest pillar parties, which represent each language group. The implication of this is that such coalitions have a very high chance of being formed, even in situations where those two (four) major pillar parties are losing votes overall. It is likely that, in the near future, the two major political families will no longer be strong enough to form a majority government together. The only way to form a winning government at the federal level would then be by means of a grand coalition of six parties, which will itself of course not (be able to) take into account electoral change. This lack of responsiveness on the part of the Belgian party system is of course a direct effect of the double-party system, but does not contribute at all to promoting the public’s trust in the parties.

The parties are aware of this and therefore tend to focus as much as possible on the regional level of politics. Life is politically less problematic for them at the regional level, where cleavages are no longer too deep, and the divisive linguistic cleavage is absent. The near-perfect linguistic encapsulation of Belgian society of course ensures that the population is not exposed to the ‘others’ (unless they live in Brussels, or in some small borderline villages). Only the political elites have to deal on a daily basis with the elites of the other language group. At the regional level, the

pillar parties can therefore be more responsive, which in turn makes a further expansion of regional competencies an attractive strategy for the pillar elites.

The absence of national 'Belgian' parties, or even of federations of the regional parties, places Belgium in a both unique and problematic situation, however. For whilst it may be attractive to go on emptying the Belgian state and to transfer more competencies to a level at which political life is easier for the pillar parties, these same parties still have to co-operate to form a Belgian government. That places them in a very difficult and almost schizophrenic situation. Parties in the federal government (and not merely their regional wings!) must play the fairly majoritarian game of regional politics (including the request for even more autonomy) and the consociational game of federal politics simultaneously. It is within the parties, and especially inside the governing parties, that the intergovernmental relations and tensions between the federal and the regional level have to be accommodated.

So far, regional coalitions have always been compatible with the federal coalition. That appears to be a systemic obligation, for it is difficult to imagine a scenario, where for example, the Flemish Christian-democrats form a coalition with the Flemish socialists for the Flemish government, while at the federal level they govern with the liberals. The same party (not its regional wing!) would be a partner in government at the federal level, and an opposition party at the regional level. This leads to a strange but very logical paradox: the absence of federal parties reduces the political autonomy of the regions. They have to do the same at both levels, and thus they cannot really be responsive to electoral change.

The current Belgian political system obliges the parties to invest a lot of energy at a level of government which is often blamed for being remote and removed from the demands of the population. Not only is there hardly any substance left at the federal level (except for justice, security and the currency—including public debt), but the obligation to accommodate is incumbent on the pillar parties themselves. Moreover, that obligation is not demanded by the electorate, but is a product of the institutional structure agreed between the pillar parties themselves.

The parties are caught in a trap (Deschouwer 1997a), and that increases their centrality and visibility. There is therefore considerable scope for anti-system challenge, as indeed, in the 1960s the new (regionalist) parties challenged the old system of pillarization and the structures and techniques of inter-pillar accommodation (Deschouwer and Koole 1992). Yet the success of these challenger parties led to a federal state reform which has itself reinforced central aspects of consociational democracy, including pillarization and government by elite cartel. Nowadays, the Greens challenge this system, as do the right-wing extremist parties *Vlaams Blok* and *Front National*, and last but not least the liberal parties, which have in recent decades been largely excluded from power. The parties that are the objects of these challenges and criticisms are mainly the socialists and the Christian-democrats. They are attacked not only for their grip on society through their traditional pillarized networks, but also because, due to the exigencies of coalition government, they are constantly having to compromise in the federal

government with the requests of that other part of the country. Belgium's new system of federal consociationalism is of course bipolar, which is not always a good condition for its smooth operation. Criticism of the Belgian partitocracy (Elchardus and Derks 1996; De Winter 1996) is at the same time criticism of Belgian pillarization, Belgian federalism and the 'classic' and new features of Belgian consociationalism.

Notes

- 1 Concluded at the King's residence at Loppem, it is referred to as the 'Pact of Loppem'.
- 2 By 'society' is meant here of course the Flemish part of the country, since that is the region where the Catholic pillar was extremely strong and broad (but since the Flemish region is also more populous and since the CVP in Flanders is the largest party of the country, the CVP state also meant to a certain extent the whole Belgian state).
- 3 The picture has changed somewhat in recent years.
- 4 With the exception of the late 1930s, that had also been the case before the Second World War. On the concept of 'consociational concentration', see [Chapter 10](#) and [Figure 10.3](#).

5

Parties, pillars and the politics of accommodation

Weak or weakening linkages? The case of Dutch consociationalism

Rudy B. Andeweg

Consociationalism in Dutch politics and in Dutch political science

The consociational credentials of Dutch politics cannot be disputed, even though there is considerable room for debate about the timing, causes, and consequences of both pillarization and the politics of accommodation in the Netherlands. In the standard version of the theory, as put forward primarily by Arend Lijphart (e.g. 1968b, 1968c, 1975), emancipatory movements of Catholics, (orthodox) Protestants and (secular) Labour mobilized their respective constituencies in their struggle against the hitherto dominant Liberals during the decades around the turn of the century. The subcultural mobilization and inter-pillar rivalry, however, resulted in such a strong segmentation of Dutch society that its political stability was put at risk. Through the prudence of the subcultural leaders, who realized the danger in time, stability was safeguarded by cooperation at the elite level. This cooperation was first exhibited in 1917, in a famous package deal to end both the school struggle and the conflict over universal suffrage. Known as the 'Pacification of 1917', this episode marked the beginning of half a century of consociational democracy. The metaphor of pillarization is apposite: separate pillars, only joined at the top, together supported and were sheltered by the roof of the Dutch state. From 1967 onwards, depillarization rapidly crumbled the hitherto solid subcultures, but with effects on consociationalism that are less clear now than they seemed at the time.

Ours is a simplified account of Lijphart's argument, narrowly escaping turning it into a straw man, but it is the 'ideal-type' of Dutch consociational theory to which other scholars have reacted. The two most important bones of contention are the nature of pillarization, and the causes of consociational practices.

With regard to pillarization, it has been argued that it was not, or at least not only, a means of emancipation of the masses, but rather an instrument to enable the political elites to exercise social control. Marxist authors, in particular, have suggested that Dutch pillarization has mobilized the masses primarily along the religious/secular cleavage, thus reducing the class struggle to an innocuous second-order cleavage (Kieve 1981). In this variation on the 'false consciousness' theme,

social class and other potentially relevant dividing lines, such as gender, were completely obfuscated (Stuurman 1983). It is a radical version of a more widespread opinion, supported by empirical evidence, especially with respect to the Catholic pillar, that social control has been an important aspect of pillarization. Most scholars, however, see no contradiction between social control on the one hand, and emancipation on the other (Van Doorn 1956).

This debate is related to the other controversy, about the causes of consociationalism. Daalder, among others, has pointed to the fact that many pillar organizations were set up after the Pacification of 1917 had recognized the legitimacy of the emancipatory movements' goals. The continuation of subcultural mobilization after 1917 seems to indicate social control, as emancipation was more or less achieved. However, continued pillarization after 1917 raises a more fundamental question with regard to Lijphart's theory. If, as he claims, the Pacification of 1917 is to be interpreted as a self-denying prophecy, as the elites' prudent reaction to the problems posed by pillarization, it seems counterintuitive that the problem became aggravated after the solution. According to Daalder, 'With some exaggeration, therefore, one might say that Lijphart found a solution to a problem which did not exist' (Daalder 1989:34). Daalder has suggested that, in the Netherlands at least, consociational practices did not have their origins in a self-denying prophecy, but were a continuation of an elite culture dating back to the Dutch Republic of pre-Napoleonic times, when the representatives from the various provinces within the confederacy sought to preserve their autonomy, and, when necessary, reached common decisions only after prolonged bargaining and compromise. The similarities between consociational democracy and Republican decision-making are striking, and it is no accident that the very term 'consociationalism' is borrowed from Althusius' seventeenth-century description of the Dutch Republic. However, just as Lijphart's theory lacks a convincing explanation for the elites' timely prudence in 1917, Daalder fails to explain why the leaders of the new emancipatory movements adopted the traditional ways of the very elites they were seeking to replace.

We shall return to this question in the conclusion to this chapter, after having explored the role of the political parties both in intra- and in inter-pillar relations. Although parties feature prominently in accounts of Dutch consociational democracy (e.g. Lijphart 1975), just as analyses of the Dutch party system resound with references to pillarization and the politics of accommodation (e.g. Daalder 1987b), the nature of the relationship has received no systematic attention. From the outset, we should emphasize that not all political parties are relevant in this respect. Since the 'official' start of consociational practices in 1917, an average of 25 electoral lists of candidates have contested the elections, with the most crowded ballot papers during the Interbellum (54 lists in 1933!); the postwar average is 20 lists. Not all these parties passed the (extremely low) electoral threshold, but during this period, an average of 11 parties were represented in Parliament. Not all these parties played the 'consociational game' (see the introductory chapter of this

volume). Some parties actually grew out of opposition to pillarization and/or the politics of accommodation, such as the prewar National-Socialist NSB, or the reformist and progressive liberal D'66 since the 1960s. Others played the consociational game only in relation to their respective subculture, but not in relation to the other pillars or parties. The small orthodox Protestant parties (SGP, GPV, and RPF), for example, are firmly entrenched in their own pillar network, but they act primarily as 'witness parties', neither seeking, nor being invited, to take responsibility for policy-making at the national level. The same can be said of the erstwhile communist party. Even a major party such as the Labour Party (PvdA, or its prewar predecessor SDAP) was in this position until 1939, having turned down an invitation to join the government in 1914, and having lost its *Koalitionsfähigkeit* after making half-hearted revolutionary noises in 1918. It can also be the other way around, with a party playing by inter-pillar consociational rules without proclaiming to represent a pillar. This is the case with the conservative-liberals (after the war the VVD), who were the butt of the emancipatory movements, and only organized themselves in defence and *contrecoeur*. Strictly speaking, only the three Christian-democratic parties (the Catholic KVP, the Dutch Reformed CHU, and the Re-reformed ARP), now merged into the CDA, can be regarded as consociational parties for the whole period since 1917, both in terms of intra- and of inter-subcultural relations.

In this chapter we shall follow the usual practice and confine our analysis of consociational parties to KVP, ARP, CHU (CDA), PvdA, and VVD, despite our qualifications regarding both the inclusion of the VVD, and the exclusion of the orthodox Protestant parties. The boundaries of the various subcultures were not very clear cut, which is reflected by the confusion in the literature about the number of subcultural segments. Only between the KVP and the Catholic pillar did an unambiguous one-on-one relationship exist. In some respects, Dutch Reformed (*Nederlands Hervormd*) and Re-reformed (*Gereformeerd*) constituted one pillar (housing, broadcasting), while separate organizations existed for other aspects of social life. There is room for doubting the existence of two different subcultures, each with its own political party. The same applies to the secular part of Dutch society, where the middle class and working class used common facilities for some aspects (such as health care) and separate ones for others (such as mass media). Depending on the specific aspect one is studying, it is just as valid to speak of five, as it is of four, or three pillars. This qualification too should be kept in mind during the remainder of our discussion.

Parties and pillars

Weak and weakening encapsulation

Given their emancipationist origins, four of the five main consociational parties can be expected to conform closely to Duverger's model of the *parti de masse*. However,

they fail to live up to those expectations when it comes to mass membership. Even if we ignore the fact that for several reasons the membership figures before 1970 are probably inflated (Koole 1992:167–9), the number of card-carrying members of these five parties as a percentage of the total electorate (M/E; Katz and Mair *et al.* 1992a) has never been impressive. This is clearly illustrated in Table 5.1 which documents their total number of party members in postwar election years, as well as the ratio of their members to their voters (M/V) and to the country's total electorate (M/E).

As the only non-emancipatory party, the conservative-liberal VVD's low degree of organization comes as no surprise, but of the other four parties, only the Catholic KVP occasionally organized more than 7 per cent of the electorate in the period immediately following the Second World War. In light of the fact that the social-democratic PvdA attracted roughly the same number of voters during this period, its degree of organization seems particularly disappointing. For both these parties, and for the Protestant ARP and CHU, the degree of organization started to decline in the second half of the 1960s. This is also the period when these parties suffered the electoral haemorrhage that signalled the onset of depillarization, but members seemed to desert the parties even quicker than the voters did; with the exception of the CHU, the parties' ratio of members to voters declined as well. Again, the VVD proves the exception to the rule: during the 1970s the party actually increased the degree of organization before it joined the others in a second wave of declining party membership in the 1980s.

Two aspects of these party membership figures should be mentioned. First, the decline of the degree of organization is not caused by the expansion of the electorate alone. True, the number of eligible voters increased from 3.5 million in 1946 to 11.8 million in 1998, an increase of 337 per cent (due to both population growth and the lowering of the voting age to the present eighteen years). However, the membership also declined in absolute terms. With the exception of the VVD, the parties now have fewer members than they had at the start of the postwar period.

Second, the low and declining membership figures for the consociational parties are not compensated by high and rising figures for the other parties. Here we should make an exception for the three small orthodox Protestant parties which normally organize between 10 and 14 per cent of their stable electorate. All parties together organized around 15 per cent of the electorate in 1946. In 1967, the organizational density dropped to 6.7 per cent, after which it continued to decline. In the 1998 elections it stood at less than 3 per cent. Dutch political parties have the lowest degree of organization in Western Europe, and the decline of the degree of organization is the second biggest (after Denmark) (Katz and Mair *et al.* 1992:334a).

For the analysis of the links between consociational parties and the pillars, however, the low initial levels of both membership figures and ratios are more surprising than their decline, as the latter is a near universal phenomenon in (former) consociational democracies and other polities alike. Moreover, the parties do not seem to have relied much on functional equivalents to mass membership. Very few people were brought under the party umbrella through membership of

auxiliary organizations. Some of the auxiliary organizations are foundations (party research centres, party institutes for political socialization and training, party foundations for support to counterparts in the Third World, or in 3 Central and Eastern Europe), which by definition have no members. With the exception of the KVP, all these parties sooner or later have set up women's organizations, but these encompassed only women who were party members already. Only some parties' youth organizations may have encapsulated parts of the subcultures not reached by party membership. This is particularly true of the JOVD, the liberal youth organization, not all members of which also joined the VVD. Not all parties had youth organizations, however, and their membership was quite small (Koole and Van de Velde 1992:636–42).

So far we have looked at formal, card-carrying membership, but the picture does not change when we look at informal party membership, or party identification.¹ Each instalment of the Dutch National Election Study dutifully reports the percentages of strong and weak party identifiers (see Koole and Van de Velde 1992: 633–4). Since it was first measured in 1971, party identification has been remarkably stable (Niemöller 1995:145–6). Party identification seems to correlate with the same independent variables (such as age) and it seems to have the same consequences (as on turnout) as elsewhere. The problem lies in its relationship to party choice. Several studies have concluded that party identification in the Netherlands does not seem causally prior to the vote (Thomassen 1976; Van der Eyk and Niemöller 1983, 307–7). One of them suggests that 'The identification with the political parties was for most people only indirect. For a Catholic, voting for the Catholic party was part of his role behaviour. As far as group identification was important in this process, the identification was probably more with the Catholic subculture and much less an identification with the associated party *per se*. An analogous process applied to Calvinists and socialists' (Thomassen 1976:78).

Weakening subcultural mobilization

If the primary allegiance was to the pillar as a whole, rather than to the party representing it, the size of the (eligible) subculture is the most important determinant of the size of the party. Using data from the highpoint of pillarization (1956) and from more recent National Election Studies, we can observe the changes in the sizes of the subcultures across time. For this purpose, we have operationalized the parties' subcultural constituencies on the basis of [Table 5.1](#). The KVP's subcultural basis consisted of practising Catholics (i.e. those attending church at least once a month), the ARP represented Re-reformed church-goers, and the CHU's constituency encompassed the practising Dutch Reformed. Since 1977, all three subcultures are supposed to support CDA. Those who classify themselves as working class and are secular (i.e. attend church less than once per month) are supposed to vote PvdA, and the secular middle and upper classes are represented by the VVD.

It is clear from [Table 5.2](#) that, until 1968, the religious subcultures remained stable, but after 1968 they have eroded to such an extent that their erstwhile majority in the electorate has dwindled to a mere quarter. The secular working class has contracted less dramatically, and the secular middle class has been the beneficiary of these transformations in the social structure. This is clearly in line with the development of the electoral fortunes of these parties. However, there are inconsistencies. First, the decline of the religious subcultures started after 1968, i.e. after the electoral exodus, especially from the KVP, had already commenced. Second, the PvdA recouped its losses in the 1970s and 1980s, when the secular working class continued to decline. More importantly, it can be shown that secularization and socioeconomic developments alone cannot account for all of the electoral changes. Something must also have happened inside the pillars, affecting the relationship between subcultural membership and party support.

The left-hand column of [Table 5.3](#) shows the degree to which the consociational parties managed to mobilize their subcultures during the heyday of pillarization, in 1956. The KVP could count on the loyalty of practically every member of the Catholic subculture (95 per cent). Among the Re-reformed, mobilization was almost as high, or even higher if we were to add the votes for the small orthodox Protestant parties. Adding these votes would also result in higher subcultural mobilization of the Dutch Reformed pillar, but the difference would be small. Many Dutch Reformed voters voted for the social-democrat PvdA, which shortly after the war could even boast being the largest party in terms of Dutch Reformed supporters. The explanation for this low degree of subcultural mobilization by the CHU lies partly in the subculture, partly in the party. On the one hand, the Dutch Reformed Church is a broad church, embracing both fundamentalist and latitudinarian currents. This religious heterogeneity has always been an obstacle to effective sociopolitical pillarization, as well as to the promotion of uniform voting behaviour. On the other hand, the party that is associated with this pillar has always refused to call itself a 'party' (the Christian Historical *Union*) and grew out of a split from the ARP around a conflict over party discipline.

It was, therefore, not the CHU, but the social-democrat PvdA that was the runner-up to KVP and ARP with regard to subcultural mobilization. There are several factors that help account for the fact that only about two-thirds of the secular working class supported the PvdA. In the first place, our operationalization of 'secular' as attending church less than once a month may categorize some voters into the socialist pillar who feel more allegiance to one of the religious subcultures: in 1956, no less than 17 per cent of what we defined as the secular working class voted for KVP, ARP or CHU. Secondly, at that time the PvdA had a small but vigorous competitor for the support of this subcultural constituency in the form of the communist party. In reality, the subcultural loyalty of the secular working class probably was higher than [Table 5.3](#) indicates.

The real exception is, once again, the conservative-liberal VVD and the secular middle (and upper) class. The VVD never managed to mobilize more than a third of

Table 5.1 Dutch pillar party membership: figures and ratios (1948–98)

	KVP			ARP			CHU			PvdA			VVD		
	#	MV	ME	#	MV	ME	#	MV	ME	#	MV	ME	#	MV	ME
1948	409	26.7	7.5	101	15.5	1.9	42	9.3	0.8	117	9.3	2.2	22	5.7	0.4
1952	278	18.1	4.8	101	16.8	1.8	45	9.4	0.8	111	7.2	1.9	26	5.5	0.5
1956	429	23.6	7.0	95	17.0	1.6	—	—	—	142	7.6	2.3	—	—	—
1959	375	19.8	5.8	100	17.6	1.6	43	8.8	0.7	147	7.8	2.3	35	4.8	0.6
1963	312	16.0	4.6	98	18.2	1.5	44	9.3	0.7	139	7.9	2.1	30	4.7	0.5
1967	156	10.7	2.1	91	13.8	1.2	40	7.1	0.5	131	8.2	1.8	35	4.7	0.5
1971	87	6.7	1.1	74	14.2	0.9	30	7.4	0.4	96	6.3	1.2	—	—	—
1972	83	6.3	0.9	70	10.7	0.8	28	8.0	0.3	94	4.7	1.1	42	3.9	0.5
1977	54	—	0.6	58	—	0.6	27	—	0.3	110	3.6	1.2	97	6.2	1.0
				CDA											
				#	MV	ME									
1981				153	5.7	1.5				110	4.5	1.1	93	6.1	0.9
1982				148	6.3	1.5				105	4.2	1.0	103	5.3	1.0
1986				129	4.1	1.2				104	3.4	1.0	85	5.6	0.8
1989				125	4.0	1.1				97	3.4	0.9	65	5.0	0.6
1994				100	5.0	0.9				68	3.2	0.6	53	3.0	0.5
1998				86	5.4	0.7				62	2.5	0.5	51	2.4	0.4

Sources: Koole (1988:A1100 86–8; 1992:170–1, 174, 177); Voerman (1996:194–5, 198)

Notes

#: membership×1000;

MV: membership as a percentage of the party vote;

ME: membership as a percentage of the electorate

For party abbreviations see list on pages xix–xx.

Table 5.2 Subcultures in the Dutch electorate (1956–98)

	1956	1968	1977	1982	1986	1989	1994	1998
practising Catholics	30	30	24	17	16	14	13	11
practising Dutch Reformed	12	16	9	8	8	8	6	6
practising Re-reformed	10	12	9	7	5	8	5	6
secular working class	33	25	28	24	26	22	21	17
secular middle class	15	18	30	43	45	48	54	60

Sources: For 1956 and 1968: Lijphart (1974:258); for other years: National Election Studies
Notes:

Entries are percentages of the electorate.

Table 5.3 Subcultural loyalty to subcultural party in the Netherlands (1956–98)

	1956	1968	1977	1982	1986	1989	1994	1998
practising Catholics	95	72	67	63	67	72	53	53
practising Dutch Reformed	63	55	51	52	59	53	43	44
practising Re-reformed	93	78	75	58	58	59	52	44
secular working class	68	65	68	63	59	63	41	51
secular middle class	32	25	29	39	28	23	30	31
total	72	60	56	51	46	44	37	38

Sources: For 1956 and 1968: Lijphart (1974, 258); for other years: National Election Studies
Notes:

Entries are percentages of a subculture voting for the relevant political party.

the voters in this segment of Dutch society. We have already mentioned that the secular middle class was reluctant to act as a pillar, or even resisted doing so. At the beginning of our time series, another factor was also involved. During the Nazi occupation, cooperation across pillars in the resistance movement had led to plans for a 'Breakthrough' in the pillar party domination of the party system. These plans involved the creation of a new party into which 'progressive' forces would merge. After the war, however, the religious parties were soon resurrected, and the new party, the PvdA, was joined only by the prewar socialist party, by a small prewar left-wing religious party, and by one of the prewar liberal parties. Soon, the leaders of this former liberal party found the PvdA too 'red' for their taste, and left to help form the current VVD. Apparently, a sizeable number of members of the secular middle class did not follow their example: in 1956, some 44 per cent of the secular middle class still supported the PvdA, against 32 per cent support for the VVD.

In 1968, when the size of the religious subcultures had not yet been adversely affected, the loyalty to the religious parties started to crumble. As Table 5.3 shows, this decline seemed to level off in the 1980s, but the figures for 1994 and 1998 indicate that this was only a temporary reprieve. The degree of subcultural mobilization among the secular working class seems to have relaxed but marginally until 1994, when the PvdA suffered a massive walk-out of its core supporters. With regard to the relationship between the VVD and its subcultural constituency no

clear trend has emerged: support from the secular middle class continued to hover at around 30 per cent.

In summary, the mixture of developments in the size and in the degree of mobilization of the subcultures has varied considerably. The religious parties have suffered from a poisonous cocktail of secularization and declining loyalty of the remaining church-goers; the social democrats were faced with a shrinking secular working class, but continued to mobilize what was left of it until 1994, when they suddenly experienced the same combination of factors as the religious parties had since about 1965. The VVD may not have been successful in mobilizing more of its subcultural potential, but the secular middle class has grown so dramatically (from 15 to 60 per cent of the electorate), that the party could grow nevertheless.

It is in particular the sudden failure of the religious parties to mobilize their subcultural potential that still remains something of an enigma. What had been the incentives to support these parties during the era of pillarization, and what had changed in the incentive structure? One (often neglected) way of establishing what motivated the voters is to analyse their own accounts of why they voted for this or that particular party. The following tables give the most important categories of answers to open-ended questions from various surveys between 1948 and 1989. Motivations that were mentioned by only few respondents, and answers that contain no information ('I voted for this party because it is the best party' was an answer that was frequently given) were left out of the tables. It should be emphasized that, due to different question wording or coding instructions, the percentages are not always comparable. According to Van Holsteyn (1994:118–59), who collected these data from various sources, only the percentages for the 1977 to 1989 period are based on the same question and on the same categorization.

Table 5.4d clearly shows the importance of religion as an incentive for voting KVP, ARP, CHU, and later CDA, and its decline since 1967. Principles were mentioned frequently throughout the postwar period, especially by voters of the two Protestant parties. Voting out of custom or tradition ('I vote for this party by birth') also remains an important motivation. The incentives that appear to have become more important over time are the party's leader and other candidates, and especially its potential as a governing party (through the KVP first, and CDA later, the Christian-democrats have been in government without interruption from the introduction of universal suffrage to 1994). It is important to note that the decline of religion as an incentive for religious voters is not confined to *political* mobilization.

As Table 5.5 shows, the percentage of respondents who reject the statement that religion is a good guide in politics steadily increased since 1971, as has the percentage indicating that parties ought to be totally separate from religion. Similar increases can also be observed in the answers to questions about the relation between religion and trade unions, schools, and broadcasting organizations. This pattern is confirmed by the answers to similar questions in surveys of religious attitudes, held in 1966 and 1979: the percentage of people, even of religious respondents, thinking it necessary to have broadcasting organizations, sports clubs,

trade unions, and youth organizations based on religion declined, as did the percentage preferring to send their children to a church school (Andeweg 1982:59).

The initial importance and subsequent decline of religion as an incentive for subcultural mobilization is of utmost significance for our analysis of the relations between the parties and the pillars. Religion is different from the other incentives mentioned in Table 5.4, because it is outside the control of the party! Parties may adapt their ideology, change their election manifesto, or nominate other candidates, but they can do little to influence their potential voters' views about the scope of religion in their lives. With but little exaggeration, we can conclude that the initial importance of religion as an incentive allowed the religious parties to let the churches do their mobilization for them, but also made the religious parties hostages to the churches' fortunes. Naturally, for the two secular consociational parties, PvdA and VVD, the religious incentive played but a marginal role.

Just as for the religious parties, the party's candidates and government potential are increasingly important in voter mobilization by PvdA and VVD. Throughout this period, interest representation has been the single most important incentive for social-democratic voters to vote PvdA. However, as we noted when discussing Table 5.3, it was only in 1994 that the PvdA suffered from declining subcultural loyalty. Many commentators suppose a relationship between that desertion and the party's responsibility, while in government, for radical cutbacks in transfer payments, especially in disability benefits. This would lead us to expect a collapse of interest representation as a voting incentive in 1994. Unfortunately, a complete categorization of motivations for party choice in the 1994 and 1998 election studies, comparable to the one used in Tables 5.4 and 5.6, is not available, but we have looked at all answers mentioning interest representation. They show that of all PvdA voters in 1994, only 14 per cent mentioned interest representation. This constitutes a drop of 20 percentage points since the last election year included in Table 5.6 (1989), and by far the lowest percentage ever recorded for this incentive to vote for the social democrats.²

According to Table 5.6b, the incentive structure of the VVD shows most fluctuation. Overall, the party's policy goals (principles, programme, issue positions) form the most important incentives for conservative-liberal voters, but interest representation also plays a role (which, as should be expected, has not declined suddenly in 1994, as it has for the PvdA).

It is interesting to note not only which incentives have been instrumental in mobilizing subcultural support for the consociational parties, but also which incentives are absent. One of the 'dogs that did not bark in the night' is fear of, or animosity towards, other pillars and their parties. In his secondary analysis of open-ended questions about voters' motivations, Van Holsteyn included a separate category for answers referring to the favoured party being different from other parties, but the frequency with which this incentive was mentioned (by between 1 and 4 per cent of the respondents) did not warrant its inclusion in Tables 5.4 and 5.6. It was mentioned most often by voters of new parties, such as D'66, especially

Table 5.4 Reported motivations of Dutch party choice: the Christian-Democrats (1948–89): (a) reported incentives to vote KVP; (b) reported incentives to ARP; (c) reported incentives to vote CHU; (d) reported incentives to vote CDA

(a)	1948	1952	1956	1967	1971	1972
Interests	1	6	3	5	3	2
Religion	58	59	69	46	25	30
Custom	4	2	3	17	20	16
Party identification					4	7
Principles	13	7	11	15	7	9
Programme				10	5	4
Issues		3	2			
Party size				5		
Gov' potential					3	1
Candidates				4	1	3
(b)	1948	1952	1956	1967	1971	1972
Interests		2	4	4	1	
Religion	36	21	47	39	30	40
Custom	7	3	5	7	13	8
Party identification					12	9
Principles	23	21	28	24	17	15
Programme				18	6	3
Issues	1				3	
Party size						
Gov' potential				1		2
Candidates				16	6	9
(c)	1948	1952	1956	1967	1971	1972
Interests		1		2	3	3
Religion	51	29	48	47	32	40
Custom	12	14	6	24	24	23
Party identification					5	6
Principles	12	22	22	24	10	8
Programme				7	1	3
Issues			1		3	1
Party size						
Gov' potential				1		
Candidates				2	1	4
(d)	1977	1981	1982	1986	1989	
Interests	7	5	7	6	7	
Religion	31	24	27	13	19	
Custom	15	13	14	13	11	
Party identification	6	9	4	4	4	
Principles	17	14	19	11	15	
Programme	8	11	15	15	18	
Issues	6	8	10	7	16	
Party size	2	5	7	1	6	
Gov' potential	4	19	5	29	28	
Candidates	15	10	10	21	19	

Sources: Compiled from Van Holsteyn (1994:118–59)

Note:

Entries are percentages mentioning a particular incentive.

shortly after their foundation. One might even hypothesize that the negative

Table 5.5 Dutch public opinion on religion as basis for organizations (1971–98)

	1971	1972	1977	1981	1982	1986	1989	1994	1998
Should be completely separate from religion:									
• parties	38	44	51	53	62	57	58	62	a
• trade unions	43	49	55	58	64	65	66	68	a
• schools	37	39	38	37	41	42	42	45	a
• broadcasting organizations	–	–	44	44	49	48	54	56	a
Religion is not a good guide in politics	53	54	51	54	57	59	60	64	61

Source: National Election Studies

Notes:

a Due to a change in question wording, no comparable data are available for 1998

Entries are percentages agreeing with the statement.

motivations were directed against pillarization and the consociational parties, but they played no role in the competition between the pillar parties.

Another incentive that is noticeable for its absence is (gratitude for) services rendered. The category of interest representation in Tables 5.4 and 5.6 most certainly includes material values, and in the categories of programme and issues, we do find references to, for example, social policies. Occasionally, social-democratic voters explained their choice with a simple 'I am drawing benefits from Drees', referring to the old-age pension law introduced after the Second World War by the PvdA's leader Drees. What we do not find, however, is individual patronage. Appointments as mayor, to high-level civil service positions, or to advisory councils, are distributed more or less proportionally among the major parties, but party membership is by no means a prerequisite for a job in the public sector. In addition to the effects of Calvinism on the political culture, the absence of any form of territorial representation in the Dutch electoral system has effectively precluded the development of 'constituency work' as part of politicians' roles. During the hey-day of pillarization, many services such as housing and health care were provided by pillar organizations, but over the years these have become professionalized and less orientated to members of their own subculture. Unlike in Austria or in Belgium, the parties have never used, or been able to use, this potential for patronage to reinforce, or later to replace, mobilization based on religion or interest representation. This reluctance or impotence on behalf of the parties has probably advanced and accelerated depillarization, but it may also have so far saved these parties from accusations of corruption.

Finally, it should be mentioned that the parties have also relied on the law in aid of their mobilization effort. Compulsory voting, or to put it more precisely, compulsory attendance at the polls, has characterized Dutch elections from 1917 to 1970, exactly the period that is seen as the era of pillarization. The maximum

Table 5.6 Reported Dutch motivations of party choice: socialists and liberals (1948–89): (a) reported incentives to vote PvdA; (b) reported incentives to vote VVD

	1948	1952	1956	1967	1971	1972	1977	1981	1982	1986	1989
(a)											
Interests	37	42	44	50	29	38	33	32	37	37	34
Religion	2	1	1		2						
Custom	5	2	3	11	9	7	11	16	14	13	12
Party identification					8	7	5	11	4	5	6
Principles	22	5	4	12	11	6	11	10	16	12	15
Programme				14	8	8	9	11	11	14	19
Issues		17	24		2	2	3	10	25	21	23
Party size				3	3	3	3	9	10	7	8
Gov' potential					1	4	15	14	6	13	20
Candidates				2		3	12	6	7	4	9
(b)											
Interests		22	1	21	17	11	23	15	20	15	13
Religion			1		1						
Custom	3	8	12	8	5	5	4	6	3	13	13
Party identification					8	15	1	4	3	7	3
Principles	11	4	11	17	9	14	25	19	18	19	33
Programme				25	17	21	18	22	24	17	23
Issues	33		16		3	5	10	21	23	14	23
Party size				1	1		3	2	2	2	9
Gov' potential							11	11	8	19	22
Candidates				4		4	6	8	7	9	4

Source: Compiled from Van Holsteyn (1994:118–59)

Note: Entries are percentages mentioning a particular incentive.

penalty (a fine) was hardly a deterrent; few offenders were prosecuted, and even fewer sentenced, but compulsory voting did result in turnout figures of 94 to 95 per cent. Just as compulsory voting was introduced to help the pillar parties mobilize their full potential, it was abolished to protect these same parties. On eight earlier occasions, proposals for the abolition of compulsory voting had been voted down, but in 1970 the situation was different. In the 1967 elections, two new parties, D'66 and the Farmers' Party, had gained fourteen seats in Parliament. For very different reasons, both these parties were founded in protest against the established parties and their consociationalist practices. In addition, both the Catholic KVP and the social-democrat PvdA suffered split-offs in that election. It was felt that all these new parties attracted most of their support from discontented voters who would have stayed home had voting not been compulsory. The abolition of compulsory voting can thus be interpreted as an attempt to take the wind out of the new competitors' sails.

Parties in control of pillars?

One of the criteria proposed by Lijphart (1971, 28) to measure pillarization is the cohesiveness of the subcultures' organizational networks. Given the low degree of organization of the parties, overlapping membership of parties and other subcultural organizations cannot but have been a minor instrument in achieving this organizational cohesiveness. Formal ties between organizations existed, but were relatively rare. Informal links in the form of interlocking directorates have been the most important instrument for intra-subcultural coordination. Depillarization in this respect usually started with the severing of formal ties, followed by a decline in the overlap of leadership. The final stage took one of three forms: a disavowal of the organization's subcultural identity, a merger with a parallel organization from another subculture, or loss of clientele to new competitors without a subcultural identity. A closer inspection, however, reveals significant variation in both the cohesiveness of the subcultural organizations, and their decline.

The socialist pillar, for example, was affected by the attempt at a 'breakthrough' (*Doorbraak*) in the Dutch party system in 1945. As we have seen, this attempt largely failed and in practice, the PvdA can be regarded as the successor to the prewar social-democratic party (SDAP). Formally, however, it was a merger of several parties, and as such had to forfeit its links to organizations that remained in the socialist subculture. The most important of these formal ties was with the socialist trade union NVV. Another formal tie, with a socialist newspaper, survived the 'breakthrough' until 1966. Although the overlap of leadership between party, union, newspaper, and broadcasting organization remained considerable until the late 1960s, Houska (1985:22) asserts that the 'breakthrough ...left the subcultural organizations without the central direction which the party had provided in the prewar years. Eventually this erosion of a visible institutional center led to a considerable loss of cohesion among organizations within the subculture'.

The Catholic subculture could have suffered from the same effects of an early attempt to broaden its appeal. The postwar KVP was explicitly set up as a 'programmatic' party, that is to say, as a party that was to be open to Catholics as well as non-Catholics, provided they could agree with the party's programme. Although this did create some initial confusion, it did not change the high level of subcultural cohesiveness. The organizational network, bound together by interlocking directorates, was more extensive than in the socialist pillar; in addition to a trade union, a newspaper, and a broadcasting organization, there were organizations for Catholic farmers, retailers, employers, as well as Catholic universities, hospitals and a health care organization, etc., and, last but not least, the Catholic church. An interesting form of overlapping leadership consisted of the 'quality seats' in the parliamentary party of the KVP; MPs who were put on the party list by virtue of their office in one of the other subcultural organizations. The decline in cohesiveness of this subculture also seems to have started before the exodus of voters, with early talks of a merger of the Catholic and socialist trade unions, a merger of Catholic and Protestant employers' organizations, and so on.

Within the Protestant pillar(s) we also find interlocking directorates. However, given the existence of two major parties plus a few minor ones, and of two main denominations plus a number of smaller ones, it is much more difficult to define the subculture, the cohesiveness of which we are seeking to measure. It would appear that the Re-reformed ARP was better integrated than the CHU into the Protestants' organizational network, which otherwise included organizations very similar to those mentioned for the Catholics. The cohesiveness of the Protestant subculture also seemed to decline later, and at a slower rate, than was the case in respect of the other two pillars.

In the liberal subculture only very few organizations saw themselves as subcultural organizations, or used the label 'liberal'. Most of them guarded their independence and hence the degree of overlap in leadership was much lower than for the other pillars. Once again, the liberals provide the counterpoint to the pillarization theme.

It is not subcultural cohesion itself that we are interested in. What is central to this book's concern is the role of the political party in maintaining subcultural cohesiveness. According to Lijphart (1975:68), '...the political parties are the central and most inclusive organs of the four blocs'. The Dutch edition is even more explicit: 'The parties acted as the most general representatives of the pillars, and as the coordinating organizations within the pillars' (Lijphart, 1979:75; our translation). This is in line with this book's hypothesis, but I disagree with it as a general conclusion. Lijphart's assertion most clearly applies to the relationship between the PvdA and the socialist subculture, despite the already mentioned circumstance that the breakthrough lessened the party's control over the pillar, and despite the fact that the trade union also played a central role within the subculture.

Historically, there is also some support for Lijphart's thesis in the case of the ARP and its relations with the Protestant, or at least with the Re-reformed, subculture.

The founder and long-time leader of this (the first national) party, Abraham Kuyper, founded many of this pillar's other organizations (church, university, newspaper, etc.) as well, and most of them were created after the party. Kuyper's emphasis on cohesion and discipline, however, also backfired, as it was a contributing factor to the split-off that led to the CHU. The existence of this CHU cannot but have weakened the ARP's control over the pillar, which was later reduced further by the subsequent creation of the fundamentalist Protestant parties. Moreover, it has been shown that early in the process of pillarization, it was Calvinist ministers, not party officials, who provided the leadership of the subculture's many organizations (Hendriks 1971:188–202). According to Houska (1985:27), the Protestants formed a pillar without central leadership; a weakness that would later prove to be an asset:

Having gone for so long without central leadership, the Protestants seemed better equipped to deal with the ambiguities of a new, less well-defined relationship among subcultural organizations. The traditional Protestant lack of hierarchy meant that Protestant subcultural organizations had always had to cooperate through largely informal ties among elites.

The Catholic pillar is customarily regarded as the most cohesive, and also as the one with most hierarchical control. However, it was not the party that provided the leadership, but the church. With few exceptions, Catholic organizations, from trade unions to local bowling associations, had a priest as 'spiritual adviser'. The priests were also instrumental in the church's social control over individual members of the subculture, ranging from family planning to party choice. So far, the difference with the Protestant subculture is one of degree only, but Protestant ministers acted largely on their own, while Catholic priests were themselves hierarchically controlled from a single centre. Other than most of its counterparts elsewhere, the Dutch province of the Catholic church has been governed collegially by its bishops, who, speaking with one voice, gave a clear direction to the subculture. Break-away organizations, such as split-offs from the Catholic party, were ordered to lay down their arms before they could endanger the unity of the subculture. In 1954, the bishops issued a joint episcopal letter forbidding Catholics to join the socialist trade union, to attend socialist meetings, to listen to socialist broadcasts, and so on. As Bakvis (1981:95) sums up in his study of Catholic power in the Netherlands:

The dominant theme that comes through in this retrospect of Dutch Catholic politics is the overwhelming importance of the church in determining all aspects of Catholic political life. It was the ecclesiastical hierarchy which was responsible for keeping the Catholic party intact and holding defections to a minimum. It was the hierarchy in combination with a willing and able clergy which ensured that Catholics voted *en masse* for the Catholic party.

Thus, the application to the Dutch case of the analytic framework that was presented in [Chapter 1](#) inescapably leads to the conclusion that the parties were

not the cores of the pillars: neither their degree of penetration and incorporation of their respective subcultures, nor the structure of subcultural mobilization, nor, above all, the extent of their hierarchical control over the subcultures allow for a different conclusion. The Protestant subculture lacked a central institution, the Catholic subculture was controlled by the church, and the liberal subculture hardly existed as such, leaving only the socialist subculture as an imperfect example of a pillar led by a party. It is sometimes pointed out that the first cracks in the pillars appeared at the organizational level, before the rank and file depillarized. Houska is one of those who see a causal relationship between the two: 'Subcultural elites ceased their efforts to integrate the subcultural networks into a cohesive whole. Without these efforts, the subcultures disintegrated' (Houska 1985:26). But if our analysis is correct, the political parties were insufficiently in control for them to have been the prime instigators of depillarization.

Parties and the politics of accommodation

We now move to the second part of Luther's analytical framework, from the vertical relations within the pillars to the horizontal relations between the consociational players. Here, the central questions are to what extent the parties dominate the interactions between the subcultures, and to what degree the interparty relations are indeed of an accommodative nature.

Pillarization without partitocrazia

The parties could dominate consociational decision-making in two ways: they could exercise their influence collectively over the whole of the polity, or they could have carved up that domain into autonomous segments, each dominated by one of them. It is difficult to measure changes in segmental autonomy. With exceptions such as the Catholic hegemony in the two southern provinces of Brabant and Limburg, there never was a significant territorial dimension to pillarization. Besides, the Netherlands have long been one of the most centralized countries in Europe (Andeweg and Irwin 1993:158-63). Segmental autonomy was also absent in functional terms, in the sense that a particular party or pillar had colonized a particular policy area. True, the Christian-democrats had strong roots in agriculture, but for the first thirteen years after the war, it was a social-democrat who was minister of Agriculture. All parties had, and still have, their preferences for policy areas (Budge and Keman 1990:89-131), but they were usually not alone in that preference, and thus prevented from monopolizing a policy sector.

The form segmental autonomy took in the Netherlands is that pillar organizations in areas such as housing, health care and education were recognized and financed by the government, and had a considerable say in the running of their policy sector. More and more, the state has intervened to impose quality standards and budget controls. The result is that many welfare state arrangements are administered by

private organizations that are autonomous in name, but in practice now act as quasi-governmental agencies. This development more or less coincided with the weakening of these organizations' links with the subcultures from which they originated. However, this depillarization was not the cause of the loss of autonomy, although it may have facilitated the state's intervention, because the former pillar organizations were no longer protected by 'their' parties. It should be noted that even when these organizations' autonomy was still intact, a particular service or policy sector was not run by a branch of only one of the pillars; several organizations would be active in a particular policy area, cooperating with each other, but each belonging to, and catering to, a different subculture. The consociational parties have therefore never been able to dominate by each monopolizing a different territorial or functional fiefdom. Where they dominated, they did so collectively.

This collective domination of inter-subcultural relations has been affected by the changes in the relations between the parties and their subcultural constituencies that were described in the previous section. First of all, the pillar parties no longer dominate the *electoral arena* to the extent that they did in the past.

As [Table 5.7](#) shows, the five main consociational parties mobilized around 90 per cent of the vote until the beginning of the 1960s. Depillarization combined with the entry of new competitors to reduce the share of the Big Five to just above 70 per cent in the early 1970s. From 1977 to 1986, the Big Three (now that KVP, ARP and CHU had merged into the CDA) recouped some of their losses, until a second exodus reduced their electoral share to 72 per cent of the vote (and 53 per cent of the eligible electorate) in 1998. In a sense, these percentages give a flattering picture of the strength of the pillar parties in the Dutch party system.

First, due to the abolition of compulsory voting in 1970, these parties were able to obfuscate some of their decline among eligible voters, where the Big Five dropped to 56 per cent in 1971, and the Big Three to 53 per cent in 1998. Second, in the 1940s and 1950s, the remainder of the vote went primarily to smaller parties that also represented (parts of) subcultures (such as the communists and orthodox Protestants). From the early 1960s onwards, however, the part of the vote that did not go to the Big Five/Three was also picked up by a new generation of parties that were not related to a subculture. Because these parties lack subcultural ties, they are also less stable: new parties came and went 'like mushrooms in the autumn of Dutch politics', observed two Dutch political scientists (Van den Berg and Molleman 1975:11, my translation). However, a few seem to have found a more permanent niche for themselves. The most important of these is D'66. It was founded to 'explode' the 'antiquated' party system and to reform the constitution, but is now often seen as a progressive-liberal counterpart to the conservative-liberal VVD. The pacifist PSP, the radical PPR, and part of the communist CPN were the main components of a merger resulting in the Green Left. On the right wing of the political spectrum, the poujadist Farmers' Party (BP) splintered and folded, but in 1989 and 1994 a new extreme right-wing party, the Centre Democrats (CD), managed to cross the electoral threshold. Third, there has been a shift within the Big Five/Three

segment of the vote away from the pillar parties (CDA and PvdA) to the VVD, a party which earlier in this chapter we characterized as a consociational player, but hardly a pillar party. Because of these three facts, the changes in the electoral arena are much more profound than the figures in [Table 5.7](#) alone intimate.

The same electoral system of proportional representation that was introduced as part of the Pacification of 1917, the start of Dutch consociationalism, now served to ensure that in the *parliamentary arena*, the consociational parties' competitors received equal representation.

Nevertheless, the electoral law still protects the consociational parties. In 1946, the Big Five obtained the votes of some 78 per cent of the electorate, which amounted to 86 per cent of votes cast and resulted in those parties being allocated 88 per cent of the then 100 seats in the Second Chamber of Parliament. By contrast, in 1998, the Big Three were able to muster the support of only 53 per cent of the eligible electorate, which translated into 72 per cent of the valid vote, and 75 per cent of the 150 seats in the Second Chamber. As a comparison of [Tables 5.7](#) and [5.8](#) shows, this amounts to the Big Five/Big Three having declined by 25 percentage points in the electoral arena, and by 13 percentage points in the parliamentary arena.

The 'Matthew Effect' is even more clearly visible in the *governmental arena* (see [Table 5.9](#)). After the last non-partisan ministers had left in 1956, the consociational parties enjoyed complete control of the government until 1971, when a shortlived right-wing split-off from the social-democrats, DS70, was brought in to help secure a parliamentary majority for a centre-right coalition. In 1973, the relatively new D'66 and PPR joined the government as the result of a pre-election pact with the PvdA. Since then, D'66 has clearly joined the ranks of *koalitionsfähige* parties, breaking the BigThree's monopoly on ministerial portfolios. However, the consociational parties still dominate governments.

Moreover, the slight weakening of the consociational parties' dominance over the parliamentary and governmental arenas in numerical terms is offset by the actual strengthening of the parties' control over the interactions in these arenas. Thus parliamentary party discipline is enforced more rigorously. In addition, mere party membership is no longer an adequate pre-condition for ministerial recruitment; prospective candidates now have to have played a prominent role in the party. Moreover, whilst government programmes used to be drafted by technocratic ministers, government policy is nowadays increasingly dictated by a detailed coalition agreement that is itself the result of negotiations between party leaders. Finally, the Dutch tradition of semi-separation of powers has been transformed by an elaborate system of weekly consultations between a party's ministers and its leaders inside and outside parliament (Andeweg and Irwin 1993:128–33, 145–8). One of the 'rules of the consociational game' originally discerned by Lijphart, was 'the government's right to govern' (Lijphart 1975:134– 7), with the corollary that the parties should not interfere and should allow the government to rise above the inter-subcultural strife. To a considerable degree, this aloofness from party politics has given way to a politicization of the cabinet by the governing parties.

Table 5.7 Dutch parliamentary election results (1946-98)

	1946	1948	1952	1956	1959	1963	1967	1971	1972	1977	1981	1982	1986	1989	1994	1998
KVP	31	31	29	32	32	32	27	22	18							
ARP	13	13	11	10	9	9	10	9	9							
CHU	8	9	9	8	8	9	8	6	5							
CDA	(52)	(53)	(49)	(50)	(49)	(49)	(45)	(37)	(31)	32	31	29	35	35	22	18
PvdA	28	26	29	33	30	28	24	25	27	34	28	30	33	32	24	29
VVD	6	8	9	9	12	10	11	10	14	18	17	23	17	15	20	25
Total Big 5/3	86	87	87	92	92	88	79	72	73	84	76	83	85	82	66	72
CPN	11	8	6	5	2	3	4	4	5	2	2	2				
SGP	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
GPV			1	1	1	1	1	2	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
RPF											1	2	1	1	2	2
D'66							5	7	4	5	11	4	6	8	16	9
PSP				2	2	3	3	1	2	1	2	2	1			
PPR								2	5	2	2	2	1			
GL														4	4	7
BP					1	2	5	1	2	1						
CD														1	3	
Other	1	3	4	1	1	1	1	9	5	2	3	2	3	1	6	7

Notes:

Entries are percentages of the valid vote.

For Party abbreviation see list on pages xix-xx.

This strengthening of the parties' position can also be observed in the *bureaucratic arena*, loosely comprising the civil service, the judiciary, and local administration. Non-partisan mayors have become exceptional, and party membership is increasingly important for recruiting senior civil servants and officials in para-statal organizations. The party preferences of judges and magistrates have also raised political interest. Jobs are not the only resources that the parties are extracting from the state: although state subventions to political parties are extremely modest compared to most other western European countries (Koole 1990), they are rising.

Without belittling these developments, it should be emphasized that they are not confined to the consociational parties. The very rule of proportionality, so central to the politics of accommodation, now ensures that both the old consociational parties as well as their new challengers have access to the state's resources. Sometimes there is a lagging effect, causing discrepancies between the latest election results and the distribution of political preferences among appointed officials. In 1992, for example, CDA, PvdA and VVD were overrepresented if we compare the percentage of the population living in a municipality with a mayor from one of these parties to the previous (1989) election results. D'66 was clearly underrepresented (Derksen and Kas 1994:A0900–103). However, there is no obvious bias in favour of the consociational parties: in 1988, D'66 and VVD were overrepresented among civil servants, whereas CDA was underrepresented (Van der Meer and Roborgh 1993:400).

Finally, a very important limitation to the collective domination of the consociational parties is that it has always been restricted to the arenas in the public sector. Outside that sector, for example in the business arena, party preference plays no role other than companies very occasionally recruiting former politicians. This leads Daalder (1987b:246) to speak of 'the modest "reach" of parties' in the Netherlands:

the role of elections in a multi-party system is not always a decisive one; in appointments partisan criteria are at most one factor, and then one which is judiciously diluted by the principle of proportionality and which is generally made subordinate to other criteria like special qualifications; even if partisan factors do play a role in appointments, this does not imply continuing party control. In general, the rival principle of 'independent' authority makes even a person who originally owed his rise to party a fairly independent, not overly partisan holder of office.

The absence of many characteristics of 'partitocrazia' in the Netherlands reinforces the general picture of relatively weak parties.

Continued consociationalism after depillarization

Finally, we turn to the effects of pillarization and depillarization on the style of party interaction. One of the defining characteristics of consociational democracy is the absence of competition. In the era of pillarization, this absence even extended to the *electoral arena*, although this had less to do with elite prudence than with the

Table 5.8 Distribution of seats in (the second chamber of) the Dutch parliament (1949–98)

	1946	1948	1952	1956	1959	1963	1967	1971	1972	1977	1981	1982	1986	1989	1994	1998
KVP	32	32	30	49	49	50	42	35	27							
ARP	13	13	12	15	14	13	15	13	14							
CHU	8	9	9	13	12	13	12	10	7							
CDA	(53)	(54)	(51)	(77)	(75)	(76)	(69)	(58)	(48)	49	48	45	54	54	34	29
PvdA	29	27	30	50	48	43	37	39	43	53	44	47	52	49	37	45
VVD	6	8	9	13	19	16	17	16	22	28	26	36	27	22	31	38
Total Big 5/3	88	89	90	140	142	135	123	113	113	130	118	128	133	125	102	112
CPN	10	8	6	7	3	4	5	6	7	2	3	3	3	3	2	3
SGP	2	2	2	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	2	3
GPV						1	1	2	2	1	1	1	1	2	2	2
RPF											2	2	1	1	3	3
D'66							7	11	6	8	17	6	9	12	24	14
PSP					2	4	4	2	2	1	3	3	1			
PPR								2	7	3	3	2	2			
GL														6	5	11
BP					3	7	1	3	1							
CD												1		1	3	
Other		1	2					10	7	1		1			9	5
Total	100	100	100	150	150	150	150	150	150	150	150	150	150	150	150	150

Note: For party abbreviations see list on pages xix–xx.

Table 5.9 Dutch governments and pillar party dominance (1946–98)

<i>Date installed</i>	<i>Prime Minister</i>	<i>Party composition</i>	<i>Pillar parties cabinet seats (%)</i>
3 July 46	Beel I	<i>PvdA/KVP/np</i>	79
7 August 48	Drees I	<i>PvdA/KVP/CHU/VVD/np</i>	87
15 March 51	Drees II	<i>PvdA/KVP/CHU/VVD/np</i>	93
2 September 52	Drees III	<i>PvdA/KVP/ARP/CHU/np</i>	94
13 October 56	Drees IV	<i>PvdA/KVP/ARP/CHU</i>	100
22 December 58	Beel II	<i>KVP/ARP/CHU</i>	100
19 May 59	De Quay	<i>KVP/ARP/CHU/VVD</i>	100
24 July 63	Marijnen	<i>KVP/ARP/CHU/VVD</i>	100
14 April 65	Cals	<i>PvdA/KVP/ARP</i>	100
22 November 66	Zijlstra	<i>KVP/ARP</i>	100
5 April 67	De Jong	<i>KVP/ARP/CHU/VVD</i>	100
6 July 71	Biesheuvel I	<i>KVP/ARP/CHU/VVD/DS70</i>	88
20 July 72	Biesheuvel II	<i>KVP/ARP/CHU/VVD</i>	100
11 May 73	Den Uyl	<i>PPR/PvdA/D'66/KVP/ARP</i>	81
19 December 77	Van Agt I	<i>CDA/VVD</i>	100
11 September 81	Van Agt II	<i>PvdA/D'66/CDA</i>	80
29 May 82	Van Agt III	<i>D'66/CDA</i>	64
4 November 82	Lubbers I	<i>CDA/VVD</i>	100
14 July 86	Lubbers II	<i>CDA/VVD</i>	100
7 November 89	Lubbers III	<i>PvdA/CDA</i>	100
22 August 94	Kok I	<i>PvdA/D'66/VVD</i>	71
3 August 98	Kok II	<i>PvdA/D'66/VVD</i>	80

Notes: Prime Minister's party in italics; np=non-party; for party abbreviations see list on pages xix–xx.

circumstance that the parties could not realistically entertain much hope of winning over voters from another subculture. In that sense, the parties regarded election campaigns as 'an inconvenient interruption of their daily routines', as a politician put it at the time (VanThijn 1966:707). This does not mean that the parties did not campaign—there does not seem to have been any change in the effort put in by the parties—but the campaigning was directed at mobilization of the subcultural constituency, not at competition with the other parties. Volatility was extremely low; before 1967 less than ten parliamentary seats changed hands in an election. From 1967 onwards, nineteen seats changed party colour in an average election, with the record, thirty-four, being established in 1994. Depillarization in the electorate constituted a dealignment without a subsequent realignment; election campaigns have turned into heated battles for the undecided voter.

At first, it was plausibly expected that this increased competition would not be confined to the electoral arena, and that its spill-over into the *parliamentary* and *governmental arenas* would destroy consociational democracy. Theoretically, this was as it should be; if pillarization led to the appearance of consociationalism, depillarization should lead to its disappearance. Lijphart predicted a transformation of Dutch politics from consociational democracy into a centripetal democracy,

Table 5.10 The changing style of Dutch politics

<i>Rules of the game observed by Lijphart, 1968</i>	<i>Proclaimed rules of the game as observed by Daalder, 1974</i>
1. the business of politics	politics as ideological conflict
2. agreement to disagree	contestation
3. summit diplomacy	'power to the people'
4. proportionality	direct democracy
5. depoliticization	politicization
6. secrecy	open government
7. the government's right to govern	accountability

although he foresaw a second self-denying prophecy to get there. Daalder observed the proclamation of new 'rules of the game' in the political discourse of the late 1960s and early 1970s, to replace Lijphart's consociational rules of the game (Daalder 1987b:261).

There were attempts to build majoritarian elements into the constitution (direct elections of the prime minister, changes in the electoral system, etc.), and the PvdA adopted a majoritarian strategy in the 1970s: it would participate in government only if the combination of leftist parties it led would become the biggest group in parliament and could claim a majority of cabinet portfolios. The reform proposals came to nothing (Andeweg 1989) and the only consequences of the PvdA's majoritarian strategy were delays in the formation of new governments (163 days in 1973, 208 days in 1977), and being in opposition itself for most of the period between 1977 and 1989.

Gradually, consociational practices were resumed. Lijphart now recognizes that there have been few significant changes in the style of party interaction. He attributes his original expectations of change to a 'myopic and exaggerated interpretation of the degrees of difference and change' which was the result of his living in the country at the time (Lijphart 1989a:140). Of all the characteristics of what he now calls consensus government, the only one that Lijphart has found changed is coalition status: between 1946 and 1967 the country was governed for only 13 per cent of the time by minimal-winning coalitions; between 1971 and 1988 Lijphart finds this percentage to have risen to 71 per cent (Lijphart 1989a:147). However, that change may be less real than it appears; prior to the CDA merger in 1977, KVP, ARP and CHU often collaborated in government but were three distinct parties. If we were to treat them as a single party prior to the merger, or as three parties after the merger, the calculations would be quite different, and would not show much change.

The return to an accommodative style has not been complete. First of all, it seems largely confined to the governmental and bureaucratic arenas. In the electoral arena, competition remains fierce as the number of voters who decide only at the last moment what to vote and whether to vote at all continues to grow. The parliamentary arena provides a permanent platform on which the last and the next

election are continuously contested, although there also remains much compromise and cooperation away from the floor, in the committee rooms, where the less controversial items are debated. Second, even in the governmental and bureaucratic arenas, some of the rules that are less crucial to the consociational game (such as 'the government's right to govern' discussed above) are relaxed.

The fact, however, that more crucial characteristics of consociationalism, such as the penchant for compromise or the sacrosanct nature of proportionality, can still be observed undiluted, does indicate that the politics of accommodation has survived. The quest for constitutional reform has not stopped, but it no longer seeks to abolish consociational practices: electoral reform should not abridge proportionality; direct elections of the prime minister are rejected once again as too radical a departure from the current system; introducing an abrogative referendum is not rejected outright only because it is perceived as a corrective mechanism, not a threat, to the existing system (Andeweg 1997). The parties' strategies, and especially the decision by PvdA and VVD no longer to exclude each other as coalition partners, are generally seen as a return to the inter-party relations of the 1950s, the heyday of consociationalism.

The puzzle of continued consociational practices, at least in the governmental arena, after depillarization, brings us back to the debate about the origins of consociationalism to which we referred in the introduction to this chapter. It can still be argued that the original explanation is more or less correct, that pillarization gave rise to consociationalism, but that this accommodative culture became so engrained that it survived its *raison d'être* (for a variation on this theme, see Hoogenboom 1996). Or one can see evidence for Daalder's hypothesis of the consensus-seeking culture predating pillarization in today's post-pillarization consociationalism. Cultural explanations are very much *en vogue* in contemporary political science, but always in close association with institutions, with structure. If the culture of consociationalism is able to survive the demise of the institutions of pillarization, the conclusion must be that the relation between the two probably has been overemphasized. However, there is also structural continuity in the Dutch party system. Since the introduction of universal suffrage, the Netherlands has been a country of minorities, and despite depillarization and all the important changes that it brought about, it still is a country of minorities. I suggest it was the fact that no party could even hope to win an absolute majority that gave rise to consociational practices; it was rational for them to seek compromise because an outright victory was out of reach. If this explanation is correct, then the accommodative practices characteristic of consociationalism will wither away only when a political party is able to win a parliamentary majority. The present distribution of party strengths is such that the largest party would need to almost double in size before that point would be reached.

Conclusion: parties as embassies

The general theme of this chapter has been the relative weakness of the Dutch parties during the era of pillarization, both with regard to intra-subcultural linkage and inter-subcultural interaction. In terms of organizational penetration of the subculture, party membership figures were very low, and not augmented by those of auxiliary organizations. In terms of political mobilization, the parties relied primarily on religion and interest representation as incentives, and never used individual patronage, not even when the other incentives started to lose their attraction. In terms of hierarchical control of the subculture, one of the consociational parties, the VVD, was never really integrated into a subcultural network. Of the others that were, the KVP was not in control of the Catholic pillar, but itself controlled, like other Catholic organizations, by the episcopal hierarchy; ARP and CHU did not control the Protestant subculture, although the ARP may have had ambitions in that direction. The only party that did provide a centre to its subculture, the PvdA, was also the first to cut all formal organizational links in 1945.

Because of their relative weakness *vis-à-vis* their subcultural constituencies, the parties were handicapped from the start in any effort to dominate inter-subcultural interaction. The parties never used the consociational principle of segmental autonomy to develop regional or functional monopolies. They dominated the electoral, parliamentary, and governmental arenas, and they may now be strengthening their grip on the governmental and bureaucratic arenas to some extent, but they never pervaded the neo-corporatist arena or civil society at large in any significant degree. In short, the parties never were the subcultural headquarters, but merely served as their subculture's embassies to the state.

Yet, this weakness also turned into strength. Depillarization deprived the parties of members and loyal supporters, but it also freed the parties from subcultural obligations, and made them into independent political actors at last. Because the parties are weak, they have not evoked the kind of anti-party sentiment and political cynicism that we see elsewhere, at least not to the same degree. The parties' weakness also allowed relatively easy access to new competitors, that were assimilated before they could become a threat to the politics of accommodation. And most interestingly, it is the parties' inability to create or at least approach a majority that may well have caused the survival of consociationalism at the governmental level, despite increased electoral competition, in the Netherlands.

Notes

- 1 Strictly speaking, party identification has never been measured as such in the Netherlands. Because of the number of parties, the original Michigan-school question was replaced by: 'Many people think of themselves as adherents of a certain party, but there are also people who do not. Do you usually think of yourself as an adherent of a certain party? If so, which party do you like best?' This question would seem to lack the psychological connotation of the American original.
- 2 I would like to thank Joop van Holsteyn for making this calculation available to me.

6

The odd fellow

Parties and consociationalism in Switzerland¹

Pascal Sciarini² and Simon Hug³

Introduction

Political parties play a central role in classic consociational countries. On their shoulders falls the duty to control their followers, and at the same time to mediate conflicts prevalent in society. While accommodative decision-making is certainly a characteristic element in Swiss democracy, the role political parties play in these processes is less clear. There are several institutional and political factors, which together may well explain the endemic weakness of Swiss political parties. Their limited role in the accommodating decision-making processes questions the strict applicability of the traditional consociational model to Switzerland. Even without this element, Switzerland has often been considered a borderline case for consociationalist theory.

In this chapter we would like to shed some new light from a different angle on the role political parties play in the Swiss political system. Drawing on a series of different research projects, we attempt to bring together as much information as possible to allow us to assess the interaction both among political parties and between political parties and their followers. These two types of interactions are of crucial importance to gain a better understanding of the role played by political parties in a consociational country.

We start our presentation with a thorough discussion of the debate on whether Switzerland can be considered as a consociational country. A series of authors have rejected this idea, citing several specificities and characteristics both of Swiss society and the Swiss political system. Based on this discussion, the third section presents a detailed account of the linkages between the Swiss parties and their followers. In the fourth section we turn to the role that political parties play in the political system. Using different indicators, we show how strongly the major political parties collude and occupy the centre of the political stage. As we will show, several institutional particularities of the Swiss political system render these linkages more difficult for the parties and have diminished their influence. Finally, in the conclusion we attempt to assess whether consociational practices are disappearing in Switzerland, or whether they are as vigorous as ever.

Consociational theory and the case of Switzerland

Introduction

Since Lijphart's (1968a, 1969, 1975, 1977) and Lehmbruch's (1967a, 1993) seminal work, the inclusion of Switzerland in the category of Consociational democracies has been hotly debated. Following Lijphart's lead, some scholars consider Switzerland to be one of the classic cases of Consociational politics (Henderson 1981; Steiner 1974; Steiner and Obler, 1977). Other authors, however, have expressed considerable doubt regarding the applicability of the model to Swiss politics. Both the structural preconditions and the specific type of decision-making required by the model are, they claim, hardly present in Switzerland. First, the country is neither culturally segmented nor pillarized (Badie and Birnbaum 1982:236; Bohn 1981; Lehner 1984; Church 1989). Consequently, segmentation cannot explain the accommodative behaviour of elites. Second, the existence of direct democratic institutions goes squarely against 'amicable agreements' (Barry 1975a; Papadopoulos 1991). In this section we attempt to evaluate these two fundamental critiques and discuss their relevance.

Cultural versus territorial segmentation

Switzerland's cultural diversity is an empirical reality that nobody would dare to question. Four linguistic regions and two major religions make for a truly multicultural society. This does not mean, however, that Switzerland is culturally segmented, i.e. that people sharing the same cultural attribute develop a sense of shared identity that distinguishes them from members of other subgroups. In fact, the different cultural groups are barely segmented. Rather, Switzerland is characterised by cross-cutting cleavages that neutralise each other.⁴ Nor are strongly encapsulated subcultures present—and therefore represented—at the national level of the political system. Compared to the classic Consociational countries such as the Netherlands, Belgium and Austria, the process of pillar formation has been limited in Switzerland (Kriesi 1995:319ff). With respect to the religious cleavage, only the Catholics tried to build a sub-society (including a political party). Self-organisation was never as intense among Protestants. In addition, Switzerland has no linguistically based political parties⁵, even though some parties exist mainly in one of the linguistic regions⁶. For instance, the Swiss Liberal Party (PLS)⁷ is almost exclusively a French-speaking party, while the Swiss People's Party (UDC) and the Swiss Democrats (DS) are mostly German speaking. On this basis, Steiner (1983:167) concludes evasively that 'Swiss decision makers are not confronted with the task of keeping peace among strongly organised subcultures, as are their counterparts in classic Consociational countries' Nevertheless, he adds, 'Swiss decision makers must be aware that their nation is

not culturally homogeneous. Their task is thus to prevent cultural diversity from being transformed into explosive cultural segmentation.'

Arguing along a different line, Kriesi (1990, 1995) suggests that Swiss federalism is a 'functional equivalent' to the formation of pillars in the Netherlands or in Belgium, albeit leading to a territorial/horizontal rather than to a cultural/vertical segmentation.⁸ Moreover, federalism is a state structure, whereas pillars are societal structures. Still, both federalism and pillarization imply the construction of parallel organisational structures performing similar social, cultural and political tasks (Kriesi 1990:438). And both reinforce segmentation, while at the same time contributing to the integration of subcultures into a larger national community.⁹

The creation of the Swiss federation was an institutional compromise between the conservative Catholic cantons hostile to centralisation and the radical Protestants, who favoured a centralised state, or at least a federal government strong enough to make the necessary decisions in the common interest. The Radicals, winners of the short civil war that gave birth to the federal state in 1848, did not exclude the losers (the Conservatives) from the subsequent state-building process. Adopting a federal solution, the Radicals conceded to the Catholics a system that provided the cantons with a high level of autonomy and allowed traditional elites to preserve most of their social control over citizens of their own regions (Kriesi 1995:318). As a result, the federal structure defused the potential for conflict between cultural subgroups, leading Linder (1994:xvii) to consider it to be the main institutional arrangement of consociational democracy in Switzerland.

However, as Kriesi (1995:317–20) acknowledges, Switzerland is far more heterogeneous and far less segmented than the classic consociational countries, even taking federalism into account. First, Swiss federalism differs significantly from pillarization, since there is no close correspondence between the subcultures and the cantons: for instance, there are several French-speaking cantons and several Catholic cantons. Second, and more fundamentally, there are cross-cutting cleavages inside the cantons: 'each Swiss canton presents a unique combination of linguistic, religious, and socio-economic cleavages' (Gruner and Pitterle 1983:34). As a result, one can hardly speak of an homogeneous elite at the cantonal level and the situation in which a single party exerts social control over the whole cantonal territory has become an exception. At the beginning of the modern state, the cantons split clearly along the religious divide, with the Catholic cantons of the 'Sonderbund' under the control of the Conservatives, and the remaining cantons under the influence of the Radical tendency. Girod (1964) shows that in all cantons of the Sonderbund (Appenzell Innerrhoden, Lucerne, Uri, Schwyz, Obwalden, Nidwalden, Zug, Fribourg and Valais) one single party (the Christian-democratic Party (PDC)) had an absolute majority in the respective cantonal parliament even after the Second World War. This also held for one Protestant canton, namely Appenzell Ausserrhoden, where the Radical-democrats still enjoyed an absolute majority. These figures barely changed up to the mid-1960s, but have declined in recent

years. At present, only three cantons are dominated by a single party (the PDC), namely, Obwald, Uri and Valais (Kriesi 1995:132).

Maintaining that federalism is a functional equivalent for pillarization requires a relaxation of the definition of consociationalism. More precisely, one has to admit that cultural or social segmentation is not a necessary precondition for elite political accommodation. This is in fact the argument first made by Scholten (1980, 1987b) and on which Kriesi based his own reasoning. Instead of assuming that the values of the population are reflected in structures, Scholten suggests that the reverse may be more plausible. Pillarized organisational structures, he claims, have not grown from the bottom upwards, but have been imposed from the top downwards. Federalism, Kriesi argues, can be interpreted in an analogous way. In both Scholten's and Kriesi's view, there never was a stability problem in search of a solution, neither in Switzerland nor in the Netherlands. Consequently, elite accommodation did not fulfil the stabilising function attributed to it by consociational theory. Instead, political accommodation was (and still is) the result of more or less consciously chosen strategies of pillarization designed to control the followers of the elite and thus to enhance the latter's power position as intermediaries in the political system (Kriesi 1990:448).¹⁰

If one takes the argument seriously, the crucial analytical question then becomes how and to what extent federalism influences both the intra- and inter-subcultural linkages that lie at the centre of consociational theory. For if federal structures have enhanced the cantonal elites' control over their populations and, consequently, served as a precondition for political accommodation, they have on the other hand diffused political power and generally fragmented the political process (Kriesi 1990: 441). Indeed, cantonal prerogatives in the elaboration of political decisions as well as in policy implementation considerably reduce the central state's capacity to act. In their determination to maintain a large degree of political autonomy, the cantons retained most of their powers and assured themselves participation in the future decision-making of the federation (Linder, 1994:39). Thus, for example, a constitutional amendment is accepted only if both a majority of the citizens and a majority of the cantons vote in its favour. This rule also applies to any change in the distribution of competencies between the federal state and the cantons. Though authority is constantly transferred to the Confederation, considerable power is still retained by the cantons, for instance in the field of education, health and social policy. In addition, the cantons are allowed to participate in the central government's decision-making process through the presence of an assembly representing the cantons (the Council of the States). This chamber, in which each full canton has two deputies regardless of the size of its population, is co-equal to the popular chamber (the National Council). Furthermore, every canton can submit proposals (initiatives) to the Federal Assembly and is consulted in early stages of the drafting of new federal laws. Finally, the implementation of federal laws is typically delegated to the cantons, which often leads to important differences in the application of the same statute.

By opening up additional political arenas at the cantonal level, federalism not only introduces new levels of political co-ordination and new political actors—the cantons themselves—but it also fragments the political actors who should engage in the co-ordination (Kriesi 1990:442). The multiplicity of political subsystems at the level of the cantons has given rise to context-specific configurations of power (Steiner 1983) and to a highly fragmented party system. As we will see below, this has important implications for the applicability of consociational theory, in terms of both the control exerted by political parties and the resulting ‘summit diplomacy’ it predicts.

Direct democracy and the consociational mode of decision-making

Apart from lacking cultural segmentation, Switzerland also creates problems for a strict application of consociationalist theory due to an important element of its institutional framework, namely, direct democracy. Swiss citizens have the opportunity to decide on a series of political issues in popular votes. As Barry (1975a) points out, direct democracy implies non-accommodative features that hardly fit the consociational model. He claims that the crucial incompatibility lies in the majoritarian logic of popular votes. Papadopoulos (1991:10) argues, however, that the major problem stems from the fact that some decisions are taken at the end of the process by a popular vote, thereby excluding any further appeal, or bargaining.

Consociational theory assumes that compromises negotiated by the political elite should be endorsed by citizens. But this implies that the elite can either control its followers, or count on their perfect loyalty. This condition is, however, rarely met in a direct democratic system. The existence of popular rights by definition limits the control that elites can exert on their followers and, consequently, on the outcome of the decision-making process. The lack of control over the process is obvious with respect to the popular initiative; by collecting 100,000 signatures in eighteen months, any group can put any issue onto the political agenda and force the elite—and then the electorate—to vote on a constitutional amendment. But the referendum, which exists in a mandatory and in an optional form, also reduces the political elite’s control over the political process. In the first case, a vote takes place automatically without requiring any action on the part of the citizenry.¹¹ In the second case, any group may call for a final decision by the electorate, by collecting 50,000 signatures of citizens in ninety days against a bill voted on by the parliament.

When a vote occurs, it inevitably introduces uncertainty into the political process (e.g., Lehner 1984; Ossipow 1994; Papadopoulos 1994). To be successful, the elite’s bill has to overcome the referendum hurdle, that is to say, the elite needs to rally either a majority of the citizens (in the case of optional referendums) or a majority of the voters and of the cantons (in the case of a mandatory referendum). The elite may arrive at an agreement, but the electorate can refuse to follow their leaders and

reject the proposal. Thus, by offering citizens direct access to the decision-making process, direct democratic institutions provide them with additional resources to withdraw from choices made by the elite. The restrictions that the instruments of direct democracy impose on the power of the elite lie at the heart of Switzerland's political system. At this point, one would doubtless conclude that direct democracy is incompatible with the 'amicable agreements' expected by consociational theory.

However, the constant risk that a proposal could be defeated in a popular vote has led the political elite to elaborate counter strategies. This is the general thrust of Neidhart's (1970) hypothesis. According to him, the referendum has had indirect effects of great significance for the functioning of the Swiss political system. By occurring at the end of the political process, the referendum has a veto function, allowing people to reject unsatisfactory bills proposed by the elite. Like the sword of Damocles, the referendum hangs as a permanent threat over the political actions of the elite. Neidhart argues that this has led to a considerable expansion of the initial phase of the legislative process—the so-called pre-parliamentary phase—and strengthened the preferences of the elites for co-operative behaviour. Every political actor thought to have the potential to mount a credible threat to the decision-making process by launching a referendum is invited to take part in this pre-parliamentary phase. Here, actors can voice their demands either in 'expert' committees established to draft a first 'embryo' of consensus, or in consultative procedures aimed at analysing and compiling the positions of all interested parties, pressure groups or cantons.¹² Hence, the pre-parliamentary phase has transformed the Swiss 'plebiscitarian democracy' into a 'bargaining democracy' (Neidhart 1970). Even the composition of the government is often seen as a result of this integrative function of the referendum. Since the end of the last century, all political parties which were thought able to use the optional referendum against a proposed bill have been successively co-opted into the government coalition. Since 1959, Switzerland has been governed by a grand coalition of the four major political parties, the so-called 'magic formula', which became the symbol of the Swiss 'concordance democracy' (Lehmbruch 1967a; 1993 and 1996).

In that sense, direct democracy has contributed greatly to a strengthening of consociational practices in Switzerland. As Papadopoulos (1991:14, our translation) rightly argues, 'the Swiss political system is "under control" both in spite, and because, of direct democracy'. As such, direct democracy constitutes an additional and unexpected—institutional—incentive for consociational accommodation. The creation of the pre-parliamentary phase sought an indirect control of the electorate by implicating as many interests as necessary in the decision-making process. This led to another type of division, namely, that based on the central distinction between the ins and the outs, i.e. between those who have the 'referendum capacity' and will be co-opted into the negotiating process, and those who lack sufficient clout.

Notwithstanding the fact that federalism and direct democracy created the preconditions for another type of 'consociational' system (Hug and Sciarini 1995), a

number of authors describe Switzerland as a classic consociational country and seek to apply the traditional theoretical framework as closely as possible. This application is mostly based on a relaxation of the assumption of cultural segmentation and an emphasis on the decision-making mode of amicable agreements that presumably lead to political stability. On both accounts, political parties are envisioned as major actors allowing for accommodative agreements. Lijphart (1977:67 and 1996:259) seems to suggest that the real beginning of consociationalism occurred in 1943, when a first Social-democrat joined the government coalition at the national level. Similarly, Steiner (1974) devotes more than a third of his book to political parties, despite arguing that the tradition of amicable agreements predates the emergence of political parties in Switzerland. Consequently, political parties appear to play a crucial role in consociational practices in Switzerland. Drawing on Luther's analytical framework, as outlined in the introductory chapter of this volume, we shall try to shed some new light on the role these actors play. When we turn to the intra- and inter-subcultural linkages, on which consociational theory is based, both federalism and direct democracy will of course prove to be important intervening factors.

Parties and their followers

Introduction

The emergence of political parties is often linked to the increasing importance of parliament and parliamentary elections. In Switzerland, a national parliament first existed for a short period of time under the 'Helvetic Republic' (1798–1803). Parties failed, however, to emerge at that time, and one has to wait until the end of the nineteenth century to see national parties emerge. Their late emergence is undeniably linked to the federal structure. Since national elections use the cantons as electoral districts, electoral campaigns were and still are mostly fought over local issues. In addition, for cantons dominated by one ideological tendency, party formation was of little relevance.¹³ The other institutional particularity which appears to question the applicability of consociational theory to Switzerland, namely, direct democracy, also influenced the formation of parties. Gruner (1977: 24f) goes as far as arguing that the parties were the children of the instruments of direct democracy. According to him, groups collecting the signatures required to initiate a referendum formed the initial nucleus of political parties in the late nineteenth century.¹⁴

Given these factors, it is hardly surprising that the first party to form at the national level was the Swiss Social-democratic Party (PSS). The working class failed to control any cantonal government and its overarching aim was to protect its interests at the national level. Hence, after some unsuccessful attempts, a party linked to the Socialist International finally emerged in 1888. The Radical-democratic Party (PRD) quickly followed in 1894, while the conservative Christian-democratic Party (PDC) appeared only in 1912. These three parties covered the ideological space

in Switzerland, and through a series of splits the party system became increasingly fragmented (Seiler 1987). The most important splits occurred in the Radical-democratic Party, which saw the appearance among others of a Swiss Liberal Party (founded in 1913), an Agrarian Party, renamed Swiss People's Party (founded in 1971, but present in Zürich and Bern since 1917 and 1918 respectively).

Consociational theory assumes that parties can control their followers. Luther's framework (Chapter 1 of this volume and Luther 1992) suggests that this control should appear mostly in three fields, namely in organisational penetration, in the provision of mobilisation values, and in hierarchical control. In this section we will shed some light on these factors, despite the fact that the notion of subcultures that parties are supposed to control is more difficult to determine in the Swiss case. Adopting a top-down perspective, we focus in what follows on the linkage between political parties and their sympathisers, without basing our analysis on predefined subcultural units.

Organisational penetration

As mentioned above, the Swiss party system is highly fragmented. As a result of federalism, national parties are rather weakly organised. Their main bases are at the cantonal level (Gruner 1977), and membership is generally achieved through local parties. This explains to a large extent why data on party membership are scarce and rarely precise.¹⁵ In spite of this, Table 6.1 gives membership details compiled from various sources. In terms of absolute membership, the largest parties are the bourgeois parties of the governing coalition. Slightly lower figures appear for the Social-democrats. Given the electoral results of these four parties, it is not surprising that the PSS has the lowest ratio of members to voters, while this same ratio is much higher for the PRD and the UDC. Much closer is the ratio of the PDC, which has as many members as the UDC in 1991, but a considerably higher vote share.

While Kriesi (1995:152) argues on the basis of survey results that a certain decline in party membership has occurred during the 1980s, this does not show up in our figures. At the level of absolute numbers a certain stability appears to predominate. The ratios between members and voters, and members and the electorate, certainly indicate a sharp drop between 1966 and 1976, but this is hardly surprising, since women gained the right to vote in 1971 and the electorate therefore doubled at that election. Even these ratios appear to change only marginally since 1976 and no general trend is visible. Given the limited reliability of the data, however, it appears inappropriate to conclude that the governing parties membership base is stable.

Switzerland has not only sixteen national party organisations, but also 150 cantonal and 6,000 communal party groupings (Geser *et al.* 1994). While information on the evolution of the party systems at the cantonal level is scarce, studies conducted on the communal level have generated interesting insights into

the role and activities of parties in local politics (Ladner 1991 and Geser *et al.* 1994). Parties are present in 70 per cent of the 3,000 Swiss communes. This is quite surprising, since half of the Swiss communes have fewer than 500 inhabitants. However, the number of parties is usually very low in the smallest communes, but increases up to ninefold in the biggest communes and towns. In addition, 85 per cent of the local groupings active at the communal level are in fact local sections of parties that are active in the federal arena. Some 70 per cent are governmental parties, mostly of the right.¹⁶ According to Ladner (1996a), the penetration of local Swiss politics by political parties (and especially by the parties of the national governing coalition) has significantly contributed to the stability of the Swiss party and political system. The last few years, however, have seen great changes in the local parties (Ladner 1996a). In the smallest communes the parties have lost some of their importance, ceding executive seats to non-party candidates. In the medium and large communes, specialised local groupings and small parties challenge the governmental parties.

Besides direct membership, parties can partly rely on auxiliary associations to extend their penetration of society. While auxiliary associations certainly exist in Switzerland, they are far less developed than in other consociational countries, like Austria (Luther 1992:51–5). To be sure, almost all the Swiss political parties also have parallel organisations such as youth organisations (Gruner 1977:252ff.) or women's groupings. Moreover, major economic interest groups have obvious links to political parties in terms of general political orientation, specific goals and regular contacts at the elite level (Kriesi 1980). In addition, there exist different kinds of membership overlaps. First, some members of the party leadership accumulate other functions in the party or political realm (Ayberk 1991). Second, these same party activists are simultaneously members of interest groups and associations (Sciarini 1991).

However, the links between parties and interest groups are very different from those prevailing in Austria (Luther 1992). In Switzerland, parties do not dominate associations. On the contrary, the associations dominate the parties. Kriesi (1995: 192) goes so far as to claim that the Swiss parties and parliament are in fact 'colonised' by interest groups. Interest organisations flex their muscles directly in parliament through MPs. Given that the chambers are a 'parliament of militia', that is a parliament of non-professional politicians, numerous MPs are simultaneously members of interest organisations. Kerr (1983) shows, for instance, that more than half of the members of the National Council represent at least passively one of the three main tendencies of interest organisations (Table 6.2). Almost a quarter see themselves as actively defending the interests of such an organisation.

Unsurprisingly, the three main types of interest group are unequally represented within the political parties (Table 6.3). All MPs of the communist Party of Labour (PDT) and more than two-thirds of the PSS are also members of trade-unions. More than two-thirds of the MPs of the UDC are member of a farmers' interest group and more than half also have ties to an employer organisation. The other government

Table 6.1 Party membership in Switzerland (1966–95)

	1966	1976	1977	1987	1991	1995
PRD	115,000	120,000	121,000	140,000	150,000	150,000
M/V	0.485	0.280	0.082	0.316	0.345	0.390
M/E	0.77	0.032	0.032	0.033	0.033	0.032
PDC	1,110,000	60,000	90,000	70,000	60,000	80,000
M/V	0.481	0.151	0.227	0.180	0.158	0.250
M/E	0.074	0.016	0.024	0.017	0.013	0.017
UDC	54,000	50,000	80,000	80,000	80,000	80,000
M/V	0.040	0.261	0.418	0.375	0.325	0.282
M/E	0.036	0.013	0.021	0.019	0.018	0.017
PSS	57,000	55,000	55,000	45,000	40,000	40,000
M/V	0.217	0.116	0.116	0.126	0.105	0.096
M/E	0.038	0.015	0.015	0.011	0.009	0.009
PLS	10,000	16,500	9,000	15,000	15,000	15,000
M/V	0.461	0.356	0.194	0.286	0.242	0.293
M/E	0.007	0.004	0.002	0.004	0.003	0.003
FPS	–	–	–	9,000	–	12,500
M/V				0.179		0.165
M/E				0.002		0.003
PES				4,500	6,000	8,200
M/V				0.103	0.048	0.085
M/E				0.001	0.001	0.002
AN/DS		10,000	10,500	5,500	–	6,000
M/V		0.092	0.220	0.095		0.101
M/E		0.003	0.003	0.001		0.001
AdI	6,000	10,000	10,700	5,000	5,000	5,000
M/V	0.122	0.085	0.091	0.062	0.086	0.144
M/E	0.004	0.003	0.003	0.001	0.001	0.001
PEP	10,000	3,500	10,000	4,000	4,000	4,000
M/V	0.633	0.091	0.260	0.109	0.102	0.117
M/E	0.007	0.001	0.003	0.001	0.001	0.001
Rep		1,200	15,600	–	–	–
M/V		0.021	0.273			
M/E		0.000	0.004			
PDT	4,000	5,000	10,000	4,000	–	4,000
M/V	0.184	0.108	0.216	0.064		0.175
M/E	0.003	0.001	0.003	0.001		0.001
POCH	–	600	–	1,500	–	–
M/V		0.031		0.062		
M/E		0.000		0.001		
PSA	–	600	–	–	–	–
M/V		0.089				
M/E		0.000				
Others			6,000			

Sources: 1966: Conrad (1970:79); 1976: Schmid (1981:65ff), 1977: Gruner (1977:218); 1987: Krill and Saint-Ouen (1988:71ff); 1991: Kriesi (1995:152) and 1995: Ladner (1996b:157).

Note: For party abbreviations see list on pages xix–xx.

parties (PRD and PDC) have much weaker links, which are predominantly to employers' groups.

Table 6.2 Overall interest group membership in the Swiss Parliament in 1975 (%)

<i>Type of representation</i>	<i>Employers</i>	<i>Organisation Farmers</i>	<i>Trade-unions</i>	<i>Total</i>
passive and among them	27	16	23	53
active	4	6	13	23

Source: Kerr (1983:199).

Table 6.3 Interest group membership amongst members of the Swiss National Council and Council of States in 1975 (%)

	<i>Employers</i>	<i>Farmers</i>	<i>Trade-unions</i>
PdT	0	0	100
PSS	7	2	70
PDC	25	17	15
AdI	31	0	14
PRD	37	8	9
UDC	56	70	4
PLS	11	10	0
AN	14	14	0
Rép	0	0	0

Source: Kerr (1983:198)

Note: For party abbreviations see list on pages xix–xx.

Consociational theory suggests that political parties would be predicated on segmented and pillarized subcultures. Accordingly, one would expect to find strong cultural or social similarities in the sociological profile of parties, and significant dissimilarities from one party to another. Is this the case in Switzerland? To ascertain the sociological profile of the Swiss political parties, we rely upon a survey conducted among Swiss party elites (Ayberk *et al.* 1991; Sciarini *et al.* 1994).¹⁷ We compare these results with data from the World Values Survey (Melich 1991), which was carried out in the same time period, namely in 1989.

We can see from Table 6.4 that, with the exception of the Social-democratic Party, the parties' activists are generally older than their sympathisers. In addition, the activists of the three bourgeois government parties are significantly older than their counterparts in the Social-democratic Party, as are their followers, albeit to a lesser extent. The data on religion highlight the religious foundation of the Christian Democratic Party. This holds for both the followers and the party's elite, which is even entirely composed of Catholics. In contrast, Protestants are dominant among the elite of the three other parties.¹⁸ A similar pattern appears among the electorate.

With respect to educational level, two results are worth mentioning. First, education levels are generally higher among the party elites than among party sympathisers, as is clearly shown by the distribution of university graduates.

Second, the educational level is on average lower among the Swiss People's Party than among the three other parties. This holds particularly for the sympathisers. This result is of course reflected in occupation: in accordance with its rural roots, the Swiss People's Party has the highest share of farmers, among both the elite and the followers.¹⁹ Overall, one should note that workers and employees are strongly underrepresented among the party elites. As the size of its working class constituency has declined, the Social-democratic Party has tried to broaden its appeal to the new middle classes. Not surprisingly then, this party has a higher share of white-collar employees (for instance teachers) among its members and sympathisers.

In short, this analysis shows some significant differences in the sociological profile of the Swiss political parties. However, it fails to indicate the existence of clear segments. Even the strong confessional foundation of the Christian Democratic Party does not provide evidence for sub-cultural encapsulation, since there are many Catholics among activists and—even more so—among followers of the other parties.²⁰

Provision of values

As we mentioned above, in the interests of obtaining its co-optation into the federal government, the Social-democratic Party subordinated its ideological orientation and political objectives, which were considerably toned down. Since that time, political accommodation has dominated within the Federal Council. Nevertheless, the left-right cleavage remains a salient cleavage (and perhaps the most salient cleavage) in Swiss politics, at least among the political elite (Finger and Sciarini 1991; Hug 1994a; Kerr 1983; Kriesi 1980; Lehner 1984; Sciarini and Finger 1991). Among the public, the impact of the left-right cleavage was also significant, especially in shaping the voter's decision (Inglehart and Sidjanski 1975). During the 1980s and 1990s this impact weakened in both the electoral and the referendum arenas (Kriesi *et al.* 1996; Sardi and Widmer 1993; Trechsel 1994), though the increased polarisation of the 1995 national elections (Caramani 1996) slightly modifies the picture. Self-positioning on the left-right scale can be used as an indicator of polarisation, i.e. of how successful the parties are in utilising ideological values to define their respective followers.

The results of a 1989 survey in which party elites and sympathisers were asked to indicate their own position on the left-right scale are contained in [Table 6.5](#). As expected, it shows that the Swiss party elite differs significantly in respect of ideological orientation. Among the government parties there exists a considerable polarisation along the left-right axis, especially between the Social-democratic Party on the one hand and the three bourgeois parties on the other. More interestingly, this also holds for the parties' sympathisers, whose self-position on the left-right axis mirrors to some extent that of the respective party's activists. These findings underline the salience of the left-right opposition in Swiss politics. The political

Table 6.4 Sociological profile of Swiss party elites and sympathisers (1989)

	Age		Religion			Educational level				Occupation				Total
	<40	17-36	Prot.	Cath.	Atheist/ none	Compul- sory schooling	Profes- sional school	High school	Uni.	Farmer/ artisan	Manual em- ployee	Self- employed	Manage- ment	
PRD	17	56	34	7	7	7	17	36	40	8	5	31	61	240
Elite	36	78	17	5	13	41	32	32	14	22	25	11	43	67
Sym.	17	0	100	0	8	23	30	30	39	14	9	27	51	332
PDC	29	3	95	2	31	39	27	27	3	30	25	10	35	71
Elite	48	50	18	26	8	28	28	28	35	2	15	15	70	371
Sym.	42	50	35	13	16	48	28	28	8	7	47	2	43	104
UDC	23	79	17	3	10	36	30	30	24	24	7	24	48	249
Elite	35	61	28	12	13	63	21	21	3	25	28	9	38	23
Sym.														

Sources: Swiss Party Elite survey 1989 (compiled from Ayberk *et al.* 1991:46); Swiss part of World Values Survey (Melich 1991).

Note: For party abbreviations see list on pages xix-xx.

Table 6.5 Subjective left-right position of Swiss party elites and followers in 1989 (average of individual positions)²¹

	<i>PSS</i>	<i>Greens</i>	<i>PDC</i>	<i>PRD</i>	<i>UDC</i>	<i>PLS</i>
Party elite	2.1	3.2	5.3	6.0	6.2	7.4
(sd)	(1.7)	(1.5)	(1.9)	(1.8)	(1.6)	(1.5)
<i>n</i>	427	91	344	264	261	73
$\eta^2 = 0.52$						
Sympathisers	4.2	4.3	7.0	6.9	6.1	6.8
(sd)	(1.8)	(1.8)	(1.8)	(1.7)	(1.2)	(1.9)
<i>n</i>	161	66	94	100	37	28
$\eta^2 = 0.36$						

Sources: Swiss Party Elite survey 1989 (Ayberk *et al.* 1991) and Swiss part of World Values Study, 1989 (Melich 1991).

Note: For party abbreviations see list on pages xix–xx.

parties presumably play a central role in organising this opposition. Still, these results provide no empirical evidence for segmentation and limited competition between parties. On the contrary, the ideological closeness of the three ‘bourgeois’ government parties on the right side of the political spectrum make them natural competitors. As the sociological profile of voters showed, they basically appeal to a similar electorate. In addition, they are challenged by other parties on their right, such as the Liberal Party in the French-speaking cantons, or more far-right parties in many German-speaking cantons. The situation is slightly different on the left, since the Social-democratic Party has no challenger within the federal government. It must nevertheless compete with other leftist parties, be they from the new left—like the Greens²²—or from the traditional left.

When seeking to mobilise their supporters, parties thus clearly use ideological values. By contrast, policy-based patronage and individual patronage play a relatively minor role in Swiss politics. With respect to the former, the delivery of material values to specific groups through social and economic policy is difficult to imagine, since the political parties are feeble and, as we showed above, closely controlled by interest organisations.²³ As for individual patronage, the specific material rewards that parties could deliver to their members depends very much on the money and other material resources that they control. Swiss parties can simply not afford such practices, since their resources are very scarce. Structural weakness is in fact a central characteristic of the Swiss parties, both in absolute and in comparative figures (Kriesi 1995:150). Accordingly, it is a crucial explanatory factor of their dependence upon economic associations. In addition, the ‘militia’ system does not allow political parties to place individuals in elected positions, which might serve as reward. Consequently, not having full-time politicians weakens Swiss parties even more.

Hierarchical control

While federalism appears to have allowed for a degree of territorial segmentation, it has at the same time rendered much more difficult the control that parties can exert over their followers. Party organisations are strongest at the cantonal level, which leaves the political parties at the national level without adequate means to control their supporters. The fact that the local party groupings formally constitute the basic units of the national parties works also against the capacity of the latter to impose their will on the party. Finally, the complex process of internal party decision-making involves incorporating the views of the various cantonal and local party sections, with the result that intra-party decision-making becomes very slow and unwieldy. On the other hand, the federal parties try to keep the cantonal and local sections in line with the party's ideology and objectives. To this end, they provide help and expertise, as well as manifestos, but the different cantonal sections often feel no obligation to follow the party line set out at the federal level. Steiner (1974) reports, on the basis of his participatory observation study of the PRD, that election programmes are modified at each level of the organisational structure. While a federal electoral platform is adopted by the federal organs of the parties, the cantonal and even local sections of the parties often adapt the manifesto to their needs and wishes. This considerable independence is certainly linked to the fact that national elections are held in electoral districts corresponding to the twenty-six cantons. But in addition, the weak reward structure that federal parties can offer to their followers is certainly also in part responsible for the absence of hierarchical party control.

The considerable independence of the cantonal sections becomes clearly visible in the course of referendum campaigns. All political parties (both at the federal, cantonal and sometimes even the local level) adopt recommendations on how citizens should vote on acts submitted for their approval. These recommendations are decided on at party conventions and the rules differ slightly between the different parties. Nevertheless, even in these vote recommendations, the considerable independence of cantonal parties appears (Table 6.6). In almost a third of all popular votes, the vote recommendations of the federal governmental parties were contested by at least one of their constituent cantonal party organisations. Among the non-governmental parties, cohesion (as measured by the percentage of uncontested vote recommendations) is considerably higher. The data show that amongst governmental parties, the average percentage of deviant cantonal party organisations is between 5 and 10 per cent. Given that with the exception of the UDC the governmental parties have sections in almost all cantons, this shows that on average between one and two sections deviate. Hug (1994c:92) shows, however, that between 1970 and 1987 all parties appearing in Table 6.6, with the exception of the communist PdT, experienced a situation where the federal recommendation was contested by more than half the cantonal sections.

It is possible to examine the degree of party control over decision-making in the direct democratic arena in another way. In principle, referendums and popular

Table 6.6 Deviations in vote recommendations of Swiss cantonal parties (1970–87)

	<i>Uncontested vote recommendations (%)</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>Mean percentage of deviant cantonal parties</i>	<i>Standard deviation</i>
PSS	65	89	4.6	10.2
PdT	98.5	133	0.3	12.4
PDC	57.7	79	6.8	13.4
PRD	59.9	82	7.3	14.2
UDC	51.8	71	10.4	15.4
PEP	83.2	114	3.3	8.6
PLS	83.1	113	3.3	7.8
AN	88.6	117	1.3	4.5

Source: Hug (1994c:89, 91).

Note: For party abbreviations see list on pages xix–xx.

initiatives could well accommodate the consociational model, if the voters simply followed the vote recommendations of the political parties. If that were the case, direct democracy would fail to introduce any uncertainty into the decision-making process, and in addition would demonstrate the perfect control that the party elites exercise over their followers. In practice, however, Swiss direct democracy hardly functions in accordance with this idealised description. Survey evidence (Kriesel 1994) seems to suggest that few voters with party sympathies actually know the vote recommendation of their preferred party. In addition, of those that do, only a small fraction vote according to party cues.

Based on a wider set of data of the popular votes held between 1981 and 1995, the analysis of Trechsel and Sciarini (1998) leads to a similar conclusion. They found that the elites' points of view (government and party recommendations) are the deciding argument for only a minority of voters. If, on the other hand, the governmental recommendation constitutes the main argument for voters, they have a rather high probability of voting in favour of the government. In addition, Trechsel and Sciarini show that the impact of party recommendations, although weak at the general level, varies according to the type of referendum being conducted. Government parties' capacity to influence the voting behaviour of their supporters is higher in the case of mandatory referendums and initiatives than in respect of optional referendums.

At the aggregate level, these figures are less pronounced, but indicate clearly that direct democracy introduces a fair amount of uncertainty into the decision-making process. Sciarini and Trechsel (1996) show that when the final parliamentary vote on a given bill is (nearly) unanimous, there is virtually no chance of an optional referendum being initiated. As the final vote becomes more divided, however, the likelihood of a referendum increases. The degree of intra-parliamentary consensus also has a strong impact on the outcome of popular votes in the case of mandatory referendums and popular initiatives: The higher the parliamentary consensus, the higher the probability of governmental success at the polls.²⁴ This seems to suggest

that direct democracy demands of elites a high level of consensus if they are to ensure that they retain control over the final outcome of the decision-making process.

A parallel to this result can be found on the level of vote recommendations. According to figures covering the period between 1970 and 1987, the political parties could only be confident of winning in a referendum vote if all tendencies represented in the parliament adopted a unanimous voting recommendation (Hug 1994b). In the absence of such unanimous support, bills defended by the major parties face the real danger of failing to cross the referendum hurdle. Consequently, the support that electors give to the coalitions that form in referendum campaigns is far from maximal. If, for instance, the four governmental parties adopt the same vote recommendation, they can expect on average only 53 per cent of their electorate to vote for their proposition (Hug 1994b:169). Given that these parties have a vote share of approximately 80 per cent, this shows that a fair proportion of bills are likely to fail, despite being supported by the government coalition. For other types of referendum coalitions, such as those comprising only the bourgeois parties, the level of mobilisation is on average higher (76 per cent for the period between 1970 and 1987). Given that the combined vote share of these parties is smaller, however, this can also not guarantee success in a referendum campaign.

The lack of control that political parties have in the arena of direct democracy seems to suggest that other actors play a significant role. Schneider's (1985) analysis of referendums with economic content has already shown that interest organisations have a considerable impact on the final outcome. They are often behind the efforts to launch referendums and can successfully mobilise voters to support their cause.

Consociationalism and the Swiss party system

Introduction

According to consociational theory, political parties should not only mobilise and control their followers, but also play a crucial role in the decision-making process. In the last section we found that the former prerequisite is hardly met in Switzerland, which is mostly due to two institutional cornerstones of the Swiss political system. In this section, we turn to the role of parties in Swiss politics. Again, federalism and direct democracy will prove to be central mediating factors.

Concentration at the top

While the Swiss party system is fragmented by the federal structure, the concentration of power at the top of the political system has always been considerable. Through most of the second half of the nineteenth century, Switzerland was governed by a single 'party' government, composed of Radical-democratic members. Only toward the end of the nineteenth century did the

government embrace a member of the party representing the losers of the short civil war of 1847, namely the Catholic Conservatives. This inclusion was mostly seen as an acknowledgement of the importance that the Christian-democrats had attained by skilfully using the instruments of direct democracy, but also as a safety measure against the rising socialist threat.

Since then, the gradual integration of additional parties into the federal government has been a main characteristic of the Swiss executive. While up to the Second World War only members of bourgeois parties (PRD, PDC and UDC) had succeeded in placing candidates in the executive, a first Social-democrat was elected in 1943. This inclusion is not unrelated to the deletion of extremist demands from the PSS party programme (e.g., dictatorship of the proletariat). After a short period of absence from 1953, the Social-democrats returned in 1959 and this has become the birth date of the so-called 'magic formula' for the composition of the federal government, which has since comprised two members each from the PRD, the PDC and the PSS, as well as a single member from the smaller UDC. Part of the explanation for the persistence of this 'cartel of power' up to the present day is to be found in the fact that the electoral balance in the national parliament elections has remained largely the same (see below). However, the rules regulating the election and operation of government have also contributed to stabilising its party-political composition. For one, the seven members of government are individually elected in a combined session of the upper and lower houses of parliament for fixed terms of four years. After each parliamentary election, the members of government are re-elected and can present themselves for re-election as often as they wish.²⁵ Each of the seven heads an administrative department and, by seniority, one of them serves as President of the Federal Council for one year. Moreover, decisions taken by the Swiss executive are governed by the principle of collegiality, which means that all Federal Councillors must support government decisions, even those reached on the basis of majority rule. This principle is written down in the constitution (art. 95) and was inspired by the directorate of the French revolution (Fleiner-Gerster 1987).

The few changes in the make up of the National Council (Table 6.7) are reflected in the rather low rates of electoral volatility. Gallagher, Laver and Mair (1992:112) find that Switzerland belongs to the set of West European countries with the lowest mean aggregate electoral volatility over the whole post-war period. In turn, this low electoral volatility is not unrelated to the indirect election of the government, since voters' decisions can hardly affect the composition of government. Linked to this is the fact that at no time since the beginning of the 'magic formula' has a non-governmental party won as many seats as one of the coalition partners. Even in 1967, when the Alliance of Independents (AdI) reached its all-time high of 9.1 per cent of the national vote, the smallest coalition partner (UDC), outscored it with 11 per cent. Potentially more significant was the outcome of the 1995 election, in which the agrarian UDC obtained 14.9 per cent of the vote (Caramani 1996). This is not far off the share obtained by the PDC, which occupies two government seats, compared to one held by the UDC (Table 6.8). The question raised by the UDC was

whether a difference of barely 2 per cent justified a second government seat for the PDC.

Figure 6.1 again illustrates the important concentration at the top of the Swiss political system. With the exception of 1955, when the Social-democrats had withdrawn from the Federal Council, the four major parties constituting the government coalition have together consistently commanded a considerable share of the national vote. While this share has diminished somewhat since the Second World War, it still remains at a comfortable level. Assuming that the governing parties are the main supporters of the consociational arrangements, this might indicate a slight erosion in ‘consociational concentration’ (see page 248). On the other hand, the non-governing parties were unable to upset the governing coalition.

An innocent observer might perceive the Swiss government as a very strong executive. It is elected for fixed periods of four years and cannot be ushered out of office by the parliament in a vote of no-confidence. In addition, since the Federal Council makes its decisions in a collegial manner, no party can hold its representative in government directly responsible. Conversely, however, the Federal Council fails to have the power to call for new elections if it is unhappy with the parliament. The power of the executive is even further eroded by the lack of party discipline in parliament. Most often, bills sent to parliament by the Federal Council face stiff opposition and are heavily modified (Lüthi 1996).²⁶ Consequently, compared to parliament and the role of interest groups in the arena of referendums, the Swiss government appears as a rather weak executive.

Electoral competition and decision-making

The astonishing degree of stability in the party-political composition of both parliament and government (Tables 6.7 and 6.8) is unlikely to have been attained without some formal rules or conventions. The party composition of government is not fixed in the constitution, or in statute. The ‘magic formula’ has simply become a political convention and is essentially uncontested (Urio and Hayoz 1985). The law is also largely silent concerning the linguistic and religious composition of government, though the constitution does restrict the number of Federal Councillors per canton to one.²⁷ Despite the limited impact of formal rules, the composition of the government continues to respect rather strict principles of representation. Two Federal Councillors are always drawn from the linguistic minorities (French- and Italian-speaking). In some cases, two Federal Councillors are French-speakers and one is Italian-speaking, the remaining coming from the German part of Switzerland. Meanwhile, the fact that the Catholic Christian-democratic Party holds two government seats almost guarantees the presence in the Federal Council of at least two Catholics.

The dominant position of the four ‘consociational players’ (see Chapter 1) in the lower house can also be explained at least in part by electoral rules. Up to 1919, the electoral system governing National Council elections was majoritarian, but all

Table 6.7 Swiss National Council elections (1947–95): votes and seats

	1947	1951	1955	1959	1963	1967	1971	1975	1979	1983	1987	1991	1995
PSS	26.2 48	26.4 49	27.0 53	26.3 51	26.6 53	23.5 50	22.9 46	24.6 55	24.4 51	22.8 47	18.4 41	18.5 41	21.8 54
PRD	23.0 52	24.0 51	23.3 50	23.7 51	24.0 51	23.2 49	21.7 49	22.2 47	24.1 51	23.3 54	22.9 51	21.0 44	20.2 45
PDC	21.2 44	22.5 48	23.2 47	23.3 47	23.4 48	22.1 49	20.5 44	20.6 46	21.5 44	20.2 42	19.7 42	18.2 36	16.8 34
UDC	12.1 21	12.6 23	12.1 22	11.6 23	11.4 22	11.0 21	11.1 23	9.9 21	11.6 23	11.1 23	11.0 25	11.9 25	14.9 29
Dém	2.9 5	2.2 4	2.1 4	2.2 4	1.8 4	1.4 3	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
PLS	3.2 7	2.6 5	2.2 5	2.3 5	2.2 6	2.3 6	2.2 6	2.4 6	2.8 8	2.8 8	2.7 9	3.0 10	2.7 7
Adl	4.4 8	5.1 10	5.5 10	5.5 10	5.0 10	9.1 16	7.6 13	6.1 11	4.1 8	4.0 8	4.2 7	2.8 5	1.8 3
PEP	0.9 1	1.0 1	1.1 1	1.4 2	1.6 2	1.6 3	2.1 3	2.0 3	2.2 3	2.1 3	1.9 3	1.9 3	1.8 2
PDT	5.1 7	2.7 5	2.6 4	2.7 3	2.2 4	2.9 5	2.6 5	2.4 4	2.1 3	0.9 1	0.8 1	0.8 2	1.2 3
DS/Rép						0.8 1	7.5 11	5.5 6	1.9 3	3.4 5	2.8 3	3.4 5	3.1 3

POCH/ DACH/ GBS	0.1 0	1.0 0	1.9 2	3.3 3	3.7 4	1.5 1	1.5 2
CSP	0.3	0.1	-	0.4	0.3	0.4	0.3
PSU	0.3	0.3	0.9	0.9	0.6	1	1
PES		0.1	0.6	1.9	4.9	6.1	5.0
EDU		0	1	3	9	14	8
FPS		0.2	0.3	0.4	0.9	1.0	1.3
Lega					2.6	5.1	4.0
Other	1	1.3	0.9	1.0	1.8	2	0.9
Total	194	100	100	100	100	100	100
		196	196	196	200	200	200

Sources: *Annuaire statistique de la Suisse*, (1976:553; 1996:372f); Ladner (1992, 1996c); Caramani (1996).

Note: For party abbreviations see list on pages xix-xx.

Table 6.8 Swiss governments and pillar party dominance (1943–98)

	1943–53	1953–54	1954–59	1959–
PRD	3	4	3	2
PDC	2	2	3	2
UDC	1	1	1	1
PSS	1	–	–	2
Pillar party share of seats (%)	100	100	100	100

Source: *Annuaire statistique de la Suisse* (1996:371).

Note: For party abbreviations see list on pages xix–xx.

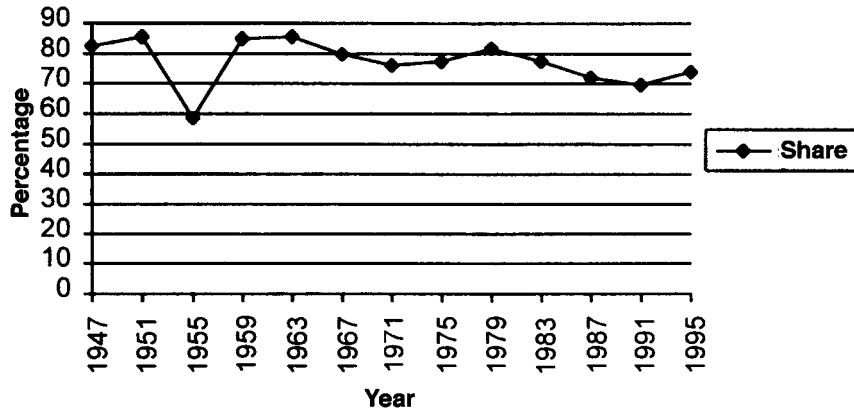


Figure 6.1 Swiss government coalition parties' combined share of the vote at National Council elections (1947–95)

subsequent national elections have been held under a type of proportional representation. Since the electoral districts correspond to the cantons, which are of very varying size, the degree of proportionality also varies considerably. The smallest half-cantons each elect one representative, while the full cantons elect from two to thirty-five representatives. In the smallest cantons, the grip of the governmental parties is most pronounced.²⁸ In the larger ones, electoral competition is frequently fiercer, but the possibility of linking party lists (*'apparentement'*), often permits parties to enter alliances to gain additional seats. This system allows for the transfer of remainders from one party list to the next, provided they are linked.

The formal rules and conventions promoting elite accommodation are not, however, limited to the electoral arena. They are even more pronounced at the level of decision-making. First, most legislative bills are vetted by expert groups, where political parties, concerned interest groups, policy experts and civil servants try to reach a fundamental agreement. Decision-making in these groups is often consensual, even if majoritarian votes occur (Germann 1985:190f). Second, even before a bill reaches the parliamentary arena, actors with an interest in a particular

policy (e.g., cantons, interest groups, political parties, etc.) are consulted and have the opportunity to state their position.

This might suggest that parties have gained an even stronger control over the decision-making process at the pre-parliamentary stage, but this is hardly the case. Though party interests are strongly represented in the pre-parliamentary phase (see below), the predominant impact upon the decision-making process is exercised by interest groups and sectoral interests. Since a number of the latter can credibly threaten to launch a referendum, they have come to exercise what in effect amounts to a mutual veto in the pre-parliamentary phase. It is worth noting, however, that although mutual veto is typical of other consociational countries (see the introductory chapter and single country studies in this volume), in Switzerland, mutual veto rests on very different institutional and political foundations and is linked not to the strength, but to the weakness of political parties.

At the parliamentary stage of the decision-making process, bills are first assigned to committees, which have only recently become permanent. Interestingly, their new status as permanent institutions with specified jurisdictions has led to new accommodative possibilities. Lüthi (1996) shows that the relative permanence of the composition of these committees has enhanced the possibilities of log-rolling. With respect to the votes on the floor of the parliament, these new possibilities have also produced some limited effects (Lüthi 1996:94ff). Most significantly in the upper chamber, but also slightly in the lower chamber, the success rate of changes to bills proposed by committees has increased since the latter are permanent.

The importance of accommodation in Swiss decision-making is also reflected in the stable and high level of consensus at final votes on bills in the lower chamber of parliament (Sciarini and Trechsel 1996; Trechsel and Sciarini 1998). The percentage of National Council votes in favour of bills subject to the optional or the mandatory referendum has remained very high during the whole post-war period.²⁹ Despite a slight decrease since the early 1980s, this percentage has never fallen below 90 per cent in the case of optional referendums and 80 per cent in the case of mandatory referendums. The economic and political actors present in the lower chamber are clearly able to form wide-reaching coalitions, and accommodative decision-making thus seems to be alive and kicking in Switzerland. This conclusion is in sharp contrast with the work of Lüthi *et al.* (1991) and Kobach (1993), who stress the increasing polarisation among Swiss MPs since the 1970s, especially among the governing coalition. However, the data on which they rely, i.e. roll-call votes, are questionable.³⁰

Some additional data are available to judge party consensus on bills that have to face the hurdle of a referendum campaign. Since parties routinely issue voting recommendations, these can serve as indicators of proximity among parties. Hug (1994a:61) shows that the parties of the governing coalition often adopt identical recommendations. The cohesion is strongest between pairs of governing parties of the right, which adopt the same endorsement in 90 per cent of all cases. The PSS plays in some sense the outcast and adopts the same recommendation as its

governing partners only in around half of all referendums. Using these vote recommendations, it is possible to identify the coalitions that form in the phase of direct democracy, namely 'referendum coalitions'. Referendum coalitions made up of at least all governing parties form in slightly less than 30 per cent of all referendums. The three bourgeois parties of the government coalition find themselves together without the PSS in more than a third of all referendums, sometimes opposed by a coalition of leftist parties including their coalition partner. Much less frequent are coalitions where all parties in the parliament adopt the same recommendation (10.9 per cent), or where a single party deviates (12.4 per cent) (Hug 1994a:70).

Proportionality

Close links among the government parties are also to be found in the composition of the federal administration and the numerous expert groups that are continuously in action. When appointment decisions at the highest level of the administration are taken, party membership or sympathy is not a factor to be neglected. What is striking about [Table 6.9](#) is the strong overrepresentation of the Radical-democrats in the upper echelons of the civil service. Almost half of the personnel at the highest level of the federal public administration were members or sympathisers of the PRD in 1980 and more than a third are in 1991. Urio and Hayoz (1985) link the strong presence of this party to the fact that the modern Swiss state is largely a creation of the radical-democratic ideological tendency and to the practice of making lifelong appointments at this upper level of the administration. Given this, it is not surprising that only the conservative PDC achieves an almost proportional representation at the top level of the federal civil service both in 1980 and 1991. The two other governmental parties (the UDC and especially the PSS) are seriously underrepresented in 1981, and a little less so in 1991 (Roth 1994). Interestingly, the degree of representation strongly reflects the tenure of government participation of the political parties. The Social-democrats only joined the government in 1943 and their underrepresentation is the highest. The PDC, having gained access to a government post before the end of the nineteenth century, have achieved almost proportional representation, while the UDC is underrepresented, but less so than the PSS. Comparing the upper civil servants of 1980 to those of 1991, one notes that the share of sympathisers of government parties has actually slightly increased, from 80.7 per cent to 81.8 per cent. Hence, the increased proportionality has been achieved by a reshuffling among the government parties and not by an overall increase or decrease in the governmental control over the upper civil service.

The situation is not much different in expert groups ([Table 6.10](#)). Since a series of decisions are already taken at the preparliamentary stage in order to minimise conflict (e.g., Lehner, 1984 and Poitry, 1989), the composition of these groups is also of considerable importance. Again, the data show that Radical-democrats control the biggest slice of the pie, with almost half of the seats in expert groups.

Table 6.9 Proportionality among senior Swiss civil servants (1980 and 1991)

<i>Knesset</i>	<i>Government coalitions</i>	<i>Years</i>	<i>No. of MKs in coalition</i>	<i>No. of religious MKs in coalition</i>	<i>Religious balancing position</i>
I	1-2	1949-51	73	16	Yes
II	3	1951-52	65	15	Yes
	4-5	1952-55	84	10	No
	6	1955-55	63	10	Yes
III	7-8	1955-59	80	11	No
IV	9	1959-61	86	12	No
V	10-12	1961-66	68	14	Yes
VI	13	1966-67	75	13	No

Sources: 1980: Urio and Hayoz (1985:619); 1991: Roth (1994).

Note: For party abbreviations see list on pages xix-xx.

Table 6.10 Proportionality in Swiss expert groups in 1980 (%)

	<i>Expert groups' party sympathy</i>	<i>Seats in lower house</i>
PRD	44.1	25.5
PSS	14.0	25.5
PDC	17.4	22.0
UDC	7.0	11.5
PLS	8.2	4.0
Others	9.3	11.5
Total	100.0	100.0
	N=203	N=200

Source: Germann (1985:245).

Note: For party abbreviations see list on pages xix-xx.

The underrepresentation of the other government parties is less pronounced in expert groups than in the upper echelons of the civil service. Both the UDC and the PRD enjoy almost proportional representation in expert groups, while the Social-democrats are less underrepresented than in the upper civil service.

Conclusion: the break-up of consociationalism?

Of the four West European countries originally cited as examples of consociationalism, Switzerland is probably the one that fits the original formulation the least. However, it is probably the country where elements of consociational decision-making have persisted longest. On the one hand, Switzerland lacks the cultural segmentation required by consociational theory. As a result, no pillarization could develop along cultural lines, and political parties were prevented from playing the leading intra-subcultural role expected by the model. We showed that the federal structure can hardly serve as a functional equivalent to pillarization. First,

even if control over cantonal subcultures was probably a fact in the late nineteenth century, this control has barely existed in the post-war period. Second, by fragmenting the political system and more importantly the party system, federalism has itself contributed to the weakness of national parties and their dependence upon cantonal sections. The other Swiss institutional peculiarity, namely, direct democracy, has also considerably diminished the control which parties might have been expected to exercise over their followers. Switzerland's instruments of direct democracy have allowed both the electorate and interest groups to gain additional access to the different stages of the decision-making process. While parties entertain close links with the interest groups, the latter have gained the upper hand, largely as a result of the considerable direct and indirect effects of referendums that we highlighted. In short, both federalism and direct democracy have prevented political parties from controlling their followers.

On the other hand, the evidence we have presented in the section devoted to decision-making and the party system suggests that Swiss political parties appear to play a game that is very similar to that one might deduce from the consociational model. Looking through the lenses of the framework advanced in this volume by Luther allowed us to highlight the similarities that exist at the level of the parties with other consociational democracies. But contrary to these other cases, the overall structure and mechanics of this game appear to have changed only marginally in Switzerland. Concentration, accommodation and proportionality are still the key words to describe the structure and style of decision-making among the political elites at the top of the Swiss political system.

Accordingly, it appears that the game which political parties play among themselves is largely disconnected from any control that the political elite might exercise over their followers. Accommodative decision-making within the context of an oversized government coalition and large-scale consultation procedures seems to be present not because of the control that the elite enjoys over its followers, but on the contrary, it exists because federalism and direct democracy ensure that the elite lack this control. As a consequence, one might venture the hypothesis that 'consociational' practices will persist as long as these two institutional cornerstones of Swiss democracy remain.

Even at present, when institutional reforms are being seriously discussed (Hug and Sciarini 1996) and a reform of the constitution is under way, few are willing to change fundamentally the institutional structure and the decision-making processes. To be sure, some scholars propose turning the Swiss political system into a more competitive democracy (Germann 1994). Others suggest substantial changes at the level of the institutions of direct democracy (Borner, Brunetti and Straubhaar 1990 and 1994). However, these are isolated views and the adjustments foreseen by the Swiss authorities are far more modest (Conseil fédéral 1995).

In sum, we have been able to demonstrate the persistence of accommodation among the political elite and thus to challenge the dominant thesis in the literature, according to which Swiss accommodative decision-making reached its high point in

the 1950s and 1960s, but has significantly weakened since that time (Delley 1987; Germann 1994; Kriesi 1995; Linder 1994; Papadopoulos 1995). To justify their argument, these authors cite the growing use since the 1970s of the optional referendum on important laws (e.g. on planning, education, or social policy). However, this hypothesis of a growing polarisation on central issues has never been tested systematically, and focusing on an arbitrary selection of bills which are presumed to be important might lead to erroneous conclusions. On the other hand, it might well be, as these authors suggest, that amicable agreement works only in respect of issues over which there is relatively little conflict.³¹ If this is the case, some current trends appear to be particularly threatening to accommodative decision-making. First and foremost, there is a fundamental divergence among the governing parties on the issue that has become undoubtedly a central—if not the central—issue in Swiss politics, namely European integration.³² After the rejection of the Treaty on the European Economic Area in 1992 (Kriesi *et al.* 1993), the talks with the European Union were relaunched on a bilateral basis. Whatever the outcome of the ratification process, the debate on full membership will soon restart. This will certainly cause considerable tensions within the governing coalition, especially between the Social-democrats, who strongly favour full membership, and the Swiss People's Party, which is strongly against. Second, the economic downturn and unfamiliar rates of unemployment have led to some tensions among the governmental parties concerning the way in which to handle these problems. Recent conflictual behaviour linked to these tensions are hardly compatible with consociational politics. Third, whilst the most recent national election reinforced the government coalition's overall parliamentary strength, it also increased polarisation within the government. The two parties that were able to increase their seats (the PSS and the UDC) are those which diverge most strongly over Europe and on other central issues. The rightist drift of the UDC is a particular concern in that respect (Schloeth 1996). History shows that Swiss political parties were integrated into the government arena once they dropped their extremist demands. In a situation of growing polarisation within government, one might wonder whether the 'magic formula' will fall to pieces due to the radicalisation of one of the constituent parties of the consociational cartel.

How the political and party system will respond to these challenges in the next few years will be a decisive test for Switzerland's politics of accommodation.

Notes

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- 4 This point has been acknowledged by Steiner (1974, 1981a) himself.
- 5 Exceptions to this rule are the short-lived attempt of the Unitary Party (Parti unitaire romand), which attempted but failed to gain representation in 1967 (Steiner 1974:59), and more recently the Lega dei Ticinesi, a populist party created to defend the interests of the Italian-speaking canton. Since 1991, the Lega has even achieved representation in the National Council.
- 6 This, in turn, is the consequence of the decentralised organisation of the Swiss party system, which is mostly a collection of cantonal party systems (see below).
- 7 A list of all abbreviations and the full names of all parties appears on pages xix– xx.
- 8 A similar argument appears already in Lijphart's (1977:41ff) discussion of segmental autonomy and federalism, which is curiously not mentioned by Kriesi (1990 and 1995).
- 9 Lehmbuch (1967a:33f) pointed out the analogy between the Swiss 'sectionalism' based on federalism and the Austrian '*Lager*'.
- 10 See also Chapters 5 and 8.
- 11 It applies for instance for every amendment of the Constitution.
- 12 Without referring to Neidhart's hypothesis, Barry (1975a:484) also suggests that some of the Swiss elite's accommodative practices, for instance the 'attempts to co-opt all the relevant experts', are responses to the existence of the referendum and the initiative.
- 13 Conrad (1970:17ff) briefly discusses the emergence of the first cantonal parties in the nineteenth century. At that time, a series of cantons still had recourse to the general assembly ('*Landsgemeinde*') of all voters. This principle of decision-making significantly retarded the formation of parties.
- 14 Jost (1986) questions this argument and shows that these referendum groups were most often short lived. By contrast, a wide range of other associations already existed and were more instrumental in the formation of political parties.
- 15 In addition, Geser *et al.* (1994) show that a certain number of local parties have no provisions for membership. This makes the calculation of membership even more problematic.
- 16 In terms of its share of seats in the local executives, the Social-democratic Party is weakly represented at the communal level (10 per cent). This is in sharp contrast with its electoral strength at the national level.
- 17 All the elite members surveyed appear to have a political and/or partisan function at—at least—one of the levels of the Swiss political system (communal, cantonal, federal).
- 18 The Social-democratic party has a significant percentage of atheists/no religion.
- 19 Twenty per cent of this party's elite still comes from the primary sector, although this sector accounts for less than 5 per cent of the active population. In addition, almost 70 per cent of the parties'elite working in the primary sector belongs to the Swiss People's Party (Garcia 1994:33–5).
- 20 Moreover, though it was salient in the past, Switzerland's religious cleavage had, as in most other European countries, largely been pacified by the mid-1970s (Kriesi *et al.* 1995:12). Accordingly, it has lost most of its influence on electoral behaviour (Trechsel 1994).
- 21 The scale ranges from 0 to 10, with 0 representing the far-left and 10 the far-right, sd corresponds to the standard deviation around the mean positions, while η^2 measures the explanatory power of the party categories for the position on the left-right scale. Its maximum value is 1 and indicates a perfect relation.
- 22 The Swiss Green Party emerged from various cantonal groupings and was established at the federal level in 1987 (Hug 1989 and 1990). The interesting point with this party is that it

- quickly took a clear left stance (Sciarini and Finger 1991; Hug 1994a:68). In turn, the ecological issue was progressively integrated into Swiss politics, which contributed to a shift in the meaning of the left-right opposition (Finger and Sciarini 1991; Sciarini and Finger 1991).
- 23 A prime example stems from the farming community that with the help of the three rightist parties could secure generous subsidies until the late 1980s (Sciarini 1994).
 - 24 On the other hand, the outcome of the popular vote in the case of optional referendums seems to be independent of the level of consensus among the elite at the final vote in the lower chamber. As an explanation for this phenomenon, Sciarini and Trechsel (1996) formulate the hypothesis of a consistency deficit among the political elite when it comes to a vote on optional referendums. In other words, they assume that the consistency of the political elite may evaporate as soon as a legislative act is successfully challenged by an optional referendum.
 - 25 Kriesi (1995:202) argues that since the establishment of the 'magic formula' only four Federal Councillors have been forced to step down before the end of their mandate. While pressure was certainly exerted on these Federal Councillors, they hung on to their mandate, sometimes for a considerable period of time.
 - 26 Perhaps even more than in other parliamentary democracies, it is important to distinguish between Switzerland's government coalition and its parliamentary coalition (Laver and Schofield 1990:129f).
 - 27 In 1993, this rule resulted in an overnight change of residence of the newly elected Ruth Dreifuss, who happened to live in Bern, the home canton of another Federal Councillor.
 - 28 Girod (1964) characterises as dominant party systems, situations where one party occupies an absolute majority of the seats.
 - 29 Indeed, 64 per cent of all acts subject to the optional referendum and 27 per cent of those subject to the mandatory referendum were accepted unanimously.
 - 30 As Kobach himself points out, 'the issues subject to roll-call tend to be the most polarized ones' (1993:168) and 'the exclusive consideration of roll-call votes ignores less-controversial bills, the majority of which produce consensus among the four governing parties' (1993:166).
 - 31 Empirical—though very partial—support for this view is provided by Poitry's (1989:303–6) study of all the legislative processes of the early 1970s. The author finds that consultation/accommodation in the pre-parliamentary phase does not reduce the level of conflict in the parliamentary phase. Based on a reanalysis of Poitry's data, Kriesi (1995:183) shows that pre-parliamentary consultation is useless in the case of the most important and conflictual bills, in the sense that it does not lead to widely supported compromises. Consequently, conflicts reappear in the parliamentary arena (Kriesi 1995:183).
 - 32 Accordingly, Europe was a key issue during the electoral campaign for the 1995 national elections (Caramani 1996).

7

Israel and the consociational model

Religion and class in the Israeli party system, from consociationalism to consensualism to majoritarianism¹

Reuven Y. Hazan

Introduction

Consociational theory has had a significant impact on the comparative study of West European democracies. There are, however, a few countries outside Western Europe which have received attention from scholars of consociational democracy and have been identified as consociational at some point in their history, among them Lebanon, Colombia, Malaysia and Uruguay. Regrettably, consociational practices in most of these countries were unable to fulfill their basic role of maintaining political stability amid a deeply fragmented political culture.

One of the countries which at one time was almost archetypal of consociationalism, and has managed to maintain political stability, is Israel. In the somewhat meager amount of literature devoted to consociationalism in Israel, the relationship between the main social segments has been termed quasi- or semi-consociational. This chapter seeks to assess the extent to which the consociational model can be applied to the Israeli party system. In doing so, it will elaborate the political sociology of the country and the political behavior of its elites in order to show that two encapsulated and hostile political subcultures existed, and that the gap was bridged by the accommodating practices of the elites. Moreover, this chapter will also trace the development and decline of consociationalism in Israel, and its replacement by another model during Israel's first post-independence phase, and by yet another model during the more recent period. The focus of this chapter is the most central aspect of consociationalism in Israel, namely, the role of the parties and the party system. The parties in Israel were the mechanism that linked the two sub-cultures and their elites, and the party system enabled accommodation to take place.

Relevance of parties in Israeli democracy

The parties in Israel continued, or inherited, a tradition of political activity from the pre-state period. The parties that functioned in the voluntary organizations of what was then a state-in-the-making penetrated practically every aspect of society in a

manner much more intensive than was acceptable in most democracies. Soon after its establishment, Israel was described as a 'party state' by Akzin (1955), who wrote that in Israel the political parties represented the single most influential political institution, fulfilled a more important role and were more influential than in any other country apart from a few of the one-party states.

According to Akzin, the party system that developed in Israel was characterized by intensive ideological differences between the political parties. As a result, the political parties attempted to influence, and politicize, almost all spheres of life. Individually, or as a bloc, the parties in Israel stood at the apex of networks which covered education, culture, sports, youth movements, trade unions, employment agencies, housing, agricultural and industrial cooperatives, transportation authorities, periodicals and publishing companies, health organizations, urban development and more. The intensity of party activity, coupled with the broad range of areas into which the parties penetrated, expanded the role of the Israeli parties almost to the point of becoming all-embracing. Therefore, the central forces in the nascent, but comprehensive, political activity of Israel were the political parties and the party system. As Galnoor (1994:92) posited, 'It would therefore not be an exaggeration to say that, in the first 20 years of the state, domestic affairs were based on the functioning of the parties. Parties were not merely involved in the classical political function of interest aggregation and articulation, since their activities extended into most aspects of social and economic life.'

Social segmentation and political parties in Israel

Israeli society is divided along four major cleavages, the first covers the entire population, whereas the other three cover only the Jewish majority. The divisions are

1. Jews and Arabs
2. secular and religious
3. ethnic divisions
4. socio-economic divisions.

The first and third cleavages have been strengthened by the last cleavage. That is, the difference between Jews and Arabs also cuts, to a large extent, along socio-economic lines. The ethnic division, between Sephardi Jews of Mediterranean extraction and Ashkenazi Jews of Central and Eastern European origin also cuts, to a lesser extent, along socio-economic lines. However, the national and ethnic cleavages did not bring about the creation of politically segmented sub-cultures, while the remaining two cleavages—religion and class—did create both social (segmentation) and political (pillarization) differentiation. It is due mainly to this fact that this chapter is devoted solely to these two divisions that possessed both the social and political institutional infrastructures to establish consociational ties. The national and ethnic divisions, on the other hand, were addressed in a manner that

can be better described as clientelism, or patronage, of the politically established Ashkenazi group toward the Sephardis, and of the Jewish political establishment toward moderate Arab leaders.²

The religious-secular and the socio-economic cleavages are thus the only two divisions that produced sub-cultures that were both segmented and pillarized. However, the socio-economic divide did not produce two sub-cultures, but only one. During the pre-state period, as well as the first decades of Israel's independence, the socio-economic cleavage was decidedly one-sided, with the socialist camp predominant over the bourgeois group. Indeed, it was the pillarization of the socialist camp that drove the religious sub-culture to emulate it, which it did quite successfully. Although the bourgeois group attempted to do likewise, it never reached the level of social segmentation and pillarization that the other two camps enjoyed.

The political relations between the socialist and religious sub-cultures reflected the issues concerning the latter cleavage, rather than the former. That is, the divisions between the socialist and religious camps were mainly over religious issues, and not economic ones. This was due largely to the predominance of the socialist camp over the economic divide, the inter-class nature of the religious camp, and the fact that the religious camp devoted itself to the pursuit of religious interests. The social segmentation in Israel is presented graphically in [Figure 7.1](#).³ Gutmann (1979a:148) states that the political camps in Israel—socialist, religious and bourgeois—could be considered *familles politiques*, or *familles spirituelles*, in the sense that each party from any particular camp was closer to all the other parties in its camp than to any party on the outside.

The political system in the pre-state period urged, and practically required, the different camps to offer services that the British mandatory power did not provide. It was in this environment, based on voluntary institutions, that the socio-political sub-cultures developed. The first camp to turn its social segmentation into pillarization and establish a sub-culture was the socialist camp—much like its European counterparts—forcing the other camps to follow in its path. Not surprisingly, with the advent of independence the state authorities took over much of the activities handled by the camps. This process affected the socialist camp much more than the religious one, because it was the leadership and institutions of this camp which became overnight the political leaders and social institutions of the new state (Etzioni 1962). The religious subculture, on the other hand, continued its segregationist practices and remained more of a distinct sub-culture than the socialist camp. It was the dominant, almost hegemonic, status that the socialist camp enjoyed during the pre- and post-independence period, and the continued sub-cultural characteristics of the religious camp, that allowed the consociationalist relationship that developed between the two sub-cultures before independence to continue after the State of Israel came into being. The bourgeois camp, which lagged well behind the other two camps in terms of pillarization, used this setback as a reason for its opposition to the segmented system that prevailed, and for its

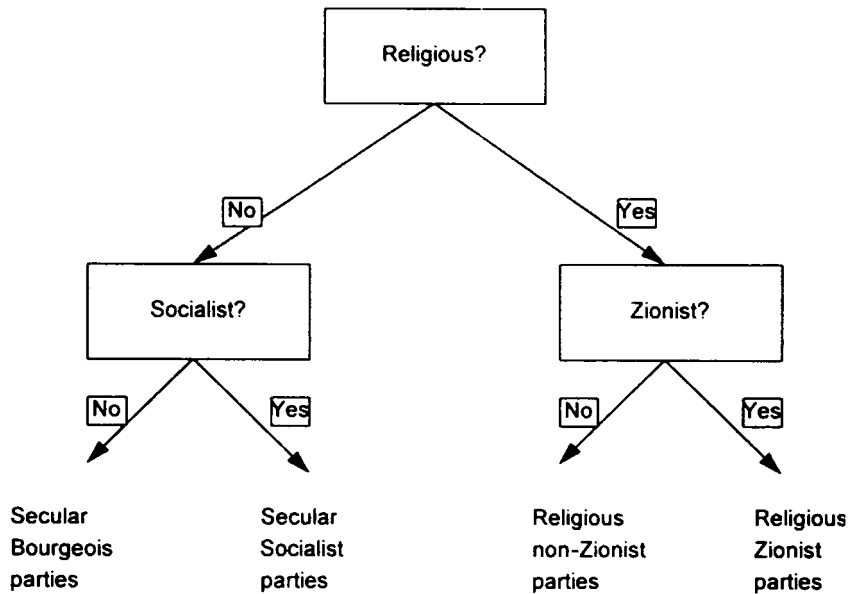


Figure 7.1 Party preference in Israel by religious, class and Zionist attitudes

objection to the exclusionary accommodationism practiced by the socialist and religious subcultures.

Horowitz and Lissak (1989:51) correctly pointed out that 'the religious-secular cleavage...divides the dominant group in Israeli society, but also...serves as a basis of political mobilization and social and cultural separatism.' The religious-secular cleavage has, therefore, severe conflict potential for Israeli society and politics. Nonetheless, the political system has managed to resolve religious conflicts by peaceful means, while preserving Israel's stability and democracy.

Role of religion in Israeli society

Religion, specifically Judaism, has a dual and contradictory role in Israeli society. On the one hand, it provides a common primordial sentiment which fosters shared loyalty and serves as an integrating element. On the other hand, it is also a source of disagreement, segregation and conflict (Gutmann 1979b, 1981). The two most prominent reasons for the latter are the politicization of religion and the sanction it has received from the civil authorities.

The politicization of religion is largely due to the extremely proportional nature of Israel's electoral system, and its resulting multiparty system, making it possible for religious parties consistently to win seats in Israel's parliament, the Knesset.⁴ This, coupled with the fact that no party ever won a majority of the seats in the Knesset, means that religion came to play a prominent role in the makeup, and the downfall, of Israel's governing coalitions. This fusion of religion and politics, and specifically

the support promised to any government by the religious parties—in exchange for financial and legislative support for their religious interests—helped foster anti-clerical sentiment, particularly in a polarized country constantly facing existential issues.

Ever since the pre-state period, the inclination of the political leadership—a majority of whom were both socialist and secular—to court the religious groups and include them in the nation-building and coalition-making processes had its price. The religious groups made their participation and support contingent upon receiving full control of many aspects of personal status, such as marriage and burial. Therefore, in order to appease the orthodox religious groups and to keep them from being alienated from what was becoming a secular (independent) state, the civil authorities accepted religious norms in their orthodox interpretation and enforced them upon the population at large. The social conflict that this development created is due to the fact that only a small minority, fewer than 20 per cent of the Israeli population, adheres to orthodox Judaism.

Nonetheless, Jewish identity in Israel is not necessarily secular. Although a small minority identify themselves as orthodox, only a slightly larger minority—approximately 25–30 per cent—describe themselves as secular. The majority of the Israeli population is characterized as traditional, i.e. those who observe some religious practices. This group does not perceive Jewish practices as adherence to God's commandments, but rather as a way of maintaining Jewish customs and tradition. Therefore, a majority in Israel favors some aspects of Judaism in Israeli public life, and some relationship between religion and state in Israel (Liebman and Don-Yehiya 1984). Israeli and Jewish identities thus tend to overlap, and religious symbols play a prominent role in the expression of Israeli identity. For example, the emblem of the State of Israel, the Menorah, a seven-branched candelabrum, is a religious symbol.

The separation of religion and state in Israel is therefore not only unlikely, but also quite impossible. The principle of separating between religion and state means, among other things, that direct state support for religious services is prohibited. In Israel, virtually every political party supports the continued funding of religious institutions, and only a small minority of the population questions the principle of state support for religious schools. The issue in Israel is not the separation of these two factors, but rather how much state support will be given to which religious institutions, and how much supervision of religious organizations the state will be granted in exchange. In short, the present condition is neither total integration nor total separation. It is a complex situation with which neither side is entirely satisfied, but which will undoubtedly continue into the foreseeable future.

Religion and politics in Israel versus Europe

In Israel, the religious parties preceded the institutionalized religious authorities, contrary to the pattern exhibited in Europe. That is, the Church existed in Europe

long before religious political parties were founded. Moreover, after the establishment of such religious parties, the Church either controlled them or maintained an independent stance towards them. In Israel, however, the situation was, and is, quite different. The institutional religious authorities i.e., the Chief Rabbinate and the Council of Torah Sages, were created at the initiative of already existing political-religious movements (in the pre-state period) or parties. Furthermore, the religious educational system was established, directed and controlled by the religious parties, not religious authorities. It is this issue of control between religious authority and religious party that distinguishes the two kinds of religious parties in Israel.

The religious camp in Israel is divided between religious Zionist parties and religious non-Zionist parties. The former came to terms with Zionism—the Jewish national movement—and its goal of creating a Jewish homeland, which they perceived as the beginning of the process of salvation. The latter parties, on the other hand, opposed the establishment of a Jewish State prior to the arrival of the Messiah, and since its creation do not see it as a Jewish State but as a state as any other, one that has no religious significance. The religious Zionist parties cooperated with the secular Zionist parties in the process of state-building, worked towards a unified society, and participated in the pre- and post-independence national institutions. The religious non-Zionist parties adopted an isolationist approach, sought autonomy from the rest of society, and boycotted the national institutions. The cooperation between the secular Zionist and religious Zionist parties brought about a moderate and pragmatic position concerning religion from both sides, whereas the isolationist rift created by the religious non-Zionist parties produced an extremist and un-compromising religious stance. These processes were buttressed by the fact that the religious Zionist movement was less extremist concerning religion to begin with, while the religious non-Zionists were ultra-orthodox in their religious outlook, seeking to achieve full compliance with religious tenets in all aspects of life. The clearest example of the difference in attitudes toward the state is that the religious Zionists had always participated in elections to the pre-state institutions, and since independence have always sought to participate in government in order to gain support for their interests. The religious non-Zionists, on the contrary, boycotted elections in the pre-state period, and since independence have participated in elections and coalitions in order to gain access to government funding and influence policy-making, but largely refuse to become members of the government of a secular Jewish state.⁵

The religious Zionists sought, and needed, legitimation and support from the Chief Rabbinate. The religious Zionist parties thus sought to strengthen the Chief Rabbinate, but at the same time to enlarge their influence on its composition and policies, bringing them into line with their party interests. In other words, the parties wanted to enhance the religious standing of their particular authority, while limiting its political influence over them. In contrast to this changing relationship based on degrees of unity and conflict between the two bodies, the religious non-

Zionist parties' relationship with their religious authority, the Council of Torah Sages, is consistent and hierarchical. The religious non-Zionist parties accept, practically without reservation, the decisions of their religious authority on almost all religious and political issues. It is the Council, therefore, that decides if a party joins a coalition or not, and how it votes on most issues.

Whereas both Zionist and non-Zionist religious parties took the initiative in establishing their respective religious authorities, the Chief Rabbinate is a break with tradition, while the Council of Torah Sages is not. The authority of the latter flows not from its formal position, but from the personal authority of its members, who are the recognized rabbinical experts on religious issues. As Don-Yehiya (1981: 114) stated, 'Much more than the Council needs the [non-Zionist religious] party, the party needs the Council in order to legitimize itself and gain the support of those same circles which from the beginning unequivocally accepted the authority of the Torah Sages' But, since these religious scholars were for the most part opposed to Zionism, and the religious Zionist movement, the Chief Rabbinate was established as a new type of religious authority in Judaism that would grant the desired legitimacy, based more on institutional than on personal legitimacy.

Despite the differences in the relationship of the two religious groups in Israel to their respective religious authorities, be it mutual intervention or domination, both groups share the recognition that the religious authority has the right to influence the decisions and activities of religious parties. In this respect, the religious parties in Israel are quite different from most important religious parties in Western Europe, where autonomy and mutual non-intervention is usually the defining characteristic of religion-party relations. The level of religious intervention in political matters in Israel, even in the religious Zionist party, is therefore above and beyond what most Christian Democratic parties would accept from the Church. Moreover, in the case of the religious Zionists, the level of interference the Chief Rabbinate has experienced from the party is also much more than that which any Christian Democratic party would dare inject into Church affairs.

Donald Smith (1970:7) wrote that the rise of religious parties is associated with the secularization of the religious system, which is reflected in the transfer of the center of religious authority from a priestly elite to a secular elite. This is apparently not the case in Israel. Religious political leaders in Israel rely on the endorsement of the religious leadership in their election campaigns, whereas the religious leaders rely on the religious political leadership to bring pressure upon the secular state authorities on behalf of religious interests. The transfer of the center of religious authority has not occurred in Israel, where the relationship between the religious authority and the religious political leaders is practically symbiotic.

Another distinguishing trait for the Israeli religious parties is their source of electoral support, which is almost exclusively from the religious electorate. Contrary to most relevant European religious parties, who both attempt to attract and receive support from voters who do not have a clear attachment to religion, the Israeli religious parties do not appeal to, nor are they recipients of, a significant portion of

the secular vote. The reason for this is the strict orthodox character of the religious parties in Israel. Although the religious non-Zionists are clearly ultra-orthodox, whereas the religious Zionists are less so, both kinds of parties place an emphasis purely on religious issues. Moreover, they both largely direct their electoral strategies at the religious public alone, and exclude secular Jews from access to their institutions and services. All together, this creates a perception that deters voters who are not very religious, and hence the support the religious parties in Israel receive from this group, as opposed to most European religious parties, is minimal.⁶

The basic similarity between religious parties in Israel and Western Europe, apart from their attention—in different degrees—to religious matters, is the socio-economic makeup of their electorate. In both cases, the religious voters come from various social standings and hold differing views on socio-economic policies. In this respect, the religious parties in Israel are socially pluralistic, similar to their European counterparts.

In short, the religious parties in Israel are quite different from Christian Democratic parties in Western Europe because the former are parties whose primary concern is religion, whereas the latter are parties who identify with religion and religious principles, but their preoccupation with religion is not predominant. Neuberger (1991:115) has gone as far as saying that the kind of religious parties found in Israel are similar to the religious parties found in some Muslim countries, rather than those found in Europe.

Consociationalism in Israel: the early years

Israel, during its pre- and immediate post-independence period, can be said to have exemplified consociational democracy in a manner approaching those states—Austria, Belgium, The Netherlands and Switzerland—that have been used as the models from which consociational theory emanated. In Israel, as well, both the formal governmental institutions and the party system have been structured to acknowledge and reinforce the ideological or religious cleavages, in addition to the socio-economic ones. The result has been—and continues to be, albeit at a lesser level—a combination of social segmentation and political stability, similar to the consociational democracies of Western Europe.

McRae's (1974:5–13) synthesis of Consociationalism points to three basic factors:

1. a social structure, segmented in a manner sufficiently intense and durable to give members of the respective groups a different orientation and outlook
2. a pattern of behavior by the elites, who recognize the dangers of fragmentation, are committed to maintaining the system, are willing to work with other elites and are capable of compromise
3. a political culture, whose underlying characteristic is based on a tradition of accommodation arising from historical circumstances.

Israel, in its formative and early years, exhibited all three factors.

The extent of social fragmentation has already been elaborated. While the Jewish-Arab and Ashkenazi-Sephardi cleavages did not produce consociational practices, they also differ in nature from the other two divisions. The split between Ashkenazi and Sephardi Jews is regarded by both sides as a temporary divide, which should eventually be blurred, if not erased, as the Jewish State develops a common Israeli identity. Indeed, the rate of intermarriage has constantly increased, and while the various gaps that separated the two communities have not closed, they are definitely closing. The Jewish-Arab cleavage, on the other hand, is based on Israel's presence in a predominantly Arab Middle East, and is strengthened by the continued state of war between Israel and her Arab neighbors. In other words, the Jewish-Arab cleavage is international, not intra-national—between two national groups rather than two sub-groups.

The religious-secular cleavage has managed to maintain its force and passion throughout the almost half-century of Israeli independence. The success of the religious community in forging and maintaining a distinct sub-culture only strengthens this cleavage. Indeed, as Gutmann (1981:203) stated, 'it is a fact that the religious population is becoming more and more isolated from the non-religious, primarily as a consequence of policies deliberately followed with this aim in mind. As a result, the cleavage between these two separate segments of the population is ever widening.'

The socio-economic divide was already strong enough to establish the main, and dominant, secular socialist sub-culture of the pre-independent Jewish community in British Mandatory Palestine. Unlike the religious-secular cleavage, which is still strong, this divide has reduced its intensity with time, similar to the Ashkenazi-Sephardi cleavage. Yet, it was the pioneer in the process of social segmentation, and the most successful in its achievements, without which the tradition of accommodationist practices of the pre-state period would have been impossible.

A tradition of accommodation was developed by the elites of two main camps—socialists and religious—which established a pattern of behavior that recognized the dangers of separation and, through compromise, showed a commitment to the survival of the system. One of the main reasons for this is that given the voluntary nature of the pre-state institutions, which lacked any sovereign powers and existed in the midst of massive immigration waves, any predominance by one camp could be only relative. The position achieved by the socialist camp, over a decade before the establishment of the state, made it the major player—but not without the need for coalition partners in order to rule. Moreover, the need for institution-building within a voluntary framework elicited a strong emphasis on internal solidarity. That is, due to the necessity of working together, broad solidarity was sought among the different movements in order to legitimize authority. The two most important movements to exhibit this were the socialists and the religious.

The socialist-secular leadership attempted to court both the religious Zionists and the religious non-Zionists. The relationship that developed between the socialists

and the religious Zionists has been called the 'historical partnership.' By the early 1900s, the religious Zionists had organized as the Mizrahi movement, and participated in power-sharing arrangements in the voluntary institutions of the Jewish community. Following virulent confrontations over issues such as education, a tradition of compromise began to develop as in the creation of dual educational institutions, one secular and one religious. This pattern carried over to the British Mandate period between the two world wars, and into the first thirty years of Israel's independence. The partnership was based on a coalition between the main socialist party and the main religious Zionist party, even when the latter was not needed. Thus, the religious Zionists participated continuously in government, except for very brief interludes. Explicit elite arrangements backed this coalition, such as the proportionate division of jobs and other benefits. As Gutmann (1979b:410) wrote, 'there is a very deep understanding between the leadership of the two camps, which are constantly exposed to pressure from their supporters who demand a less compromising policy and who exhibit less understanding of the necessity, which need not be condemned, for reaching compromises as the price of enjoying the fruits of government.' Don-Yehiya (1977: 271) goes a step further, pointing to two motivating factors for the socialists in establishing the historical partnership: 'First, there is a recognition of the need to grant both expression and representation to the "religious sub-culture." Second, there is a tendency to overcome the divisive potential concerning the different outlooks on religion by negotiation and compromise with the political elite of the religious camp...'

The relationship between the socialist leadership and the religious non-Zionists is based on a letter that became known as the status quo agreement. In June of 1947, the socialist leadership of the Jewish community attempted to reach out to the religious non-Zionist leaders, prior to the arrival of the United Nations' Special Committee on Palestine, in order to unite behind the goal of establishing a Jewish State. A letter was sent offering a number of promises with respect to public control of religious matters, attempting to assure the leadership of the religious non-Zionists that the principal arrangements regarding religion-state relations would be maintained in the newly-established state, hence the term status quo, which has come to identify this letter and its resulting accommodation.⁷ The status quo became the principle for cooperation between the two elites, and later served as the basis for the resolution of religious questions that arose. Moreover, these principles had already been accepted by both sides prior to the issuing of the letter, and hence the status quo is an affirmation of what had become accepted by the two elites and a confirmation between them of what would continue. The status quo is, therefore, a dynamic solution, its provisions changing according to alterations in the balance of power and to new circumstances. In short, it is a pragmatic resolution of religious-secular tensions that facilitated and fostered elite accommodation.

Israel, in the pre- and immediate post-independence period, thus exhibited the three main elements of consociational democracy, similar to the smaller European countries. Furthermore, the specific factors and facilitating conditions of

consociationalism, as developed by its major theorist, Arend Lijphart, were also present in Israel at that period.

Lijphart (1969:216) defined consociational democracy as ‘government by elite cartel designed to turn a democracy with a fragmented political culture into a stable democracy.’ For such a framework to succeed, the elites must possess certain characteristics: first, the capacity to accommodate the divergent interests and demands of their sub-cultures; second, the ability to transcend cleavages and cooperate with the rival sub-culture; third, a commitment to the cohesion and stability of the system; and fourth, an understanding of the perils of fragmentation. I have already shown that both the secular socialist and the religious elites were clearly capable of manifesting all four factors, with the result that religious affairs were dealt with at the elite level through alliances among the political parties. As Don-Yehiya (1986:203) stated

Problems of religion and state are among the most divisive issues in Israeli politics... Nevertheless, on the whole, the Israeli political system has managed to resolve religious conflicts by peaceful means, while preserving its stability and democratic character... To a large extent, the phenomenon can be explained by a pattern of decision-making and conflict management, defined by Arend Lijphart as the ‘consociational democracy’ model.

The deliberate joint effort by the elites to stabilize the system was later defined by Lijphart (1977:24–44) in terms of four characteristics: government by a grand coalition of all significant segments of the plural society; mutual veto as a protection of minority interests; proportionality in elections, appointments and allocations; and autonomy for each segment to run its internal affairs. Once again, the original foundations of Israeli democracy were quite similar to the consociational type of democracy.

Governing coalitions in Israel have rarely been grand coalitions, but they also have rarely been minimum winning ones, especially during the first two decades of Israel’s independence. As [Table 7.1](#) shows, an overwhelming majority of the governing coalitions have included more than 61 of the 120 MKs (Members of Knesset). Moreover, of the two coalitions which approached this majority threshold, the third government coalition lasted for only fourteen months and included parties above the minimum winning requirement, while the sixth government coalition was truly a minimum winning coalition but lasted for less than five months. In other words, minimum winning coalitions existed in Israel for only four months out of the first eighteen years, or just slightly less than 2 per cent of the time. In short, while grand coalitions are rare in Israel, the inclusion of parties—specifically religious ones—above and beyond the minimum winning requirement was not only common but actually prevalent. As long as the Labor Party was dominant, the ‘historical partnership’ with the NRP (National Religious Party) was stable, even though Labor could have often formed a governing coalition without the latter’s support. Therefore, as Don-Yehiya (1986: 204) pointed out, ‘the almost permanent participation of the

Table 7.1 Israeli governing coalitions (1949–67)

<i>Knesset</i>	<i>Government coalitions</i>	<i>Years</i>	<i>No. of MKs in coalition</i>	<i>No. of religious MKs in coalition</i>	<i>Religious balancing position</i>
I	1–2	1949–51	73	16	Yes
II	3	1951–52	65	15	Yes
	4–5	1952–55	84	10	No
	6	1955–55	63	10	Yes
III	7–8	1955–59	80	11	No
IV	9	1959–61	86	12	No
V	10–12	1961–66	68	14	Yes
VI	13	1966–67	75	13	No

Source: Elaborated from Galnoor (1989:140).

NRP in governmental coalitions was not due to arithmetic considerations of coalition formation. Rather, it reflected the application of the consociational model in Israel to the management of religious conflicts.⁸

Mutual veto rights are exhibited in Israel through what has become known as the status quo agreement. The acceptance of this framework by the diverging sides has enabled the political system to dodge crises by solving or shelving explosive and controversial issues. That is, the status quo principle, based on the explicit or implicit consent of the parties involved, is used to maintain and preserve political agreements by granting either side veto power to block any changes in the existing framework which involve vital sub-cultural interests. Therefore, neither side can coerce a controversial decision on the other, even if it is backed by a majority in power. The maintenance of such a fluid solution is due to the fact that both sides perceive it to be more important to continue the ongoing process, rather than to gain a specific advantage on a particular issue. The most blatant manifestation of mutual veto can be found in the lack of a written constitution in Israel. Despite the fact that Israel's Declaration of Independence states that the soon-to-be-elected constituent assembly would enact a constitution, its first piece of legislation was to transform itself into a regularly-elected legislature and thereby to relegate its constitution-making function to a lower level of importance. This step was due mainly to the fundamental conflict over the source of legitimacy of such a document in the newly-established democratic Jewish State: on the one hand, popular sovereignty; and on the other, theological principles. The religious parties have always opposed enacting a constitution which would abrogate the special role played by religion in Israel, rejecting the likely separation of religion and state that would be embodied in the constitution; and due to their possession of veto rights, they have kept Israel in the small category of democratic states—along with Britain and New Zealand—which do not have a formal, written constitution.⁹

A proportional system of representation, of appointment to public positions and of allocation of public funds were all present in Israel. The electoral system, which had a rather meaningless threshold set at 1 per cent with the entire country serving as one constituency, was tied with that of The Netherlands in terms of extreme proportionality. The same kind of electoral system had been utilized before independence for various voluntary organizations, as well as after independence for various quasi-governmental institutions and agencies. The proportionality principle was also applied in additional spheres, such as the allocation of ministries, patronage, the allotment of financial resources, access to state lands, etc., among the sub-cultures. This method of proportionality, a highly refined version of *Proporz* known in Israel as the 'party key,' dispersed public goods and benefits according to the relative strengths of the parties. In other words, proportionality was extended beyond the electoral system and applied to the method of public allocation in general.

Segmental autonomy was, in practical terms, granted to the religious subculture with regard to the internal management of its affairs. The severe conflict potential of the secular-religious cleavage was abated by the acceptance of the autonomy principle, for both the religious Zionist and religious non-Zionist camps. For example, one of the most volatile conflicts was over the control of education—similar to the history of Europe—which in accordance with the autonomy principle resulted in the creation of two state school systems, one secular and one religious (for the religious Zionists), as well as a third state-funded independent religious school system (for the religious non-Zionists). Similar autonomous compromises extend to an entire network of religious institutions, including even a separate court system. Moreover, additional autonomy concerning particularistic issues for the religious sub-culture was also granted, such as the exemption of religious women and male theological students from compulsory military service. From the other perspective, the secular sub-culture was also autonomous in that the religious authorities made little effort to impose their rulings on the secular majority, even if they were committed in principle to doing so.

Galnoor (1989:139) summarized the existence of these four characteristics of consociational democracy in Israel.

The religious parties were the main beneficiaries of these arrangements. The proportional system allowed them to retain approximately 13 percent in all centers of power. They enjoyed effective veto power on core religious issues, thus the political struggle was over questions on the margins of the status quo. The religious camp enjoyed a high degree of autonomous control over such institutions as the chief rabbinate, the ministry of religious affairs and the local religious councils. The inclusion of the religious parties, particularly the NRP, was the main reason why government coalitions in Israel were usually not 'minimum winning coalitions'

However, the consociational relationship between the socialist secular and the religious sub-cultures was not due to any single factor elaborated above—nor did one factor necessarily rely upon another—but rather due to all four independent

and mutually reinforcing factors, and others as well. For example, the religious minority did not possess veto power because it was indispensable to coalition politics, but rather because of the fear of a possible *Kulturkampf*. The religious parties, on their part, have typically tended to focus on narrow religious issues, and to make modest demands, rather than to advance broad issues based on principle, which were raised but never pushed to the brink (Sharkansky 1985).

There were other characteristics which were exhibited in Israel during the period of consociationalism, as well as additional conditions which Lijphart points to as favorable for consociational democracy. Don-Yehiya (1977:307–15) suggests at least five other accommodationist features: the first was de-politicization, which means the non-interference of the state in the voluntary institutions of the sub-cultures (as opposed to autonomy for the governmental organizations); the second was localization, where controversial issues were dealt with not at the national level but at the local level, which allowed for a lessening of the load on the national government, while achieving particular compromises whose principles did not have to influence other regions; the third was bureaucratization, or the transfer of conflicts to the administrative level, where objective and technocratic criteria could form a compromise that was impossible at the principled and politically-charged national level; the fourth was the judiciary, to whom conflictual issues could also be passed on in order to reach a decision that the public at large would accept; the fifth addressed the legislative process, where divisive issues were not handled by parliamentary bills but by provisional departmental regulations that were either flexible or ambiguous. There were others, such as the practice of not enforcing statutes that would hamper the fragile status quo, all of which were Israeli additions and alterations to the accommodationist practices of consociational democracy.

Furthermore, several of Lijphart's (1977:53–103, 129–34) favorable conditions for consociational democracy, which are conducive to elite cooperation and stable non-elite support, were exhibited by Israel in that period: A multiple balance of power, based on three main segments, with the largest short of a majority; the small size of the country and the serious external threats to its existence; the multiparty nature of Israel's party system; strong overarching loyalties producing a commitment to the survival of both Judaism and Israel; distinct lines of cleavages and segmental isolation, mainly of the orthodox religious sub-culture; and a prior tradition of elite accommodation developed during the Zionist movement and expanded in the pre-state period. All of these conditions led Lijphart (1977:132) to conclude that, 'Israel fulfills almost all of the conditions that are conducive to consociational democracy; in fact these are so strongly favorable that they should have been able to sustain a much higher degree of consociationalism than has actually been developed.'

Dissolution of consociationalism: the rise of consensualism

Consociationalism declined in Israel not because it failed, but more precisely due to its success. Two extremely divergent sub-cultures, virtually mutually exclusive in

every aspect, were able to cooperate and overcome their segmentation due to elite accommodation and the utilization of characteristically accommodationist mechanisms. Here, too, Israel resembles West European patterns, as seen in the success and subsequent decline of segmental pluralism in The Netherlands (Lorwin, 1971) and Austria (Luther and Müller 1992c). The major reason for the demise of the consociational model in Israel, as previously mentioned, is the fact that the newly established state authorities took over many of the functions once performed by the sub-cultural voluntary organizations. More precisely, the leadership and sub-cultural institutions of the main secular socialist camp became the official state leaders and agencies when independence was achieved, while the religious sub-culture remained relatively intact, but became financially dependent on the state. As Gutmann (1979a:167) stated, since independence, the ‘signs of consociationalism... are constantly declining, and not because there is a lack of elite accommodation. Although deep cleavages continue to exist in Israeli society, and they might be deepening; there are no signs of closed camps that advocate isolationism due to their members’ organizational affiliation.’

Therefore, while it was still important to maintain as much ‘artificial’ consensus as possible in the new state, segmental autonomy was reduced to one particular sub-culture—a minority religious camp—while the dominant sub-culture slowly gave way to statehood. This change did not occur overnight, but was a gradual process over many years. Nonetheless, the more stringent requirements of consociationalism, which according to Lijphart (1989b:41) ‘demands segmental autonomy,’ could no longer be met. Moreover, as the new state began to emphasize formal-institutional devices, instead of the informal practices of the previous period, consociational democracy began to give way to consensus democracy, the former being a ‘stronger form’ of the latter (Lijphart, 1994:3).

Consensus democracy, much like consociationalism, aims to restrain majority rule by sharing, dispersing and limiting political power. It is defined by Lijphart (1984a) based on two separate dimensions, the executive-parties dimension and the federal-unitary dimension. The first dimension has five variables: executive power sharing; executive-legislative balance; a multiparty system; a multi-dimensional party system; and proportional representation. The second dimension has three variables: federal and decentralized government; strong bicameralism; and a rigid constitution. Israel’s position in the top left-hand corner of [Figure 7.2](#) means that it was highly consensual on the first dimension—approximately as consensual as Switzerland and The Netherlands—but quite the opposite on the second dimension (see also [Chapter 2](#)).

In the executive-parties dimension, the first variable, executive power-sharing, is measured by the percentage of minimal winning coalitions. The lower this percentage is, the higher the level of executive power-sharing. In Israel’s first two decades, between 1949 and 1967, the percentage of time that minimal winning coalitions existed was less than 2 per cent. Executive-legislative balance, the second variable, is measured by cabinet durability, in months. Israel’s average for the first

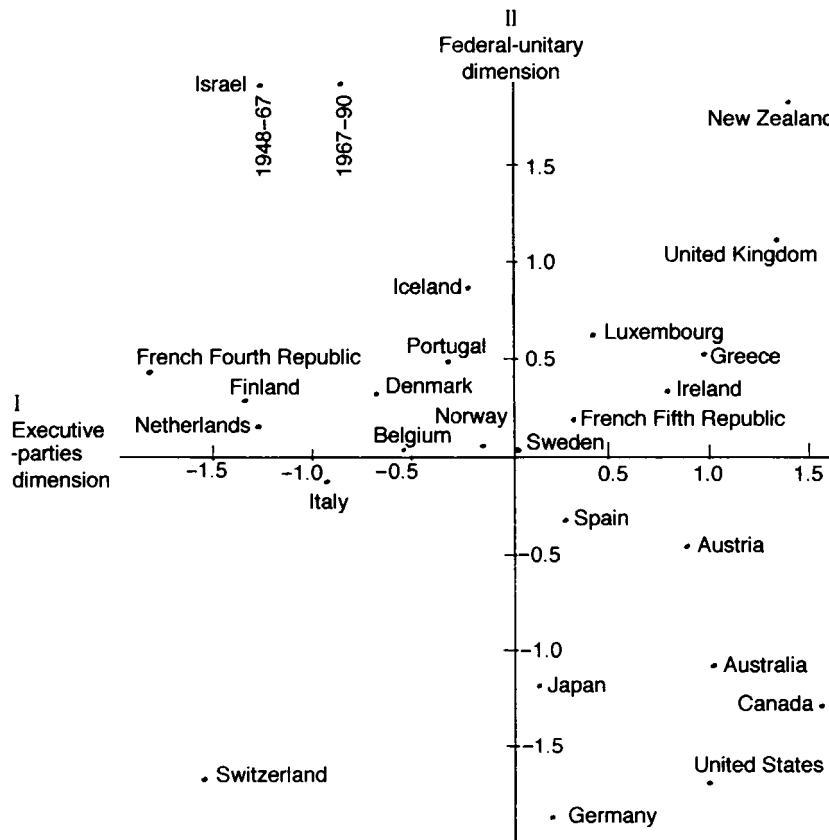


Figure 7.2 Twenty-five democratic regimes plotted on the two consensual-majoritarian dimensions (From *Israeli Democracy Under Stress*, edited by Ehud Sprinzak and Larry Diamond. Copyright © 1993 by the Israel Democracy Institute. Reprinted with permission of Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc.)

twenty years was twenty-eight. The existence of a multiparty system, the third variable, is verified according to the 'effective number of parties' (Laakso and Taagepera 1979), which was above five in Israel for that period. The fourth variable, a multidimensional party system, is assessed according to the number of issue dimensions, which in Israel included not only the socio-economic but also the religious as well as the foreign policy dimensions. The last variable of the first dimension, proportional representation, is measured according to electoral disproportionality, which in Israel until 1956 was the lowest, surpassed since only by The Netherlands. The results of these five variables identified Israel as a highly consensual democracy. Table 7.2 presents a comparison between Israel's scores to that of the most outstanding case of consensualism, Switzerland, and also to that of the average of twenty-five democracies.

Table 7.2 Executive-parties dimension variables

	<i>Israel</i>	<i>Switzerland</i>	<i>Average</i>
Executive power-sharing	2	0	68
Executive-legislative balance	28	30	52
Multiparty system	5.1	5.0	3.3
Multidimensional party system	2.5	3.0	2.6
Proportional representation	0.8	1.5	3.9

Source: Elaborated from Lijphart (1993:111, 118)

Note: Israeli results cover 1949–67, Switzerland and Average cover 1945–80. My measure for Israel differs from that presented by Lijphart for the first dimension

The federal-unitary dimension presents a problem for Israel, because on all three variables it ranks as non-consensual. On the first variable, federal and decentralized government, which is measured by the government's share of total tax receipts, Israel ranks at 96 per cent. Strong bicameralism, the second dimension, which is measured on a five-point scale, places Israel on the edge due to its unicameral parliament. The last variable, a written and rigid constitution, which is measured on a four-point scale, results in Israel being placed close to the end because it lacks a written constitution. Table 7.3 shows the contrast between Israel's position and that of consensual Switzerland and the average of twenty-five democracies.

Two of these three measures, it could be argued, misrepresent the Israeli case. The first does not reflect informal decentralization, such as official recognition and subsidization of private religious associations, which has been called a 'quasi-federalist' aspect of Israeli society (Fein 1967b:100; Eisenstadt 1967:410; Paltiel 1975: 405). The third variable does not recognize the existence of several 'Basic Laws' that are the building-blocks of an ongoing constitution-making process in Israel, some of which are quite difficult to amend due to the requirement of a special majority. Moreover, Lijphart (1989b:42) himself gave the best reason for discounting this entire second dimension, when he concluded that countries such as Belgium, The Netherlands, Luxembourg, and Israel, which are 'characterized by non-territorial autonomy...should not be expected to be consensual on Dimension II.'

The dissolution of consociationalism in Israel, and its replacement by consensualism, was due to the establishment of legitimate state authorities—which were based on the agencies of the dominant sub-culture—and the continued opening of the system with time. As the dominant sub-culture converted into a pluralist state, the distance between it and the rest of the secular society diminished, while the minority religious sub-culture continued to distance itself from Israeli society. During this period, consociational practices were sustained; but the prerequisites for consociational democracy ceased to exist. If the characteristics are present, but the infrastructure is not, the resulting situation is indeed a less strong form of consociationalism: consensus democracy, which began to manifest itself in Israel in the 1950s and expanded with time. The main players were still the

Table 7.3 Federal-unitary dimension variables

	<i>Israel</i>	<i>Switzerland</i>	<i>Average</i>
Federal and decentralized government	96	41	78
Strong bicameralism	5.0	0.0	2.4
Written and rigid constitution	3.0	1.0	0.9

Source Elaborated from Lijphart (1993:111).

Note: Israel, Switzerland and Average results cover 1945–80. My measure for Israel differs from that presented by Lijphart for the second dimension.

dominant socialist secular party and the religious Zionist and non-Zionist parties. Moreover, the ‘historical partnership’ between the socialists and the religious Zionists continued throughout this period. Thus, despite the retraction of segmental isolationism into one sub-culture, the characteristics of mutual veto, proportionality and autonomy continued to function. Maybe this is why those who have written about consociationalism in Israel prefer to call it a semi- or quasi-consociational democracy. However, a more appropriate terminology for this second period would be a consensual democracy. Since the attributes of consensualism began to appear in the years immediately after independence, and some persist until today, this ‘transitional’ phase of consensus politics covers the overwhelming majority of Israel’s existence as a state. It was preceded by a period of consociationalism, which identified the pre- and immediate post-independence period, and is currently being supplanted by elements of majoritarianism.

Demise of consensualism: advent of majoritarianism

Majoritarian politics appeared in Israel due to four main reasons:

1. the Six Day War and its territorial consequences
2. changes within the religious sub-culture
3. the appearance of a two-bloc party system that altered party relations and systemic mechanics
4. a new electoral reform law that transforms the entire regime.

These changes cover a period of thirty years, from 1967 to 1996, and thus represent a gradual shift towards majoritarianism and away from consensus politics. This shift is by no means over, and Israel cannot yet be termed a majoritarian democracy, but it has taken significant steps away from consensualism and towards majoritarianism.

The Six Day War of 1967 reopened the ideological debate, which had been either frozen or accommodated, on the goals of Zionism and the ways and means to obtain them. The quick victory gained by Israel, in spite of the massive forces allied against it, was perceived by certain elements of the religious camp as ‘miraculous.’ The

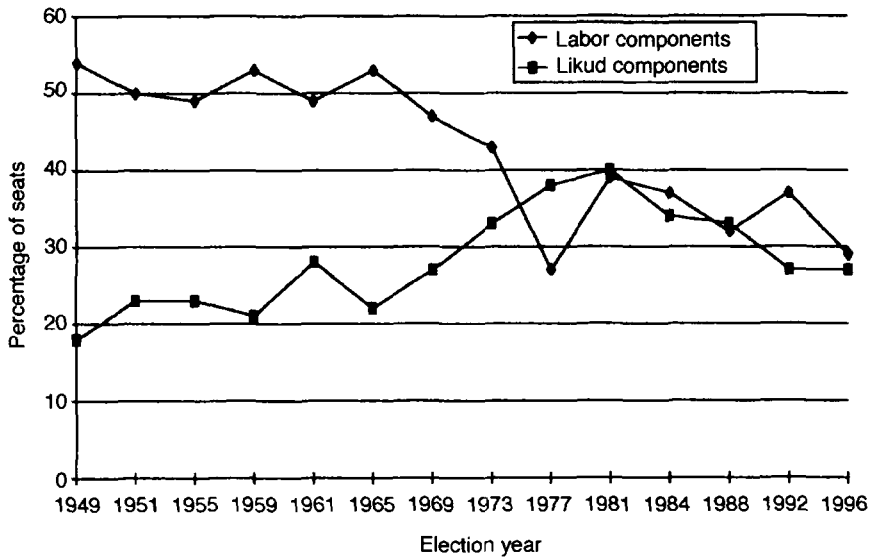


Figure 7.3 Seat percentage of Labor and Likud components, Knesset elections (1949–96)

territories captured during the war—East Jerusalem and the West Bank from Jordan, the Gaza Strip and Sinai peninsula from Egypt, and the Golan Heights from Syria—were considered by many on the right as a much awaited correction of the dismal border situation since independence. Zionism, which many perceived to be manifested by Jewish settlement in the whole Land of Israel, now had a new opportunity for expansion. The result was a new dominant cleavage in Israeli politics, focused on the territories, where the left (minimalist Zionists) was identified as those willing to return the captured territories in exchange for peace, and the right (maximalist Zionists) as those unwilling to part with the territories.

The dominance of one camp for almost thirty years, and specifically one party within that camp, characterized the Israeli party system, which resembled the Italian one of the same period. However, unlike its Italian counterpart, Israel's one-party dominance ended in the 1970s. The first election results after the 1967 Six Day War showed the gap between the two opposing camps narrowing significantly, and within less than a decade it would reach parity, ending the dominance of the socialist camp forever. As Figure 7.3 illustrates, elections began to result in two parties equal in size—Labor and Likud—though both were short of a majority. The Israeli party system thus shifted to a competitive bipolar structure, leaving the centrally-located religious parties as the brokers of political power. The 'historical partnership' came to an end, since the religious parties were now able to grant either side the necessary majority to form a coalition. While the two major parties competed ferociously for the support of the smaller religious parties, these, in turn, successfully played one off against the other—and not only demanded a much

higher fee for their inclusion, but continuously threatened to bring down the government while constantly increasing their demands.

Within the religious camp itself, a metamorphosis took place. The religious Zionist party (NRP), which had dominated the religious camp, began to disintegrate and decline. Simultaneously, it became involved with non-religious aspects of Israel's political life, and as its younger leadership took over the party, it became more closely associated with those opposed to territorial concessions—the right wing in Israel. The NRP also became more extremist concerning religious matters, and militated its demands concerning these issues (Sandier 1981). At the same time, the religious non-Zionists began to take positions on non-religious issues, as well. Although not as dramatic as their Zionists counterparts, they too moved to the right and adopted nationalistic principles. The result was a closing of the gap between the two types of religious parties. As Liebman (1993) argued, the religious extremists became more nationalized, while the religious nationalists became more extremist. However, unlike the religious Zionists, the representation of the religious non-Zionists increased, which served to exacerbate the tensions surrounding religious issues.

Furthermore, the religious parties went through internal splits, a hitherto unknown phenomenon. New parties based on religious 'combinations' developed, mainly religion and nationalism (Tehiya), and religion and ethnicity (Tami and Shas). Shas, an orthodox-ethnic party, also broke the isolationist political practices of the religious non-Zionists, and has participated not only in the coalition but in government as well, thus raising both the influence and the visibility of extremist religious elements in Israeli politics.

As previous political partnerships and arrangements collapsed, even the status quo agreements were reopened for debate and conflict. The result was that fragile coalition agreements became the norm, and minimal winning coalitions became more frequent. Religious confrontation became closely linked to both ethnic cleavages and to the dominant division over the future of the territories. Because of the extreme demands raised by some of the religious parties in the mid-1980s, the two big parties reached a point where they could no longer enter into a coalition with such parties, due to the backlash expected from the secular electorate. This produced a period of 'national unity' governments, from 1984 until 1990. Unlike the grand coalition governments of the consociational model in Europe, these were 'last ditch' efforts to maintain a system which had already passed the point of instability. Since 1967, therefore, coalition governments in Israel have been either too small or too large. By the end of the 1980s, it was thus apparent to all concerned that the system was in need of reform.

In 1992, the Knesset enacted a new 'Basic Law: The Government,' which provides Israel with the distinction of being the only country to have direct popular election of its Prime Minister (beginning with the 1996 election). This new basic law not only effectively altered the electoral system, but also changed the entire political system in Israel (Hazan 1996). The tenure of the Prime Minister is concurrent with that of

the Knesset, and they are elected simultaneously. The Prime Minister is elected according to the two-ballot system. A majority of the vote is necessary to elect the Prime Minister in the first round; if that is not obtained, then two weeks later a second round is held in which only the two candidates with the highest vote in the previous round can participate. The Prime Minister in Israel is therefore elected by an absolute majority of the voters. The Knesset, however, continues to be elected by a strict list system of proportional representation, with the entire state serving as one constituency and the electoral threshold set at 1.5 per cent.

The new political system is described in the same basic law. The Prime Minister is given the power to nominate the Cabinet; however, a parliamentary vote of investiture is necessary before the Cabinet can begin to function. Moreover, the parliament can oust the Prime Minister by a vote of no-confidence, which requires only a bare majority of 61 of its 120 members. The removal of the Prime Minister brings about the dissolution of the Knesset as well, meaning that new elections will be necessary for both. By the same token, the Prime Minister—with the approval of the President, a symbolic position elected by the Knesset—has the power to dissolve the Knesset, but such a step would also end the Prime Minister's own tenure and force new elections. In short, the electoral and political reforms appear to have decidedly shifted Israel towards a majoritarian form of democracy, both in the manner by which its Prime Minister must be elected, and according to the requirements for maintaining, or removing, the Prime Minister from power.

The need to win an absolute majority of the vote in order to win the first directly-elected prime ministerial race in 1996 forced the two major parties—whose candidates were the only ones running—to woo the religious voters. However, by 1996, the religious sub-culture had moved largely to the right, adopting a clear position on the predominant secular issue over which the campaign was waged—the peace process. The result was that most of the religious parties openly backed the candidate of the right, and campaigned for him. Surveys show that over 90 per cent of the religious voters cast their ballot for Prime Minister for Netanyahu, the right-wing Likud candidate. Netanyahu's victory, with 50.5 per cent of the vote, shows that Israeli society is divided into two equal camps; the religious sub-culture clearly belongs to one of these camps; and the majoritarian electoral system serves only to strengthen the two previous factors. That is, the adoption of majoritarian elections produced a clear winner, and in the process made the social division both apparent and measurable, while forcing the religious camp to take sides—as opposed to the previous proportional electoral system which had managed to maintain a semblance of consensualism by allowing the religious parties to play a pivotal role in a party system lacking a clear winner.

According to Lijphart, the conditions for majoritarian democracy are precisely the inverse of the variables used to identify consensual democracy, and a shift away from consensualism can be seen in every variable in contemporary Israel. Executive power has become more concentrated, as exhibited by the increase of both minimal winning and 'last ditch' grand coalitions. After both the 1984 and 1988 elections,

the exorbitant demands of the religious parties, while Labor or Likud were in a dead heat, made even a minimal winning coalition impossible. The resulting grand coalitions were thus not a sign of executive power-sharing between sub-cultures, but rather an attempt by the two major secular parties to cooperate in order to concentrate executive power and diminish the influence of the religious sub-culture. When this arrangement ceased to function, the resulting coalitions in 1990 and 1992 were both minimum winning coalitions. From 1993, however, the government was a minority coalition—a new phenomenon in Israeli politics—with the outside support of the Arab parties, resulting in a minimum winning parliamentary ‘bloc.’ In short, as [Table 7.4](#) shows, the six years prior to the 1996 elections were characterized by minimum winning coalitions, or blocs, exhibiting a sharp decrease in executive power-sharing.

Average cabinet durability in Israel, reflecting executive dominance, increased significantly to thirty-eight months, an increase of over one-third compared to the pre-1967 period. Multipartyism, measured by the ‘effective number of parties,’ declined from over five to less than four in the latter period. Multidimensionality, expressed by the number of issue dimensions in the party system, increased after 1967 with the rise of the security dimension. However, due to the growing involvement of the religious parties in non-religious politics, the religious dimension came to practically overlap the dominant security dimension; simultaneously, a decline of the socio-economic dimension occurred due to the movement of all the major and medium-sized parties toward the center. Proportional elections, of which Israel was an extreme example, have been relegated to the parliamentary elections alone, while the Prime Minister, mayors, and heads of local authorities are elected by plurality or majority electoral methods. The overall shift is presented in [Table 7.5](#).

In summation, while Israel has moved little on the federal-unitary dimension—where it already occupied a majoritarian position—it changed its position significantly on the executive-parties dimension by moving away from extreme consensualism and towards majoritarianism. Lijphart (1993:117) pointed out that Israel ‘has already become more majoritarian since 1967,’ but the extent of the shift in the most recent period has accelerated this trend quite dramatically. It is interesting to note that Lijphart strongly recommended against any radical changes to a majoritarian form of democracy in Israel, recognizing that what was then a reform plan alone was indeed strongly majoritarian. The electoral and political changes eventually adopted induced the following changes in the executive: they introduced a majoritarian electoral system for the chief executive, reduced the race to two parties, diminished all but the dominant issue dimension, disengaged the executive from the legislature and concentrated its power. It appears as though Israel, in the late 1990s, is no longer interested in restraining majority rule by either sharing, dispersing or limiting political power.

Table 7.4 Israeli governing coalitions (1967–96)

<i>Knesset</i>	<i>Government coalitions</i>	<i>Years</i>	<i>No. of MKs in coalition</i>	<i>No. of religious MKs in coalition</i>	<i>Religious balancing position</i>
VI	1–2 ^a	1967–69	108	13	No
VII	3	1969–74	101	12	No
VIII	4–5 ^b	1974–77	65	10	Yes
IX	6	1977–81	77	16	No
X	7–8 ^c	1981–84	67	13	Yes
XI	9–10 ^d	1984–88	97	12	No
XII	11	1988–90	95	16	No
	12	1990–92	62	13	Yes
XIII	13	1992–95	62	6	Yes
	14 ^e	1995–96	56	0	No
XIV	15	1996–	66	23	Yes

Notes:

a The first government came to an end due to the death of the Prime Minister. The second, headed by a Prime Minister from the same party as the previous government, was reconstituted with all the same parties except for one minor party, and continued to function according to the guidelines of the previous government. The two governments, for the purpose of cabinet durability, are thus considered as one.

b The fourth government came to an end due to the resignation of the Prime Minister. The fifth government, headed by a Prime Minister from the same party as the previous government, was reconstituted with all the same parties including two minor additions. The two governments, for the purpose of cabinet durability, are thus considered as one.

c The seventh government came to an end due to the resignation of the Prime Minister. The eighth government, headed by a Prime Minister from the same party as the previous government, was reconstituted with all the same parties. The two governments, for the purpose of cabinet durability, are thus considered as one.

d The grand coalition agreement included a rotation of the Prime Minister between the two major parties, the ninth and tenth governments were based on the same parties. The two governments, for the purpose of cabinet durability, are thus considered as one.

e The fourteenth government was formed following the assassination of Prime Minister Rabin in November 1995, continuing a minority government based on the same two parties, which was already in place since 1993 after the sole religious party split from the coalition. This and the previous governments, for the purpose of cabinet durability, are thus considered as one.

Conclusion

Within fifty years, the Israeli party system has evolved from one that aimed at precluding simple majoritarian decision-making in the pre- and immediate post-independence period, to one that is embracing majoritarianism. In doing so, Israeli democracy exhibited consociational practices, then consensual characteristics, and is now manifesting majoritarian behavior.

The political parties, which were the key coordinating factors during the first phase of consociationalism, saw their functions slightly reduced during the period of consensualism, but more recently have proven to be no longer able to carry out their accommodating functions. As Israel has become a more pluralistic and open society, social tensions have become less ‘manageable’ politically, the elitist nature

Table 7.5 Executive-parties dimension variables in Israel

	1947-67	1967-96
Executive power-sharing	2	18
Executive-legislative balance	28	38
Multiparty system	5.1	3.9
Multidimensional party system	2.5	2.0
Proportional representation	0.8	1.8 ^a

Note:

a Since 1996 this measure applies to the parliamentary elections alone.

of Israeli politics has been weakened and social cleavages are now finding different outlets within the political system. The ability of the political leadership to make accommodative, binding decisions has thus been adversely affected. As Galnoor (1994:97) stated, 'the inability of the parties to perform their mediating roles discreetly contributes to political instability.' In other words, the contemporary Israeli political system exhibits a marked decline in the ability to produce compromises. For example, in the previous periods, the participation of the religious parties in oversized coalitions headed by a dominant party was perceived as an accommodative and stabilizing factor, whereas their more recent willingness to form minimum winning coalitions with either of the two major parties has become a disruptive ingredient.

Furthermore, the erosion of the fundamental consensus in Israel on many issues, including the meaning of Zionism and the demarcation of the country's borders, weakened the ability of the political system even further in the production of functional coalitions based on compromise and accommodation. Other branches of government have already begun to fill the void, most prominently the intervention of the judiciary in what has until now been an exclusively political domain. For example, the Israeli High Court of Justice was asked to rule on the legality of a coalition agreement between a secular and a religious party. Should the weakening of the authoritative decision-making capabilities of the government continue, the judiciary's intervention will only increase. One must remember that judicial decisions are based on legal aspects of right and wrong—not politically-produced compromises that are meant to accommodate both sides—and thus are, in essence, zero-sum and can be seen as contributing to the majoritarian trend of Israeli politics (Hazan 1997).

In summation, Israel's fiftieth anniversary finds its political system having crossed the threshold into majoritarianism, thereby exhibiting the contemporary irrelevancy of the previous consociational mechanisms. The question that beckons is whether there will be a return to consociationalism, or even to consensualism? Regretfully, the preliminary answer is that Israel is no longer an example of consociationalism, and it is unlikely to reappear under the current circumstances.

The continued demise of accommodationist practices between religious and secular Jews is, interestingly, associated with the Middle East peace process. Should the latter succeed, the result within the Israeli party system will be a decline in the dominance of security and defense issues. If this dominant dimension of electoral competition is undermined, in its place will remain the already diminished socio-economic cleavage and the increasingly volatile secular—religious divide. Therefore, if security and defense issues are resolved, then the secular-religious dimension is more likely to gain intensity and assume a high priority.

Paradoxically, as Israel embraces majoritarian methods, while discarding consociational and consensual practices, the probable rise of religious issues to the forefront will come at a time when both the party system and the society would have been much better off had the accommodative patterns of the previous periods not been swept away by social changes and electoral reforms. Moreover, the transition to majoritarianism coupled with the irrelevancy of consociationalism will only serve to exacerbate and polarize the imminent crisis in Israeli politics, which has been successfully accommodated for generations.

Lijphart (1994:13) correctly noted that Israel is a non-European country that can be regarded as a political-cultural 'extension' of Europe. In other words, Israel is truly a comparable and comparative case for European purposes. The application of the consociational model to Israel has been acknowledged by most Israeli scholars, but not by European ones. The consensual model which replaced it has undergone similar treatment. The current shift towards majoritarianism makes Israel an interesting and evolving political laboratory, which both deserves and is appropriate for analytical comparison to cases in the European context.

Notes

- 1 I am grateful to Emanuel Gutmann, Aviezer Ravitzky and Lauri Karvonen for their comments and suggestions. An earlier version of this chapter was presented at the workshop on Consociationalism, Parties and Party Systems, 23rd Joint Sessions of Workshops of the European Consortium for Political Research, Bordeaux, 1995.
- 2 Arabs make up approximately 15 per cent of the Israeli population, and are the largest national minority in a state that is over 80 per cent Jewish. Within the Jewish population, the Ashkenazis dominated in numbers during the pre-state period, but after independence there began an influx of Sephardi Jews that slowly brought the ratio to its current state of near parity.
- 3 One should note that the religious parties, Zionists and non-Zionists, were at times divided between socialist and non-socialist parties. Therefore, another divide could be added to the religious side of the figure. However, these two segments have united permanently on the religious Zionist side, and have alternated between union and separation on the religious non-Zionist side. The socialist cleavage is thus subservient to the religious one, and has become less influential with time as religious issues assumed the forefront in all the religious parties.
- 4 The single-chamber parliament in Israel, the Knesset, has 120 members, making it possible to be elected with less than 1 per cent of the vote. A threshold was set, however, at 1 per

cent, which made Israel the most extreme proportional democracy in the world, along with The Netherlands. When the Dutch Tweede Kamer expanded its membership from 100 to 150 in 1956, Israel became the second most proportional system.

- 5 This extreme isolationism declined with the appearance of an ultra-orthodox ethnic party in the 1980s, which participated fully in government. For further discussion of this party see the section on majoritarianism.
- 6 It is interesting to note that the ultra-orthodox community votes in very high percentages, estimated at over 90 per cent, and does so largely in accordance with the decisions of their religious leaders. Furthermore, the members of the Council of Torah Sages represent the leadership of most of the ultra-orthodox sects, and a division between two important Rabbis can lead, and has, to the creation of a new party and a split in the ultra-orthodox vote.
- 7 The letter promised that the Sabbath would be set aside as a national day of rest; that dietary laws would be observed by all state institutions; that religious courts would maintain exclusive jurisdiction over marriage and divorce laws; and that the existing autonomous religious educational system would be recognized by the state.
- 8 For a discussion on how the accommodative process in Israel actually rests on the structural features of the coalition system see Paltiel (1975).
- 9 For a fuller discussion see Gutmann (1988).

Part III

Party dimensions in comparative perspective

8

Electoral consequences of (de-)pillarization

The cases of Austria, Belgium and the Netherlands (1945–96)¹

Mónica Méndez-Lago

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to explore both the theoretical propositions concerning the role and activities of parties and pillarization, and their effects on electoral stability in Austria, Belgium and the Netherlands. The second section of this chapter will be devoted to examining the propositions concerning pillarization that are contained in or can be deduced from consociational theory. In the third section, the electoral consequences of pillarization and of the process of de-pillarization will be spelled out in the form of hypotheses that will be tested in the final part of the chapter. The latter will be divided into two sections. The first will look at the question of electoral stability from a systemic perspective, focusing on the evolution of certain features such as the share of the vote of pillar parties and the fractionalisation of the party systems. The second will analyse the electoral evolution of Austria, Belgium and the Netherlands since the Second World War, adapting the measures of total volatility and block volatility designed by Pedersen (1979) and Bartolini and Mair (1990).

Organisational strategy of parties in consociational democracies: pillarization

Definition of pillarization

The theory of consociational democracy (esp. Lijphart 1968a, 1969, 1975) seeks to explain the apparent paradox of the existence of political stability in certain countries that have a very fragmented political culture. According to this theory, this is possible thanks to the combination of two factors. The first is the willingness and ability of the political elite to engage in accommodative decision-making, whilst the second relates to a distinct form of sociopolitical organisation known as pillarization, which comprises a particular type of linkage between the citizens and the elites who channel the potential conflict.

Kriesi (1990:437) has characterised pillarization as a particularly pervasive strategy of vertical penetration, which entails the construction of parallel organisational structures performing similar social, cultural and political tasks. The network of organisations of each pillar include schools, communications media, interest groups, leisure-time associations and political parties (Lorwin 1971:141). Pillarization directly affects the daily lives of individuals, who are immersed in their segment 'from the cradle to the grave'; they attend its schools, join its trade unions, rely on it for their leisure activities, and so on.

Parties can be regarded as central organisations in their respective pillars. They fulfil a number of important functions, including the articulation of the demands and needs of the organisations in the pillar, and carry out the political action that is functional for the pillar. In certain cases, pillars are charged with carrying out significant state tasks and are thus able, for example, to distribute to their members the services of the welfare state and to controlled appointments in the public administration and state sector enterprises. In short, parties are seen to exercise direct or indirect control over important spheres of citizens' lives (Deschouwer 1994a:81). In some consociational countries such as Belgium or Austria, they have access to a large reservoir of selective incentives (mainly based on patronage), which they offer to voters in exchange for their support (Deschouwer 1994a; Luther 1992). To sum up, political parties constitute the political expression of the pillars, which are a network of societal organisations bound together by common ideational values, which can be based upon, for example, religion, ideology, or group solidarity (Koole 1994:278).

Approaches to the analysis of pillarization

Van Mierlo (1986) distinguishes two theoretical interpretations of the phenomenon of pillarization. The first is based on his reading of the work of Lijphart (1975), in particular on the latter's *Politics of Accommodation*. According to Van Mierlo (1986; also Scholten 1980), Lijphart takes the segmentation of society as a given and then considers elite behaviour as a response to those characteristics. Elites of culturally segmented countries recognise the dangers that stem from these centrifugal forces and strive for a decision-making system that facilitates consensus building. The formation of pillarized organisational structures is thus understood primarily as a bottom-up process.² An alternative interpretation of the process suggests that pillarization is a product of a conscious elite decision to adopt pillarization at a particular historical moment as a strategy for political control.³ Social and political segmentation is considered as a partial product of the strategy of pillarization and encapsulation developed by elites, who have vested interests in maintaining a fragmented culture. The high degree of interaction and communication within pillars offers a suitable network for political control, while the cultural differences and minimal contact among pillars provides an isolation of each pillar from external influences (Van Mierlo 1986:100). The authors who advance this interpretation

criticise what they consider to be an inaccurate, but all too widespread tendency for the concepts of segmentation and pillarization to be considered interchangeable, despite the fact that, in their opinion, the latter concept is considerably broader than that of segmentation (Scholten 1980).

The three countries analysed in this chapter have undergone a process of pillarization, which started during the second half of the nineteenth century. There are authors who have regarded the process as a reaction of the dominant groups in society in order to accommodate the demands that emerged in the process of social and political modernisation. Pillarization was the organisational response to the segmentation of society according to religion and class in the three countries. In contrast to those two cleavages, the ethno-linguistic division did not lead to the formation of another pillar, and had a late institutionalisation in the Belgian party system (Urwin 1970). In none of the three countries being considered here were the pillars equally cohesive and homogeneous, though the liberal pillar was consistently weaker.

The period in which the pillars consolidated their position and expanded the services they provided coincides in the three cases with the post-war period and lasts until at least the end of the 1960s, when the foundations upon which the pillars had emerged started to experience a gradual erosion. Processes of social, economic and political transformations such as secularisation, increasing geographical and social mobility, technological change and the emergence of mass media help explain this erosion. The translation of these changes in the conditions that had facilitated pillarization have been interpreted in the two ways mentioned above. That is to say, some authors have emphasised the erosion of the social basis of pillarization, while others have focused on the reaction of elites to counter the effects of such erosion.

Since the aim of this chapter is neither to account for the emergence of pillarization, nor to explore in detail its evolution in the three countries,⁴ there is no need to pursue this issue further here, nor to keep these two models separate. Indeed, the integration of the two may prove to be quite fruitful, arriving at a model in which there is a mutual relationship between societal segmentation and the behaviour of elites. Once established, pillarization has certain effects which help perpetuate segmentation. In turn, this helps legitimate the maintenance of pillarization as a strategy of the political elites.

However, the consideration of the two approaches to explaining the genesis of pillarization is crucial for identifying its indicators. If we restrict the concept of pillarization to societal characteristics and just equate it with segmentation, then we might be tempted to look for the sources and indicators of de-pillarization only in societal features. Conversely, if we consider pillarization as an elite strategy aimed at controlling and maintaining segmentation, we may focus exclusively on the evolution of elite behaviour and organisational networks.

Figure 8.1 is an attempt to clarify this question. It identifies four aspects of pillarization: societal segmentation and differentiation, a normative element,

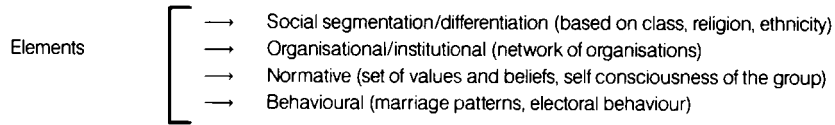


Figure 8.1 The constituent elements of the concept of pillarization

organisational features and behaviour.⁵ Societal segmentation corresponds to the social bases of the cleavages, that is to say, to the different religious groups, or to the social classes which underpin the subculture. The organisational aspect refers to the existence of a network of organisations such as trade unions, auxiliary associations and parties, which together encapsulate the lives of the members of the subculture. The normative element refers to ‘the sets of values and beliefs... which reflects the self-consciousness of the social group(s) involved’ (Bartolini and Mair 1990:215). Finally, the behavioural aspect refers to many different types of individual behaviour which in an idealised situation one would assume to be affected by and congruent with the former two elements. Examples include marriage patterns, friendship, and of course electoral behaviour.

Unpacking the concept of pillarization in this way also allows one to test hypotheses about the divergent evolution of the constituent elements of pillarization. For example, though empirical analyses suggest that many of the organisations that form the pillars have grown in size and resources, there is also evidence to suggest that the organisational networks within some of the pillars have lost an overall sense of cohesion and hierarchical control (see points 1 and 2 of Luther’s framework, as outlined in the introductory chapter of this volume, as well as the single-country chapters). These organisations seem also to have less control over certain processes such as, for example, political socialisation. If we do not take into account the multidimensional character of pillarization, we may find it difficult to be certain whether de-pillarization denotes a shrinking of the social bases of the organisations that form the pillar; the erosion of the cohesion of its organisations; the weakening presence of these organisations in society and their declining capacity to attract citizens, or the decreasing capacity of parties and pillars to structure political behaviour. It could be that pillars persist from an organisational point of view, while their impact on individual behaviour is reduced. In other words, it may well be that organisational persistence masks a decline in the structuring and stabilising capacities of subcultural organisations.

The need to identify the constituent elements of pillarization also stems from the specific research question that one wants to address. If the focus of interest is pillarization as such, then the four elements should be included in the analysis as indicators of different facets of the same phenomenon, either as a dependent variable which needs to be explained, or as an independent variable. In cases where the focus of interest is not the interrelationship of the different components of pillarization, electoral behaviour may be considered to be just one of the possible

indicators of pillarization. Conversely, if one is interested in the internal causal relationship between the different components of the phenomenon of pillarization, then the analytical division between the different dimensions becomes essential. There seems to be consensus in the literature on the existence of both a decline in the sociostructural features upon which pillars were based and of decreasing cohesion among the organisations in the political networks (Koole 1994; Müller 1996c). This chapter, however, will not go into the analysis of these trends, but will concentrate on the behavioural component and moreover will be restricted to behaviour in the electoral arena. Thus, the main goal of this chapter is to explore the consequences of these developments in the electoral arena.

The link with electoral behaviour

The link between pillarization and electoral behaviour, both at the individual and at the aggregate level, revolves around the notion of stability and the understanding of pillarization as a barrier to electoral mobility. As indicated above, pillarization entails the encapsulation of individuals in the context of organisational networks that cover most aspects of their lives. Pillarization is thus expected to have two main, interrelated consequences in the electoral arena: the stabilisation of individual electoral behaviour and of the electoral arena. We shall now review each of these hypotheses.

Hypothesis 1: pillarization and stabilisation of electoral behaviour

First, pillarization is presumed to affect individual voting behaviour by reducing the likelihood that voters shift parties from one election to the other. In a fully segmented and pillarized system, individuals are immersed into subcultures and have few incentives to choose a party other than that of their pillar. Lijphart (1981: 356) states that in plural societies ‘...since party and segmental loyalties should coincide, there should be little or no change in the voting support of the different parties from election to election: in a perfectly plural society an election is a segmental census’. Similarly, Daalder (1996:11) notes that in the hey-day of pillarization, elections tended to be ‘more of a periodical census than an expression of concrete electoral opinions regarding policies or personalities’. This summarises what other authors have called ‘structured competition’, which characterised elections in subculturally divided societies (Irwin and Van Holsteyn 1989a; Plasser *et al.* 1992). Thus the main implication of pillarization on individual voting behaviour is that the act of voting does not entail choice, but the affirmation of one’s membership of a subcultural group. The most relevant consequence of this, as Houska (1985:57) points out, is that Voting choice should remain constant from election to election since the choice is based on a stable subcultural identity which normally does not change’ within a short period of time. It is assumed that the subcultures and the organisational encapsulation of individuals are likely to create

a large proportion of voters who are isolated from incongruent political stimuli, who live in relatively homogeneous political environments, which present few incentives to change political allegiance.

A *prima facie* paradoxical feature of consociational democracy is the co-existence of on the one hand fragmented societies that are assumed to necessitate accommodative elite behaviour and on the other hand passivity and apathy on the part of the citizens and voters. According to Deschouwer (1990:33) such low levels of ideological commitment are perfectly understandable. They are one of the factors that allow elites to engage in accommodative behaviour. Since they can rely on the support of loyal voters who do not in general, however, hold strong ideological views, leaders enjoy the strategic freedom to settle political conflict through pragmatic compromise. Houska (1985:77) contends that the subcultural organisations were able to inspire stable support for their parties, replacing intense ideological commitment and mobilisation with the 'totality of a life experience'. He points to two mechanisms of this process: education, which instils the political orientation of the subculture and helps to build a feeling of commitment, and organisational encapsulation, which solidifies the results of that education by isolating individuals from information or life experiences which could endanger it. As a result, individuals' defection from their pillar or subculture is not equally costly for each individual.

As noted above, parties are able to promote amongst members of their subcultures a sense of belonging via their control of the process of political socialisation and their pervasive presence in society. Virtually all organisations with which individuals interact are organised on a segmented basis. This obviously gives pillar parties some advantage over non-pillar parties. To the extent that these processes have opened up, this should increase the likelihood of an individual changing his or her vote. To be sure, the extent to which voters are encapsulated varies between countries, between subcultures and even within subcultures (Deschouwer 1990:34). Accordingly, the preceding account of the potential impact of pillarization upon electoral behaviour should be regarded as a simplified, or idealised description.

Deschouwer (1990) has used organisational theories to analyse mobilisational incentives produced by parties and other pillar organisations and to link them to political/electoral stability. He argues that associative sanctions enhance stability by offering members a meaningful social environment and encapsulating them in a subcultural milieu. This produces a passive but loyal electorate. The feeling of belonging is the dominant incentive used by pillar organisations to reward members for their participation. On the other hand, ideological incentives rely upon the values defended by the party being congruent with individuals' beliefs. However, this predominantly generates short-term, conditional support. Electoral instability, both at the individual and at the aggregate level is more likely if short-term motivations prevail in the voting decision and thus ideological incentives are less durable than associative incentives.

However, pillarization often involves more deliberate practices that can be assumed to reinforce electoral stabilisation further. Thus Deschouwer (1990) and Luther (1992, 1997b) point to the use of material rewards in Belgium and in Austria, where the practice of patronage has increased steadily since the 1960s. The relative distribution to each subculture of favours and personal services is often formalised and is usually delivered by the organisations that make up the pillar. In principle, this could be assumed to have had a beneficial effect on the electoral stability of the pillar parties, which have in this period experienced an erosion of the social bases of their pillars (see also [Chapter 10](#)).

However, the actual impact upon the electoral position of pillar parties of their use of material incentives is not clear, amongst other things because the parties had no effective sanction to ensure that recipients of material rewards reciprocated by providing loyal electoral behaviour. In addition, social and cultural changes have made clientelism a more risky strategy, because it has made the use of sanctions increasingly ineffective. As the efficacy of associative and ideological incentives declines, the relationship between citizens and parties appears to be increasingly instrumental. As Deschouwer (1990:37) points out ‘if the possibilities of getting help from a politician increase while at the same time pre-established loyalties decline, the relationship between the politicians and their protégés becomes merely a relationship between seller and buyer...’. Accordingly, the mobilisational strategies of pillar parties are not necessarily conducive to stability in voters’ electoral behaviour. (These issues are also discussed in the introductory chapter of this volume.)

To sum up, the first hypothesis to be tested is whether pillarization correlates with low levels of electoral mobility. An extension of this first hypothesis concerns the evolution of electoral stability. We shall seek to investigate whether a relationship exists between the phases of growth and consolidation of the pillars on the one hand, and the stabilisation of the electorates on the other.

Hypothesis 2: pillarization and the closure of the electoral market

The second hypothesis is that pillarization should produce a stabilisation of the ‘supply’ of political alternatives. Though this hypothesis is not unique to consociational democracies (see the freezing hypothesis and ‘the narrowing of the support market’ as developed by Lipset and Rokkan 1967b:51), the latter type of political system is assumed to exhibit a high degree of pillarization and to have densely organised parties, thus making the scope for new party formation especially small. Pillarized political systems could thus be considered cases of highly institutionalised cleavage structures. Seen thus, the strategy of pillarization can be regarded as avoiding or restraining the ‘supply side’ of political competition (Bartolini 1995). Pillar parties are the political representatives of their subcultures, but the legitimacy of this representation depends to a large extent on the absence of other important political parties. As Luther has argued (1992:46 and in the introduction to this volume), consociational democracy requires the subcultural political elite to

be able to ‘deliver’ their side of the political bargains struck with rival subcultural elites. However, maintaining a consociational decision-making style would be made more difficult if the party system contained significant actors asserting the value of an alternative decision-making logic. Pillarization limits the opportunities for rival party actors to become established and as such can be regarded as conducive to the maintenance of consociational democracy. Yet the opportunities for new political parties to enter the system and gain representation do not depend only on the existence of strong organisational networks around parties and on the resulting lack of available voters. Indeed, some institutional arrangements typical for consociational democracies can have a perverse, or unintended effect (Luther 1992). This applies especially to electoral law, which is usually highly proportional and therefore has the effect of facilitating the entry of new parties.

The two levels of electoral stability addressed in our hypotheses are obviously linked. The higher the proportion of the electorate that is ‘available’, the greater the opportunities for new parties to make it through the system and gain enough votes to secure representation. Alternatively, in the absence of new parties, ‘available’ voters will have no alternative voting opportunities. It is difficult to establish which comes first, a reservoir of ‘available’ voters, or an alternative party.

Pillarization and electoral stability

Stabilisation and closure of the electoral market

We will start by testing the hypotheses advanced by finding indicators for the second hypothesis, namely the narrowing of the ‘support market’ and the stabilisation of the supply of political alternatives. Our first indicator of the electoral effects of pillarization is the degree to which parties connected with the pillars dominate the electoral arena (termed ‘consociational concentration’ in [Chapter 10](#)), or, conversely, the degree to which non-pillar parties are electorally relevant. Yet deciding which parties are to be considered pillar parties and which are not is not always very straightforward. The decisive criterion is neither absolute party membership, membership relative to other parties, nor even the extent of the party’s organisational network. Instead, the decision must be based upon the extent to which a given party constitutes a principal participant in the ‘consociational game’ (see [Chapter 1](#)). This can only be established on the basis of detailed knowledge of each country. The parties which this chapter identifies as pillar parties are also described as such (or as ‘parties playing the consociational game’) in the single-country studies in this volume and listed in column two of [Table 8.1](#). (Columns 3 and 4 of [Table 8.1](#) list the parties that will be used in the calculation of religion and class volatility later in this chapter.)

The joint share of the valid vote obtained by the pillar parties in Austria, Belgium and the Netherlands are provided in [Table 8.2](#) and illustrated in [Figure 8.2](#). Austria is characterised by a greater level of stability of the pillar parties than is the case in

Table 8.1 List of parties included in the calculation of block volatilities

	<i>Pillar parties</i>	<i>Religious parties</i>	<i>Class parties</i>
Austria	SPÖ		SPÖ
Belgium	ÖVP	ÖVP	
	CVP	CVP	
	PSC	PSC	
	SP		SP
	PS		PS
	PVV (later VLD)		
The Netherlands	PRL		KPB-PCB UDRT ^a
	KVP	KVP	
	ARP	ARP	
	CHU	CHU	
	CDA	CDA	
	PvdA		PvdA
	VVD		
		RKPN	DS 70
		KNP	PSP
		GPU	CPN
		SGP	SP
	RPF		
	EVP		

Notes:

a A minor Belgian party, AMADA (All the Power to the Workers), has not been included due to a mistake in the computation of the index. However, given the low levels of electoral support for this party, only 0.4 in 1974, this has not affected the results. For party abbreviations see list on pages xix– xx.

the Netherlands and Belgium. This phase of stability lasted in Austria from the 1950s to the early 1980s. Although the post-war electoral rise of the Austrian pillar parties was initially somewhat slower than that of their Dutch and Belgian counterparts, in the 1950s they managed to concentrate around 90 per cent of the valid votes. Moreover, Austrian pillar parties were able to maintain their dominance of the electoral arena twenty years longer than their Dutch or Belgian counterparts. As [Figure 8.2](#) shows, at the time when the Austrian pillar parties started to suffer a decline of their vote, the Dutch and Belgian parties had already been in decline for twenty years. However, once the electoral decline of the Austrian pillar parties started in the mid-1980s it has been sharper than has been the case either in the Netherlands or in Belgium.

The Netherlands and Belgium both look remarkably similar in the trends followed by the pillar parties, which gathered around 90 per cent of the vote in the period from the end of the Second World War until the beginning of the 1960s, when they experienced a rapid decline. This lasted until the beginning of the 1970s when in both countries the pillar parties obtained the lowest percentage of the vote (around

Table 8.2 Pillar parties' joint share of the national vote in Austria, Belgium and the Netherlands (1945–95)^a

<i>Austria</i>		<i>Belgium</i>		<i>The Netherlands</i>	
1945	94.4	1946	83.0	1946	86.2
1949	82.7	1949	88.4	1948	86.9
1953	83.4	1950	93.5	1952	86.7
1956	89.0	1954	90.5	1956	91.5
1959	89.0	1958	93.4	1959	91.7
1962	89.4	1961	90.5	1963	87.5
1966	90.9	1965	84.4	1967	78.8
1970	93.1	1968	80.6	1971	71.6
1971	93.1	1971	72.4	1972	73.0
1975	93.4	1974	74.3	1977	83.6
1979	92.9	1977	77.4	1981	76.4
1983	90.8	1978	77.2	1982	82.9
1986	84.4	1981	73.1	1986	85.3
1990	75.1	1985	78.7	1989	81.8
1994	62.6	1987	79.1	1994	66.2
1995	66.4	1991	70.1		
		1995	72.7		

Source: Elaborated by M.Méndez-Lago. All electoral data for all the tables and computations except otherwise stated come from Mackie and Rose 1991, and various issues of *Electoral Studies* for the rest of the elections.

Notes:

a Austria: SPÖ and ÖVP; Belgium: Christian Democrats (CVP and PSC), Socialists (PS and SP) and Liberals (PRL and VLD, former PVV); Netherlands: ARP, KVP, CHU (CDA from 1977), PvdA and VVD.

73 per cent) in 1971–2. From that period onwards, we have witnessed a fluctuation in the two countries (with lower levels in the share of the vote for pillar parties in the case of Belgium) which contains two waves. The first started at the beginning of the 1970s, when the share of the vote of pillar parties increased, and lasted until the end of the decade, when it started dropping again. The elections held in both countries in 1981 mark a decline in the vote of pillar parties. From then on we can see a second wave of recovery, which lasts for most of the 1980s and starts declining at the end. At this point, the similarities in the patterns followed by the two countries stop; after the 1994 general elections, the pillar parties in the Netherlands are still on a downwards trend, whereas at the last general election in Belgium, the Belgian pillar parties started a very timid increase of their joint share of the vote.

Another important task is the identification of the new type of parties the pillar parties have had to confront. In all three countries, at least part of the decline of the pillar parties' share of the vote has been attributable to the emergence or strengthening of parties advocating a fundamental change in the style of politics. Examples are the D'66 in the Netherlands, or Austrian FPÖ since its change in leader and strategy in 1986 (see Chapters 3 and 5). To be sure, there are other factors that explain the decrease, such as the emergence of the linguistic cleavage in Belgium.

A second possible indicator of change in the extent of pillar parties' domination of electoral outcomes is Rae's index of electoral fractionalisation, which is based on the number and relative electoral strength of parties (see Figure 8.3 and Table 8.3). If we

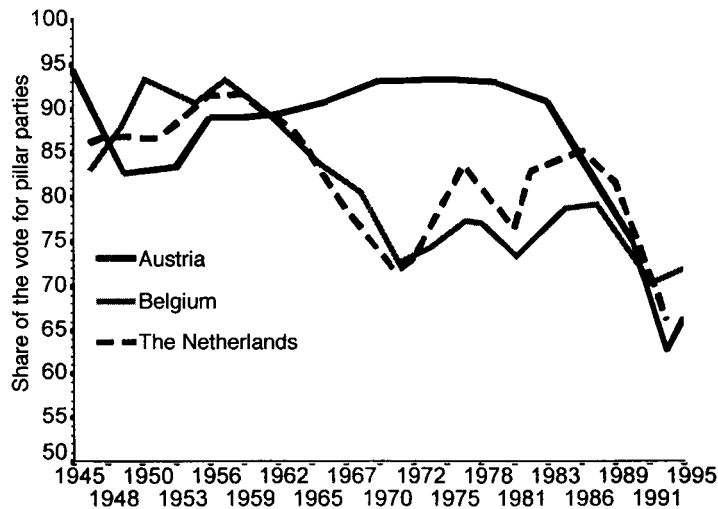


Figure 8.2 Pillar parties' joint share of the national vote in Austria, Belgium and the Netherlands (1945–95)

consider a situation of initial dominance of pillar parties, an increase in fractionalisation can also be interpreted as a decrease in the electoral hold of these parties.

As expected, Figure 8.3 shows that the level of electoral fractionalisation rose as the combined share of the vote of pillar parties declined. The case of Belgium is somewhat unusual, since the increase of electoral fractionalisation is due not only to the decline of pillar parties, but also to their bifurcation into separate Francophone and Flemish parties. From the electoral point of view, there is no longer one national party system in Belgium, since the Francophone and Flemish parties do not compete in the same electoral arena (Dewachter 1987; Deschouwer 1994a, 1996; Chapter 4). Yet the electoral fractionalisation index computed without taking into consideration the split of the traditional parties also shows a clear increase, albeit smaller than when the parties are each considered separately.

At the level of the electoral arena, these indicators show a clear trend. In Belgium and the Netherlands, pillar parties managed to dominate until the mid-1960s, whereas in Austria the decline did not commence until the 1980s. However, both the Belgian and Dutch pillar parties have undergone two subsequent cycles of recovery and decline. Whether this constitutes a relative success, or a failure of the pillar parties, is a matter of interpretation. Though their support has declined, they still control two-thirds of votes. A more fundamental question is whether it is still legitimate to depict all of these parties as pillar parties, since electoral considerations have led some to choose to attract electoral support by distancing themselves from traditional consociational practices.

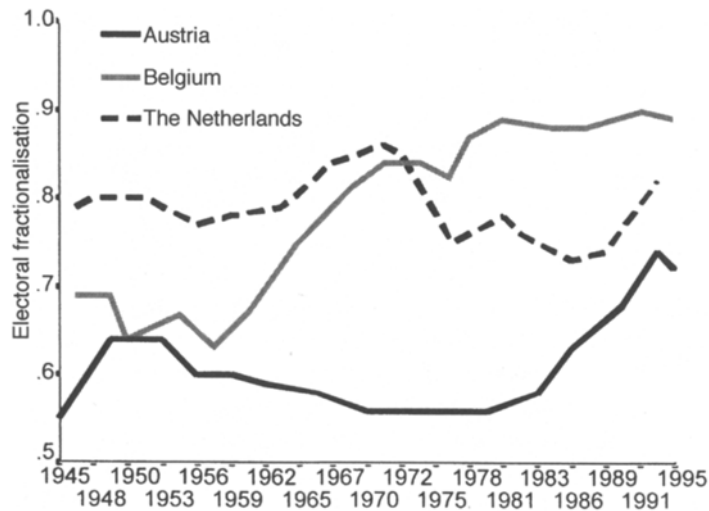


Figure 8.3 Electoral fractionalisation in Austria, Belgium and the Netherlands (1945–95)

Stabilisation of electorates

The first hypothesis advanced in the third part of this chapter concerned the effects of pillarization on individual electoral behaviour. Pillarization should reduce the incentives for switching parties and thus promote stable electoral behaviour at the individual level. At the aggregate level, this should produce a small amount of available voters. Conversely, de-pillarization is assumed to produce more open competition, in which parties not only mobilise their own subcultures, but also appeal to voters of other groups (see Irwin and Van Holsteyn 1989a; Luther 1992 and Plasser *et al.* 1992).

The most widely used indicator of mobility based on aggregate data is the index of net volatility, which has been used to assess electoral change both at the individual and at the aggregate level (Pedersen 1979; Bartolini and Mair 1990: 20). Though it would probably be more desirable to explore the hypothesis using survey data, these are not available. However, as Bartolini and Mair have argued, ‘aggregate electoral volatility may be considered as a valid indicator of the cumulation of individual voting shifts’, since the two measures are positively associated (Bartolini and Mair 1990:37).

The theoretical state of absolute stability of the electorate corresponds to the situation of absolute closure of cleavage relations (Bartolini and Mair 1990), which for our purposes might be considered to correspond to a situation in which social and organisational pillarization is so pronounced that it prevents any electoral mobility. Admittedly, volatility not only depends on the degree of cleavage or pillar closure, but also, as Bartolini and Mair maintain, the other factors are somewhat ‘residual’, since it is the degree of closure that determines the structural or ‘normal’ level of volatility in a political system. Variations around this ‘normal’ level are the

Table 8.3 Rae's index^a of (electoral) party system fractionalisation applied to Austria, Belgium and the Netherlands (1945–95)

<i>Austria</i>		<i>Belgium</i>		<i>The Netherlands</i>		
1945	0.55	1946	0.69	1946	0.79	
1949	0.64	1949	0.69	1948	0.80	
1953	0.64	1950	0.64	1952	0.80	
1956	0.60	1954	0.67	1956	0.77	
1959	0.60	1958	0.63	1959	0.78	
1962	0.59	1961	0.67	1963	0.79	
1966	0.58	1965	0.75	1967	0.84	
1970	0.56	1968	0.81	0.76	1971	0.86
1971	0.56	1971	0.84	0.79	1972	0.85
1975	0.56	1974	0.84	0.78	1977	0.75
1979	0.56	1977	0.82	0.76	1981	0.78
1983	0.58	1978	0.87	0.77	1982	0.76
1986	0.63	1981	0.89	0.81	1986	0.73
1990	0.68	1985	0.88	0.78	1989	0.74
1994	0.74	1987	0.88	0.78	1994	0.82
1995	0.72	1991	0.90	0.82		
		1995	0.89	0.81		

Source: Elaborated by M.Méndez-Lago

Notes:

a Rae's index of electoral fractionalisation = $1 - \sum(p_i)^2$, where p is the proportion of the valid vote of each party (Rae, 1968).

b Electoral fractionalisation considering the CVP and the PSC as one party, the PS and the SP as another and the PRL and the PVV (later VLD) as another party.

result of the influence of factors such as the policy distance between parties, the number of political parties in competition, the electoral system, the level and changes in electoral participation (since abstention figures are not included in the calculation of the volatility index), and finally all sorts of contingent short-term factors (Bartolini and Mair 1990: 38–9).

The evolution of total volatility 1945–96

The results of the computations of the index of total volatility for all elections from 1948 to 1995 are presented in Figure 8.4. In order to see the trends and to check for the possibility of a stabilisation of electorates over time, it is better to look at the mean of total volatility in a number of elections, and only go back to look at specific elections in case they are outliers or elections of particular interest.⁶ The mean and standard deviations of total volatility for each of the three electoral phases (1945–65, 1966–85 and 1986–96)⁷ are provided in diagrammatic form in Figures 8.5, 8.6 and 8.7.

The first hypothesis was that electoral volatility should be particularly low in pillarized political systems, lower than in other systems. If the societal

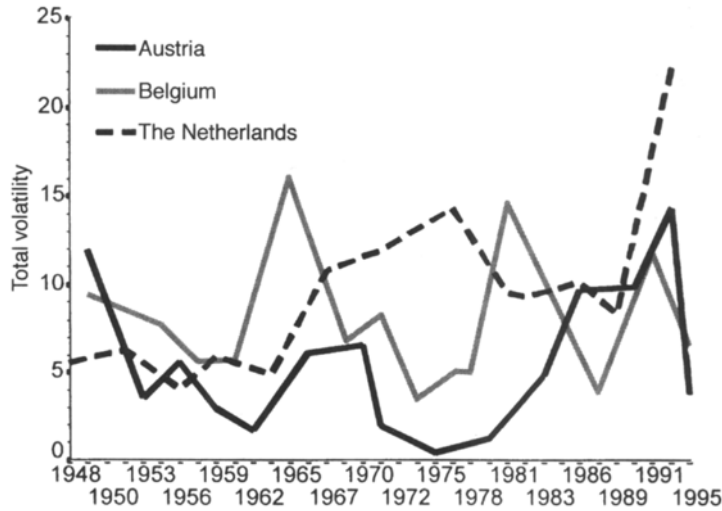


Figure 8.4 Total volatility per election in Austria, Belgium and the Netherlands, (1948–95)

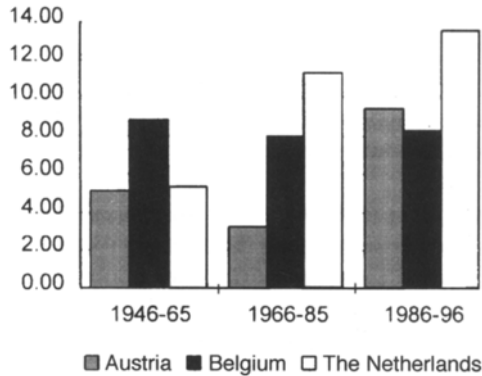


Figure 8.5 Mean of total volatility per electoral phase in Austria, Belgium and the Netherlands (1946–96)

characteristics of consociational systems tended to erode, we should expect an increase in volatility.

In the first electoral phase (1945–65), both Austria and the Netherlands had levels of total volatility which were among the lowest in Western Europe (see Table 8.4), but they are grouped together with other countries that are neither segmented nor pillarized such as the United Kingdom. The level of volatility in Belgium has to be considered ‘medium’ or ‘medium-high’ in comparison to other West European countries.

In the following electoral phase (1966–85), Austria has the lowest mean of electoral volatility of all countries. Belgium presents a similar mean total volatility as in the previous phase, while many other countries show considerable changes. Finally, the

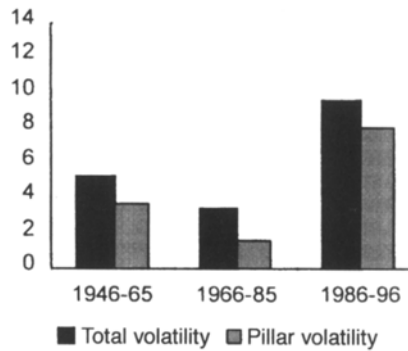


Figure 8.6 Mean of total and pillar volatility per electoral phase in Austria (1946–96)

Netherlands have in this phase the second highest level of volatility. In these first two phases, our three countries have certainly not exhibited levels of total volatility lower than the rest of Western Europe.

The story is also different for each of our countries. In the two first electoral phases, the mean electoral volatility in Austria is rather low. That might be partially explained by the party system: a two (or two and a half) party system in the case of Austria, while Belgium and the Netherlands have multi-party systems. The trend followed by electoral volatility in Austria is very clear if we look at [Figure 8.5](#), which shows how our second electoral phase (1966–85) was the most stable of the post-war period with a mean total volatility of 3.3 and a standard deviation of 2.4 (see [Table 8.5](#) for the standard deviation). In the following phase (1986–96), total volatility went up by more than six points.

Belgium follows a rather stable pattern (see [Figure 8.5](#)), but with a higher level of total volatility. The standard deviation around the mean is quite high, but also stable in the three phases, due to the fact that there are deviating elections in all of them. There are three important peaks which account for the relatively high standard deviation in each phase. They correspond to the 1965, 1981 and 1991 elections. If we calculate the mean volatility of the whole post-war period without considering those three elections, and also without the one just after the war, we get a mean volatility of 6.2 with a standard deviation of 1.9, whereas including these three elections the mean is 8.3 with a standard deviation of 3.6.

Contrary to this ‘stability with peaks’, the evolution of electoral volatility in the Netherlands presents a clearer upward trend, particularly from 1967 onwards, which were the elections in which the effects of the erosion of both the social bases of segmentation and the organisational pillarization became more obvious. The increase in electoral instability is not only shown by the rising means of the levels of total volatility in each phase (see [Figure 8.5](#)), but also by the increasing size of the standard deviation around the mean, which is very small for the first two phases, and grows considerably in the period from 1986 to 1996. To be sure, this might be due to the smaller number of elections included in this last phase, but also to the

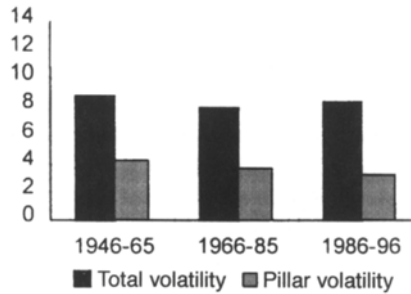


Figure 8.7 Mean of total and pillar volatility per electoral phase in Belgium (1946–96)

Table 8.4 Mean of total volatility per electoral phase in Western Europe (1945–65 and 1966–85)

	1945–65	1966–85
Switzerland	3.3	6.3
United Kingdom	4.6	6.7
Norway	4.8	10.4
Sweden	5.0	6.7
Finland	5.0	8.4
Austria	5.2	3.3
The Netherlands	5.4	11.4
Denmark	8.7	13.5
Belgium	8.8	8.0
Ireland	10.7	5.1
Germany	12.4	5.8
Italy	12.7	7.2
France	16.3	9.3

Source: Bartolini and Mair (1990:111), except for the means of Austria, Belgium and the Netherlands, which are our own calculation. There is little discrepancy between the two calculations, except for the case of Belgium, where the difference between our index and the one calculated by Bartolini and Mair is 0.6 for 1946–65 and 0.3 for 1966–85. In the case of the Netherlands the difference is 0.2 and 0.4 respectively. This does not alter the relative position of these countries in this list.

high peak of the 1994 elections. As can be observed in Figure 8.4, the highest levels of electoral volatility, excluding the 1994 election, were attained from 1967 to 1977, a period in which most authors agree that the Netherlands no longer operated as a consociational democracy (Andeweg and Irwin 1993, Daalder 1996). This matches the expectations of a low degree of electoral volatility during the time when pillarization and consociational practices were most pronounced, and a higher degree of electoral mobility once they started to disappear. As Bartolini and Mair (1990:110) state ‘it is tempting to see this pattern [of total volatility] as reflecting the history of Dutch consociationalism’⁸.

Volatility between pillar and non-pillar parties

As Bartolini and Mair (1990:36) noted during their search for an appropriate measure of the stability or hold of cleavages, the total volatility figure is an indicator of limited utility, since it masks a variety of different types of electoral movement. In order to achieve greater insight into the evolution of volatility in the three countries with which we are concerned here, it might be useful to explore whether we could adopt in amended form the solution Bartolini and Mair proposed to resolve their dilemma: the index of block volatility (BV). The latter is based on change at the level of blocks of parties. Two or more parties which share a common property are aggregated in terms of their electoral results, and it is only the net electoral changes between these blocks which enter the calculation of the index (Bartolini and Mair 1990:22). Block volatility represents the part of the total net electoral change which occurs between the two groups of parties which have been aggregated into blocks. The remaining part of total volatility is defined by Bartolini as within-block volatility (WBV).⁹

In their analysis, Bartolini and Mair consider the class parties of the left as one block, versus the rest of the parties. In the context of the present analysis, there are a number of dichotomies that might prove useful. The first type of 'block volatility' we shall refer to concerns movement between pillar versus non-pillar parties and can be used to check whether pillarization has produced closure of mobility from pillar to non-pillar parties, and whether this relationship holds over the period of time studied. We shall label this type of block volatility 'pillar volatility'. The difficulty regarding which parties to include as pillar parties in each country has already been discussed elsewhere in this chapter. To be sure, some of the choices are questionable, and therefore being aware of them is important when interpreting the figures of 'pillar volatility'.

The second important point is to spell out our expectations regarding the evolution of 'pillar volatility', i.e. a set of guidelines which are useful to interpret the trends in pillar volatility with respect to our first hypothesis about the stabilisation of electoral behaviour. Block volatility is used by Bartolini and Mair to measure the closure, strength, or hold of the class cleavage. Low levels of block volatility are associated with closure, whereas high levels are associated with openness of a cleavage line. Similarly, in this chapter 'pillar volatility' is associated with closure of the pillar/non-pillar parties line whereas high levels are connected with openness. The problem is to find the threshold used to classify a certain level of volatility as low or high. Bartolini and Mair used the overall mean of class volatility in Western European countries analysed in their study as the reference point to classify a particular block volatility as high, medium and low. In the present analysis, 'pillar volatility' (analogous to Bartolini and Mair's notion of block volatility), will be discussed with reference to the evolution within each country, i.e. taking the mean of each country as the point of reference.

In an 'ideal' pillarized system, we would expect pillar volatility to be low; there would be little exchange of votes between pillar and non-pillar parties. As a matter of fact,

Table 8.5 Total volatility and block volatility defined by pillars, religion and class by country and electoral phase in Austria, Belgium and the Netherlands (1945–96)

	<i>Total vol</i>	<i>Tvstdv^a</i>	<i>Ptblol</i>	<i>Pilstdv^a</i>	<i>Pilsal</i>	<i>Reltbl</i>	<i>Relstd</i>	<i>Classvol</i>	<i>Classsal</i>
Austria	1946–65	5.16	4.09	3.70	5.02	3.38	69.7	2.30	47.6
Austria	1966–85	3.31	2.39	1.66	1.80	1.90	54.5	1.68	51.1
Austria	1986–96	9.50	4.46	8.00	3.76	4.03	39.7	4.08	47.6
Belgium	1946–65	8.80	4.10	4.23	1.46	4.55	57.3	3.83	43.9
Belgium	1966–85	7.97	3.54	3.71	2.59	3.44	41.7	0.77	11.0
Belgium	1986–96	8.33	4.04	3.30	0.40	2.62	27.3	2.43	24.2
The Netherlands	1946–65	5.37	0.86	1.49	1.70	1.79	33.1	2.67	49.8
The Netherlands	1966–85	11.41	1.93	6.11	1.39	3.11	26.4	3.56	32.1
The Netherlands	1986–96	13.57	7.53	7.20	7.30	5.83	36.0	3.50	24.0

Source: Elaborated by M. Méndez-Lago.

Note:

a *Tvstdv* and *pilstdv* are the standard deviations of the total and pillar volatility, respectively, in each electoral phase.

following our hypothesis about the stabilisation of individual voting behaviour, we expect both total volatility and 'pillar volatility' to be low.¹⁰ In other words, since the subcultures are mutually exclusive, we anticipate few electoral shifts among the parties representing these subcultures, i.e. among pillar parties, but we also predict little movement from these parties to non-pillar parties. However, we can expect changes in the levels of total volatility and of 'pillar volatility' if there is any change in the conditions that facilitated the success of the strategy of encapsulation. The first expected effect of such a change would take the form of an increase in 'pillar volatility', that is to say, of shifts from pillar to non-pillar parties. The reason why we expect first an increase of pillar volatility rather than movement from one pillar party to another is easy to explain: it is more logical to anticipate initial moves of voters to non-pillar parties, since support to these parties might imply a certain 'denial' of the group identity the voter was part of, but does not mean acquiring a rival one. At a later stage, following the same line of reasoning, we can anticipate that both pillar and within-pillar volatility would increase, given that the forces that hitherto prevented movements within the pillar parties would wane even further. In that case, electoral movement from one pillar party to another would become less 'costly', for reasons such as the erosion of the bases of social segmentation and of organisational differentiation, or as a result of a defensive reaction developed by pillar parties in an attempt to recover their share of the vote by changing their strategies, from mobilising their own supporters to trying to get votes from other camps.¹¹ All of these changes would therefore result in an increase of both total and pillar volatility.

Pillar volatility as defined here only measures the movement from pillar parties to non-pillar parties. This problem can be solved if we interpret pillar volatility in relation to total volatility, then we are able to see the proportion of the total volatility that takes place from pillar to non-pillar parties and the proportion of it that takes place in each of the blocks (among pillar parties on the one hand and non-pillar parties on the other). Therefore, pillar volatility can be interpreted on its own, but in the context of the hypothesis advanced in this chapter it makes more sense to interpret it with respect to total volatility. For this purpose, the means of both total and pillar volatility for each of these phases has been computed. They are reported both in [Table 8.5](#) and in [Figures 8.6, 8.7 and 8.8](#). This relationship can also be summarised by calculating the ratio between pillar and total volatility. Bartolini and Mair (1990:79) refer to this ratio as the cleavage salience, i.e. the proportion of the total electoral change which is accounted for by inter-block electoral change. If this ratio is small, then inter-block electoral exchanges constitute a small proportion of the total electoral mobility and therefore most of the electoral shifts have occurred inside each block. Conversely, when it is big, inter-block changes account for a large proportion of the total amount of total changes. It can be multiplied by 100 to enable one to interpret it in terms of percentages (Bartolini and Mair 1990:44). Salience can be low or high, independent of the absolute level of total volatility. Bartolini and Mair (1990:44) also emphasise the theoretical relevance of this

Table 8.6 Evolution of different volatility measures in Austria (1949–95)

	<i>Total vol</i>	<i>Pilvol</i>	<i>Pilsal</i>	<i>Relvol</i>	<i>Realsal</i>	<i>Classvol</i>	<i>Classal</i>
1949	12.00	11.70	97.5	5.80	48.3	6.20	51.7
1953	3.55	0.65	18.3	2.75	77.5	3.55	100
1956	5.65	5.65	100	4.75	84.1	0.05	0.9
1959	2.95	0.05	1.7	1.85	62.7	0.65	22.0
1962	1.65	0.45	27.3	1.25	75.8	1.05	63.6
1966	4.80	4.80	100	2.90	60.4	0.70	14.6
1970	6.50	2.20	33.8	3.60	55.4	3.50	53.8
1971	2.02	0.02	1.0	1.62	80.2	1.58	78.2
1975	0.42	0.32	76.2	0.08	19.0	0.22	52.4
1979	1.30	0.50	38.5	1.10	84.6	0.40	30.8
1983	4.80	2.10	43.8	1.30	27.1	3.70	77.1
1986	9.65	6.35	65.8	1.85	19.2	4.45	46.1
1990	9.85	9.35	94.9	9.25	93.9	0.35	3.6
1994	14.70	12.50	85.2	4.40	29.9	8.30	56.5
1995	3.80	3.80	100	0.60	15.8	3.20	84.2
Mean (1945–96)	5.58	4.03	58.9	2.87	55.6	2.53	49.0

Source: Elaborated by M. Méndez-Lago.

For Tables 8.4, 8.5 and 8.6: total vol=aggregate volatility, pilvol=block volatility considering pillar (as defined in Table 8.1), versus non-pillar parties, pilsal=(pilvol/totvol)×100, relvol=block volatility considering religious vs. non-religious parties (as defined in Table 8.1), realsal=(relvol/totvol)×100, class vol=class volatility considering class vs. non-class parties (as defined in Table 8.1) and classal=(classvol/totvol)×100.

measure, which constitutes an indicator of the relative electoral importance of a given cleavage as a dimension of competition and, as such, does not tell us about the cleavage itself, but about its relative weight within the broader cleavage structure. The third columns in Tables 8.6, 8.7 and 8.8 report the evolution of pillar volatility for each election in the three countries analysed, whereas the figures for pillar salience for the three countries are reported in the fourth column.

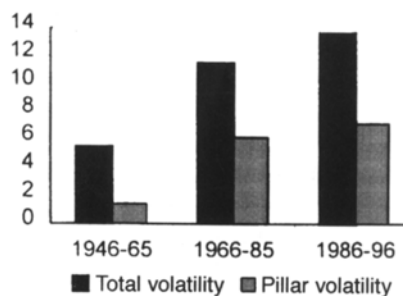


Figure 8.8 Mean of total and pillar volatility per electoral phase in the Netherlands (1946–96)

In all three cases, the pattern of pillar volatility resembles that of total volatility. In Belgium, where total volatility has been more stable than in the other cases, the

Table 8.7 Evolution of different volatility measures in Belgium (1949–95)

	<i>Total vol</i>	<i>Pilvol</i>	<i>Pilsal</i>	<i>Relvol</i>	<i>Relsal</i>	<i>Classvol</i>	<i>Classal</i>
1949	9.40	5.40	57.4	3.20	34.0	7.10	75.5
1950	9.00	5.10	56.7	4.65	51.7	2.00	22.2
1954	7.70	3.00	39.0	4.80	62.3	1.70	22.1
1958	5.40	2.90	53.7	4.15	76.9	3.20	59.3
1961	5.00	2.90	58.0	3.95	79.0	2.10	42.0
1965	16.30	6.10	37.4	6.55	40.2	6.90	42.3
1968	6.70	3.80	56.7	3.30	49.3	1.60	23.9
1971	8.40	8.20	97.6	4.90	58.3	1.00	11.9
1974	4.60	1.90	41.3	2.10	45.7	0.40	8.7
1977	5.60	2.30	41.1	2.55	45.5	0.80	14.3
1978	5.90	0.30	5.1	0.25	4.2	0.50	8.5
1981	15.00	4.00	26.7	6.85	45.7	0.50	3.3
1985	9.60	5.50	57.3	4.15	43.2	0.60	6.3
1987	4.50	0.40	8.9	1.10	24.4	0.80	17.8
1991	12.55	8.85	70.5	5.95	47.4	5.85	46.6
1995	7.95	0.65	8.2	0.80	10.1	0.65	8.2
Mean (1945–96)	8.35	3.83	44.7	3.7	44.9	1.3	25.8

Source: Elaborated by M.Méndez-Lago.

level of pillar volatility has also remained stable, both in size and in salience in relation to total volatility, at least for the two first electoral phases (1945–65 and 1966–85). The low figures of the standard deviation for the mean of pillar volatility in the three phases reinforce this idea of stability (see Table 8.5). The salience of pillar volatility has diminished in the last electoral phase, which suggests that there are other forces increasing total volatility, rather than the move between pillar and non-pillar parties. Therefore we do not see in Belgium the pattern anticipated in the preceding paragraphs regarding the evolution of total and pillar volatility.

In the cases of the Netherlands since the 1960s and of Austria since the mid-1980s, pillar volatility has followed the rising pattern of total volatility. Austria follows quite closely the pattern described above. Thus from 1945 to 1965 we see a period where total and pillar volatility were both low, though there were initially a few elections characterised by higher electoral mobility, when the voter movement which set the basis for the subsequent low levels of electoral mobility was being established (see Table 8.6 for data on particular elections). The results are more distinctive in the second phase, which shows even lower total and pillar volatility. Changes in the social and political conditions facilitating pillarization started to take place in the phase from 1966 to 1985, but were only reflected in the electoral arena during the most recent phase (1986–96), when the salience of pillar volatility increased greatly, reaching around 85 per cent of total volatility. In other words, most of the electoral change of the last phase can be understood as a decline in the combined electoral hold of the two pillar parties.

Table 8.8 Evolution of different volatility measures in the Netherlands (1948–94)

	<i>Total vol</i>	<i>Pilvol</i>	<i>Pilsal</i>	<i>Relvol</i>	<i>Relsal</i>	<i>Classvol</i>	<i>Classal</i>
1948	5.60	0.70	12.5	3.5	62.5	5.6	100
1952	6.30	0.30	4.8	2.5	39.7	1.8	28.6
1956	4.10	2.20	53.7	1.7	41.5	2.3	56.1
1959	5.90	0.10	1.7	1	16.9	2.9	49.2
1963	4.95	4.15	83.8	0.25	5.1	0.75	15.2
1967	10.75	8.75	81.4	4.85	45.1	3.75	34.9
1971	11.95	0.15	1.3	4.45	37.2	5.25	43.9
1972	12.55	1.65	13.1	6.45	51.4	3.75	29.9
1977	14.35	12.25	85.4	1.65	11.5	1.85	12.9
1981	9.55	7.35	77.0	0.25	2.6	4.75	49.7
1982	9.30	6.50	69.9	1	10.8	2	21.5
1986	10.15	2.45	24.1	4.15	40.9	0.65	6.4
1989	8.35	3.55	42.5	0.95	11.4	2.85	34.1
1994	22.20	15.60	70.3	12.4	55.9	7	31.5
Mean (1945–96)	9.71	4.69	48.1	3.22	30.9	3.23	36.7

Source: Elaborated by M.Méndez-Lago.

In the Netherlands, pillar volatility is virtually non-existent in the first phase, which is also characterised by low total volatility. However, in the next two electoral phases, both gradually increase and demonstrate the most consistent rising trend of the three countries analysed. It is interesting to note that the salience of pillar volatility was greater in the 1966–85 phase than it had been during 1946–65, but then declined again from 1986 to 1996. In other words, pillar volatility grew as total volatility increased, but not at the same speed, particularly in the last phase (1986–96).

In both the Netherlands and Austria, most of the rise in total volatility can be explained by the increase of voter shifts from pillar to non-pillar parties. Thus the rejection of established/pillar parties and the search for other styles of politics is an important component of electoral change, even if this means abandoning (at least in one important aspect such as voting) the traditional identity of the pillar to which one once belonged.

After having assessed the trends of total volatility and pillar volatility, it is useful to look at Figures 8.9, 8.10 and 8.11, which present their evolution per election. These can provide us with some details hidden in the general trend, or signal outlier elections with specific characteristics. In the case of Austria, the lines for total volatility and pillar volatility per election run practically parallel for the whole period under analysis, so Figure 8.9 presents no information additional to that presented in Figure 8.6.

Both in Belgium and in the Netherlands, the patterns of pillar volatility by election are more interesting. As we can see in Figure 8.10, the line representing Belgian pillar volatility does not display two out of the three peaks present in the evolution of

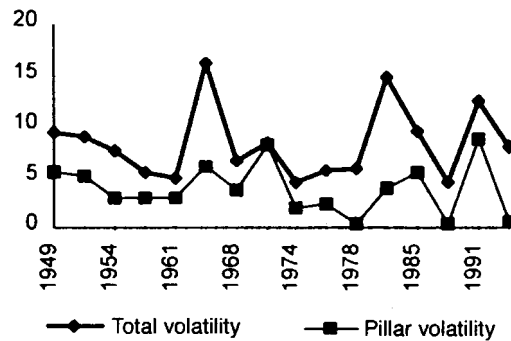


Figure 8.10 Evolution of total and pillar volatility in Belgium (1949–96)

total volatility, which correspond to the 1965 and 1981 elections respectively, whereas it does exhibit the one corresponding to the 1991 elections. This leads us to formulate an interpretation according to which the two former peaks might be better explained in terms of voting shifts

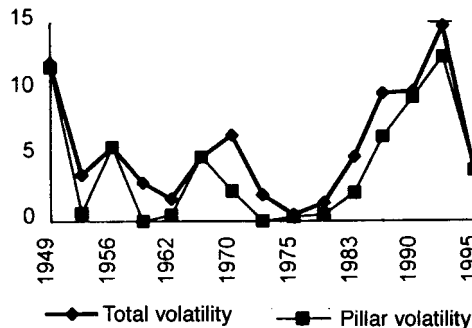


Figure 8.9 Evolution of total and pillar volatility in Austria (1949–95)

among the parties inside each of the blocks, i.e. among the pillar parties on the one hand, and among the non-pillar parties on the other hand, whereas at the last peak (the 1991 election) the shifts of electors from pillar to non-pillar parties and vice versa constitute a greater part of the total number of shifts. In other words, as columns 3 and 4 in Table 8.7 show, in the 1965 and 1981 elections, pillar volatility was lower than in 1991, constituting 37.4 and 26.7 per cent of total volatility. This suggests that there were few exchanges of votes from the pillar parties block to the non-pillar one. Since we know that it was particularly in these elections that new parties made a breakthrough into the system, this result seems surprising. According to this measure, a good part of the voter shifts occurred among the parties within each of the blocks and also from new electors or previous non-voters that are not taken into account in the index. This is not the case with the third most volatile election, that of 1991, in which exchanges of votes between pillar and non-pillar parties constituted most of the total volatility.

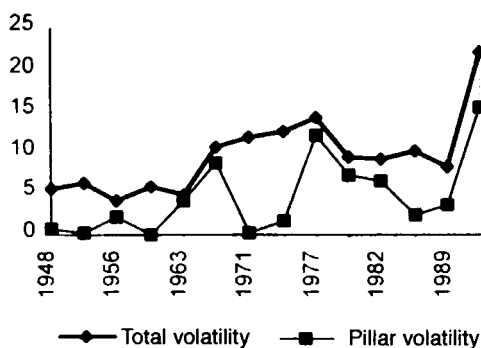


Figure 8.11 Evolution of total and pillar volatility in the Netherlands (1948–96)

Figure 8.11 shows the evolution of total and of pillar volatility in each Dutch election from 1945 to 1994. Pillar volatility is very low, virtually non-existent in the elections until 1963. At the end of this first phase, it started rising, reaching a peak in the 1967 elections, when pillar volatility accounted for most (80.1 per cent) of the vote shifts. At the second most volatile post-war election (1977), pillar volatility again accounts for most of the total volatility, with a salience of 85.4 per cent. Most of the electoral change in that year can thus be understood as shifts between the pillar and non-pillar blocks. Conversely, there are elections with a fairly high total volatility in which pillar volatility is virtually non-existent. This is the case in 1971 and 1972, when most of the vote shifts took place within each of the blocks defined and was—albeit to a more limited extent—also the case in 1986, when pillar volatility accounted for a 24.1 per cent of total volatility (see Table 8.8).

Volatility across class and religion cleavage lines

Party blocks can also be defined by reference to other criteria, such as the cleavage lines of religion and class, which are common to the three countries studied. Since these are the conflict lines defining the mutually exclusive subcultures, this might constitute a possible, albeit only partial, way to tap the degree of electoral change within pillar parties. The results of the calculation of religious volatility and class volatility, and the salience of the two volatilities with respect to total volatility for the three countries are presented in columns 5 to 8 of Tables 8.6, 8.7 and 8.8. The same procedure used to present the figures of pillar volatility has been followed, namely the means of class/religion volatility for each electoral phase have been computed and plotted against the evolution of total volatility in each country (see also Table 8.5).

In their seminal work on the evolution of the class cleavage in Western Europe, Bartolini and Mair (1990) hypothesised that class should be mainly a dimension of competition in homogeneous societies, whereas in segmented ones it should be more a domain of identification, therefore leading to small amounts of voter shifts across cleavage lines, i.e. across parties on different sides of a cleavage line. They

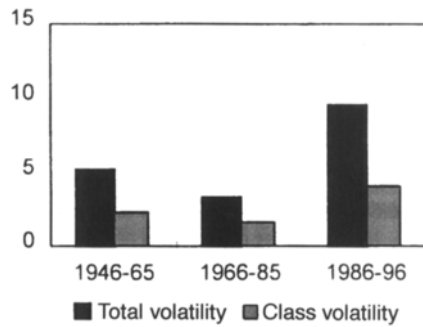


Figure 8.12 Means of total and class volatility per electoral phase in Austria (1945–96)

also predicted class volatility would decrease over time, as the class cleavage became institutionalised.

In the case of Austria, Table 8.5 and Figure 8.12 show a decline in class volatility from the first (1945–66) to the second electoral phase (1966–85), a trend which is then reversed in the third electoral phase (1986–96), when class volatility increases. In spite of the increase in the mean level of class volatility, its mean salience remains more or less stable over the period analysed, growing slightly only at the last electoral phase. On average, class accounts for half of the total volatility in Austria since 1945, a very high figure compared to other Western European countries.¹² After the Second World War, class volatility was quite high, and represented a high proportion of total volatility in the first two general elections, particularly in 1953, when all the total volatility is accounted for by shifts across the class cleavage line. After these initial elections, class volatility dropped to lower levels, as did its salience. In these cases total volatility must thus be explained by looking at other dimensions, or features, rather than at shifts across the class cleavage line. Both total and class volatility increased in the two subsequent electoral phases, in which class volatility augmented substantially its weight in total volatility, with the exception of the elections in 1990, characterised by very low class salience. If we look at column five in Table 8.6, we notice that in Austria, ‘religion volatility’ (i.e. shifts across the religious cleavage) is very important in this election, accounting for around 90 per cent of total volatility.

If we group the parties on the basis of the religious cleavage, we have the ÖVP against the rest of the parties. The evolution of this measure is reported in Table 8.6, and the means for the three electoral phases are shown in Table 8.5 and Figure 8.13. As we can see in Figure 8.13, religion volatility tends to follow closely the pattern of total volatility for most of the period analysed, except in the last electoral phase (1986–96). As we lack a cross-national comparative study of the religious cleavage analogous to that conducted in respect of the class cleavage by Bartolini and Mair (1990), we do not really know whether Austria’s level of volatility across the religion cleavage line is high or low by Western European standards. If we compare it with the two other political systems analysed in this chapter,

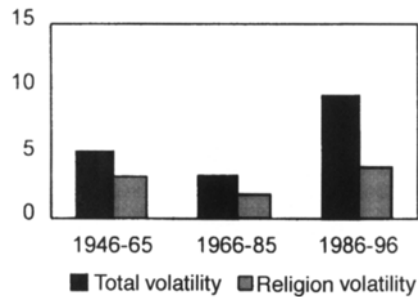


Figure 8.13 Means of total and religion volatility per electoral phase in Austria (1945–96)

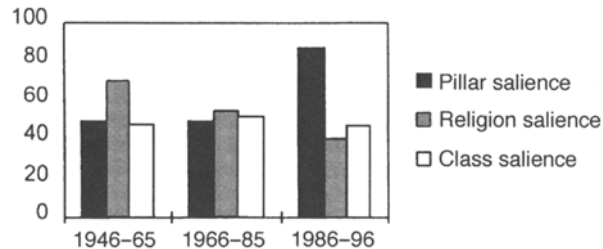


Figure 8.14 Austrian pillar, religion and class salience compared (1946–96)

however, we see that the levels of volatility across the religion cleavage line in Austria are roughly similar to those of Belgium and the Netherlands, but in these two other cases, the level of total volatility is higher. The salience of the religion cleavage is therefore proportionately greater in Austria than in the other two countries, a suspicion that is confirmed looking at the figures in [Table 8.5](#) and the last column in [Figures 8.14](#), [8.17](#) and [8.20](#).

[Figure 8.14](#) shows the evolution of the mean salience of the three types of block volatility that have been analysed in the three electoral phases in Austria. It becomes clear that the only type of volatility whose importance increases over time with respect to total volatility is the one that distinguishes pillar and non-pillar parties, i.e. the SPÖ and the ÖVP on the one hand and the FPÖ, the Greens and other small parties on the other.

As [Table 8.5](#) shows, during the first electoral phase (1945–65), Belgium's mean class volatility was 3.8. This constitutes the highest rate of all the Western European countries included in the study carried out by Bartolini and Mair (1990: 111). In the second electoral phase (1966–85), its class volatility dropped considerably and became one of the lowest in Western Europe (Bartolini and Mair 1990:111), only to grow again in the 1986 to 1996 phase (see [Figure 8.15](#)). The evolution of class volatility presents three peaks: one corresponds to the first elections after the end of the war, and the other two correspond to two of the most volatile elections in the period studied, the ones held in 1965 and in 1991 (see [Table 8.7](#)). In the 1945–66 electoral phase, mean class salience was around 44 per

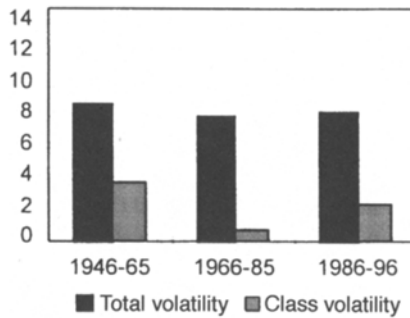


Figure 8.15 Means of total and class volatility per electoral phase in Belgium (1946–96)

cent, whereas in the following phase, it declined to 11 per cent, increasing again during 1986–96 to around 24 per cent of total volatility. This leads us to the conclusion that—

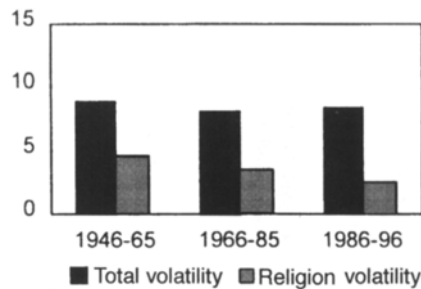


Figure 8.16 Means of total and religion volatility per electoral phase in Belgium (1946–96)

particularly from 1966 to 1996—cleavage lines other than class better account for the levels of total volatility.¹³

The mean salience of religious cleavage volatility in Belgium, although higher than that of class volatility, also declined across the three electoral phases. It averaged 57.3 per cent of total volatility during 1945–65, 41.7 per cent during 1966–85 and 27.3 per cent from 1986–96 (see Figure 8.16). In other words, the degree to which electoral change in Belgium can be explained by shifts of voters from religious to non-religious parties has diminished, particularly in the period from 1966 to 1996. Figure 8.17 shows the evolution of the salience of the three block volatilities defined in this chapter. They have evolved in different ways, but all display a pattern of decline and converge in the last electoral phase on levels of 25 to 30 per cent of salience with respect to the level of total volatility.

Figure 8.18 shows a trend of stability of the class cleavage line in the Netherlands, with stable levels of class volatility matched by increasing levels of total volatility. Accordingly, the salience of class has experienced a decline from a mean of 49.8 per cent of total volatility from 1945–65, to 32.1 per cent thereafter and 24.0

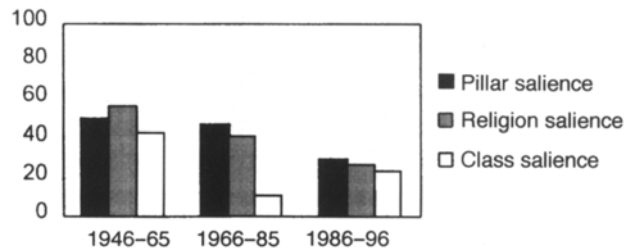


Figure 8.17 Belgian pillar, religion and class salience compared (1946–96)

in the most recent period (see Figure 8.20). Bartolini and Mair interpret this evolution by suggesting that class has become more a domain of identification than a dimension of competition, and that the amount of voter shifts across this cleavage line has therefore diminished. As in the case of Belgium, the decrease in salience of the class cleavage points to the need to find other cleavages, or issues, which could help account for the increasing levels of total volatility.

Religion is the other cleavage line that has traditionally characterised the Dutch political system. The mean level of religion volatility in the three phases has increased (see Figure 8.19 and Table 8.5). Using Bartolini and Mair's interpretation, the fact that 'religion volatility' has increased suggests a transformation of religion from a domain of identification to a dimension of competition. The mean of 'religion volatility' shows a clearer pattern of increase quasi-parallel to that of total volatility, both in pattern and in the size of growth and decline (see Figure 8.19). As a result, the salience of religion volatility remains fairly similar in the three phases studied. It accounts for around 33 per cent of total volatility in the first phase, 26.4 in the second and 36 per cent in the third.

Figure 8.20 presents the mean salience of the three types of volatility that have been computed (pillar parties' block, religious parties' block and class parties' block) for each of the three electoral phases in the Netherlands. Pillar volatility demonstrates a clear increase in the period from 1966 to 1985, to decrease again in the period from 1986 to 1996, whereas the salience of class diminishes clearly throughout the three phases. The salience of religion as a cleavage line displays the most stable evolution of the three.

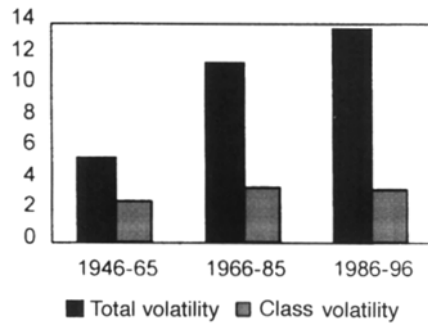


Figure 8.18 Means of total and class volatility per electoral phase in the Netherlands (1946–96)

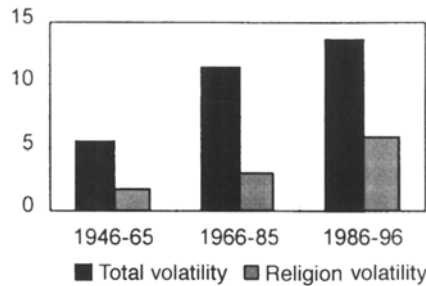


Figure 8.19 Means of total and religion volatility per electoral phase in the Netherlands (1946–96)

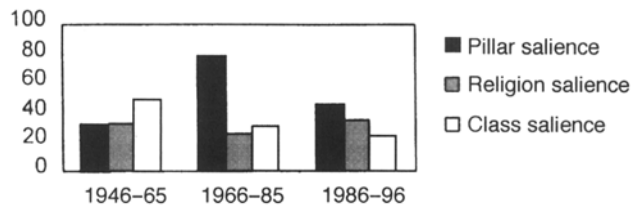


Figure 8.20 Dutch pillar, religion and class salience compared (1946–96)

Characterisation of the electoral phases

In this final section we will look at the characteristics of the electoral phases in terms of the closedness/openness of elections. This dichotomy is at the heart of the two hypotheses advanced, given that pillarization enhanced both the stabilisation of the electorate and of the supply side of party competition and in this way pointed to a closure, or possibly even a demise, of competition. Conversely, the decreasing prevalence of the conditions conducive to pillarization point to an increase of electoral competition.

As has already been mentioned, Bartolini and Mair consider block volatility a useful measure of the closure of a cleavage line. In other words, they argue that low levels of block volatility correspond to closed cleavage lines, whereas high levels

correspond to open cleavage lines. They classify total volatility and block volatility as 'high', 'medium' and 'low' on the basis of the difference between total and block volatility for each election and the mean of the total and block volatility, respectively, in all the elections they analyse (measured in Z-scores). The same procedure has been followed here, but each country has been analysed separately. Thus a mean has been calculated for the total volatility and block volatility (for each of the three criteria) in each country in the whole period analysed, and each election has been classified as 'low', 'medium' or 'high volatility' with respect to that mean. In order to have a reasonable number of cases to examine, but at the same time to disregard those elections whose volatilities were very close to the reference point, only those elections which were close to the mean have been considered as 'medium'.¹⁴

The cross-tabulation of total volatility and each of the block volatilities yields a classification of each election as competitive when both the total volatility and the block volatility are high, and as closed or non-competitive, when both the total and the block volatility are low and therefore there is a small number of electoral shifts within and between the blocks defined. Bartolini and Mair refer to the combination of high total volatility and low block volatility as denoting 'intra-block competitive' elections. The latter are characterised by the fact that most electoral shifts take place within each of the blocks defined. Conversely, low total volatility and high block volatility yields 'inter-block competitive' elections, since most of the voter shifts take place between the two blocks (see Bartolini and Mair 1990:43).

The tables are thus a good summary of the results of the analysis of total and block volatility according to the different grouping criteria used. For the sake of clarity, [Table 8.9](#) only reports the number of closed elections according to one of the criteria analysed in the chapter (i.e. elections characterised both by low levels of total and block volatility, according to each of the three grouping criteria, pillar/non-pillar, class and religion). According to our initial hypothesis about the effects of pillarization, the number of closed elections should be a high proportion of the total number of elections. The effects of de-pillarization in the electoral arena should translate into a decrease in the number of closed elections, or conversely, in the increase in the number of competitive elections, particularly during the most recent electoral phase.

Several conclusions stem from [Table 8.9](#). Firstly, it becomes apparent that the three countries have gone through phases in which elections were predominantly closed. In the case of Austria, this is true for the period from the end of the Second World War until the mid-1980s. These two electoral phases are characterised by a high number of closed elections, particularly if we consider the division between pillar and non-pillar parties. The contrast with the last electoral phase, with only one closed election, is remarkable. Of the three countries examined here, Austria is the one which exhibits the lowest levels of electoral mobility and the greatest levels of stability for the longer period of time. To be sure, further analysis is needed in order to ascertain the factors that account for these results.

Table 8.9 Number of closed (non-competitive) elections by electoral phase and by grouping criteria in Austria, Belgium and the Netherlands (1945–96)

<i>Austria</i>	<i>1945–65</i>	<i>1966–85</i>	<i>1986–96</i>	<i>Total</i>
Pillar	3	3	0	6 (40%)
Class	2	3	0	5 (33.3%)
Religion	2	3	1	6 (40%)
Total number of elections per phase	5	6	4	15 ^a
<i>Belgium</i>	<i>1945–65</i>	<i>1966–85</i>	<i>1986–96</i>	<i>Total</i>
Pillar	2	3	1	6 (37.5%)
Class	0	4	1	5 (31.3%)
Religion	0	4	1	5 (31.3%)
Total number of elections per phase	6	7	3	16 ^a
<i>The Netherlands</i>	<i>1945–65</i>	<i>1966–85</i>	<i>1986–96</i>	<i>Total</i>
Pillar	4	0	0	4 (28.6%)
Class	3	1	0	4 (28.6%)
Religion	3	1	1	5 (35.7%)
Total number of elections per phase	5	6	3	14 ^a

Source: Own elaboration.

Note:

a Total number of elections considered in the calculations of volatility. This does not correspond to the sum of columns, because the same election can be classified as closed on the basis of more than one criterion.

Both from 1945–65 and especially from 1966–85, Belgium exhibits a considerable proportion of closed elections. These results are consistent with our earlier characterisation of the evolution of total Belgian volatility as ‘stability with peaks’. Those peaks of total volatility, sometimes accompanied by the block volatilities here defined, constitute exceptions of a situation characterised by moderate levels of competition. When reading the table, we have to take into account that an election might be categorised as closed on the basis of the comparison between class volatility and total volatility and not closed on the basis of another criterion. Most of Belgium’s elections during the second phase (1965–85) are characterised by low levels of block volatility in the three types analysed here. Finally, the third electoral phase is distinguished by a much lower proportion of closed elections, i.e. by an increase in electoral mobility across the lines considered in this chapter (pillar/ non-pillar parties, religion and class cleavage).

Finally, in the Netherlands we can speak only of a situation of low electoral mobility in the phase immediately after the war. According to the three criteria we have used to compute block volatilities, most elections were closed. This situation

changed dramatically in the following electoral phases, characterised by the practical absence of closed elections.

Conclusions

The main purpose of this chapter has been to review propositions deduced from consociational theory regarding the role of parties in consociational systems, and more concretely, the expected consequences of pillarization in the electoral arena. It has been hypothesised that pillarization produces stabilisation both of the offer of political alternatives and of electoral behaviour. The former process should translate into a dominance of the electoral arena by the pillar parties. As has been shown, in Belgium and in the Netherlands, pillar parties managed to dominate the electoral arena until the mid-1960s. In Belgium, the pillar parties' subsequent decline was a product of the emergence and electoral success of the ethno-linguistic parties, whilst in the Netherlands it was a consequence of the emergence of new and splinter parties. By contrast, the decline of the Austrian pillar parties was delayed until the 1980s. However, even though the pillar parties' joint electoral strength has diminished in all three countries, they still manage to poll around two-thirds of the total number of valid votes.

The hypothesis regarding the stabilisation of individual electoral behaviour has been explored using the index of total volatility and different variants of the index of block volatility developed by Bartolini and Mair (1990). Three grouping criteria have been proposed: pillar parties versus non-pillar parties, class parties versus non-class parties and the religious versus non-religious parties. The trends of these four indices for the countries analysed have been described both by reference to summary measures per electoral phase and by dividing the post-war period in three phases: 1945–65, 1966–85 and 1986–96.

We expected total volatility to be low in the period during which pillarization was strongest, with a gradual increase once the bases of pillarization started to erode. The pattern followed by total volatility in Austria is the one that matches these expectations most closely. Not only did Austria have low levels of total volatility until the beginning of the 1980s, but the lowest post-war mean of volatility was during the 1966–86 phase, when pillarization was most extensive. By contrast, the Netherlands exhibits increasing levels of volatility over time, with growth already under way in the 1960s. For its part, Belgium presents a stable mean level of electoral volatility throughout the whole post-war period, with only three distinct high peaks (at the elections of 1965, 1981 and 1991).

The use of pillar, class and religion volatility has allowed us to explore further the underlying patterns in this total volatility. We have shown that pillar volatility has increased in all three cases, following the pattern of total volatility. In other words, most of the total volatility can be accounted for by exchanges of voters between pillar and non-pillar parties. The last part of the preceding section of this chapter contains a classification of elections in the three electoral phases according to their

level of competitiveness across the three mentioned criteria used to define party blocks referred to here. As such, it serves as a summary of the trends of the three measures. This classification shows that over time, elections have become more competitive in respect of each of the criteria we have examined. However, the extent of this increased competitiveness has differed, as has its timing (particularly in Austria). Until the mid-1980s, the number of closed elections was high in Austria, while in Belgium it started decreasing after the mid-1960s. In the Netherlands, the 1945–65 phase is characterised by a dominance of closed elections, but this situation changed dramatically in the two subsequent phases.

To be sure, both the appropriateness of the three grouping criteria employed in this chapter and our interpretation of their evolution over time are debatable. This chapter constitutes merely a preliminary approximation to the study of the evolution of electoral behaviour using aggregate indicators. These measures and the implications of their use in order to test hypotheses regarding electoral change have to be further discussed. More research is also needed to validate and deepen the analysis of the influence of certain individual level variables on the likelihood that voters will be electorally mobile. One possibility would be to use survey data, which provide more information on individual characteristics. The use of survey data would also allow one to test more refined hypotheses regarding the way pillarization affects the electoral behaviour of individuals and how de-pillarization also has different effects according to divergent combinations of individual variables. Finally, another relevant question that has not been addressed in this chapter refers to the need to explore how distinct consociational democracies are from other Western European states, both in their electoral trends and in the transformation of the processes underlying them. In other words, more research is needed to examine what, if anything, makes (or made) consociational systems particular with respect to electoral behaviour and whether they share certain peculiarities in the explanations of electoral change.

Notes

- 1 I would like to thank Eva Anduiza, Stefano Bartolini, Matthijs Bogaards, the participants in the 1995 ECPR Bordeaux Joint Sessions, and especially the editors of this volume, Kris Deschouwer and Kurt Richard Luther, for useful comments and suggestions on earlier drafts. All remaining mistakes are, of course, mine alone.
- 2 See Lijphart (1984b:11–12) for a response to previous critiques in a similar direction to that made later by Van Mierlo, in which he explicitly recognises that *verzuijing* can be considered both an independent and a dependent variable and that ‘consociational democracy enhances the democratic stability of a plural society not by making it less plural, but by making it more plural’.
- 3 See also Scholten (1980), Van Schendelen (1984) and Kriesi (1990) for this top-down interpretation of the phenomenon of pillarization.
- 4 This is developed in the country chapters of this book. Also see Huyse (1985), Billiet (1984) and Deschouwer (1990 and 1994a) for Belgium; Houska (1985), Luther (1992 and 1997b), Luther and Müller (1992a) and Müller (1996c) for Austria; Andeweg and Irwin (1993), Daalder

- (1966 and 1996), Ellemers (1984), Houska (1985), Irwin and Van Holsteyn (1989a), Lijphart (1975) and Wolinetz (1990) for the Netherlands.
- 5 This section is partly inspired by the analysis of the dimensions of cleavages developed by Bartolini and Mair (1990:212–20).
 - 6 Bartolini and Mair (1990:27), in their analysis of the value of aggregate volatility as an indicator of individual voting shifts, warn about the need to consider trends in time. ‘The measurable levels of aggregate volatility and changes in these levels *over time* reflect corresponding levels and changes in individual volatility.’
 - 7 The division of the post-war period into electoral phases has been done in the same way as Bartolini and Mair (1990) for the sake of comparability with countries that have not been included in the present analysis.
 - 8 Their analysis, however, covers a much longer period which includes two other phases, the pre-1981 phase, in which the total volatility was 10.4 and that between 1918 and 1944, with a mean total volatility of 8.4 (Bartolini and Mair 1990:111).
 - 9 Therefore, total volatility is equal to the sum of block volatility and within-block volatility (Bartolini and Mair 1990:23).
 - 10 This phase of stability might be preceded by one of relative electoral mobility (both total volatility and pillar volatility), derived from the fact that the strategy of encapsulation does not have an immediate effect.
 - 11 For a discussion of this process by reference to the Austrian case, see Luther (1992, 1997b and [Chapter 3](#)).
 - 12 Bartolini and Mair do not cover the last electoral phase included in this chapter. In the period from 1918 to 1985 Austria stands as the country with the second-highest class salience average.
 - 13 This cleavage line could be the linguistic one, which as has been mentioned in other sections of the chapter, emerged precisely during this period.
 - 14 The cut-off point was set at a quarter of a standard deviation below (classified as ‘low’), and above (classified as ‘high’) the mean of total, or block volatility of each country for the whole 1945–96 period.

9

The consociational party system

Steven B. Wolinetz

'The answer, my friend, is blowin' in the wind'

Bob Dylan, 'Blowin' in the Wind'

Introduction

A quotation from a 1960s folk song may seem like an odd way to begin an essay on party system change in the 1990s, but Bob Dylan's refrain, once an anthem of the American civil rights movement, captures the ways in which thinking about party systems and voting behaviour has changed. Thirty years ago we thought of party systems and the voter alignments which sustained them as immutable features of the landscape. That is no longer the case. Political scientists are less surprised than before when voters in successive elections fail to replicate past choices. The need to explain changes has generated new foci, such as recent emphases on anti-party sentiment. However, the implications of such phenomena for party systems and when and how they change remain uncertain.

This chapter examines four consociational polities—Austria, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Switzerland—in light of the broader topic of party system change. All have changed in the last thirty years. Of the four, the Dutch party system has undergone the most change, the Swiss the least. However, neither Austria nor Belgium have been immutable. Once static, the Austrian party system is undergoing rapid changes. Under Jörg Haider, the Freedom Party (*Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs*, or FPÖ) has emerged from the margins and challenged the hegemony of the SPÖ and ÖVP. In Belgium, parties based on the older pillars or *families spirituelles*, split into separate Flemish and Walloon parties in the 1960s and 1970s, but retain a dominant position even though smaller parties on the right and left occasionally win votes from them. This chapter will consider whether these four systems display patterns of continuity and change different from other European countries.

Two caveats are in order. Although the chapter concentrates on party system change in consociational polities, the term 'consociational' is used to designate a category of political systems in which party and other elites have frequently engaged

in co-operative rather than adversarial behaviour, forming overly large (grand or near grand) coalitions, or otherwise co-operating across party lines (Lijphart 1968a, 1968b and 1975). This does not mean acceptance of consociational theory, or its application to these systems. More specifically, I am not arguing (a) that Austria, Belgium, the Netherlands, or Switzerland are, or have always been, consociational democracies; (b) that use of consociational practices, such as grand coalition, proportional allocation, or mutual veto, necessarily reduced conflict; or (c) that in the absence of such practices, any or all of these systems would have 'flown apart' or otherwise disintegrated. Instead, the term is used to denote a cluster of systems which share some common features and may display common patterns of party system change.

Second, we lack a theory of party system change. Political scientists have become more adept at measuring change, but there is disagreement not only on when and how change is likely to occur, but also the significance which should be attributed to different kinds of change (Laver 1989; Mair 1989; Müller 1993b). In contrast to the United States, where mass politics emerged earlier and periodic realignments were considered to be the norm, Western European party systems emerged later and were, until recently, considered to be frozen since the completion of suffrage extension *circa* 1918 (Lipset and Rokkan 1967b). Despite evidence of considerable fluctuation in many countries during the interwar period (Urwin and Rose 1970; Mair 1989), analyses of change have concentrated on the period since the 1960s. As a result, we lack both the long time periods and comparative referents we need to detect or assess broader patterns. Theory-building has been handicapped by inadequate baselines from which to assess change and the ongoing need to assimilate and take account of recent events. The problems of developing predictive theory are compounded by the diverse literatures which bear on party system change. Students of parties must integrate changing conceptions of voting behaviour, the spatial ordering of party systems, and coalition formation, while taking account of phenomena as diverse as the rise of alternative and new right parties.

The lack of theory inhibits but does not prevent a systematic analysis of change in consociational or other party systems. Years of debate have given us not only a better idea of how to measure change, but also numerous suppositions about the circumstances in which certain kinds of changes—for example, reactions against established parties—might occur. These can be examined in light of the literature on consociational democracy.

The chapter has three parts. The first considers party system change in light of consociational theory and the changes which might be predicted from it. The second examines changes in each of the four countries under study, and the third considers whether party systems in the four consociational democracies exhibit patterns of change different from those of non-consociational polities.

Party system change in consociational democracies

Consociational theory consists of suppositions about the ways in which divided or subculturally plural societies are held together through the actions of political elites, aware of the potential dangers of fragmentation, and willing and able to avert them by engaging in a politics of elite accommodation. The principal emphases are on the attitudes and orientations of political elites and their use of a variety of accommodative mechanisms including (a) power-sharing (often but not always in grand or near grand coalitions); (b) recourse to proportional allocation of power, jobs, offices, or other rewards to the principal groups or subcultures; (c) granting each group a veto over policies to which it might object; and (d) allowing key groups considerable autonomy and control in their own sphere (Lijphart 1968a). Political parties play a role because power-sharing and accommodation take place in the context of a democratically constituted political system. Parties compete in elections, but co-operate afterwards. As such, party leaders are involved in a two-level game in which they mobilize support on the basis of positions which they later compromise. If such a system is to be maintained, one or more of the following conditions must obtain. First, followers must be shielded from competing points of view. Second, party (or other subcultural) leaders must be accorded a high degree of deference, as Lijphart (1968b) originally argued. Third, party (or other subcultural) leaders must be able to offer voters other rewards (i.e. patronage or other selective incentives) in exchange for their support. Presumably, change in any (or all of these, if more than one is operative) could trigger changes in party strengths, and the durability and reliability of party support. However, consociational theory offers few predictions about when or to what degree such changes might take place. Nevertheless, it is easy to derive such suppositions from the academic literature on political parties.

The academic literature on political parties

The academic literature on political parties contains two interrelated arguments about change (Flanagan and Dalton 1984). The first views voting preferences as a reflection of social cleavages and argues that electoral realignment reflects changes in social structure, particularly the relative size of class, occupational, or religious groups. The second emphasizes dealignment and argues that this stems more from value changes and the broader phenomenon of post-industrialization than changes in social structure. In the first, realignment—long-term shifts in voting behaviour and party allegiance—reflects long-term changes in the proportion of the population engaged in farming, industry, and the service sector, or attending church regularly. The second argument takes education, affluence, and the growth of the tertiary sector as points of departure and places its principal emphases on value change. It argues that as societies (consociational or otherwise) become wealthier, individuals raised in relative affluence and security are more likely to hold post-industrial rather than material values. As a consequence, they may shift their support to

parties articulating environmental, quality of life, or participatory values. Increased emphasis on such themes might entail shifts from governing parties—typically regular participants in compromises—to opposition parties (Flanagan and Dalton 1984).

Neither of these phenomena is confined to consociational systems, but their consequences may be amplified in this or other forms of consensual democracy. In adversarial systems, changes in cleavage structure should result in shifts of allegiance among established parties, e.g., shifts from working class to middle class or confessional to secular parties. However, this is less likely to be the case in consociational systems, where major parties are closely identified with distinct subcultures or pillars. Voters deviating from previous allegiances may find it easier to support minor parties rather than parties previously identified as ‘enemies’, or somehow alien. If so, then surges in support for parties not associated with a politics of accommodation should be a typical form of change. In addition, voters might use minor or anti-establishment parties as way stations toward new allegiances.¹

The post-industrial literature stresses dealignment rather than realignment. Nevertheless, anti-establishment parties play an important role. Minor parties, new or old, are better positioned to articulate post-industrial values than parties which govern regularly, let alone participate in a politics of accommodation. The reasons for this are fairly obvious. Power-sharing works best when authoritative elites are able to make binding deals on behalf of their followers. However, the centralised and oligarchic structures which facilitate this are likely to repel post-materialists demanding more participation and control. Such demands should translate into support for smaller, anti-establishment parties (cf. Inglehart and Flanagan 1987), rather than parties whose leaders are seen to be in collusion.

At this stage two observations are in order. First, the earlier literature emphasizes only one form of party system change: shifts in party strengths and in the strength and durability of electoral attachments. Little consideration is given either to other forms such as changes in party positions, coalition patterns or relations among parties (Laver 1989), or to the ways in which changes in one or more of these might affect voting behaviour. Taking account of the latter produces a more complex set of suppositions. Second, there is little attempt to analyse long-term, multifaceted processes over time. We cannot detail either of these here, but it is important to note that parties are not passive organizations locked into a single position on a left-right spectrum, but rather organizations sometimes capable of redefining not only themselves but also the alternatives with which voters are confronted and the institutional setting of competition.² This makes a considerable difference. Parties in consociational and other democracies may respond to the changes described above by assuming a more adversarial posture (Wolinetz 1988), by taking up some of the themes articulated by their competitors (Kitschelt 1988, 1993), or by seeking where possible to amend the ‘rules of the game’ in their favour. Changes in positions,

along with changes in electoral strength or in the institutional setting may in turn lead to changes in coalition partners.

The consociational literature

Consociational theory offers few predictions about how either the parties or party systems of consociational democracy might change. Although parties play a central role in the operation of consociational democracy and the literature makes important statements about the dynamics of party systems, students of consociational democracy have been more concerned with the ways in which whole systems might change. This reflects both preoccupation with typologies and the need to come to explain changes which have occurred in consociational systems. Consider, for example, the way in which Arend Lijphart dealt with deviations from his original typology. Lijphart's theory of consociational democracy stemmed from his analysis of the Netherlands as a deviant case. The stability of the Dutch system could not, he argued, be explained by structural-functionalism, prevailing views of multipartyism, or the theory of cross-cutting cleavages (Lijphart, 1968a; 1968b, 1975). *The Politics of Accommodation* had barely been published when it became apparent that the Dutch political system was changing. Lijphart (1975) argued that once underlying tensions were resolved, consociational democracies evolve into depoliticized democracies; although accommodative mechanisms were no longer needed to hold a fragmented society together, elites would continue to co-operate in what was now a more homogeneous polity.

This supposition flowed more from the logic of Lijphart's two-dimensional typology than the Dutch case, which had become more openly conflictual. In the second English edition of *The Politics of Accommodation*, Lijphart (1975) offered five explanations of the ways in which the Dutch system had changed. These focused both on factors specific to the Dutch case and tensions built into depoliticized democracy. Lijphart argued (a) that the transition to depoliticized democracy had 'not been a smooth one because it...[had been] a multidimensional process in which the movements along the different dimensions have not occurred at a uniform pace' (Lijphart 1975:210); (b) that depoliticized democracy, like Dahl's 'democratic Leviathan', generated its own tensions because it was insufficiently democratic (211-12); (c) that elites had responded to the pressures which they faced in a 'nervous, ambivalent, and as a result, ineffective' (212) fashion, fostered to some degree by the latitude which they had previously enjoyed (213); (d) that the Netherlands' pure form of proportional representation had facilitated the entry of new groups (214-15); and finally, (e) that elites had recognized the inherent problems of depoliticized democracy and in a further self-denying prophecy, were trying to avoid them by moving toward a centripetal system. However, this movement toward a competitive system was inhibited by their inability to agree on the kinds of reforms which were desirable (215-19).

Lijphart tells us more about how consociational systems might evolve than about their party systems or the ways in which they might change. Nevertheless, he introduces several factors which might be included in a theory of party system change. These include electoral systems, the independent role of elites, and the problems of the 'democratic Leviathan'. The latter bring us back both to the Dutch case and the suppositions derived from the parties' literature. The Dutch system in the late 1960s and 1970s was characterized both by surges of support for minor parties and by changes in the orientation and posture of established parties. These provide us with a base for assessing the kinds of changes which might occur in the party systems of consociational democracies. Because accommodation among parties representing the principal segments of society is a central feature, shifts in support from established parties to minor or anti-establishment parties should be a salient feature of change in systems in which previous conflicts have become less important. And, once this occurs (or threatens to occur), changes in the positions or orientation of established parties are likely to be important in determining how a larger process of party system change unfolds. Sooner or later, established parties may change their positions or style in order to recoup lost support. As my earlier research on the Netherlands (Wolinetz 1973, 1988) demonstrated, whether and to what extent this occurs may depend on a number of factors. These include not only the degree to which losses of electoral support are regarded as temporary rather than permanent, but also the extent to which changes in electoral strength prevent established parties from exercising power in the same way in which they did before. Moreover, the latter in turn depends in part on how elites respond to changes, and the degree to which parties have or retain alternative means, such as patronage, for mobilizing or retaining support.

Thus far, we have explored ways in which party systems in consociational democracies might change. Some are no different from likely changes in other Western European party systems. Others are more distinctive: that voters in consociational systems are likely—at least in the first instance—to shift from established or governing to anti-establishment or opposition parties.

The four countries

Before we can determine if there are patterns common to the four consociational democracies, we must examine patterns of continuity and change in each country. These vary considerably. Changes began earlier in the Netherlands and Belgium and have been more complex. Changes in the Austrian party system were minimal until the late 1980s, but have since been pronounced. In contrast, changes in the Swiss party system have been barely visible. Since each country's party system is covered in considerable detail elsewhere in this volume, our introduction to the background of each system can be brief. The Dutch case is a useful starting point.

The Netherlands

The Netherlands provides diverse prototypes of the ways in which consociational and other party systems may change. We can isolate different facets of party system change, some of which occurred concurrently. These included electoral changes, changes in party tactics and position, and changes in relationships over time. The party system of the 1950s and early 1960s was dominated by five major parties divided by religion and social class. Several parties had roots in a complex system of pillarization which minimized electoral change. Parties were locked into a system in which coalition-building was a necessity and broad-based cabinets were the norm. The three confessional parties had a bare electoral and parliamentary majority and could determine whether cabinets would be centre-left or centre-right.

The contemporary party system is very different. Secularization and decreasing church attendance have shrunk the size of the confessional bloc. Although the formation of a single inter-confessional party, the Christian Democratic Appeal (CDA), temporarily stabilized the confessional centre, the extent of decline was brought home by the 1994 departure of its leader, Ruud Lubbers. Under Lubbers and his predecessor, Andreas van Agt, the CDA had regularly won 30–5 per cent of the vote and maintained its pivotal position in cabinet formation. However, in 1994 the CDA plummeted to 22.2 per cent and lost twenty of its fifty-four seats. Four years later, the CDA won only 18.4 per cent and 29 seats. In contrast, the Liberals (VVD) advanced from 14.4 per cent of the vote in 1989 to 19.9 per cent in 1994 and 24.7 per cent in 1998. Although the Social Democratic Party (PvdA) dropped to 24 per cent in 1994 (a loss of twelve seats), they advanced to 29 per cent in 1998.

Cabinet politics changed as well. The 1994 election produced four parties of roughly equal strength and no obvious governing coalition. After some wrangling, the PvdA, D'66, and VVD formed a secular cabinet under PvdA leader Wim Kok. The CDA went into opposition for the first time since 1918, but found it difficult to oppose a government whose policies it supported. A second secular cabinet was formed after the 1998 elections. Changes in voting behaviour are sufficiently great that it is unlikely that earlier patterns will reappear (Irwin and van Holsteyn 1997, and [Chapter 5](#)).

One view of changes in the Netherlands emphasizes the diminishing scope and impact of pillarization, the decline of the structured model of electoral behaviour (Irwin and van Holsteyn 1989a; 1989b; 1997), and concomitant changes in the party system. However, the process has been much more complex. Prominent facets have included the emergence and success of smaller anti-establishment parties, such as the Farmers' Party (BP) and Democrats '66 (D'66) in the late 1960s, as well as the almost simultaneous emergence of dissident factions demanding change, in many but not all of the established parties. Second, there has been a numerical decline of the Catholic Party (KVP) and with it, the confessional centre. Third, the Netherlands has experienced the coming together of the Catholic (KVP) and two Protestant parties, the Anti-Revolutionary Party (ARP) and the Christian Historical Union (CHU) as the Christian Democratic Appeal (CDA).

Fourth, in the late 1960s and early 1970s, there was a re-orientation of the Dutch left, including changes in the style and posture of the Social Democratic Party (PvdA); electoral alliances among the PvdA, D'66 and the Radical Party (PPR), a smaller party to its left; the PvdA's adherence to a strategy of polarization from 1969 through 1986. Fifth, parallel but by no means identical changes have occurred on the right, including the Liberals' assumption of a more aggressive posture in the 1970s (complementing the PvdA's polarization strategy). Sixth, the PvdA's abandonment of the polarization strategy has resulted in the return to a 'politics of accommodation' after 1986. Finally, the merger of three smaller parties to the left of the PvdA (Communists, Pacifist Socialists, and Radicals led to the formation of Green Left.

The Dutch party system, then, has undergone substantial changes. The system of five major parties, based on class and religion, has given way to a four-party system, in which the principal players are Liberals, Social Democrats, Christian Democrats, and Democrats '66. Smaller parties persist—Green Left on the left, smaller Calvinist parties on the right—but without significant influence as long as their support is not needed to form cabinets. Class and religious cleavages persist, but their impact on voting behaviour or political issues is muted. After a period of polarization, major party positions have converged. And finally, the politics of cabinet formation has changed; Christian Democrats have lost the pivotal position which made it impossible to form a cabinet without them.

Belgium

The Belgian case is different. Until the appearance of ecology and new right parties in the 1980s, the principal changes reflected the emergence of linguistic cleavages. Belgium had a three-party system in which power was shared by Liberals, Catholics and Socialists. Parties were rooted in cradle-to-grave networks of religious or ideologically based organizations. These included not only unions, churches, and schools but, following the Ghent model, insurance funds. Because unions and subculturally based organizations were the principal suppliers of health and unemployment insurance, it was difficult to resign from one's party or segment, even if one no longer supported it (Covell, 1988). Typically, two out of the three parties governed. The inability of any one spiritual family to impose its will on the others resulted in a system in which power-sharing was the norm (Lorwin 1966; Covell 1988).

Missing were linguistically based political parties. Each of the three *families spirituelles* were present in both Flanders and Wallonia, but French was the dominant language. This changed in the 1960s, when Flemings finally reached equal status with Francophones. Demands for linguistic parity led to the drawing of the language borders in 1963 and a series of constitutional reforms transforming a unitary state into a federal system.

Linguistic conflicts did not leave the party system untouched. Parties such as the *Volksunie* in Flanders, the Walloon Front, and the Francophone Democratic Front in Brussels gained support in the 1960s, and the *Volksunie* has become a permanent fixture in Flanders. Catholics, Liberals, and Socialists responded by organizing themselves into Flemish and Francophone wings, but by 1977, each had separated into separate Flemish and Francophone parties. This had important consequences for the party system. Parties' support networks remained intact, but there were now six major players (seven, if the *Volksunie* is counted) instead of three, and Wallonian and Flemish counterparts diverged in relative size, attitudes and orientations. Parties ceased to compete across linguistic lines (Deschouwer 1996). Instead, Belgium had two separate party systems, summed into one for purposes of cabinet formation.

Although Walloon and Flemish party systems were superficially mirror images of each other, party strengths and party orientations varied. The Flemish Christian Democrats (CVP) were much stronger in Flanders than the Social Christian Party (PSC) in Wallonia. In contrast, the Wallonian Socialists (PS) were stronger and more radical than Flemish Socialists (SP). Different interests and perspectives complicated coalition formation. Cabinets had to contain an equal number of Flemish and Francophone ministers. However, the *families spirituelles* persisted. Cabinets typically contained four parties drawn from two of the three *families spirituelles*. Occasionally the *Volksunie* was included as well.

Only in the 1980s did other parties intrude. The first were the Flemish and Francophone environmentalist parties, AGALEV and Ecolo, whose combined strength increased from 4.8 per cent in 1981 to 10.0 per cent in 1991 and 8.4 in 1995. These were followed by extreme right parties. The *Vlaams Blok* (VB) increased its vote from 1.9 per cent in 1987 to 6.6 in 1991 and 7.8 in 1995, including 27.7 per cent in Antwerp. Its Francophone equivalent, the *Front National* (FN) won 1.1 per cent in 1991 and 2.3 per cent in 1995 (Fitzmaurice 1992). Nevertheless, the impact of Green and new right parties is difficult to assess. Green or alternative parties are growing, but have not yet gained influence in national or regional politics. The same is true of the extreme right. Whether either set of parties will play more than an agenda-setting or issue-defining role remains to be seen. At the moment, the system seems more directly challenged by scandals and police incompetence, which could produce a Belgian version of the Italian *tangentopoli*.

The Belgian case, then, is different from the Dutch. In the latter, established parties, challenged by new parties and dissident factions, shifted positions and became more openly competitive, altering previous modes of cabinet formation and the prevalent pattern of elite accommodation. In Belgium, established parties were also challenged by newer parties, but adapted by taking up some of their demands and dividing into separate Flemish and Francophone parties. However, they retained previous bases of support in Catholic, Liberal, or Socialist pillars and continued to dominate cabinet formations. However, the increased number of players and ongoing debate about constitutional change made it more difficult to form

governments. A two-thirds majority was required to approve constitutional amendments. Nevertheless, Belgium has been transformed from a unitary state to a federal system. The party system is more intact than the central state, which has been hollowed out in the process.

Austria

The situation in Austria is different from either Belgium or the Netherlands. Until the 1980s, the Austrian system had been a paragon of stability; the combination of neo-corporatism, *Proporz* politics, power-sharing, and extensive sub-cultural organization meant that very little changed during the Second Republic, which itself was characterized by elements of continuity from the First Republic (Engelmann 1988). However, this picture altered considerably in the mid-1980s. The Green Party, formed by the unification of two alternative lists, won 4.8 per cent of the vote in 1986, 4.5 in 1990, 7.0 per cent in 1994 and 4.8 per cent in 1995. More important, the Freedom Party (FPÖ) came under the leadership of Jörg Haider, a right-wing populist. The FPÖ, which had hovered at 5–6 per cent of the vote since the 1960s, was transformed from a liberal party with right-wing overtones into a populist new right party and a formidable competitor. The FPÖ won 9.7 per cent of the vote in 1986, 16.6 per cent in 1990, 22.6 per cent in 1994 and 21.9 per cent in 1995. FPÖ and Green gains have been at the expense of the established parties. The Austrian People's Party (*Österreichische Volkspartei*, or ÖVP) slid from 42–3 per cent of the popular vote in elections from 1971 to 1986, to 32.1 per cent in 1990, 27.7 per cent in 1994 and 28.3 per cent in 1995. ÖVP losses were shared by the Socialists (*Sozialdemokratische Partei Österreichs*, or SPÖ). The Socialists dropped from 50–1 per cent of the vote in the 1970s to 43.1 per cent in 1986 and 34.9 per cent in 1994, before recovering to 38.1 per cent in 1995. In the light of previous stability, these changes were nothing short of spectacular.

Space does not permit an extended treatment of the Austrian situation (see [Chapter 3](#)). However, two factors are particularly salient. One is that social bases of the two major parties, and particularly the ÖVP, have been shrinking, requiring them to innovate if they were to maintain their previous electoral strength (Plasser *et al.* 1992; Luther 1992). The other is that the internal organization of the ÖVP—the party is indirectly structured, with the Farmers' League playing a dominant role—made this exceedingly difficult to do (Müller and Steininger 1994). Resistance to internal reform or restructuring made it difficult for the ÖVP to innovate or to capture voters detaching either from its own or the socialist *Lager*. Instead, the combination of changing social structures and reactions against cartel-like politics of a highly corporatist and consociational system made both the SPÖ and the ÖVP vulnerable to challenges, both by the Greens on the left and the Freedom Party on the right. As the most recent election results demonstrate, Haider's attacks have been extremely successful; in both 1994 and 1995, the FPÖ came within five to six percentage points of a weakened ÖVP, reduced to a shrinking core of farmers and

small businessmen. The slight recovery of the ÖVP and especially the SPÖ in the 1995 elections did little to change the overall pattern.

In contrast to the Netherlands, the changes in Austria have been simpler and more straightforward, and (at least on the surface) much more rapid. Whether this will continue to be the case is another matter. Thus far, the principal response has been the resumption, since 1987, of the grand coalition between the SPÖ and the ÖVP, which had ended in 1966.

Switzerland

The Swiss party system has been least affected by the ‘winds of change’ (to borrow from Andeweg 1982), which have blown over other European consociational democracies. Although in recent elections their combined strength has dropped from 80 to 72–3 per cent of the popular vote, the federal party system continues to be dominated by Radicals, Christian Democrats, Social Democrats, and the smaller People’s Party (Church 1989). Nevertheless, Church (1992) reports a number of indicators of small changes. These include record low turnouts, an increased number of lists competing in many cantons, increased turnover of seats despite aggregate stability, and the growth in recent elections of Green and right-wing protest parties, such as the Automobilists, and autonomist leagues (*Lega dei Ticinesi*). However, the federal cabinet continues to be dominated by the four major parties, sharing out portfolios according to the ‘magic’ 2:2:2:1 ratio. The portrait is one of a country in which there is an undercurrent of protest and disgruntlement. However, thus far, this has received greater expression in referenda and low turnouts than in electoral realignment or restructuring of the party system and coalition patterns (see [Chapter 6](#)).

Aggregate patterns: the four countries compared

Earlier we raised two questions: whether the party systems of consociational politics displayed similar patterns of change—particularly support for newer, or pre-existing, minor parties—and whether patterns of change in the party systems of consociational democracies differed from those of other political systems. Our examination of the Netherlands, Belgium, Austria and Switzerland suggests some commonality, but also that patterns of continuity and change in the four consociational systems diverge from each other. Changes in the Netherlands and, in a different way, Belgium, have been more drawn-out and more complex; those in Austria simpler and more dramatic. In contrast, the Swiss party system has barely changed at all.³ In this section we will examine commonalities and consider whether and in what ways the four consociational democracies differ from each other and from other Western European systems.

Table 9.1 Mean aggregate electoral volatility in four Western European consociational democracies (1950s–80s)

	1950s	1960s	1970s	1980s
Austria	4.1	3.3	2.7	5.5
Belgium	7.6	10.2	5.3	10.1
Netherlands	5.1	7.9	12.3	8.5
Switzerland	2.6	3.8	6.4	6.3
Mean for four consociational democracies	4.1	6.3	6.7	7.6
Mean for thirteen countries	7.6	7.0	8.2	8.0

Source: Adapted from Gallagher, Laver and Mair (1992:112).

Volatility and electoral change

Let us begin with the question of commonalities. Our presentation has emphasized divergence, but the four consociational systems do display certain common patterns; major parties have lost support to minor or anti-establishment parties in each of the four countries and electoral volatility has increased.

Aggregate volatility scores are a useful place to begin. They provide an approximate measure of the degree to which voters may be shifting from one party to another (Bartolini and Mair 1990). Our presumption has been that consociational democracies should display increased rates of aggregate electoral volatility over time as voter preferences become less anchored in social structure and/or more imbued with post-industrial values. [Table 9.1](#) presents data on the mean aggregate electoral volatility per decade for the four consociational democracies from 1950 to 1990, while [Table 9.2](#) presents similar data in rank order for thirteen Western European countries with continuous elections during the same period. Several observations are in order. First, as both [Tables 9.1](#) and [9.2](#) demonstrate, the mean aggregate volatility scores of the four consociational democracies were either at or below the thirteen-country mean. Second, mean aggregate volatility increased not only in the four consociational democracies, but also in most of the other thirteen countries. The principal exceptions were France and Germany—both of which began the period with extremely high volatility scores—and Ireland. Nevertheless, the mean aggregate electoral volatility score for the four consociational democracies has remained below the mean score for all thirteen countries in each decade. However, both the Netherlands and Belgium were above the thirteen-country mean in the 1960s and the 1980s, as was the Netherlands in the 1970s.

Although the data suggest a common pattern in the 1950s (a period in which all four countries could safely be considered to have been consociational democracies) there is little evidence of patterns of volatility distinct from other Western European democracies. Almost all countries display increased volatility in the 1970s and/or the 1980s. Although the argument might be rescued by excluding the Netherlands in the 1970s and 1980s on the grounds that it no longer operated as a

consociational democracy, this begs the question and still leaves us searching for common patterns.

Examining support for established versus minor parties brings us to a similar conclusion. [Table 9.3](#) presents the total percentage of the vote won by the pillar parties (see Chapter 11), defined for this purpose as the normal participants in grand or near-grand coalitions, for Austria, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Switzerland from 1945 to 1998. Although support for established parties was not as high as one might assume in the 1940s or 1950s, the aggregate percentages which they won in the first two postwar decades were considerably higher than in the later three. Established parties lost ground to smaller parties, new or old, in each of the four countries. In the 1950s, established parties in each country jointly commanded at least 80 per cent of the popular vote. By the late 1980s and early 1990s, the totals ranged from 62 to 85 per cent. However, these higher scores were achieved in the mid-1980s and have since declined. Decline set in earlier in the Netherlands and Belgium, and later and more dramatically in Austria. Decline was least apparent in Switzerland, but the percentage won by the four major parties there was not as high in the 1950s or 1960s as in the other three countries.

The shift away from established parties in three of the four consociational democracies is a significant one, and would remain so even if we were to add the vote of those newer parties (Democrats'66 in the Netherlands and the *Volksunie* in Belgium) which are occasionally included in governments. However, this phenomenon is not confined to consociational polities. Established parties have lost ground to smaller parties—left libertarian (Greens, alternative lists), new or extreme right (Progress Parties in Denmark and Norway, *Front National* in France) or centre (Liberal Democrats in the UK)—in most Western European countries. Whether this is a temporary or more permanent phenomenon remains to be seen.

Polarization and elite interaction

Electoral change and volatility scores are only one variant of party system change. Other forms include changes in the number of parties, the extent of polarization, and the ways in which parties and their leaders interact. However, even here, it is difficult to find any obvious consistency among the four consociational democracies. In the period which we have been examining, the number of parties contesting elections and winning seats in parliament increased not only in consociational democracies, but in other systems as well. Among the four consociational democracies, increases were more pronounced in the Netherlands, where the number eventually declined, and in Belgium, where linguistic divisions permanently increased the number of parties contesting national elections. However, as Deschouwer (1996) points out, the Flemish and Wallonian party systems are distinct and outside of Brussels, Flemish and Wallonian parties are not in direct competition with each other (see also [Chapter 4](#)).

Table 9.2 Mean aggregate electoral volatility in Western European party systems in rank order (1950s-80s)

	1950s	1960s	1970s	1980s
<i>Highest:</i>				
France	(22.3)	France <i>Belgium</i>	(11.5)	France Norway <i>Belgium</i>
Germany	(15.2)	Denmark	(10.2)	Norway <i>Belgium</i>
Ireland	(10.3)	Germany	(8.7)	Denmark Finland
Italy	(9.7)	Italy <i>Netherlands</i>	(8.4)	Denmark Finland Italy <i>Netherlands</i>
			(8.2)	Denmark Finland Italy <i>Netherlands</i>
			(7.9)	Italy <i>Netherlands</i>
<i>Belgium</i>	(7.6)	Finland	(7.0)	Italy <i>Netherlands</i>
Mean	(7.6)	Ireland	(7.0)	Italy <i>Netherlands</i>
		Mean	(7.0)	Italy <i>Netherlands</i>
<i>Lowest</i>				
Denmark	(5.5)	Norway	(5.3)	Sweden Germany <i>Switzerland</i>
<i>Netherlands</i>	(5.1)	UK	(5.2)	Sweden Germany <i>Switzerland</i>
Sweden	(4.8)	Sweden	(4.0)	Sweden Germany <i>Switzerland</i>
Finland	(4.4)	<i>Switzerland</i>	(3.8)	Sweden Germany <i>Switzerland</i>
UK	(4.3)	Austria	(3.3)	Sweden Germany <i>Switzerland</i>
<i>Austria</i>	(4.1)			Sweden Germany <i>Switzerland</i>
Norway	(3.4)			Sweden Germany <i>Switzerland</i>
<i>Switzerland</i>	(2.6)			Sweden Germany <i>Switzerland</i>

Source: Adapted from Gallagher, Laver and Mair (1992:112).

Note:

Mean=thirteen-country mean.

Table 9.3 Percentage of the vote won by the principal participants in consociational politics (1945–98)

<i>Austria</i>		<i>Belgium</i>		<i>Netherlands</i>		<i>Switzerland</i>	
Date	% vote	Date	% vote	Date	% vote	Date	% vote
1945	94.4	1946	83.0	1946	86.2	1947	82.4
1949	82.7	1949	88.4	1948	87.0	1951	85.1
1953	83.3	1950	93.5	1952	86.7	1955	85.8
1956	89.0	1954	90.5	1956	91.5	1959	85.0
1959	89.0	1958	93.4	1959	91.6	1963	85.3
1962	89.4	1961	90.5	1963	87.5	1967	79.8
1966	90.9	1965	84.4	1967	78.9	1971	76.3
1970	93.1	1968	68.9	1971	71.7	1975	77.6
1971	93.1	1971	73.8	1972	73.1	1979	81.8
1975	93.3	1974	73.8	1977	83.6	1983	77.8
1979	92.9	1977	78.5	1981	76.4	1987	72.3
1983	90.8	1978	77.9	1982	82.9	1991	69.7
1986	84.4	1981	73.1	1986	85.3	1995	73.7
1990	75.1	1985	78.6	1989	81.8		
1994	62.2	1987	79.0	1994	66.1		
1995	66.4	1991	70.2	1998	72.1		
		1995	72.8				

Sources: (Mackie and Rose 1991), updated in the *European Journal of Political Research*.

Note:

Parties included for Austria: ÖVP, SPÖ; for Belgium: CVP, PSC, PS, SP, VLD, PRL; for Netherlands: ARP, CHU, KVP (from 1977, the CDA), PvdA, VVD; for Switzerland: SPS, CVP, FDP, SVP.

Few common patterns emerge if we examine changes in the degree of polarization. Of the four consociational party systems, only the Dutch system became more polarized than before, but this eased when the Social Democrats (PvdA) became frustrated with opposition and assumed a more accommodative posture in the late 1980s. Increased polarization complicated cabinet formations when either political considerations or parliamentary arithmetic dictated centre-left governments (1972, 1977, 1981), but eased the process when centre-right cabinets were numerically possible. Neither Austria nor Belgium experienced similar changes. In Austria, the growing strength of the FPÖ forced the two major parties to re-establish the grand coalition which they had abandoned in 1966. In Belgium, the bifurcation of national parties and federalization of the central state resulted in the creation of separate party systems and more complex cabinet formations. However, these reflected the larger number of parties involved rather than changes in party positions or polarization. Parties continued earlier practices and retained their bases in a clientelistic system. Switzerland barely changed at all. As in non-consociational systems (e.g. Scandinavia), the four consociational systems display different patterns and responses.

Differences and similarities further considered

Let us return to differences and similarities among patterns of change in the four consociational systems. Differences are more apparent than similarities, but each of the four countries show increased volatility and decreased support for major parties. These characteristics are shared not only by consociational but also many non-consociational systems. Variations among these four systems can be explained in different ways. One possibility is that differences reflect differences in the timing of changes. Changes in the Netherlands may appear to be more complicated because they began earlier, allowing parties and politicians more time to react. However, this is improbable. Although changes began much earlier in the Netherlands and Belgium than in Austria, reactions have been different in each country. In the Netherlands, relatively small electoral changes triggered major efforts to revamp the party system, changes in ‘the rules of the game’ and an end to the ‘politics of accommodation’. In Belgium, larger electoral changes triggered constitutional changes negotiated by the same party elites who had come under challenge. In Austria, greater changes—the growing strength of the FPÖ and the Greens, and the changing orientation of the FPÖ—forced the SPÖ and the ÖPV back into coalition with each other. In that reactions were different in the first place, it is unlikely that developments over a longer time would result in similar patterns.

A more likely explanation is that the differences which we have observed reflect differences in the countries which we have been considering. One reason why the Netherlands has undergone a complex pattern of adjustment different from that which occurred in Belgium is that the two systems are different. Belgium’s variant of the politics of accommodation was rooted in a system of clientelism absent in the Netherlands. Trade unions and other subculturally-based organizations retained control of social insurance funds and parties used their control of government departments to generate patronage and share out positions among themselves. In the Netherlands, social insurance programmes were either detached from the direct control of parties and subculturally-based organizations or brought under the control of the state. Appointments as mayors, queen’s commissioners, and to numerous supervisory boards were apportioned among political parties, and parties connected to pillars defended subculturally-based organizations involved in the delivery of services or construction of housing, but the state was not colonized as in Belgium or Austria. Expertise was often a criterion for appointment. Although appointments were often balanced according to political leanings, it was possible for many people to deviate from their pillars without endangering their careers. Alternative channels existed and some parties, such as the Liberals, occasionally advanced non-members to top positions, including cabinet portfolios.

When the Dutch system began to change in the late 1960s and 1970s, political elites were not only uncertain, as Lijphart and Daalder have argued, but could not rely on patronage to ensure support whatever else happened. Parties scrambled to take up new positions and construct electoral alliances to ensure their survival. In contrast, parties in Belgium negotiated and oversaw a major transition from a

unitary to a regionalized, federal state, while retaining control of key appointments and maintaining their position despite decreased electoral support. Only now is the prevailing system beginning to be challenged.

Clientelism, however, is only one point of difference. Although the Netherlands is the case from which Lijphart generalized the consociational type, the politics of accommodation was never as complete as Lijphart and others have suggested. Social Democrats (SDAP) were excluded from the system until 1939, and merged with smaller parties and reorganized themselves as the present Labour Party (PvdA) in 1946 in an effort to broaden their support. The aim was to break through confessional lines of division and build a majority for a more explicitly moderate, non-Marxist variant of socialism. This failed, but altered the direction of Dutch Social Democracy. In the absence of either a majority or a substantially larger base of support, the PvdA became part of the politics of accommodation. Nevertheless, party members retained a 'dream of the great march'—rallying the masses to socialism (Molleman 1969). This influenced the way in which they reacted to changes in the late 1960s. Party leaders were annoyed when they were attacked in 1966 and 1967 from a dissident new left faction charging that they had abandoned their ideals, but they responded by adopting a more aggressive, majoritarian strategy attempting, in effect, to break out of the consociational system. The Liberals (VVD) also sought to polarize the system and rally voters detaching themselves from the Catholic pillar. However, their efforts were less strident and did not preclude coalitions with the three confessional parties or, after 1976, the Christian Democratic Appeal (CDA) (Wolinetz 1988, 1993).

The Netherlands, then, was different not only because reactions to consociational politics and the process of change began earlier, but also because parties with fewer resources of patronage responded differently to the strategic environment in which they found themselves. The combination of a more open or permissive electoral law facilitating the entry of a large number of political parties, and pressures from dissident factions and parties demanding change created a sense of crisis and uncertainty. But, rather than responding either by doing more of the same or serving up a bare minimum of change—which, to be sure, some wanted to do—Dutch parties attempted to redefine themselves and the party system in which they operated.⁴ The outcome was never as far-reaching as proponents of change had demanded, but nevertheless, resulted in a party system more extensively changed than any of the other three consociational systems.

Differences between the Netherlands and Belgium reflect not only differences between the two countries, but also differences in the goals which activists were pursuing. In the Netherlands, party leaders and the way in which they made decisions were the principal targets. In Belgium, consociational politics was not the issue, but rather its failure to take account of linguistic divisions. Flemish and Francophone and Wallonian activists demanded recognition and then parity with each other. Finding solutions was complicated by the distribution of populations and the problem of Brussels. In both instances, party leaders responded by taking

up and trying to channel dissidents' demands while preserving as much of the status quo as possible. In the Netherlands this meant that almost everyone favoured some kind of 'party renewal', but differed on what this actually meant. Different solutions (e.g. constitutional changes, changes in the electoral law, electoral alliances) became sources of disagreement. In Belgium, party leaders attempted to mollify dissidents by yielding to demands for linguistic rights, decentralization, and parity, while retaining control of the process at every stage. Austria is different yet again. There have been few innovations other than the abandonment of the grand coalition in 1966 and its resurrection in the 1980s. *Proporz* politics—proportional allocation—and neo-corporatist decision-making continued even though the grand coalition had been scrapped. As in Belgium, parties retain a strong hold on the state apparatus. However, this may be more common to party-dominated states than to consociational democracies.

Conclusion

We began by asking whether patterns of party system change in consociational democracies differed from those of other Western European countries. Our examination has not been conclusive. Although we have not dealt extensively with change in other party systems, we have not demonstrated that consociational politics display patterns of change distinct from other democracies, or that there is a single pattern of change common to consociational democracies. If anything, the differences among consociational systems are as striking as the differences between consociational and non-consociational systems. This is not surprising; almost all liberal democracies have been subject to similar sources of realignment and dealignment and parties in most countries are vulnerable to losses of support because they have been complicit in governing.

Katz and Mair (1995) have argued that a new ideal type of party, the *cartel party*—defined by its complicity in government and close ties to the state—has supplanted the *mass party* and the *catch-all party*. Although Katz and Mair's depiction of the cartel party may be exaggerated (see Wolinetz 1994b and Koole 1996), they raise important points about the relationship of contemporary political parties to the states which they govern. Parties are not as much a part of the state as Katz and Mair suggest, but those which have governed are responsible for its policies and are susceptible to losing support when voters feel disgruntled or annoyed (Smith 1989; Mair 1989). However, this is likely to be true not only in consociational democracies, in which parties share power, but also in neo-corporatist systems,⁵ in which larger producer groups are allowed a disproportionate voice in public policy and clientelistic systems in which parties colonize the state. Even if none of the above is true, parties may be vulnerable simply because they rotate in and out of power in periods in which policy alternatives have narrowed, making it more and more difficult for parties to deliver on what they have promised.

Unlike the other chapters in this book, this chapter's examination of party and party system change in consociational democracies has not applied Luther's analytical framework (1992, 1997b) and [Chapter 1](#).⁶ The conclusion of our analysis is that the case that there is a pattern of change, unique to consociational democracies, has not been proven. Instead, changes in the party systems of consociational democracies are best understood as part of broader processes of change in liberal democracies. Indeed, our analysis suggests that differences among different types of consociational democracy may not be as significant as we once thought.

Notes

- 1 See also the discussion of these matters in [Chapters 8](#) and [10](#).
- 2 See [Chapters 3](#) and [4](#) on Austria and Belgium, as well as [Chapter 10](#).
- 3 However, Church (1992) suggests that aggregate electoral stability might mask greater changes below the surface. A larger than usual number of Federal Council seats changed hands in the 1991 elections. In addition, low turnouts could mask considerable shifting among voters and non-voters.
- 4 Otto Kirchheimer (1966) excluded countries which were later to be defined as consociational democracies from his supposition that parties of mass integration were transforming themselves into catch-all parties. Kirchheimer argued that these parties' stable bases of support excluded them from the pressures to which other parties were subjected. Parties in the Netherlands did try to form catch-all parties. However, the same cannot be said for most parties in the other three consociational systems. Of these, only the SPÖ, which during the 1970s commanded 50–1 per cent of the vote, has been successful in either diversifying its support or increasing, even if only temporarily, the percentage of votes it won.
- 5 Many consociational democracies also display traits of neo-corporatism. However, this is not always the case, and some neo-corporatist systems, e.g. Sweden, are not consociational democracies.
- 6 For a comparative analysis that uses Luther's framework and offers a different perspective, see [Chapter 10](#).

10

‘Prudent leadership’ to successful adaptation?

Pillar parties and consociational democracy thirty years on

Kurt Richard Luther and Kris Deschouwer

Introduction

This concluding chapter will highlight what we believe to be some of the most significant overall insights provided by the comparative framework applied in this volume. Our empirical focus will be restricted to the four archetypal West European consociational democracies: Austria, Belgium, the Netherlands and Switzerland. We will address first the role of pillar parties within their respective subcultures and then their role in inter-subcultural accommodation. Thereafter, we shall offer some tentative conclusions about the role of pillar parties in the dynamics of continuity and change in consociational democracies.

Pillar parties’ intra-subcultural linkages: weakening or resilient?

Organisational penetration

Of the two indicators of subcultural penetration proposed in Luther’s framework, that pertaining to auxiliary association membership proved the more difficult to measure. Though the country studies each provided useful information on the nature and extent of subcultural auxiliary association membership, the lack of comparability of many of the data makes it difficult to provide an overall quantification of the size of the associations and the extent of change in their penetration of their respective subcultures. However, the general message is clear: in both absolute and relative terms, auxiliary association membership has been highest in Austria, which was closely followed by Belgium, and lower in the Netherlands (see also Pennings 1997). By comparison, Swiss auxiliary associations have never been anything like as well developed (and will not be considered further here). Second, the nature of auxiliary associations was different in Austria and Belgium on the one hand and the Netherlands on the other. In the first two, the sociocultural organisations were complemented by large associations linked to the para-state and closely involved in access to (and the allocation of) state resources. As Andeweg has shown, Dutch auxiliary associations were much less likely to

assume this gatekeeper role. Third, the picture regarding the timing and extent of change in total auxiliary association membership is quite complex and varied. In the Netherlands, decline was already under way in the 1960s. By contrast, in Austria and Belgium, total auxiliary association membership continued to increase for *circa* two more decades. Yet growth was concentrated primarily in the least politicised associations, whilst some of those perceived to be the most politically partisan have suffered a steep decline. Greatest stability is to be found amongst associations dispensing clientelistic services and it appears reasonable to conclude that the establishment of the latter type not only initially facilitated subcultural encapsulation, but also subsequently helped militate against the decline of organisational penetration.

Luther's second indicator of subcultural penetration was pillar party membership. The picture shown by the country chapters is uniformly one of declining absolute and relative pillar party membership, albeit from in part very different levels. [Figure 10.1](#) depicts the trend in overall membership density, measured as a proportion of the total electorates of the relevant countries. Austria stands out as the country with by far the highest membership density, whilst the levels of the other three countries are much closer to each other. When one compares these figures to those provided in respect of the countries covered by the Katz and Mair *et al.* project (1992:338–44), it is clear that though Austrian membership density is indeed high by international comparison, the density levels in the other three countries are not exceptionally high and are in fact lower than many Scandinavian countries.¹ [Figure 10.1](#) also shows that with the exception of Belgium, all four countries have since the 1960s experienced significant decline in the total membership density of the parties 'playing the consociational game'.

The relative rate and timing of pillar party membership decline is illustrated more clearly in [Figure 10.2](#). By standardising membership levels in 1960 (or as close thereto as the available data permit) at 100, it establishes a common benchmark from which to compare the speed and extent of change. The year 1960 is clearly to some extent arbitrary. However, since this was a time when membership was in all countries still relatively high, it can be justified empirically. More importantly, it can be justified theoretically by reference to the fact that this is the period which Lijphart had in mind when formulating his original theory and has for many observers come to denote the age of 'classic consociationalism' (Luther and Müller 1992b).

Total pillar party membership has clearly declined most in the Netherlands, where it now comprises merely 18 per cent of its 1960 level. Indeed, decline started even before 1960 and if one were to standardise at say 1949, membership density in 1995 would be a mere 15 per cent of that level. Accordingly, though Austria is an outlier in terms of the total membership density of its pillar parties (see [Figure 10.1](#)), [Figure 10.2](#) clearly demonstrates that the Dutch pillar parties constitute an exception in both the timing, speed and extent of membership density decline. By 1968, when Lijphart wrote his initial work on Dutch consociational

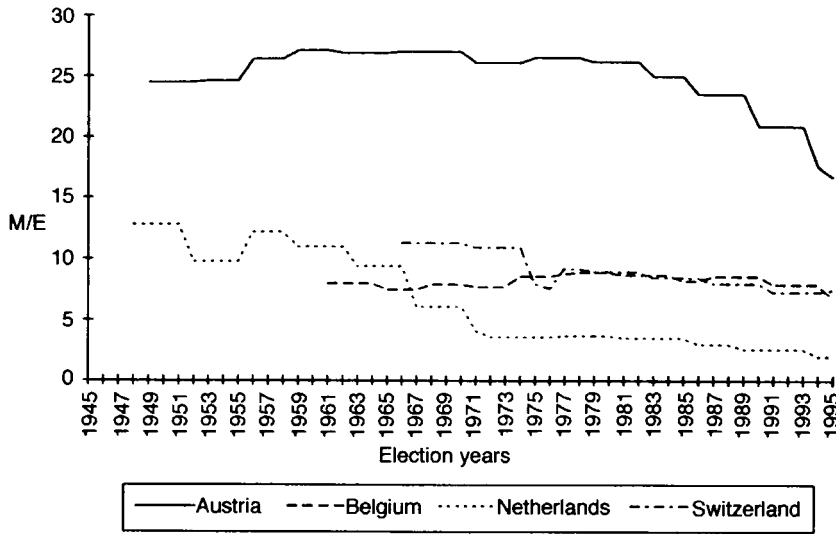


Figure 10.1 Total pillar party membership density in Austria, Belgium, the Netherlands and Switzerland (as percentages of their respective electorates)

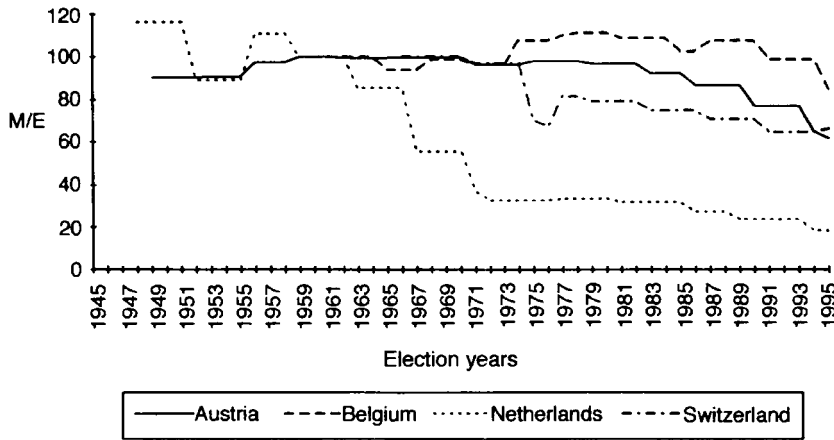


Figure 10.2 Total pillar party membership density in Austria, Belgium, the Netherlands and Switzerland (M/E) standardised as near as possible to 1960

democracy, the pillar parties were already well into a phase of steep decline, which then levelled off from the early 1970s. The extent of membership density decline in the other three countries has been more similar and much less pronounced. Thus by the mid-1990s, Belgian, Swiss and Austrian density levels were still at 85, 66 and 61 per cent of their 1960 levels. Moreover, if one examines the timing of decline, it is clear that in these three countries there was virtually no change in total pillar party membership density between 1960 and the mid-1970s. Decline came first in

Switzerland and then some ten years or so later in Austria, where the speed of decline has since the late 1980s significantly accelerated. By contrast, Belgian membership density initially actually increased further, before falling relatively marginally from the early 1990s. Finally, it is worth noting that whilst Austria has experienced only the second highest proportionate decline of total pillar party membership, that development has to be judged in the context of the country's much higher absolute level of total pillar party membership density (see [Figure 10.1](#)). This means that of all the four countries being considered here, absolute membership loss has been by far the highest in Austria.

Bases and success of pillar parties' political mobilisation

According to Lijphart's initial formulation (1968a), consociational techniques were established by prudent leaders willing and able to respond to the potentially destabilising effects of subcultural segmentation. Though Lijphart's assumptions regarding the causal relationship between segmentation (or pillarization) and accommodation have been questioned in a number of contributions to this volume and will be returned to below, the four country chapters have shown significant changes in the way in which subcultural values have been mobilised in consociational democracies, as well as in the impact of recent societal change upon pillar parties' mobilisational capacity.

One very interesting common conclusion concerns the salience of religious values, which traditionally functioned as important and powerful incentives, but have in this volume been shown to be the values whose mobilising power appears to have weakened most. In the Netherlands and Belgium, the once so successful and powerful religious parties have experienced a protracted period of electoral decline. The Belgian School Pact of 1958 can to some extent be regarded as the formal termination of the once so salient clerical versus anti-clerical cleavage. It obliged the Christian pillar organisations to broaden their appeal, which they did by softening the explicit reference to their Catholic identity and by referring to a 'social cultural Christianity'. In the Netherlands, the decline of religious parties has to a very large extent been concentrated in the decline of the KVP. However, 1994 marked a key moment in the long-term decline of the Dutch religious parties in general, since that year witnessed the first ever occasion on which a national government was formed without their participation.

In Austria, the old state—church cleavage has also been eroded, and it is again the religious pillar party which has declined most. Indeed, it is interesting to note that the Austrian FPÖ, which like the Belgian Liberal party was traditionally markedly anti-clerical, has of late not only started to present itself as a Christian party, but in its new Linz programme of October 1997 even claims that it and not the ÖVP is the best defender of Christian values. In Switzerland, where the decline in the total vote of the parties playing the consociational game has to date generally been less

pronounced, it is also a religious party—the Christian-Democratic party—which has suffered the greatest electoral losses.

A major factor militating against the capacity of religious values to mobilise political support is obviously Western Europe's general process of secularisation. Moreover, as a value underpinning political mobilisation, religion is intrinsically rather limited in its capacity for flexible adaptation. Religious parties can loosen their explicit link to the (Catholic) church, and try to articulate their appeal more in terms of societal commitment than religious, or clerical principles, but their degree of latitude remains limited. By contrast, socialist parties have thus far fared somewhat better. That is to say, they have apparently been more able to adapt to the changing societal conditions. Yet since this is not really a feature peculiar to consociational democracies, we shall not develop this point further here.

Much more interesting is the fact that parties in consociational systems have (or can have) access to other mobilisational incentives. It is in particular pillarization and the principle of segmental autonomy—whereby the distribution of policy outputs is delegated to the pillar organisations—that provide them with a reservoir of selective incentives which have the potential to help mobilise the rank and file at a time when the old ideational values are increasingly less able to do so. It should come as no surprise that it is in Belgium and Austria, the two countries where pillarization is still fairly strong and where the pillars have been thoroughly linked to the state, that high levels of patronage and clientelism have survived. The comparative absence of this type of exchange in the Netherlands is very striking. Rudy Andeweg advances the non-territorial electoral system (seats are distributed at the national level) and the Protestant (Calvinist) culture to explain the contrast with Belgium and Austria. In Switzerland, there is hardly any patronage either. As Pascal Sciarini and Simon Hug point out, the absence of real full-time politicians and the general weakness of political parties help explain the lower level of party patronage in the Swiss confederation.

The erosion of the old cleavages and value systems is again neither unique to, nor exceptionally high in, consociational democracies. This is the main thrust of Chapter 9. However, not least because it does not employ Luther's framework, this chapter does not address a point which we shall develop in greater detail below, namely, that such developments are arguably of much greater systemic relevance for consociational democracies, where pillarization meant that cleavages were once so highly institutionalised, so 'deeply frozen'. A recognition of the systemic relevance of dealignment for consociational democracies is to be found in [Chapter 8](#) which, however, argues that the analysis of change in consociational democracies could usefully complement the traditional concern with class and religious volatility with a more general consideration of 'pillar volatility', that is to say, the extent to which the shifts in party support have taken place between the traditional pillar parties on the one hand and non-pillar parties on the other. A strong indicator of the decline of consociationalism would then be not the rise of electoral volatility in general, but the overall loss of electoral support for the pillar parties.

This trend was already pointed out by Lijphart in 1975, when he maintained that in the Netherlands' now more homogeneous society, 'neo-democratic' movements would challenge the closed consociational rules of the game. The rise and success of D'66 was Lijphart's major example, but the breakthrough of *Volkspartij*, FDF and RW in Belgium can also be interpreted as a first successful mobilisation against the 'traditional parties'. It is interesting to note that in the 1980s and 1990s the parties voicing this kind of protest against the system—like the *Vlaams Blok* in Belgium and the FPÖ in Austria (Luther 1997a)—can also be seen in such functional terms, even if they are more usually characterised as manifestations of the 'third wave' of 'right-wing extremism' (Beyme, 1988), as 'right-wing populist' (Betz 1994), or as 'radical right' (Kitschelt 1996) parties.

The second aspect of subcultural mobilisation addressed in this volume concerns pillar parties' mobilisational success, which can be measured by reference to change not only in total pillar party membership, but also in the total pillar party vote. During the early 1960s, the level of the latter was similar in all four countries, but by the mid-1990s, each had experienced a comparable level of decline. In terms of the timing of this decline, Austria again appears as an outlier, since it was not until the mid-1980s that a significant reduction in the pillar parties' total share of the vote took place.

In [Figure 10.3](#) the pillar parties' joint electoral strength is standardised at 100 on the occasion of the election closest to 1960. This enables us to compare the four countries in respect of both the timing and the degree of change in the consociational players' post-war domination of their respective electoral markets. (This measure can also be regarded as an indicator of comparative pillar party dominance, or 'consociational concentration' in electoral arenas.) It helps highlight a number of further aspects. For one, it is clear that there have been interesting variations in the rate of decline. In Belgium, the Netherlands and Switzerland, it was quite similar, but in Austria, change during the period since the early 1980s has been very dramatic. Second, the decline in Austrian pillar parties' aggregate electoral performance has since the mid-1980s been so steep that by 1994, Austria had moved from being the most 'consociationally concentrated' to being the least. Third, in three of the four countries we are examining here, the latest national election has produced a modest revival of the pillar parties. In Switzerland, this was the first revival since 1985, whilst in the Netherlands and Austria, it was the first since 1981 and 1971 respectively. However, it is too early to suggest that these elections constitute a reversal of the predominant trend of recent years.

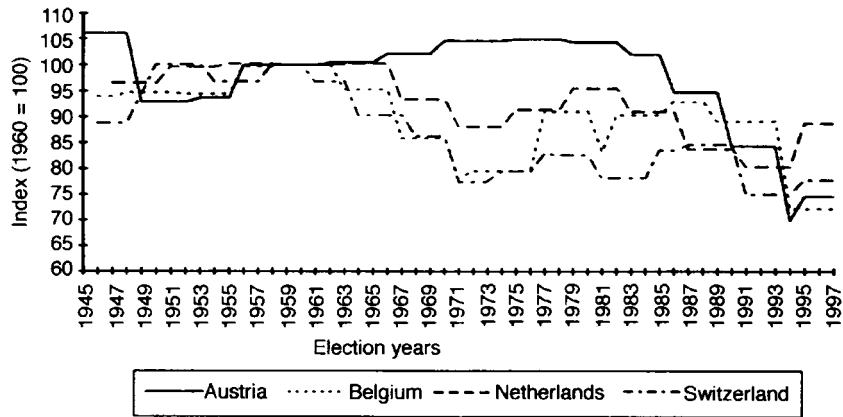


Figure 10.3 Total vote of pillar parties, standardised at 1960

Pillar parties' hierarchical control of their subculture

Luther's comparative framework, as outlined in the introductory chapter of this volume, hypothesised that in consociational democracies, pillar parties would be the major political actors within their respective subcultural segments. Yet the detailed analyses in this volume suggest that it is necessary to qualify that hypothesis. This can be done in respect both of the individual countries and of the different party families.

The Christian and socialist pillar parties vary not only in terms of the nature and efficacy of their mobilisational values, but also with regard to the exercise of hierarchical control over their pillars, with the socialist parties generally being more successful. Even in the Netherlands, where pillar parties have been shown by Rudy Andeweg to have played a much more modest role within their subcultures than we expected, the PvdA seems to be the clear leader of the socialist pillar. Socialist parties also dominate their pillars in Austria and in Belgium, although in the latter, party leadership of the socialist pillar is more pronounced in the Walloon region, where the socialist party has its electoral strongholds. By comparison, Christian pillars seem to be on the whole less party-centred. The Belgian Catholic pillar is very broad and internally divided, which makes it difficult for the party to play a leading role. The same can be seen in the Dutch Protestant pillar(s). The smaller Catholic pillar is more coherent, however, but then its leadership is assumed by the Church and not by the KVP. The Austrian Catholic pillar is also internally divided and the indirect nature of ÖVP party membership (the overwhelming majority of which is mediated through the party's three constituent 'Leagues') helps ensure that the party's constituent organisations and related auxiliary associations have a more important role to play than the central party leadership.

Where they exist, liberal pillars are in general fairly weak. Indeed, in order to be able to include such organisationally comparatively underdeveloped parties under the rubric of pillar parties, which are characterised by strong intra-subcultural linkage, it is often necessary to undertake a considerable degree of 'conceptual stretching' (Sartori 1970). Moreover, since the combined socio-political presence of liberal pillar parties and their auxiliary organisations is so weak, questions related to the political cohesion of liberal subcultures and of liberal parties' hierarchical political control of the latter become irrelevant.

There are also some clear differences in the nature and extent of pillar parties' hierarchical control over their respective subcultures in the individual countries. Predictably, Switzerland is again a problem here. According to the analysis offered by Pascal Sciarini and Simon Hug, Swiss society is 'barely segmented', and in respect of the religious cleavage, only the Catholics tried to build their own pillar organisations.² They contend that the only element one could look at is the degree to which the parties are strong organisations, able to enforce decisions beyond the boundaries of Switzerland's territorial (cantonal and communal) units. Then Sciarini and Hug examine the extent to which voters are aware of the voting recommendations (for referendums) of their party, and to which cantonal and communal party units follow these recommendations. Whilst this again shows the socialist party to be the strongest (or most centralised and nationalised) party, in general it confirms the Swiss parties' limited ability to control their own local organisations and thus offers a useful indication of the weakness of Switzerland's federal parties.

Austria and Belgium seem to have the highest degree of 'partyiness' of their segments. Pillar parties in these countries are fairly ubiquitous. Both in their own right and in conjunction with their auxiliary associations, they still penetrate into and control important aspects of the daily lives of the members of their respective subcultures. This has much to do with their control of the structure of rewards within the extensive range of activities that fall under the direct or indirect control of the (para-)state. As the 'reach' of Belgian and Austrian pillar parties is thus still quite extensive, many subcultural members remain dependent upon them and leader-follower relations remain highly unequal. By contrast, in the Netherlands, the 'substitutability' of organisational incentives (Panebianco 1988:31) was already much higher (and the parties concomitantly weaker) by 1968, when Lijphart's first work on consociational democracy was published. Early and sustained depillarization has exacerbated this trend, so that by the late 1990s, the question of Dutch pillar parties' control over their respective subcultures has become nearly as irrelevant as it is in Switzerland.

Pillar parties and inter-subcultural accommodation: pillar party dominance or party systems under threat?

As the various contributions to this volume have documented, the Austrian, Belgian, Dutch and Swiss pillar party electorates have of late all exhibited dealignment, declining partisan attachment and rising pillar volatility. This implies that the pillar parties are less successful in exercising their 'vertical' role of mobilising their subcultures. In turn, however, these developments are likely to impact also upon the structure and style of the pattern of 'horizontal' inter-subcultural relations between pillar parties, that is to say, upon the party system. Rather than rehearsing here the details contained in the country studies, it will suffice for our purposes to note that the structure of party interaction in the electoral arena has everywhere undergone a process of consociational deconcentration (i.e. a decline in pillar party dominance) and has become increasingly competitive, as new party actors have emerged and hitherto small opposition parties have grown. In addition, there have been changes in the levels of territorial concentration ('segmental', or 'sectional' autonomy) of the pillar parties' vote. (See below.)

As we have indicated above, whilst analogous trends may well be under way elsewhere, they have a potentially especially significant systemic implication for consociational democracies. In particular, a decline in vertical encapsulation and in pillar parties' capacity to mobilise their subcultures is likely not only to reduce their bargaining potential, but also to undermine the very *raison d'être* of consociational decision-making techniques in general and of pillar party monopoly of government participation in particular. Changes to the relative strength of pillar and non-pillar parties may also cause rules initially established above all in the interests of pillar parties and to facilitate inter-subcultural accommodation to come to exercise a perverse, unintended effect. This has already started to happen. Rules on party financing now benefit both new and revitalised non-pillar party actors, who in many cases articulate a fundamental critique of the 'consociational game'. There has also been an analogous change in the functioning of the key consociational principle of proportionality. For example, in Austria, most *Länder* constitutions still require all parties that gain a relatively modest share of the vote at *Land* parliament elections to be allocated seats in the provincial government. In recent years, the main beneficiary of this rule has been the FPÖ, which is now represented in all *Land* governments and has thus acquired a more prominent platform from which to articulate its opposition to the whole 'consociational game'. There is of course a considerable irony in the fact that it owes its *Land* government success to a key consociational principle and the pillar parties response has been to start changing the rules of the game in order to prevent the FPÖ's access to provincial government.

For its part, Belgian proportionality has also resulted in electorally successful anti-consociational parties such as the *Vlaams Blok* obtaining access to state resources which the pillar parties had intended to be shared solely amongst themselves. In Switzerland, direct democratic institutions are one of the main structures whereby mutual veto has been guaranteed. As Simon Hug and Pascal

Sciarini show, this means that assessments of the political relevance of a given political party have to take into account the extent to which it can credibly threaten to launch a referendum. Accordingly, significant increases in the electoral strength of non-pillar parties such as the Swiss Freedom Party or the Swiss Green Party could have a wider impact upon the party system, for it would require their inclusion in the pre-parliamentary phase of Switzerland's 'bargaining democracy' (Neidhart 1970).

In sum, reductions in the effectiveness of pillar parties' 'vertical' function of incorporating their subcultures and mobilising them politically is likely to challenge their combined dominance of electoral outcomes, which in turn may well have implications for the structure and style of party interaction. However, the electoral arena is but one potential site for 'decisive encounters' (Dahl 1966: 338–40) between parties. To establish whether the sociopolitical changes that have undermined the pillar parties' electoral dominance have been accompanied by an overall loss of pillar parties' dominance within their respective party systems, we need to examine additional arenas of party competition. Foremost amongst these is the national governmental arena.³ Luther's framework hypothesises that a consociational democracy would be characterised by (near) monopolisation of the governmental arena by the pillar parties.

Drawing upon the latest suggestions by Peter Mair (1996, 1997) on the comparative analysis of party systems, [Table 10.1](#) provides three indicators of the structure of cabinet competition in the countries being considered here. The first concerns 'alternation' (A), which relates to change in the party composition of governments and can be wholesale (w), partial (p), or non-existent (n). Second, we have noted cases of 'innovation' (I), that is to say, governments comprising previously unknown party combinations. Finally, we have sought to capture Mair's notion of 'access', which he argues should be understood as an indicator of 'whether governing remains the privilege of a limited subset of parties' (Mair 1996:93). Since we are interested in the extent to which the decline of the pillar vote has increased access from outside the 'subset' of the pillar parties, we have calculated the percentage of cabinet seats held by non-pillar parties ('non-pillar access' or NpA).

[Table 10.1](#) raises a number of very interesting issues, two of which will be addressed here. The first relates to (apparent differences in) the relative degree of closure of the national governmental arenas in the four countries. The position in Switzerland is clear-cut: non-pillar access to the government arena has never been permitted, nor (with the minor exception of the absence of the PSS from the *Bundesrat* during 1953–59), has there been any alternation, or innovation (see [Table 10.1](#), note p.). In short, the structure of competition in the Swiss governmental arena has been completely closed. Closure is also the predominant feature of the Austrian system. Since 1947, there have been only two significant changes. The first came at the end of the 1960s, when after 20 years of continuous grand coalition government, Austria witnessed partial alternation and an innovative single-party ÖVP government (1966), followed in 1970 by wholesale alternation to a single-

Table 10.1 Structure of cabinet competition in Austria, Belgium, the Netherlands and Switzerland: 'alternation', 'innovation' and 'non-pillar access (1945–98)

	<i>Austria</i>			<i>Belgium</i>			<i>Netherlands</i>			<i>Switzerland</i>		
	<i>A</i>	<i>I</i>	<i>NpA</i>	<i>A</i>	<i>I</i>	<i>NpA</i>	<i>A</i>	<i>I</i>	<i>NpA</i>	<i>A</i>	<i>I</i>	<i>NpA</i>
1945	–		0	N		11+(11) ^b						
	N		0	p	i	17+(22) ^c						
1946				p	i	19+(13) ^d	–		14+(7) ^f			
				p	i	32						
				n		32						
1947	p	(I) ^a	0	p		11				N		0
1948							P	I	7+(7) ^f			
1949	N		0	P		0						
1950				P		0						
				n		6						
1951							n		7 ^g	N		0
1952				n		6	P	I	6 ^g			
1953	N		0							p ^p	i ^p	0
1954				W		0				n		0
1955										N		0
1956	N		0				N	(I) ^h	0			
1957												
1958				W		6	p	i	0			
				p		(6) ^c						
1959	N		0				P	I	0	p ^p		0
1960												
1961	n		0	P		0						
1962												
1963	N		0				N		0	N		0
1964	n		0									
1965				N		0	p	i	0			
1966	P	I	0	p		0	p	i	0			
1967							P		0	N		0
1968				P		0						
1969												
1970	W	I	0									
1971	N		0				P	I	12 ⁱ	N		0
1972				N		0	P		0			
1973				p		0	p	i	(19) ^j			
1974				P		0						
				p	i	8						
1975	N		0							N		0
1976												
1977				p		0	P	^k	0			
				P	I	13						
1978				N		14						
1979	N		0	p	i	4				N		0
1980				p		0						
				p		0						
				p		0						
1981				N		0	P	I	20 ^l			
				p		0						

1982					P	i	36 ^m		
1983	P	I	20		P		0	N	0
1984									
1985			N	0					
1986	n		20		N		0		
1987	P		0					N	0
1988			P	i	11				
1989						P	0		
1990	N		0						
1991			P		0			N	0
1992			n		0				
1993									
1994	N		0			P	I	29 ⁿ	
1995			N		0			N	0
1996	N		0						
1997	n		0						
1998						N		20 ^o	

Sources: Individual country chapters and their authors, whom we thank. We should also like to express our appreciation to Lieven De Winter, Patrick Dumont and Iain Ogilvie for additional assistance kindly provided on Belgium.

Legends: This table adapts Mair's (1996, 1997) proposed indicators of the extent of closure of party competition for government. Alternation (A) relates to party turnover in cabinet and can be wholesale (w), partial (p), or non-existent (n). Innovation (I) denotes cabinets comprising party combinations unknown since 1945. Within the body of the table, alternation or innovation immediately following general elections are indicated by the use of upper case. NpA indicates the percentage of cabinet seats held by persons not representing pillar parties. Where two NpA figures are provided, overall NpA comprises their sum. Figures not in brackets relate to ministers who were independent technocrats, or from 'non-pillar' parties. Figures in brackets denote the share of portfolios held by ministers who though not formally representatives of 'pillar' parties might be considered to have been sympathisers, or even members, of one of the relevant subcultures. They might thus be deemed 'closet pillar party ministers'. Though total NpA is relatively clear-cut, allocating individual non-pillar ministers to the two NpA subtypes was more difficult (see below under 'Notes'). The relative size of the subtypes must thus be treated with caution.

Notes:

a Austria's first two post-war governments were all-party (i.e. included the KPÖ, which is therefore considered a party 'playing the consociational game' and its ministers do not figure as cases of NpA). The 1947 cabinet was thus 'innovative' only in that the KPÖ had ceased to be a full 'pillar party'.

b 2 Catholic technocrats

c 2 Catholic technocrats and 2 UDB (a splinter party from the Catholic pillar)

d 2 Catholic technocrats

e 1 Catholic technocrat who subsequently formally became a CVP minister

f 1 ARP technocrat

g 1 technocrat

h Innovative merely by virtue of excluding technocrats

i 2 DS70 ministers (of 16)

j 1 D'66 and 2 PRR (of 16), though all had been active in pillar parties; (van Doorn as KVP president)

k Not innovative. The 'new' CDA was a merger of hitherto separate pillar parties: KVP, CHU and ARP.

l 3 D'66 ministers (of 16)

m 5 D'66 ministers (of 14), but merely an interim cabinet preparing early elections

n 4 D'66 (of 14)

o 3 D'66 (of 15)

p The PSS minister resigned in 1953 and his party chose to stay out of government. Only in that limited sense was the 1953 government 'innovative'. The PSS re-entered government in 1959 (2 ministers).

party SPÖ government. Given the emphasis in his model upon grand coalition *government* the 1966 change caused Lijphart to conclude that consociational democracy had ended in Austria, though as [Chapter 3](#) in this volume has argued, that would be to over-emphasise the ‘decisiveness’ (Dahl 1966) of Austria’s government arena and to neglect the significance of the neo-corporatist arena, where the parties and their proxies continued to hold a mutual veto over most key policy areas. The second and thus in many ways more significant opening of the structure of competition came in 1983, when the SPÖ/ FPÖ coalition marked not only the first ‘small coalition’, but above all the to date sole example of non-pillar access to the national government arena. However, the significance of this period is considerably mitigated by on the one hand the weakness of the non-pillar party within the government, and on the other hand by the fact that since 1987, Austria has reverted to grand coalition government, where the two pillar parties together monopolise cabinet portfolios.

At first sight, the Belgian and Dutch systems appear to have been considerably more open, but that impression also requires considerable qualification. During the unusual conditions pertaining during the first two or three post-war years, when the party system had not yet stabilised, Belgian governments did indeed regularly contain independent technocrats and even ministers from non-pillar parties. However, a significant proportion of non-pillar access took the form of what one might term ‘closet’ pillar party ministers (i.e. ministers who though not formally representatives of ‘pillar’ parties might be considered to have been sympathisers, or even members, of one of the relevant subcultures). If one divides the post-war period into two halves (February 1945 to January 1972 and the period thereafter), one finds that in the former, non-pillar access amounted to merely 4.9 per cent of the total number of minister months. The largest proportion (2.4 per cent) comprised independent technocrats; 1.3 per cent of total minister months was made up by ‘closet’ pillar ministers and the portfolios held by representatives of the non-pillar PCB/KPB amounted to only 1.2 per cent. After the 1940s, non-pillar access soon became either insignificant or non-existent. Since January 1972, Belgium has experienced two periods (the mid- to late 1970s and the 1980s) of innovative coalition formulae and an opening of the structure of competition. Yet during the 26 years between 1972 and 1998, non-pillar access totalled a mere 3.3 per cent of minister months. To be sure, inasmuch as it was made up exclusively of representatives of non-pillar parties, non-pillar access was more significant than hitherto. On the other hand, as [Chapter 4](#) has explained, the major factors explaining the granting of this access was the pillar parties’ need to obtain the political majorities required for the approval of reforms to Belgium’s political system. Moreover, since 1991, the Belgian pillar parties again monopolise cabinet portfolios.

Of the four countries we are examining, the Netherlands boasts the most open structure of cabinet competition. Alternation has as a rule been at least partial, innovation has been high and for approximately 12 of the 27 years from July 1971

to August 1998, at least one non-pillar party has enjoyed access to the government arena. Yet a detailed examination of the information contained in Tables 5.9 and 10.1 suggests that major caveats are in order here also. Thus in the period up to July 1971, non-pillar access amounted to no more than about 4.7 per cent of the total number of minister months and no parties other than those 'playing the consociational game' held cabinet seats. Moreover, though most of this very limited non-pillar access comprised independent technocrats, nearly a third took the form of 'closet' pillar party representatives. Since July 1971, there has been a significant increase in overall non-pillar access, but above all in the scale of access to the government arena by parties not 'playing the consociational game'. Total non-pillar access increased to 12.3 per cent of minister months. The shares held by independent technocrats and 'closet' pillar party ministers stood at 0.5 and 2 per cent respectively, whilst the non-pillar parties (D70, but above all D'66 ministers) held some 9.7 per cent of the total number of minister months. The significance of change in the Dutch government arena should not be exaggerated, however. Though one might be tempted to conclude that D'66 appears to have assumed the status of an 'insider' party, the fact remains that the pillar parties still dominate this arena and the 'mechanics' of interaction between government parties retains many of the features that characterised Dutch politics during 'classic' consociationalism.

In sum, with the qualified exception of the Netherlands and the episodic opening of Belgium's party system, the structure of competition in the national government arenas of the four West European consociational democracies being considered here has predominantly been closed. As the country studies in this volume have shown (see Chapters 3 to 6), the style of interaction between government parties is still mainly consensual. Moreover, in Austria, Belgium and Switzerland, electorally relevant parties continue to be excluded and thus constitute at least 'isolated', if not 'anti-system' parties.

A second interesting issue is the contrast between on the one hand a closed structure of competition within the government arena of three of the four countries, where access for parties outside (and especially for those opposed to) the pattern of cartelised, accommodative interaction is at best infrequent and usually non-existent, and on the other hand, the fact that it is in precisely the same three countries that pillar party electoral dominance has fallen most (see Figure 10.3). It is to possible explanations of this apparent paradox of incongruent change in the 'horizontal' and 'vertical' role of pillar parties that we now turn.

Dynamics of continuity and change

A framework for the comparative analysis of change

Even the very earliest consociational literature explicitly acknowledged that things were changing. Thus in his introduction to *The politics of accommodation*, Lijphart (1968b) argued that Dutch politics was becoming very different and could no longer

be considered consociational. In the Dutch version of Lijphart's book (1968c), the aspect of change (*kentering*) was even picked up in the title. Lijphart's suggestion is that consociational democracies where subcultural divisions erode, and society thus becomes homogeneous, whilst political elites and institutions nonetheless still display a 'prudent leadership' style, may be considered to be becoming depoliticised or cartel democracies. The crucial factor is of course system stability, the non-adaptation of the accommodative rules of the political game to changing societal demands. In this Lijphartian logic we recognise the distinction in Luther's framework between the vertical and the horizontal aspect of consociational democracy, between the parties and their societal linkage on the one hand, and the party system and its link with the state on the other hand.

The distinction that has been made in this volume between segmentation and pillarization proves very useful for disentangling the mechanisms of change and adaptation and especially also the possible reasons for their absence. Whilst 'segmentation' pertains purely to the societal aspect of the vertical subcultural encapsulation, 'pillarization' denotes the organisational aspect of segmentation. Where pillar organisations fulfil state functions and distribute state outputs to their own rank and file, pillarization can provide a link between the segment and the state. There are thus two possible ways in which consociational patterns can be 'frozen' into the political system: the first is the penetration of society by the pillars (a vertical aspect), whilst the second comprises the rules of the game at the level of the party system. Combining Lijphart's original conceptualisation of the ending of consociational systems with the party-centred approach underpinning Luther's comparative framework, which looks at segments, pillars and systemic rules of the game, produces an interesting set of tools to compare consociational democracies, the way in which they change and the direction they take when moving away from their traditional consociational structures and techniques.

The other thing which is highlighted by using this conceptual language is, once again, the problematic nature of the Swiss case. According to Lijphart's original typology, a country only fully qualifies for the status of a consociational democracy where both societal segmentation (and pillarization) and elite accommodation coexist. According to this criterion, Switzerland does not fit the type very well, since whilst it clearly exhibits elite accommodation, the extent of segmentation and pillarization is, at best, limited. One can try to look for a 'functional equivalent' for societal segments and point to the importance of the cantons in the Swiss political system, but then it becomes clear that one also needs to think of a 'functional equivalent' for de-pillarization when one wants to look at the kinds of changes we are discussing here. The decline of intra-cantonal homogeneity might be a relevant historical change (e.g. the decline of the religious cleavage), but since elite accommodation is not primarily about the accommodation of cantonal interests, it is difficult to imagine how such possible homogenisation would affect relations between segments and the system. In short, the problem is that Switzerland hardly displays the societal (vertical) aspects of consociationalism. It constitutes a perfect

fit for the ‘consensus democracy’ posited by Lijphart (1984a), but then that is hardly surprising, since that typology focuses primarily on political institutions (see [Chapter 2](#)). Since our aim here is to seek to capture the dynamics of change in consociationalism by looking at changes in both the vertical and the horizontal aspect, the Swiss case is and remains problematic.

The possible functional equivalents for segments and pillars of the Swiss cantons, raises another relevant question for the comparative analysis of consociational systems. Belgium has lately become a fully-fledged federal state, with individual political parties never representing more than one of the two linguistic groups. As Kris Deschouwer has argued in [Chapter 4](#), the Belgian federal state employs many of the structures and techniques identified with consociational democracy, while society is indeed deeply divided along territorially reinforced linguistic lines. Here we have both aspects of consociationalism, with the societal segmentation being territorial. But the fact that there is not a one-to-one relation between segments and parties—each segment has more than one party—also raises problems for comparison. We will return to the topic of ‘territorial’ consociationalism below.

Similarities and differences

Our analysis of continuity and change in the four (or three) consociational countries has brought to the fore one very obvious similarity: the process of de-segmentation. By that we mean the erosion of the ideational and/or solidary aspect of the societal subcultures, which no longer function as encapsulated ‘milieux’ and are thus *inter alia* no longer fully able to mobilise votes in support of their ‘logical’ pillar party. Using the general decline in the combined vote for pillar parties as our electoral indicator of de-segmentation leads us to assume that de-segmentation encourages voters to move away from the traditional parties in general. Mónica Méndez-Lago ([Chapter 8](#)) has called this ‘pillar volatility’ and argued that moving away from a pillar party to a non-pillar party is an easier step than going straight to another pillar party. Though the figures of pillar volatility and total volatility available to her did not permit her to see a clear sequence, she did see that pillar volatility constituted a quite high proportion of total volatility, which means that electoral changes are to a large extent changes produced by the voters leaving the pillar parties.

A major reason why the volatility figures cannot prove that pillar volatility precedes voter shifts between the pillar parties is to be found in the weakness of the volatility measure as such. It is only able to give vague and superficial minimal indications of what is really happening in the electorate. Individual data are able to tell a more complete story, but then they are not available for this kind of comparative investigation. However, if we re-examine total votes, we can identify a movement that might support the hypothesis of a sequence. Both in Belgium and in the Netherlands, a sharp decline of the total vote for the pillar parties (i.e. a period when pillar volatility must be high) was followed by a slow but significant recovery

on the part of the old pillar parties. This could be the result of the changed image of the old pillar parties. If they are no longer considered to be pillar parties, then changing from one pillar party to another is no longer a major change. For instance, new voters might vote for the traditional pillar parties, because they have changed and are no longer considered to be the traditional pillar parties. In addition, where new parties enter the governing arena and thus become more similar to the traditional parties, they might also gradually lose the attractiveness they originally had because they were new and different. That appears to be what has happened in Belgium (to the VU, RW and FDF) and in the Netherlands (D'66). In Austria, a recovery of the pillar parties is not yet visible, but then pillar party decline only really started in the late 1980s and the challengers (Greens, LiF and above all Haider's FPÖ) have not yet entered the federal government.

Possibly the most interesting similarity is thus the sharp decline of the pillar vote, followed by a recovery after a decade or so. In Austria, the decline in the pillar vote started later, which is perhaps why there is as yet no evidence of (sustained) recovery. Switzerland also follows this common pattern, although the decline is less sharp, and the recovery is certainly not due to the integration of the new parties in the federal government, which has remained absolutely closed.

One of the most striking differences between the four countries is of course the timing of the electoral change experienced by the pillar parties. In three countries, the vote for the players of the 'consociational game' declined in the 1960s, while in Austria, this process started two decades later and was then extremely rapid. This begs the question: what made Austria different? The answer might again be provided by returning to our analytical distinction between segmentation and pillarization. Implicit in our use of the electoral indicator to measure decline in the mobilising power of the subcultures (de-segmentation), is the assumption that this mobilising potential is based on cultural symbols and ideas. Yet as we have argued above, other incentives can also be used, especially when segments become pillars and as such acquire organisations that have access to material outputs and services. These outputs can help to keep the loyalty of the voters at a level sufficiently high to prevent a radical electoral decline on the part of the pillar parties. In other words: the stronger pillarization is, the higher are the chances that subcultural de-segmentation will not be accompanied by the pillar parties' loss of control over the party system. Another condition that needs to be fulfilled in this respect is of course a fairly high degree of centrality of the party within its pillar. The outputs channelled through the pillar organisations have to be recognised as being provided by the party. Political patronage, where politicians can use their privileged access to the state (or to state-linked auxiliary organisations) to offer assistance to individual members of their subculture, can fulfil the same function.

The Netherlands and Austria behave exactly as one would expect under these circumstances. The low degree of party centrality in the Netherlands, the absence of clientelism and the non-penetration of the state by the pillar organisations together help explain full depillarization and the early collapse of the pillar party vote. The

late electoral decline in Austria would then have to be attributed to the higher degree of partyness of the pillars, the tradition of clientelism and the penetration of the state by the parties and pillar organisations.

Belgium does not seem to fit the picture here. The decline of the pillar vote comes much too early. Belgium should be closer to the Austrian timing. Yet for Belgium we need to consider an additional factor: the politicisation of the ethno-linguistic cleavage. This ‘disturbed’ the decline of the pillar vote. The decline of the 1960s was higher than a consideration of the systemic conditions to which we have alluded would lead one to expect, because the success of the challenging parties was related to the growing salience of a substantial cleavage. It is perfectly reasonable to explain the rise and success of the linguistic and regionalist parties as a challenge to the traditional pillar parties. However, the challengers were criticising not only (nor necessarily even primarily) the traditional parties’ old consociational structures and techniques, but also the fact that the latter were not addressing ethno-linguistic demands. This development of a permanent and structural new issue is—at least within the family of consociational countries—a unique Belgian phenomenon.

As we have argued above, change in pillar parties’ ‘vertical’ and ‘horizontal’ roles has been very different in both its timing and extent. In Austria, the parties’ capacity to exercise their traditional vertical role started to decline only relatively recently, but has since weakened greatly. By contrast, Austrian pillar parties still dominate the governmental arena of the party system and, given the fact that the neo-corporatist arena retained a veto power over significant areas of policy even during the periods of single-party government (1966–87), there has been comparatively little change in crucial aspects of the structure of Austrian party competition at the national level.⁴ In Belgium, the pillar parties’ ‘vertical’ role has declined, but they have successfully used the federalisation of the state to establish within their halves of the bifurcated party system an even greater degree of pillar party dominance than was formerly the case. In Switzerland, the absence of segmentation means that though the same parties continue to monopolise the ‘horizontal’ politics of accommodation, they never exercised the vertical role which Luther’s framework hypothesised for parties in consociational democracies. Finally, the Dutch pillar parties were the first to experience a loss of ‘vertical’ encapsulation of their subcultures and though until 1971 they were able to exclude any other party from the national government arena, since that time their ‘horizontal’ interaction has frequently had to be extended to embrace non-pillar parties. Yet paradoxically, the Dutch pillar parties’ combined share of the total national vote is now closer to its 1960 level than the combined votes of the pillar parties of any of the other three countries are to their own 1960 values (Figure 10.3)

We believe the analyses in this volume strongly suggest that parties do matter. Societal changes alone are not enough to explain change in consociational democracies and the differences and similarities between them. It is especially inappropriate to argue of political parties that they are simply at the mercy of their societal environment. On the contrary, they are to a certain extent in control of

what is happening to them, or at least of what is happening in their institutional environment. Some parties are more in control than others. Some have more and better access to resources allowing them to keep their environmental conditions under control. We have argued here that parties in consociational democracies—and especially parties in fully pillarized consociational democracies—have extra resources which enable them to maintain not only their individual political strength, but also (and perhaps much more importantly) the equilibrium of the system. In so doing, the parties reproduce the party system. They provide and keep alive the dominant ‘language of politics’ (Mair 1997), which defines the way in which issues are defined, the way in which they are treated and the actors having the right and the opportunity to deal with them. The format and style of the party system can then remain largely unchanged, thus in turn reinforcing the logic and the limits of political action. In consociational democracies, the pillars and the link between parties, pillars and the state, act as ‘freezing devices’ (Deschouwer 1997a) allowing the system to survive beyond the life-span of the underlying societal divisions. And that is exactly what Lijphart then described as a depoliticised or cartel democracy. The power of the institutions related to consociational practices is thus important, and adds to our understanding of the evolution of consociational democracies and of the timing of the evolution.

Yet the typically consociational institutions are of course not the only variables that can explain recent developments in the consociational countries, though the concept of ‘explanation’ may not be the most appropriate in this respect. We are dealing with four, or perhaps even only three countries, for which a number of societal evolutions and institutional constraints provide the conditions under which they function. This can never lead to a conclusion in terms of explanation. There are too many variables and not enough cases. This discussion of differences and similarities therefore does not presume to establish a fully-blown theory of change, but simply to improve and deepen our understanding of the cases. The approach offered by the consociational model, and especially by Luther’s party-centred adaptation of it, leads to the identification of a number of interesting conditions and mechanisms.

Three more variables will be addressed here. The first introduces an additional factor into our discussion of the reasons behind the early decline of consociationalism in the Netherlands; the second addresses the question of why pillar party decline was so much later in Austria; the third permits greater elaboration of the Belgian and Swiss cases. This first variable has already been raised in Rudy Andeweg’s analysis of the Netherlands: Protestantism. Andeweg asserts that the Protestant (Calvinist) culture of the Netherlands militated against the development of patronage and clientelism and therefore constituted a serious impediment to the penetration of the state by pillar organisations. It is interesting to note that the two countries with the highest levels of clientelism and patronage (Belgium and Austria) are homogeneously Catholic. One may tentatively assert that a Catholic culture allows for greater flexibility in how bureaucratic rules are dealt

with and that this is reflected in the generally rather different practices in Northern and Southern Europe. Moreover, Catholicism is often accompanied by a Church-state cleavage, which can (and usually does) lead to a lower level of legitimacy for bureaucratic state rules and to the development of separate Christian organisations.

The second variable is membership of the European Union (EU). Both Belgium and the Netherlands are founding members of the EU, while Austria only entered serious negotiations in the late 1980s, joining in January 1995. Not being a member of the EU enabled the Austrian party elites to continue to use the state for purposes of linkage with their own rank and file, for whom they provided selective and policy-based material incentives. EU directives introduce a number of limits, such as the obligation to open the market for state contracts to all European firms, which means that existing agreements on divisions of the internal market can no longer be honoured. This removes at least one important element of pillar party control over the institutional environment. The fact that this power was present in Austria until the early 1990s, could be another factor that helped delay the decline of segmentation and of consociational accommodation.

The third variable relates to territory. It was mentioned by Andeweg as another factor explaining the absence of clientelism in the Netherlands. The Dutch electoral system is centralised and does not allow politicians to defend the interests of their own constituency, or to offer tangible services to their local rank and file (pork-barrel politics). The Belgian and the Austrian electoral systems are much more decentralised, and do offer this possibility of a direct and possibly clientelistic link between the citizens and ‘their’ members of parliament. Moreover, in the case of Austria, the traditional territorial concentration of the subcultures meant a fair degree of segmental autonomy at the level of the *Länder*. Though this declining territorial concentration has of late implied a move away from such ‘sectional autonomy’ (Lehmbruch 1968 and [Chapter 3](#) in this volume), federalism has played an important role in shaping both the political sociology and the elite accommodation of Austrian consociational democracy. Territory also played a crucial role in the discussion of the Swiss case. Here the territorial division was seen as a possible functional alternative for the subcultural segmentation in the other consociational countries. Given the absence of pillars, the idea that the localism of the Swiss institutions could offer the possibility for clientelism is not relevant.

It is relevant though for Belgium, where consociational practices are still very much present in the federal institutions. Here, the trend is rather the opposite of that just described in Austria, where the territorial concentration and sectional autonomy of the subcultures is being eroded. The Belgian actors in the consociational game are increasingly the territorially encapsulated (‘federated’) entities. In terms of Belgium’s traditional religious and socioeconomic cleavages, they are now much more homogeneous than they ever were at the pan-Belgian level. State reform has thus reinforced the partyness of pillarization. The Catholic pillar, being the strongest in Flanders, has now its own sub-state, in which it is stronger than it was

at the national level, whilst the socialist pillar has the same quasi-monopoly in Wallonia. One can see the (Flemish) Christian-Democratic party leading the Flemish government, and the (Walloon) socialist party leading the Walloon government. Unlike Switzerland, Belgium now has a territorial and federal division which almost coincides with the old cleavage lines, and which completely coincides with the new ethno-linguistic cleavage lines. The federal state is too young to assess fully the effects of this state-society linkage.

Conclusion

The future of the pillar parties and of the consociational practices in which they have traditionally engaged remains uncertain. On the one hand, the maintenance of a closed structure of competition in the Swiss, Austrian and (albeit to a lesser degree) in the Belgian national governmental arenas might enable them to ensure that the 'language of politics' (Mair 1997) remains in their favour and thus helps them face down the non-pillar parties' challenge to the 'consociational game'. However, the refusal to widen access, or to change increasingly disputed consociational practices could further increase public support for anti-consociational parties. Ultimately, that might generate a major systemic crisis such as recently occurred in Italy and could put an end to the pillar parties' dominance of the party system. On the other hand, the Dutch experience suggests that early responsiveness to anti-consociational challenges by opening the structure of party system competition to other actors may in the long term enable the traditional parties to revive.

Whichever scenario proves correct, one of the main conclusions of the framework adopted in this volume is that parties do matter. They are not mere passive respondents to sociopolitical factors, but strategic actors. Their 'prudent leadership' initially created consociational structures which they then moulded to their advantage. Yet as La Palombara and Weiner (1966:14) argue, 'new institutions are created that persist long after the factors which precipitated their creation have disappeared'. The challenge for the pillar parties now lies in finding strategies of adaptation to changed circumstances that will maximise their chances of maintaining the advantages they have for so long enjoyed. Their future will be closely linked to the prudence of those adaptive strategies.

Notes

- 1 Strictly speaking, the two figures measure slightly different phenomena. Pillar party membership density excludes parties that do not 'play the consociational game', whilst Katz and Mair's figures include all parties. In practice, however, this disparity does not undermine the point we are making here.
- 2 This assertion is not accepted by Jürg Steiner, however, whom they refer to in their chapter. He is strongly of the opinion that Switzerland does (or at least did) have an encapsulated Catholic subculture with pillarization. See, for example, Steiner (1998a and 1998b).

- 3 We could in principle also do this in respect of other arenas. One is the parliamentary arena, but as has been argued in respect of the Austrian case (see [Chapter 3](#)), the relatively high level of proportionality of the electoral system means that we will not find a significant disparity in the two arenas. Other sites of party interaction that will not be reviewed here (but which are addressed in the country chapters) are the neo-corporatist and bureaucratic arenas.
- 4 For a recent essay on this 'asymmetrical change', see Luther (1999c).

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