

Political Institutions in Europe



*Edited by
Josep M. Colomer*

Germany
**Great Britain
and Ireland**
France
Italy
**Spain
and Portugal**
**The Low
Countries**
**The Nordic
Countries**

Political Institutions in Europe

This is a clear, accessible introduction to the institutional regimes of fifteen countries in Western Europe written by an outstanding group of European political scientists.

Each chapter is devoted either to a single country or to a small group of countries and each follows a common framework, allowing readers to draw sophisticated comparisons between countries. The topics covered by each chapter include parliaments, national, regional and local governments, as well as the relationships between state institutions and the European Union. Also examined are the electoral, policy, coalitional and strategic criteria used by political organizations. The analysis aims to combine factual descriptions of the governments and politics of the European Union countries with a more theoretical understanding of institutions.

Political Institutions in Europe provides a detailed panorama of the design and workings of the political institutions of Western Europe at the end of the twentieth century. Hence it will be an invaluable text for any student of European politics.

Josep M.Colomer is based at the Spanish Higher Council of Scientific Research, Barcelona

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Notes on Contributors

Josep M. Colomer is Professor of Political Science at the Higher Council of Scientific Research, in Barcelona, Spain, and Visiting Professor at New York University, USA. He has published on formal political theory, political institutions and democratization, including the books *El arte de la manipulation política* and *Game Theory and the Transition to Democracy*.

Ian Budge is Professor of Government at the University of Essex, Colchester, UK. He is the author or co-author of some fifteen books on democracy and political parties, including *Parties and Democracy* (with H.Keman), *Party Policy and Government Coalitions* (with M.Laver and others), *Parties, Policies and Democracy* (with H.-D.Klingemann and R.I.Hofferbert) and *Voting and Party Competition* (with D.J.Farlie).

Svente Ersson is Lecturer at Umea University, Sweden, and co-author (with J.-E. Lane) of *Comparative Politics*.

Hans Keman is Professor of Political Science at the Free University of Amsterdam, The Netherlands. He has published on the welfare state, military expenditure, and social-democratic politics, including *The Development Towards Surplus Welfare* and *Parties and Democracy* (with I.Budge).

Jan-Erik Lane is Professor of Political Science at Oslo University, Norway, and Adjunct Professor at the Norwegian School of Management at Sandvika. He has published on the welfare state, the public sector, and comparative public policy, including *Politics and Society in Western Europe* and *Comparative Politics* (with S. Ersson).

Yves Mény is Director of the Robert Schuman Centre at the European University Institute, in Florence, Italy. He was Professor at the Institute of Political Studies of Paris. He has published on administration reform, regionalization, the crisis of the European iron and steel industry, and constitutions, including *Politiques Publiques* and *Government and Politics in Western Europe*.

Gianfranco Pasquino is Professor of Political Science at the University of Bologna, Italy, and Adjunct Professor at the Bologna Center of the Johns Hopkins University. He has published on political parties, electoral reform and federalism, including *L'opposizione, Il federalismo* and a co-edition of *Ending the First Republic Italian Politics in 1994*.

Manfred G.Schmidt is Professor in Political Science at the University of Heidelberg, Germany. He has published on comparative public policy, labour force, and political parties. His books include *Die Westlichen Länder* and *Managing Mixed Economies*.

Introduction

Josep M. Colomer

Europe is the continent of old democracies, and democracy is the form of government which has triumphantly extended to the eastern part of that continent and also to many other parts of the world at the end of the twentieth century. However, just when this typically European form of government is being accepted as never before, popular dissatisfaction with democratic outcomes, criticism of political decisions and unpopularity of politicians seem to be spreading. There is a far-reaching suspicion that this paradoxical growth of dissatisfaction with the real working of the most accepted form of government, in particular its apparently decreasing ability to manage the economy, is related to the arrangements and structuring of political institutions in democratic regimes.

In this book political institutions in fifteen European democratic countries are described, analysed and partly compared. Institutions—the typical subject of political science—are considered both in the sense of rules of the political game and as political organizations acting within that framework. Our main concerns will be electoral rules, political parties, elections, parliaments, national, regional and local governments, and the relationship between State institutions and the European Union, as well as the electoral, policy, coalition and strategic criteria used by political actors constrained by institutional rules. Chapters are devoted to single-country analysis, in the cases of Germany, France and Italy, and to sub-area studies in the cases of the islands of Britain and Ireland, the Iberian peninsula (Spain and Portugal), the Low Countries (Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg), and the Scandinavian and Nordic countries (Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Finland and Iceland). (Some basic data on these countries are presented in Table 1.1.) The common historical and cultural features of the groups of countries mentioned allow us to isolate their specific institutions and compare their specific effects. Throughout the text, and in particular in this introduction, relevant comparisons of some institutional features of all the countries are also presented. Five general tables and several common tables for each chapter help to offer an overall view of all the countries of Western Europe.

2 Introduction

Table 1.1 Basic data

Country	Population 1993 (million)	Territory (000 km ²)	GDP per capita 1993 (\$)	Year of current constitution
Austria	7.8	84	23,380	1920 (1945)
Belgium	10.0	31	21,000	1831 (1945)
Britain	57.5	245	16,300	1215/1832
Denmark	5.1	43	26,900	1953
Finland	5.0	338	16,830	1919
France	57.5	552	22,670	1958
Germany	80.6	357	23,520	1949
Greece	10.2	132	7,700	1975
Iceland ^a	0.25	103	25,500	1944
Ireland	3.5	70	12,990	1937
Italy	57.5	301	17,600	1948
Luxembourg	0.4	3	35,260	1868 (1948)
Netherlands	15.1	37	20,410	1983
Norway	4.3	324	25,410	1814 (1945)
Portugal	9.8	92	6,320	1976
Spain	39.1	505	12,180	1978
Sweden	8.8	450	22,260	1975
Switzerland ^a	6.7	41	32,680	1874

Notes Parentheses denote the most recent year the constitution was enacted, (a) Figures for 1991.

Source GDP per capita from *The Economist*.

In the opinion of the authors of this project, a clear, accessible, up-to-date and, at the same time, analytical and critical exposition of the institutional regimes of the European countries mentioned was a void to be filled in academic literature. This book may be used as an intermediate textbook for studies in Political Science, Comparative Politics, European Politics, Political Institutions or Constitutional Law, but as a whole or in some of its parts it can also be useful either for more introductory or more advanced courses in the same fields. In writing the text, it has not been assumed that the reader should be familiar with the abundant factual information provided here or that he or she should have prior knowledge of the analytical concepts sparingly used throughout.

The editor has had the pleasure of working with an outstanding selection of European political scientists, well known for their insightful comprehension of the political systems of their countries and for their research and analytical skills. Most of the co-authors have been in regular contact through the European Consortium of Political Research and other university networks; regarding this book, the editor has personally met most of the authors (in Britain, the Netherlands, Norway and Spain), and there has been a series of exchanges and mutual revisions, with the aim of developing a common general framework to present data and some conceptual tools for explaining the real world. The book is a joint venture of three European publishers, Routledge in English, Ariel in Spanish and Laterza in Italian, acting in concert since the project's inception.

The applied analyses presented in this book attempt to fill a gap between empirical knowledge and political theory. For several decades a corpus of increasingly refined theoretical statements and great amounts of empirical data have grown up together in political science. Yet it is obvious that formal deductive reasoning without reference to real facts, on the one hand, and merely inductive generalizations, on the other, have not exhausted the possibilities of intellectual progress in the discipline of politics.

Within the field of comparative politics—an admittedly large, plural and often evasive field—there is a tradition which pushes in a more appropriate direction. This is formed by all those pieces of research devoted not only to more or less accurate descriptions of political facts in several countries but also to advancing knowledge about similarities and differences among political structures and, at the same time, testing theoretical propositions about the real working of political institutions. (For comparative methodology see Lijphart 1971; Przeworski and Teune 1970; Smelser 1976.)

Nevertheless, one should be aware that discontinuities in the relationship between explanation and description in political science have also been partly provoked by the lack of a single, widely accepted methodological approach among the members of the discipline. Only progress in the consistency and rigour of theoretical assumptions and of analytical methods can create adequate conditions for articulating observations of the real world in a meaningful ensemble.

The development of political science during the twentieth century has contributed in a discontinuous and fragmentary way to achieving this aim.

As is well known, during the first part of the century the main influence in the study of politics came from constitutional law. Its characteristic subjects were at that time certain features of political institutions, such as relations between the legislature, the executive and the judiciary, the forms and types of government and, more incipiently, electoral laws. This tradition gave us important description and systematization of political data and, with its universalist claim, helped to enlarge the territorial scope of study to all parts of the planet. However, the typical approach of political law was normative rather than explanatory, and many of its works were pervaded by value judgements often supported merely by preconceptions in favour of or opposed to certain real existing political arrangements.

The 'behavioural revolution' diffused in the 1950s had the salutary effect of contributing to reduce the former prescriptive focus while, at the same time, introducing new actors, such as real voters, political parties and interest groups, as the main subject of the study of politics. This in turn enlarged political studies and produced huge amounts of empirical knowledge and collections of data. However, its methods, focusing on inductive statistics and generalizing reasoning, did not have the capacity to provide explanatory causality and falsifiable prediction. Furthermore, the 'sociological' emphasis on socio-economic structures, values inherited from

education and family, party motives and ideology, public opinion and motives for voting, mostly considered as factors in the stability of political systems, led to neglect of the study of political institutions—a crucial intermediary between values and outcomes—which were often forgotten in a ‘black box’.

The rediscovery of institutions came both from a search for complementary explanations in this kind of empirical ‘sociological’ analysis and from some developments in formal political theory. The latter were in their turn a result of a new theoretical and methodological course, the ‘rational choice’ revolution, basically inspired by the deductive and formal, ‘economic’ style of reasoning, sparked off in the 1960s and 1970s. After a number of years of sophisticated modelling of ‘market’-type interactions among political actors, the apparent lack of a theoretical explanation for real equilibria or stable outcomes of those interactions led to the pursuit of new research in the institutional direction. Political institutions were, thus, rediscovered as a source of empirical regularities which were inconsistent with the findings of formal models previously built in an institutional vacuum. The theoretical scheme was then improved with concepts such as ‘structure-induced equilibria’, that is, those collective decisions which are relatively stable, in spite of being made in social conditions prone to instability, because they are efficaciously produced by the institutional structure (Shepsle 1979, 1989; Riker 1980).

In this approach, ‘institutions’ are considered in a rather abstract way simply as rules of the game, especially rules for making collective decisions. However, the analysis tends to be completed with ‘organizations’, that is, parties, pressure groups, economic and social bodies and other purposive actors trying to take advantage of the opportunities stemming from the existing institutions. This formal restatement of the main elements of the political process was enough to draw the attention of a relevant number of political scientists again towards their old and temporarily lost tradition emphasizing the study of institutions.

The search for explanations of empirical observations and the development of formal theory helpful in understanding the real world converged, thus, at the beginning of the 1980s, upon reviving this traditional and at the same time new focus of political research.

A COMMON ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

What we are trying to promote in the present book is political analysis, that is, a level of understanding of the real world which is neither mere factual description nor pure formal theory, although it relies upon empirical information and theoretical concepts. The book has been planned in the belief that theory should be able to explain real data, and that data are meaningless unless organized and interpreted by some theoretical framework. This kind of analysis was finally developed, in one way or another, by such outstanding masters as Smith and Marx, Montesquieu and Tocqueville, as well as in the best political studies of contemporary times.

In a much more modest way, we have tried to draw from some recent political theory an agenda of questions for applied analysis, which in turn guides the search for a selection of empirical material.

It is interesting to note that, even among American political scientists, a research agenda derived from certain recent theoretical developments about the role of institutions in the political process has led to new interest in European politics. Europe is, obviously, the preferred setting for multipartism, parliamentarianism, coalition politics, consociational and corporatist negotiations. In these features the role of institutions in collective decision-making can be perceived even more penetratingly than in the freer North American interactions among flexible parties and political representatives elected in single-member districts.

Europe also offers a relatively large number of country cases allowing strict comparative analysis of political institutions, since variables such as socio-economic structures and cultural traditions are not so varied and can be more easily isolated in explaining causal relationships. In particular, and as we shall see in the chapters that follow, different outcomes in rather similar cultural and institutional structures, such as those of Britain and Ireland, can be attributed to their different electoral systems; the different strategic behaviour of political actors in Belgium and in the Netherlands has led to different outcomes in terms of political performance and institutional change; in Scandinavian and Nordic countries similar outcomes are derived from significant consensual devices, such as patterns of negotiation among parties in parliament to corporatist policy concertation; and it is possible to attribute the great governmental instability in Portugal during its first years of democracy, contrasted with the governmental stability in Spain (the greatest in Europe), respectively to their presidential and parliamentary institutional arrangements.

Systematic comparisons such as those just mentioned are limited to certain groups of countries in this book. However, we have tried to avoid at least some of the traditional criticisms of standard comparative politics: formal legalism and empiricism. With this purpose, all the authors of the following chapters have adopted a common, previously agreed upon analytical framework which is based on an implicit interpretation of the political process as a series of decision-making steps.

Each country or comparative chapter starts with elections. Usually a brief presentation of the main issue dimensions, where voters' political preferences can be placed, is followed by a more thorough analysis of electoral rules.

Parties and party systems are then examined in the context of the two constraints just mentioned: the policy ideological space of citizens' preferences and the electoral institutions. Besides using standard categories to classify party systems, attention is devoted to party strategies, trying in particular to characterize the predominance of either centrist or polarized trends.

Next, party competitive and coalition strategies are studied in parliament. The role of parliamentary rules ('institutions' in the narrow sense) and the codes of

behaviour of parties ('organizations' within the same approach) provide the setting for studying performance, legislative production and, according to country specifics, government formation.

Governments in their different formulae—which in the European context are basically reduced to parliamentary and semi-presidential—are subsequently approached. The analysis of executives is expanded to the bureaucracy and the institutions of corporatist intermediation or social concertation in order to explain outcomes in the shape of public policies.

After this 'vertical' journey, from the citizens through elections and parties to parliament and government and their outputs, a 'horizontal' analysis is sketched. It includes decentralization, where it exists, and the links between domestic and European institutions, as well as the relationship between the above-mentioned institutions and the judiciary.

In each chapter a final section attempts an assessment of the performance of the existing institutional framework. Real debates and alternative proposals for institutional reforms in several countries are used as a basis for forecasting their degree of institutional stability or change and their foreseeable effects.

Different emphases on any of these aspects depend on country specifics. In this way, government and bureaucracy in the cabinet regime of Britain, intergovernmental relations in Germany, the relative powers of president and parliament in France, the electoral system and its reforms in Italy, party rule in the weakly institutionalized processes of decision-making in Spain and Portugal, coalition strategies in Belgium and the Netherlands, receive particular attention.

In spite of these varied emphases, which contribute to a better understanding of the similarities and differences among countries, the common general scheme has allowed the authors to organize country and comparative analyses into common topics and to use similar categories for selecting and dealing with the corresponding data. Comparisons centring on relevant variables are presented in all the chapters. More systematic and general comparisons between the complete political structures of different countries are attempted in apparently 'comparable' cases, which can be considered as 'sub-area studies' on account of their geographical proximity and common history and culture, although this comparability is also submitted to some critical revision. As a whole, the amount of information collected in all of them seems sufficient to yield an overall and quite detailed panorama of the design and working of political institutions in Western Europe at the end of the twentieth century.

SOCIAL STRUCTURES AND POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS

Two parallel debates in different fields of political science have been helpful in understanding the role of political institutions in the collective process.

The first line of progress took place in the traditional field of comparative politics. In the 1960s certain conventional statements formulated in a sociological perspective tended to underline the importance of homogeneous social structures and common values to the stability of democratic regimes (typically, Almond and Verba 1963). Given that at that time cultural homogeneity seemed greater in the United States than in plural Europe, the European turmoil of democracy and authoritarianism in the first half of the twentieth century appeared in this light as deeply rooted in society and even hard to prevent or avoid again.

Credit should go to Arend Lijphart for having first and so convincingly presented an alternative to these statements. According to his well-known contribution, a plural and heterogeneous society, such as many actually existing in Western Europe, may support a stable democratic regime if the institutional structure allows the expression of this pluralism, and if the prevailing conventions and norms of behaviour favour exchanges and co-operation among actors. On this basis Lijphart developed his categories of 'majoritarian' regimes—containing institutions such as plurality or majority electoral systems, bipartism, concentrated governments and unity of powers—and 'consensual' regimes—including proportional representation, multipartism, coalition governments and divided powers (Lijphart 1984).

Lijphart focused his attention on 'consociational' devices, that is, informal rules and customs conceived as tools to reduce the depth of ethnic and religious cleavages (particularly relevant in democracies such as those of Belgium, the Netherlands and Switzerland). Yet these could also be complemented with the role of some 'corporatist' institutions built with the aim of reducing conflict among employers, trade unions, farmers and other groups in the socio-economic dimension (particularly consolidated in Austria and some Scandinavian countries) (Lehmbruch and Schmitter 1982).

Nowadays in Europe it is possible to associate cultural 'homogeneity' only with certain small countries, whilst most of the large and socially complex countries should be considered 'heterogeneous'. If this slight simplification is accepted, we could restate the question in the following way. It is to be expected that majoritarian institutions and unity of powers will produce political efficacy, in the sense of good performance in decision-making, but also, in large and heterogeneous countries, some unequally distributed political dissatisfaction among different groups in society (a 'majority tyranny'), which may even favour manifestations of social unrest. On the other hand, institutional pluralism and separation of powers would produce either negotiations and co-operation among parties or conflict. The first—co-operation—would feed democratic consensus through a fair distribution of satisfaction with political outcomes among the different groups in society, although perhaps at the cost of some political inefficacy, whilst the second—conflict—would bring about some danger of democratic instability.

This scheme seems consistent with that derived from other, more theoretical debate between some exponents of the 'sociological' and the 'rational choice'

approaches in political science (for relevant references see Dahl 1956 and Riker 1982). According to the former, politics fought out on a single ideological dimension, such as the usual left-right axis, reinforces the lines of conflict. However, unidimensionality of the policy ideological space is considered to be a necessary condition for the existence of equilibrium, that is, a stable collective outcome, such as a policy or party membership of a government, in the latter approach. On the contrary, whilst cross-cutting divisions among the population are considered to favour consensus and egalitarian distribution of political satisfaction in standard political sociology, rational choice models found the existence of two or more ideological dimensions to be a source of policy and governmental instability through cycles of variable winning coalitions of minorities with intense preferences in the different dimensions (for a comparison of statements and the findings of the two approaches see Miller 1983).

There is in fact a notable coincidence in the analyses of the two theoretical approaches, although they sometimes differ in their implicit value judgements. They coincide in stating that social and cultural homogeneity or unidimensionality of citizens' preferences—to use both vocabularies at the same time—favours equilibrium or policy and governmental stability, but also an unequal distribution of political satisfaction in society. Both also agree in seeing social and cultural heterogeneity or the multi-dimensionality of citizens' preferences as favouring disequilibrium or policy and governmental instability, but also a more egalitarian distribution of average political satisfaction in the medium or long term.

If efficacy in decision-making and policy and governmental stability were priority values, an homogeneous society or, if that did not exist, as is mostly the case in Europe, a majoritarian and unitary institutional framework favouring clear and robust decisions should be preferred. On the contrary, where social consensus is highly valued a pluralist institutional scheme reflecting the variety of society should be preferred, even though it would imply a certain abundance of vote-trading, strategic voting, coalition-building and splitting, and other apparently undesirable practices (also known, in perhaps less disagreeable terms, as accommodation and bargaining politics, consociationalism and corporatism). It is reasonable to accept that, if these latter criteria of behaviour, encouraging exchanges and pacts, prevail, there can be widespread acceptance of existing institutional arrangements, that is, some political consensus favouring the stability of the democratic regime.

It is thus possible to establish a clear parallel between the two types of political regime distinguished by Lijphart in the applied analysis first mentioned and the two types of democracy considered relevant by Riker after revising Dahl in the second theoretical development. 'Majoritarian' institutions would correspond to 'populist' democracy, a model characterized by its political outcomes' stability, administrative efficacy, and a high social concentration of political satisfaction and dissatisfaction. 'Plural' or 'consensual' institutions would correspond to 'liberal' democracy, a model characterized by the relative instability of outcomes, some

inefficacy in decision-making or, in the best of the cases, high negotiation costs among parties, but also the opportunity of social consensus and broad democratic satisfaction.

MEASURING INSTITUTIONAL PLURALISM AND MAJORITARIANISM

It seems possible to approach a relative measurement of the degrees of institutional 'pluralism' and 'majoritarianism' through the analysis of the number of and differences between the institutional actors involved in the decision process.

We shall provisionally take into account the characteristics of the following actors: political parties, chambers in the parliament, a directly elected president and regional governments in federal systems. The degree of pluralism/majoritarianism in an institutional structure will depend on how many of these actors can be considered necessary to agree in order to make a policy decision, as well as on their power to make decisions by themselves in different ways from the other actors.

In principle it seems reasonable to assume that a large number of actors and their election or formation in different ways will favour the likelihood of different political majorities in the institutions—in other words, pluralism. Nonetheless, some accuracy in measuring their number and relative decision-making powers, must be introduced.

First, the number of parties will be measured by the 'effective number of parties' in parliamentary seats (Laakso and Taagepera 1979). In fact the party system reflects the combined influence both of the number of issue dimensions in the political competition and of the electoral system. The 'effective number of parties' allows a measurement of party systems in which both the number of parties and their size in parliament are reflected. It is strongly correlated with other measurements (especially Rae's 'fractionalization index') and also implies some probabilities for single-party and coalition governments (Table 1.2). In order to enable this measurement to be aggregated with those of other institutional features, we shall give scores to the different countries, according to a simple classification (Sartori 1976): 2 for those with an effective number of parties higher than five, corresponding to extreme pluralism; 1 for those with an effective number of parties between three and five, corresponding to limited pluralism; and 0 for those with fewer than three effective parties, generically corresponding to bipartism.

Second, we shall deal with unicameral and bicameral parliaments. In the bicameral schemes, we shall consider two features favourable to pluralism: the existence of different electoral systems able to create different political majorities in the chambers, and symmetrical powers promoting long and hard bargains between them to agree on legislation. However, in only two of the cases considered, Germany and Switzerland, do we find the possibility of different political majorities and at the same time decision rules accepting an indefinite number of negotiation rounds between

Table 1.2 Electoral system for the lower House or first chamber

Country	Elements			Ballot	Representation 1980–90 (%)	
	Formula	District magnitude	Threshold (%)		Electoral deviation	Effective No. of parties in seats
Austria	D'Hondt	91.5		Non-blocked list	2.3	2.4
	LR-Hare	20.3				
Belgium	D'Hondt	23.5		Non-blocked list	8.2	6.4
	LR-Hare	7.1				
Britain	Plurality	1.0		Categoric vote	20.0	2.1
Denmark	LR-Hare	17.5		Preferential vote	3.4	5.1
	m.S.Lague	7.3	2.00			
Finland	D'Hondt	13.2		Preferential vote	6.5	5.2
France	Majority	1.0	12.00 run-off	Two-categoric ballot	19.6 ^a	3.2
Germany	LR-Hare	497.0	5.00	Two votes per voter	1.4	2.6
Greece	LR-Hare	22.2		Preferential vote	8.8	2.3
	LR-Droop	5.4				
Iceland	D'Hondt	60.3		Non-blocked list	4.2	4.1
	D'Hondt	6.1				
Ireland	Droop	3.8		Single transferable vote	4.7	2.5
Italy	D'Hondt	6.0		Two votes per voter	4.8	3.6
	Plurality	1.0	4.00			
Luxembourg	D'Hondt	15.0		Open	7.7	3.3
Netherlands	D'Hondt	150.0	0.67	Non-blocked list	2.7	4.1
Norway	m. S.Lague	165.0		Non-blocked list	7.3	3.3
	m. S.Lague	8.3	4.00			
Portugal	D'Hondt	12.4		Blocked list	6.6	3.6
Spain	D'Hondt	6.7	3.00	Blocked list	15.4	2.7
Sweden	m. S.Lague	349.0		Non-blocked list	2.9	3.4
	m. S.Lague	11.1	4.00			
Switzerland	D'Hondt	8.2		Open	6.8	5.2

Notes Formula: the two rows with different formulas refer to two-tier seat allocation. Proportional formulas are either of LR, largest remainders, or of highest quotients. District magnitude: number of seats/number of districts. Electoral deviation, according to the Loosenmore-Hanby formula $=\frac{1}{2} \sum | \%s_i - \%v_i |$ where s =seats, v =votes, i =party i . (a) Only elections of 1981 and 1988, those with majority run-off rule. Effective number of parties, according to the Laakso-Taagepera formula $=1/\sum p_i^2$ where p_i =proportion of seats of party i .

Sources For elements of the electoral rules, Arend Lijphart, *Electoral Systems and Party Systems, 1945–90*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1994, and the Italian press. For ballot structure, Richard Katz, 'Intraparty preference voting', in Bernard Grofman and Arend Lijphart (eds) *Electoral Laws and their Political Consequences*, New York, Agathon, 1986. For electoral deviation and effective number of parties, Michael Gallagher, 'Proportionality, disproportionality and electoral systems', *Electoral Studies* 10 (1991):33–51; José R.Montero, 'Las elecciones legislativas', in R.Cotarelo (ed.) *Transición política y consolidación democrática en España, 1975–1986*, Madrid, Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas, 1992, pp. 243–297, and author's own calculations.

the two chambers. Accordingly, two marks will be given to these cases of 'symmetrical' bicameralism. In almost all the other bicameral cases there is either the possibility of different majorities, but with restrictive decision rules in favour of one of the chambers in limited negotiations (Austria, Britain, France, Ireland, Spain), or the possibility of indefinite negotiations between chambers which are likely to be homogeneous in political terms (Belgium and Italy). (Data may be found in Money and Tsebelis 1992.)

Table 1.3 Parliament and President

Country	Unicameralism	Bicameralism		President elected
		Asymmetric	Symmetric	
Austria		•		•
Belgium		•		
Britain		•		
Denmark	•			
Finland	•			•
France		•		•
Germany			•	
Greece	•			
Iceland	•			•
Ireland		•		•
Italy		•		
Luxembourg	•			
Netherlands		•		
Norway	•			
Portugal	•			•
Spain		•		
Sweden	•			
Switzerland			•	

Accordingly, one mark will be given to all these cases of 'asymmetrical' bicameralism, whilst the unicameral parliaments will be valued 0 (Table 1.3).

Third, the parliamentary or presidential scheme will also be evaluated. In six of the European countries considered there is a separate election for the President. It would be possible to proceed to some measurement of presidential powers, taking into account two features. First, presidential legislative powers are, in fact, very limited in the European cases considered here: a legislative veto which can be overridden by a qualified majority of the parliament exists in Portugal, and there are some presidential powers to make laws by decree in Iceland and France. Second, some government formation powers and the possibility of dissolving the assembly exist, to varying degrees, in five cases (Austria, Finland, France, Iceland and Portugal). (See the accurate measurement of these powers presented by Shugart and Carey 1992:155.) However, all these European cases must be considered to be cases of the weak variant of presidentialism, also called 'semi-presidentialism' (Duverger 1980), and therefore only one or no marks will be given respectively to the countries with or without an elected president (Table 1.3).

Finally, the degree of decentralization is also measured by the usual index of proportion of public expenditure in the hands of regional governments. A simple classification allows us to distinguish those countries with more than 20 per cent of regionalized public expenditure (Switzerland, Germany and Spain), those with a level of financial regionalization between 10 per cent and 20 per cent (Italy and Austria), and those below, to which two, one and no marks are given respectively. In

Table 1.4 Decentralization

Country	Regional percentage of public expenditure (1990)	Index of political decentralization (average %) ^a
Austria	14.0	
France	1.5	69
Germany	21.0	53
Italy	10.5	49
Spain	21.0	50
Switzerland	28.0	

Notes Index of political decentralization, $1-\theta_i$, where θ_i =power index of party (or parties) in central government (number of pivotal membership of party i to minimum connected winning coalitions in regional governments/total number of pivotal memberships to minimum connected winning coalitions in regional governments).

(a) For France, 1986–93; for Germany, 1951–90; for Italy, 1970–85; for Spain: 1983–92.

Source Albert Batlle, 'Partits politics i poder regional', doctoral thesis, Autonomous University of Barcelona, 1994.

Table 1.4 we have added an 'index of political decentralization' which would permit an evaluation of the differences between the party orientations of the regional governments and that of the central government; in other words, the proportion of regional power out of the hands of the central government (Riker 1975). However, whilst in some of the available cases, those of Germany, Italy and Spain, the average of this index is about 50 per cent, showing, thus, an intermediate degree of political decentralization, in France it is higher. The French data correspond to a shorter period with dramatic political ups and downs, but—as Professor Yves Mény remarks in his chapter—they also indicate the important role of the local 'notables' in the policy process in spite of their legal and financial limits.

Table 1.5 Votes in the EU institutions

Country	European Parliament	Council of Ministers
Austria	20	4
Belgium	25	5
Britain	87	10
Denmark	16	3
Finland	16	3
France	87	10
Germany	99	10
Greece	25	5
Ireland	15	3
Italy	87	10
Luxembourg	6	2
Netherlands	31	5
Portugal	25	5
Spain	64	8
Sweden	21	4
Total	624	87
	Majority	62

Table 1.6 Institutional pluralism versus majoritarianism

Country	Party system	Bicameralism	President elected	Decentralization	Total
Switzerland	2	2	0	2	6
Germany	0	2	0	2	4
Italy	1	1	0	1	3
France	1	1	1	0	3
Austria	0	1	1	1	3
Spain	0	1	0	2	3
Finland	2	0	1	0	3
Belgium	2	1	0	0	3
Netherlands	1	1	0	0	2
Portugal	1	0	1	0	2
Ireland	0	1	1	0	2
Denmark	2	0	0	0	2
Iceland	1	0	1	0	2
Norway	1	0	0	0	1
Sweden	1	0	0	0	1
Britain	0	1	0	0	1
Greece	0	0	0	0	0

Notes Party system: measured by the effective number of parties (N), being $N=1/\sum p_i^2$ (and p_i =proportion of seats of party i): two points to $N>5$; one point to $5\geq N\geq 3$; no points to $N<3$. Bicameralism: two points to symmetrical bicameralism; one point to asymmetrical bicameralism, one point to unicameralism. President elected: one point to semi-presidentialism; no points to parliamentarism. Decentralization: measured by the proportion of public expenditure in the hands of regional governments (R): two points to $R>20\%$; one point to $20\%\geq R\geq 10\%$; no points to $R<10\%$.

Other institutional features could be included in a more detailed analysis, such as the existence of constitutional courts and other independent institutions in particular policy areas, such as those of corporate bodies, national banks, etc. Nonetheless, it seems reasonable not to include too many variables in a set of a relatively small number of cases. The data considered here are relevant enough to assess the relative degree of institutional pluralism of several European countries and allow for some comparative comments (Table 1.6).

The final list of institutional models actually existing in the countries considered shows much greater variety than their economic or cultural structures do. Among sixteen cases, only two have exactly the same combination—moderate multipartism, unicameral parliamentarism and a unitary state—Sweden and Norway, belonging to the Scandinavian group. Close enough are other pairs of countries, such as Britain and Ireland, Belgium and the Netherlands, also supporting close comparisons in their joint presentation in the corresponding chapters. The contrast is greater between Spain and Portugal, in spite of their similar historical inheritance and level of economic development, as is also stressed in the corresponding chapter. (For coincidences, especially in the extreme cases of our classification, see again Lijphart 1984, last chapter.)

At the top of our scale of pluralism we find Switzerland, an extreme multi-party, bicameral and federal system, typically considered to be an example of a plural and consensual regime. Other Swiss institutions not included in our examination, such as the particular division between the legislature and the executive, and referenda by popular initiative, would reinforce this evaluation.

Lower down the scale we find some intermediate cases implying different tradeoffs between decision-making efficacy, expectedly higher when the number and the symmetry of institutional actors are low, and negotiations or conflicts, corresponding to the opposing features of the institutional structure. Following Germany, which ranks quite high in terms of pluralism, our way of comparing institutional structures permits us to consider countries with different relevant features at a similar level of intermediate or moderate pluralism, such as Belgium and Finland with extreme multipartism, France and Austria with semi-presidentialism, Italy and Spain with decentralization. In all these cases there are relevant negotiations among institutions, 'cohabitation' of differently oriented powers, coalition politics, or several of these features. The corresponding negotiation costs may bring about some inefficacy in decision-making, but they also produce a tendency to achieve compromises or arbitration on quite stable policies around the centre. In particular, the permanent search for consensus in a context of divided power has led Professor Manfred Schmidt, in his chapter of this book, to present the German political system as resting upon 'a formal or informal Grand Coalition between the major parties and between the federal government and the majority of the [regional] state governments' votes in the Bundesrat [the upper federal chamber]'. In a parallel analysis, also valid for similar countries, Professor Gianfranco Pasquino characterizes the Italian case as one of 'unstable governments, relatively stable Ministers and Prime Ministers, lasting coalitions and stagnating policies'.

Further down our list, a group of small and quite homogeneous countries—the Netherlands, Portugal, Ireland, Iceland and Denmark—show lower degrees of pluralism, as the corresponding comparisons with other countries of their sub-area chapters will allow us to confirm.

At the other extreme, as best examples of majoritarian regimes, we find Norway, Sweden, Britain and Greece, parliamentary and unitary countries, also traditionally considered typical in this aspect. In these countries it is possible to observe clearer alternations between different partisan governments and policies than in those ranked above them on the scale, which also implies greater social biases. Specifically, Professor Jan-Erik Lane characterizes the Scandinavian model as 'the combination of Westminster ['majoritarian'] politics with compromise politics', particularly corporatism. Yet he also stresses that 'government formation in Scandinavia involves much adversarial politics between the socialists and the non-socialists, a Westminster characteristic', and that in the 1980s and 1990s the Scandinavian model has become transformed, with 'less of corporatism, more of choice and competition, as well as less of collectivism and more of personal freedom'. Regarding Britain, Professor Ian

Budge also remarks in his chapter that majoritarian institutions and the corresponding party strategies have given governments a basis on which 'to exclude large societal interests from government decision-making, to re-establish the market as the major mechanism for economic and social decisions in Britain, despite the objections of disadvantaged groups, and to assert the overriding authority of the reduced central State over other political institutions'.

TOWARDS A THEORY OF POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS

As was said above, applied analysis should be able not only to classify and compare but also to test some theoretical propositions. This is not the place to build or present a theory of institutions, but, with an eye on the information presented in the following chapters, it is possible to illustrate some theoretical statements about the role of institutions in the political process. (For more comments on this matter see Brennan and Buchanan 1985; March and Olsen 1989; North 1990.)

First of all, it should be borne in mind that political institutions are useful. Expressed in standard terms, institutions form a necessary framework for human interaction and the peaceful solution of social conflicts, which at the same time attempts to promote social benefits. In a more theoretical manner, institutions may be conceived of as a means of overcoming the free-rider problem in collective action for the provision of public goods and for achieving agreement among individuals with varied preferences and interests. Specifically, institutions are tools for individuals to reduce information costs through co-ordination, as well as a means of reducing uncertainty about collective outcomes, especially in repetitive actions. The longevity of institutions induces learning in individuals, which in its turn feeds consensus in institutions.

Second, institutions such as electoral systems, power relations between the legislature and the executive, and decentralization are not neutral but privilege certain policy alternatives, reduce the scope of the citizens' choice and give incentives to some particular behaviours. By introducing these biases, institutions promote the existence of collective decisions, and this is exactly the reason for their utility. However, their degree of representativeness and, in consequence, the political satisfaction they create in society are varied and, to some degree, arbitrary. Think, for example, about the different paths of the liberal party in Belgium, where proportional representation allowed it to continue as one of the major parties for more than a century, and in Britain, where the Liberals were almost destroyed by plurality electoral rules when a third party appeared and gained support.

Third, informal rules, such as conventions, codes of behaviour, traditions and taboos, are developed as extensions of formal or institutional rules and give rise to different collective outcomes. For instance, when the coalition criteria used by parties give priority to maintaining policy or ideological connections with potential partners in government, as in Germany, the power of the centre party (in the German case,

the liberals) dramatically increases, since the centre becomes a sure pivot. In consequence, policies seem consensual and close to the average preference of the citizens. On the other hand, when more 'opportunist' (non-ideological) criteria are used, as in the multi-dimensional politics of Belgium, government formation brings about high transaction costs and instability.

Fourth, strategic behaviour can counteract the restrictions and inducements of institutions. Perhaps one of the most fascinating stories in this sense is that which occurred in France in the mid-1980s. First, in 1985 the socialist party, then in government, fearful of electoral defeat, introduced a change in the electoral system, from majority run-off to proportional representation, in the hope of benefiting from the corresponding coalition politics; however, the centre-right won an absolute parliamentary majority in the following election of 1986. Immediately the new centre-right government re-established the former majoritarian system, but the electorate reacted again to this institutional manoeuvring, granting a new victory to the forecast loser, in this case the socialists, in 1988.

Fifth, institutions always bring about some degree of social inefficiency, that is, an unequal distribution of political satisfaction in society. Some recurrent and contradictory proposals for electoral reform reported in the following chapters seem indicative of this sometimes latent, sometimes explicit, but permanent annoyance with institutions: in countries with an old plurality system, like Britain, some reform towards more proportional representation is supported by a majority of voters of all parties; but, at the same time, in a country like Italy, proportional representation has been judged a main factor in political inefficacy and, when political reform has begun, it has been rapidly replaced by more majoritarian rules.

From all these features of political institutions—their general utility and their specific social biases, their continuous reaction to and interaction with social groups and individual behaviours—it is possible to understand that institutions are a source of political discomfort but, at the same time, that even the most inefficient institutions tend to last. An important reason for their persistence is the high cost of changing them and the possibility that negotiations over reform may lead not to more efficient outcomes but rather to unintended consequences, with the risk of conflict or failure to reach any agreed decision. Given this, we may consider that an institutional framework is relatively stable, even when it does not imply the existence of a high degree of political efficacy or satisfactory representation, in a situation where, given the bargaining strength of the actors, none of them would find it worthwhile to enter into a process of bargaining and political change. As remarked, institutions also induce adaptive behaviour in the political actors, such as the party election strategies induced by electoral systems. As it is possible to see in the rest of this book, parties are even created, disappear or evolve in response to the incentives embodied in the institutional framework. All this increases social biases and political inefficiency, but it also gives political institutions powerful self-reinforcing mechanisms.

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Great Britain and Ireland

Variations on dominant party government

Ian Budge

The United Kingdom comprehended the territory of the present Republic of Ireland until 1922. The republic inherited most of its political institutions and much of its political culture from the union. Though its secession was violent, relations between the successor States are probably the most intimate in Western Europe. English is spoken in both, and England, with roughly five-sixths of the population of the archipelago, and above all London, with its overwhelming economic and cultural impact, remain the social centres of gravity whatever the formal political arrangements. Irish citizens can vote in all British elections, while inhabitants of the disputed territory of Northern Ireland are automatically entitled to both British and Irish citizenship.

Clearly differences exist within the British Isles, otherwise there would not have been an Irish secession or contemporary autonomist movements in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. But these are played out within a unifying cultural context which is especially obvious when compared with that of the other countries of the European Union. The political institutions of both the United Kingdom and Ireland are distinguished by extraordinary stability. Parliamentary government, with power centralized in a Cabinet supported by a partisan majority in the lower House, goes back in both cases to the system which emerged in Britain in 1868, and which in its essentials (also at the bureaucratic level) has not been altered since. It has survived transferral (in the Irish case), two world wars, two social and political revolutions in the post-war period, and appears ready to go on unchanged to the twenty-first century. Such stability is good in itself, but the limited ability of the traditional institutions to cope with an extended governmental role (more evident in the British case than in the Irish) may create a structural bias towards the restricted role for government favoured by the New Right (see pp. 27–9).

The strong cultural and political similarities between the Republic of Ireland and the United Kingdom render their political differences all the more interesting, as they can generally be traced to one or two key contrasts which render party strategies, and hence political outcomes, very different as between the two States. We thus have the ability to draw a highly controlled institutional comparison to see why, in spite

of many resemblances, their contemporary politics differ so much. The basis of such difference is to be found in the electoral system and the way it reflects underlying cleavages. We therefore initiate our analysis with these.

ELECTIONS

Cleavages

The major British cleavage is class—based on accumulated social differences in type of occupation (factory-based manual work versus others), education, accent, life-style, place and type of housing, trade union membership, income and the life experiences which stem from these. Class cleavages were intensified in the inter-war period by the removal of cross-cutting territorial cleavages, with the secession of southern Ireland, and the general decline of religion as a serious political force. In voting terms class influences reached their apotheosis in the early post-war elections from 1945 to 1955.

Class as a political cleavage both produced and was sharpened by Labour and Conservative conflict over this period. The decline of the religions and Irish cleavages caused the weakening and near disappearance of the old cross-class Liberal Party. This transformed earlier three-party competition into effective two-party competition by 1935—a situation which continued at the electoral level until 1964 and which, because of the electoral mechanisms described below, meant that Labour and Conservatives were the only effective competitors for governmental power until the 1980s.

The social bases of the class cleavage weakened after the 1950s. This was due in part to industrial and economic changes which reduced the numerical strength of the manual, factory-based, unionized working class, the core of Labour support. Services grew at the expense of manufacturing; manufacturing itself changed, reducing the role of both skilled and semi-skilled manual workers such as shipbuilders and miners, and even of repetitive assembly-line operatives such as car workers. They were replaced by more skilled or by more flexible workers, often part-time, with women increasing to half the work force. The life experiences of most workers became increasingly divergent from those of the traditional unionized manual worker, who stayed in one job, one establishment and often one house all his life. Economic change was intensified by the levelling effects of the comprehensive Welfare State introduced by Labour from 1945 to 1948.

The traditional, static bases of the class cleavage thus began to erode ever more quickly after 1959. This process was mirrored in the rise of Liberal voting and the increase of electoral volatility in the 1960s and 1970s. At first this led to rapid Conservative-Labour alternation in government. By the 1980s, however, as the Labour vote shrank and the Conservatives gained a large enough plurality (42 per cent) to keep themselves permanently in government, it appeared that they were

Table 2.1 Elections to the House of Commons 1945–92

<i>Date</i>	<i>Turnout %</i>	<i>Conservative</i>	<i>Labour</i>	<i>Liberal</i>	<i>Nationalist</i>
1945	75.8	39.8	48.3	9.1	0.2
1950	83.9	43.5	46.1	9.1	0.1
1951	82.6	48.0	48.8	2.5	0.1
1955	76.8	49.7	46.4	2.7	0.2
1959	78.7	49.4	43.8	5.9	0.4
1964	77.1	43.4	44.1	11.2	0.5
1966	75.8	41.9	47.9	8.5	0.7
1970	72.0	46.4	43.0	7.5	1.3
Feb. 1974	78.8	37.8	37.1	19.3	2.6
Oct. 1974	72.8	35.8	39.2	18.3	3.5
1979	76.0	43.9	37.0	13.8	2.0
1983	72.7	42.4	27.6	25.4	1.5
1987	75.3	42.3	30.8	22.6	1.7
1992	80.0	41.9	34.4	17.8	2.3

Notes Party vote is measured as a percentage of votes cast. 'Liberal' vote is attributed to the Liberal Party 1945–79, the Liberal/Social Democrat Alliance 1983–7, the Liberal Democrat Party 1992. 'Nationalists' is the combined vote of the Scottish National Party and the Welsh National Party (Plaid Cymru).

the main beneficiaries, and Labour the main losers, from the social changes that had been under way. Strengthened by a Social Democratic split from Labour in the early 1980s, the Liberals had also improved their electoral standing to a point where their results (especially in 1983) rivalled Labour's. These points are illustrated in Table 2.1, which shows voting support for the major parties as well as turnout for the post-war period.

Table 2.2 shows, however, that the national result of 1992 (as for the other recent elections not broken down into areas) was the result of very different votes obtained by the parties in different regions of Great Britain. Generally speaking, though with some anomalies, the Conservative vote went down and that of the non-Conservative parties went up the farther one went north and west from London.

Table 2.2 The territorial distribution of votes in the British general election of 1992

<i>Regions</i>	<i>% of votes</i>			
	<i>Conservative</i>	<i>Labour</i>	<i>Liberal</i>	<i>Nationalist</i>
Greater London	45	37	15	
South-east England outside London	53	23	22	0
South-west England	48	20	31	0
Midlands	46	38	15	0
Northern England	36	47	16	0
Scotland	26	39	13	22
Wales	29	50	12	9

The sharply differentiated pattern of regional results illustrates a central point about the British political cleavage which applies also to the past. That is, it is only partly based on the class differences in terms of which it has been almost exclusively discussed (Pulzer 1967). It would in fact be more accurate to describe the central political division as a cumulation of regional and class conflicts rather than purely class ones—a cumulation in which the territorial and regional dimension is now more important than the class-based one, if they can be separated out at all (Miller 1981).

The reason why territorial and class cleavages overlap, both socially and politically, is that the manufacturing and extraction industries associated with the nineteenth-century industrial revolution—mining, steel, shipbuilding and textiles—developed in the peripheries rather than the core of Britain—in Scotland, Wales, Cornwall and the north of England rather than in London and the south-east. Thus the classical industrial proletariat also developed in these areas, in the new metropolises of Glasgow, Manchester, Leeds, Newcastle, Cardiff and their associated mining and mill towns. In many ways the culture and social experience of these areas were shaped by the existence of the new class and its social and political struggles. Existing regional contrasts with the south-east of England, the stronghold of established institutions and of the traditional elite, were reinforced by, and became entangled with, class ones.

Industrial change brought about the partial collapse of the older industries of the north and west in the 1970s and 1980s. The new service industries grouped themselves around London, the largest market and the communications centre. At the same time the negative redistribution of wealth from poor to rich, fostered by the Conservative governments of the 1980s, hit most severely in the peripheries, where the poor were concentrated in larger numbers.

The 1980s thus saw a re-emergence of the territorial basis of British politics, where Conservative governments drew their parliamentary majorities from the south-east of England and Labour MPs came almost exclusively from the north and west. At the extremes, the Conservatives had derisory representation in Scotland and Wales, while hardly a Labour MP came from south-east England outside the deprived area of central London.

This sharp territorial contrast underlines the essential nature of political conflict in Britain, between a coalition of dispersed peripheral groups (both social and territorial) supporting Labour and a cohesive, centrally located and privileged group supporting the Conservatives—who can thus enhance their electoral appeal as defenders of the national ‘British’ interest. The restored Liberals, who might have bridged the gap between Labour and Conservatives, were penalized by an electoral system which privileges regionally concentrated parties. They thus secured few parliamentary seats even when they received a quarter of the national vote. Meanwhile local nationalist parties, especially in Scotland, increased their local support in reaction against Labour’s parliamentary impotence and the Conservatives’ apparent permanence in government.

One can gain a further insight into the concentrated and cumulative nature of the British political division by comparing it with the Republic of Ireland. Secession from the United Kingdom appealed to the most socially distinct stratum in Ireland, the rural Catholic peasantry and small-town bourgeoisie. It was violently opposed by Protestants, above all in the only industrialized area of the island—around Belfast, in the North. Independence when it came was thus accompanied by partition—the rural south and west going to the republic while Northern Ireland stayed as a province of the United Kingdom.

Within the new republic there was thus no obvious social cleavage round which the new party system could organize. Incipient differences between the overwhelmingly largest city, Dublin, and the rest of the country were diverted by the immediate issue of whether to accept independence and partition or to fight on. The incipient party system divided itself on these lines in the midst of an on-going civil war. The pro-Treaty group which formed the first government became Fine Gael (Party of the Gael) while the constitutional opposition, and governing party for most of the time from 1932 onwards, became Fianna Fail (Heroes of Destiny). Their names indicate the appeal of both to Irish nationalism. Both subscribed to the social doctrines enunciated by the Catholic Church. There was a tendency for Fine Gael to uphold the economic interests of Dublin and the east coast, as perceived by the upper bourgeoisie, outflanked in the 1930s by Fianna Fail's construction of a western small farmer and Dublin working-class alliance. These lines were very blurred, however, and easily overcome by tactical and election considerations. Fianna Fail's creation of a near majority coalition meant that Fine Gael's only chance of government office was to ally itself with smaller parties, often of a relatively radical agrarian or proletarian nature. Increasingly, from the 1950s onwards, its ally was the Labour Party (Sinnott 1993: chapters 2–3).

The Labour Party, an offshoot of the all-British Labour movement, had held aloof from the nationalist controversies of the 1920s in its pursuit of social reform. This gave it permanent minority status, averaging about 10 per cent of the vote in national elections. While giving support to Fianna Fail in the 1930s, it went into coalition with Fine Gael in return for promises of reform in the 1950s, 1970s and 1980s. The increasing volatility both of voting and of the party system in the late 1980s, associated with an economic boom in the 1970s, followed by recession, produced an increase in Labour support (particularly in Dublin, to 26 per cent of votes in 1992). This made Labour a desirable partner for Fianna Fail in the new coalition government which emerged after the election of that year.

Electoral system and party system

A comparison of the British and Irish electoral systems demonstrates, if proof were needed, that differences in the rules for aggregating votes into seats have a profound effect on national politics. Ireland has a system much more geared to

Table 2.3 Elections to the Irish parliament, 1948–92

<i>Date</i>	<i>Turnout (%)</i>	<i>Fianna Fail</i>	<i>Fine Gael</i>	<i>Labour</i>	<i>Other</i>
1948	74.2	42	20	9	19
1951	75.3	46	26	11	7
1954	76.4	43	32	12	7
1957	71.3	48	27	9	16
1961	70.6	44	32	12	13
1965	75.1	48	34	15	3
1969	76.9	46	34	17	3
1973	76.6	46	35	14	5
1977	76.3	51	31	12	7
1981	76.2	45	37	10	8
Feb. 1982	73.8	47	37	9	6
Nov. 1982	72.8	45	39	9	6
1987	73.3	44	27	6	11
1989	68.5	44	29	10	17
1992	68.5	39	25	19	17

Note Party vote is measured as a percentage of votes cast.

obtaining proportionality between the shares of party votes and of parliamentary seats than the British (O'Leary 1979). It also offers voters more of a choice between parties and candidates. The British single-member constituencies with simple pluralities would have guaranteed Fianna Fail, with nearly 50 per cent of the popular vote in most elections from 1932, a near-permanent majority government in Ireland. Under the actual system of the single transferable vote in multi-member constituencies Fianna Fail had instead often to form minority governments with outside support. Conversely the Irish system, applied to Britain, would have enforced minority or coalition government over the whole post-war period, with marked differences in party style and policies, not to mention the institutional workings of government.

The Irish system works by allowing voters, within constituencies usually of three or four members, to rank candidates in order of their preference. Votes are aggregated by (1) establishing an 'electoral quota' which a candidate needs to be elected, which consists of total vote divided by number of seats, plus one, (2) electing the most popular candidate and distributing his or her surplus of votes over the electoral quota to the other candidates in proportion to each one's share of second preferences in the elected candidate's total set of votes. (3) After this redistribution the second most popular candidate is declared elected and his or her surplus votes are redistributed among the remaining candidates in the same way. (4) The same procedure is followed until all seats are allocated.

The Irish system makes strong local support in the constituency very important for each candidate, since even if his or her party is preferred (s)he may be ranked well below party colleagues and thus not elected. There is no such danger under the

British system (see below). This reinforces the strong localism of Irish deputies and their relative lack of interest in national affairs, which in turn contribute to the autonomy of the national leadership (Chubb 1963). More important, it creates considerable incentives to form electoral coalitions, as the parties within them can reward each other by urging supporters to give second preference to their partner. The electorally successful coalition of Labour and Fine Gael in 1972 used this tactic. The use of multi-member constituencies also ensures, in contrast to Britain, that strong local minorities can hope to gain a seat. Thus small parties do not need to be in a local majority to gain parliamentary representation. This feature of the system has kept Irish Labour going and, with the acceptance by Fianna Fail of coalition government in the late 1980s, may well give Labour a pivotal role from now on in determining which of the larger parties will govern.

None of these features of Irish politics is reflected in mainland Britain, owing to the use of the ‘first past the post’, or single-member, simple plurality, electoral system (Budge *et al.* 1993:92–5). As the name implies, one MP is elected for each constituency on the basis of receiving more votes than any of his or her rivals. There is no requirement to gain a majority. In an extreme case an MP with 33 per cent or even 25 per cent of the vote would win the seat if (s)he got one vote more than any rival.

The consequence is that parties win seats if they have strong local support, and are in a position to win a majority of seats and form a government if such support extends over wide areas of the country. Local minorities do not get represented. A party with wide national support spread evenly, like the Liberals, gains very few seats. This is the reason for extreme discrepancies between the Liberals’ national vote shares and seats. (In 1983 they and their partners took 26 per cent of the vote but just-over 3 per cent of parliamentary seats.) Liberals are in a strong local minority almost everywhere and hence do not usually win seats. It is Labour and Conservatives who have enough support over wide areas of the country to gain a large parliamentary representation.

However, as we have seen, this support is regionally concentrated—the Conservatives have pluralities in the south-east of England, and Labour in the west and north, including Scotland and Wales. Despite substantial minorities of the other major party’s supporters existing in its rival’s area of predominance, these minorities are not represented. The system thus exaggerates regional contrasts in support, so that Conservatives increasingly seem like a south-east-English party in terms of parliamentary representation and Labour more and more like a coalition of outsiders and peripherals.

Were a third party like the Liberals to get up to 37–8 per cent of the vote, its support would necessarily be enough in certain localities to pick up parliamentary seats very rapidly. This is a very high level to attain before gaining influence, however. In effect, ‘first past the post’ operates to consolidate and stabilize the existing party system and thus resists and deflects major movements for change. When these become

very strong, however, it may register such change so rapidly as to destabilize the political situation further.

The same considerations apply in regard to regionally strong parties like the Welsh and Scottish nationalists. As these can generate concentrated regional support, they do not suffer from underrepresentation to the same extent as do the Liberals. The Scottish Nationalists are still underrepresented, however, to the benefit of Labour. Were they to expand their current 22 per cent of the Scottish vote by another 12–15 per cent they would suddenly gain around fifty Scottish seats. The political effect would be an immediate demand for independence.

The inflexibility of ‘first past the post’ thus enables national parties to ignore many political movements and the demands they voice. Where these become even more widely supported, perhaps because of the frustration generated by stalemate, the electoral system creates a critical situation by suddenly registering the strength of the movement. This may explain the fact that territorial or constitutional change in Britain is liable to come all at once, after a long period of inattention and nonresponse by policy-makers.

The electoral system has other effects on the style and conduct of British government. Members of Parliament do not have to contend with party colleagues for election. This directs their attention to national rather than local affairs, since what counts for getting elected is nomination by a national party, and that in turn depends heavily on leadership endorsement or at least approval. The dependence of MPs on the national leadership also makes for strong party discipline in Parliament. While nominally party policy is agreed in parliamentary party meetings (subject to endorsement by the annual party conference), in practice the leadership dominates discussion in both, particularly when in government.

Both in its direct and in its indirect effects, therefore, the British electoral system operates to reduce the number of parties by restricting effective parliamentary representation to two. It also tends to give an unequivocal parliamentary majority to only one of the two, thus promoting the creation of strong single-party majority government in the teeth of what is effectively a three-party system at electoral level. Although the single transferable vote in Ireland operates in an opposite direction, two factors have tempered its tendency to spread parliamentary seats between parties and create coalition governments. One has been the strong sociopolitical base of Fianna Fail, which has made it into a near-majority government on many occasions. The other has been the bias of inherited British traditions and institutions (such as collective Cabinet responsibility) towards single-party government. With the emergence of a four-party—or at least two-and-two-halves-party—system at electoral level, the single transferable vote clearly favours long-term change towards a multi-party coalition system. So far in Britain the election system has prevented Parliament and governments from reflecting Liberal electoral successes. Not surprisingly a major Liberal objective is to change that.

As the above discussion indicates, British parties run the whole gamut of ideological tendencies found elsewhere in Europe, from minority nationalism through Green and left socialist parties to mainstream Labour, Liberal Democrats and Conservatives. Only Christian Democracy is lacking, although the Northern Irish Unionists and the Social Democratic and Labour Party are in effect based on religious cleavages—the first representing the Protestants and the other the Catholics of Northern Ireland. The Unionists are exceptional among the peripherally based parties in having socially highly conservative policies (though not economically—they could hardly be, as the province is so dependent on State subsidies). Their *raison d'être* is, however, to support partition and the incorporation of the province within the British State, just as the SDLP, moderately Labour in terms of overall ideology, basically supports the union of Northern with southern Ireland. Both parties have provided useful parliamentary support for the major parties in their time and have been rewarded by a change of Northern Irish policy in their favour.

The Welsh and Scottish nationalists share a more positive left-wing orientation—a natural position to take on the central-periphery cleavage which strongly characterizes British politics. Indeed, their ideological tendencies are sometimes to the left of Labour's. The Scottish Nationalists are stronger in terms of voting support than the Welsh, gaining 22 per cent of the Scottish vote in the 1992 national elections, as compared with 9 per cent of the Welsh vote for Plaid Cymru (the Welsh party). Their official policy is nothing less than Scottish secession from the British State, though they are prepared to support devolution of powers within a federal structure as a stage on the road to that. Plaid Cymru stands more for devolution than for independence. Its core support is in Welsh-speaking North Wales, which creates internal divisions with English-speakers in the south, the most populous area of the country.

While the Green Party and various extreme groups on left and right have gained substantial votes in occasional European and local elections, none has mustered enough to gain even one parliamentary seat. The workings of the electoral system will continue to marginalize them for the foreseeable future. It is therefore with the mainstream parties—Labour and Conservatives above all—that we ought to be concerned when we discuss the normal workings of politics in the United Kingdom.

Table 2.4 Policy space of parties in Britain, 1984

Year	Labour	Welsh nationalist	Scottish Nationalist	Liberal	Conservative	Ulster Unionist
1984	2.3	3.4	4.4	5	7.8	8.3

Note 0 extreme left, 10 extreme right.

Source F.Castles and P.Mair, 'Left-right political scales', *European Journal of Political Research* 12 (1984): 83–8.

The ideological positions of the major parties as summarized on a left-right scale (see Table 2.4) can be characterized from content analyses of the parties' own programmes at national elections (Budge *et al.* 1987; Laver and Budge 1992:29). Left-wing support for greater government intervention in the economy and society, more welfare and social services, and peace and international solidarity abroad, contrasts with a right-wing emphasis on individual freedom, incentives, traditional morality and military alliances. These are the 'core' left versus right positions which, on the evidence of their own manifestoes, parties take. Accordingly, Labour is consistently to the left of the Conservatives on these points. Usually the parties maintain a fair degree of ideological distance from each other, though this may be modified by strategic and situational factors, when they move closer or take over some of their rival's policies. In the 1950s the Liberals switched between the Conservative and Labour positions, but from the 1960s onwards they became more resolutely centrist and ceased to 'leapfrog' the other parties.

While maintaining their own individuality the parties obviously modify their policies to gain voting support and win elections. In the early 1950s the Conservatives' pledge to accept most of Labour's post-war reforms moved them over towards the left of the political spectrum. In 1964 and 1970 the two parties came quite close together. The rise of the 'New Left' in the Labour Party and of Margaret Thatcher's 'New Right' among the Conservatives produced a major ideological divergence in the 1980s. Labour's loss of four elections in a row caused far-reaching internal modification of its policies and a move towards Conservative positions in 1987. It returned to the left in 1992. The Conservatives responded by maintaining right-wing positions, suited to their governmental policies of reducing State intervention in society by selling off public enterprises and imposing market-oriented reforms on the Welfare State and the education system.

It is instructive that the way the major parties present their policies to the public emphasizes the class elements in the basic political cleavage and de-emphasizes the territorial element. This is partly due to Labour's late acceptance of devolution for Scotland and Wales. Even after its acceptance of devolution and institution of a party commission on constitutional reform, the proposals have hardly bulked large in its electoral appeals. Rather, the party has preferred to concentrate on social and economic policy—for two reasons. One is straightforwardly electoral: to win power at British level, Labour need to gain votes in the Midlands and south-east of England, where devolution has no positive and possibly somewhat negative connotations. It already has all the support in Scotland and Wales that it needs. The enhancement of social services and redistribution in general are points on which all its present and potential supporters can agree, so it would be counterproductive to emphasize territorial questions too much in its electoral appeals.

The other factor shaping the Labour leadership's priorities lies in the party's origins as a class-based political movement and in the basic values built into the party as a result. The party's core beliefs centre on the question of social and economic equality.

As we have seen, this is also a matter of central importance to the remoter peripheries where the underprivileged are more concentrated. Labour stand historically for the elimination of poverty, steady improvement in ordinary people's living standards, the narrowing of income and wealth differentials, wider and more evenly spread opportunities, and the abolition of social and legal distinctions based formally or informally on social status. Recently it has paid growing attention to racial and sexual equality as well as class equality. Its international outlook also originates in egalitarian values: traditionally it has supported transnational organizations, seeing them as a more effective road to international peace and world redistribution than military alliances. Thus it has given more reluctant support to NATO and the American alliance than the Conservatives, which has exposed it to charges of being 'soft' on national security. Labour has also been active in support of anti-colonial movements and the elimination of Third World poverty.

Unlike some other European socialist movements, Labour has downplayed political reform, seeing in the undefined reserve powers of the State and its formally unlimited parliamentary sovereignty a useful instrument for imposing social change. This accounts for its late support for devolution and unwillingness to consider radical constitutional reform. In spite of its semi-permanent exclusion from power after 1979 it is reluctant to support major political change, or to consider an electoral alliance with the Liberal Democrats, being still attracted by the possibility of untrammelled action as a single-party government which the present set-up gives it.

For the Conservatives, political power *per se* has been much more important and they have historically been willing to make more ideological concessions than Labour to get it. They have therefore been quite consistent in upholding the unitary British State, unlimited parliamentary sovereignty (which as we shall see gives effective autonomy to the leadership of the majority party) and in opposing attempts to codify the constitution, which would reduce governmental power *vis-à-vis* other groups in society. They have even been prepared to accept that at times Labour may have access to power, counting on their own electoral strengths to minimize such periods. In this they have not been mistaken. The Conservatives have controlled the government for thirty-three years of the half-century from 1945 and have currently been in office since 1979, with Labour's electoral strength permanently weakened by the Social Democrat secession to the Liberals in 1981–8.

Conservative core values thus relate primarily to the idea of a strong State which will secure social order. Different elements in the party emphasize different aspects of this role—on the one hand as an instrument of law and order through police, courts, school discipline and traditional religious, morality, on the other as a supporter of paternalism and hierarchy, with basic welfare for the less well-off. In the first part of the post-war period this latter point of view seemed electorally popular with the majority of the population, so the party pragmatically accepted it as a policy to gain power, which it held from 1951 to 1964. The subsequent Labour government's attempts to impose widely unpopular measures such as comprehensive

(neighbourhood) schools and a further redistribution of wealth gave strength to a New Right element in the Conservative Party. This element mounted a radical attack on Labour policies, in favour of re-establishing an entirely free-market economy, cutting welfare and increasing wealth differentials. Traditional Conservatives who did not themselves feel the same attachment to a free market were reconciled to this stance by its reassertion of State authority in the face of the social opposition, particularly from trade unions, which the changes provoked (see the next section). This combination of 'Free Market, Strong State' (Gamble 1988) underlay Conservative policies from the mid-1970s onwards, reaching its full flowering in the period of Margaret Thatcher's premiership (1979–90). The reassertion of State authority also applied to foreign policy, where it fitted happily with Conservative support for a strong military and diplomatic position. The electoral successes of Thatcherism, with its particular appeal to the upwardly mobile sectors in the south-east and Midlands of England, reconciled even the non-free-marketeers to the Conservative position during the 1980s.

The breakdown of the Thatcherite synthesis came with the question of closer British integration into the European Community, which pitted its 'free market' elements against supporters of the 'strong State'. For them the concept of British sovereignty became increasingly important as it seemed to be threatened by the growing powers of the European Commission under the Single European Act of 1986–7 and especially the Treaty of Maastricht of 1992–3. For the free-marketeers, led by Mrs Thatcher's successor, John Major, the liberalization of trade within a larger European market was of greater importance, even though they diverged radically from other European governments on questions of social protection from free-market forces. The opposition between the two elements within the party was muted, however, by the overriding concern to retain political power—a pragmatic consideration which in the end is likely, among Conservatives, to overwhelm all others. Mrs Thatcher's unusually ideological stances were tolerated while she won elections: when she seemed likely to lose she was dumped. This is likely to happen whenever any leader or policy jeopardizes the Conservatives' electoral position.

Labour is much more tied to its ideology and to its current leader, however much they may jeopardize elections and its chances of power. This is in large part due to the institutional structure of the party and the support base it gives to internally competing groups.

The Labour Party was founded at the beginning of this century when various socialist groups came together with the trade unions. The latter provided support and an organizational base: the socialists provided activists and a constituency organization. The two groups had somewhat different objectives and tactics, though of course both concurred in their ultimate aim of securing equality and advancement for the less privileged. The trade unions, however, had more immediate and pragmatic objectives: to secure their own power and position in industry, to extend immediate

welfare benefits and in general to use pragmatic concessions and bargaining to secure immediate concrete gains for the working class. The socialist elements, strong in constituency associations, were keen to promote a radical reorganization of society along egalitarian lines. Both sides could concur on the creation of the Welfare State and nationalization in the late 1940s but diverged in the 1960s over such matters as school comprehensivization and union privileges.

In recognition of the trade unions' financial support their leadership was given a predominant role in the party conference, the main policy-making body of the Labour Party, through the 'bloc vote'. Each union delegation cast the votes of all its members paying party subscriptions as a unified whole in favour of, or against, proposed policies. These votes overwhelmed those of constituency delegations. Generally, over the post-war period, the unions' votes helped to secure the election of a relatively pragmatic parliamentary leadership which could generally count on their support against the more radical left of the party.

By the end of the 1960s, however, several large unions had elected a more radical leadership which increasingly diverged from the party leader. The New Left of the party gained in power and proposed more distinctively left-wing policies. In turn this provoked an internal split and secession of centrist leaders to form the Social Democratic Party, which was later absorbed by the Liberals. The split permanently weakened Labour's electoral base and possibly more than anything else was responsible for Labour's weakness in the 1980s and 1990s. A centrist leadership regained control after the crushing electoral defeat of 1983 but the potential for internal division remains greater among Labour than among the Conservatives, the basis of whose internal divisions changes from one decade to another.

The Liberal Democratic Party emerged from the fusion, in 1988, of the Social Democrats and the Liberals, one of the traditional parties which had been gradually squeezed out of power by Labour and Conservatives in the inter-war period. The Liberals predominated in the new party, and it is their core values which give it its distinctive ideological tinge—above all, concern with individual freedom. As we have seen, support for individual freedom could lead, as in the Conservative Party, to support for radical free-market measures and lack of concern for individual security and welfare. This is what characterizes many free-enterprise liberal parties on the Continent. In the case of the British Liberals, like their Scandinavian counter-parts, concern for freedom led to support for welfare on the grounds that political freedom is impossible without some level of economic and social security for all. More direct preoccupations have been their opposition to censorship, advocacy of a written and limited constitution, the liberalization of abortion and divorce. The Liberals have always been firm on regional devolution, on environmental protection and on extending the ownership of industry to the workforce, with workers having the same rights as management. They have also been the most consistently favourable of the parties to full integration with the European Union. And of course they have supported reform of the electoral system towards full proportional representation—both because

it gives greater freedom of individual choice and because they are the party most penalized by the existing arrangements.

Liberal policies do not fit well into classic left-right divisions, which accounts for the Liberals' largely centrist position in regard to these. Of all the parties they are the most committed to the extension of political rights and to constitutional reform—which would, given their central ideological position, make them the determining factor in choosing a Conservative or Labour partner in a coalition government. As it is, the existing electoral system shuts them out from effective policy-making and debate.

Whatever its idiosyncrasies, Britain fits quite well into the standard model of European party systems, with a well-organized left opposed to a well-organized right, with a significant centrist party competing at electoral if not at parliamentary level. Ireland is quite different. Its system of parties has long been regarded as the most distinctive in the world, even taking Canada and the United States into account.

The peculiarity of the Irish system has been to have two parties competing for power which are almost identical ideologically. As we noted above (p. 22), Fianna Fail and Fine Gael originated in the civil war between those not prepared to accept independence from Britain for the south and west of Ireland without the North (Fianna Fail) and those who had signed the treaty accepting partition (Fine Gael) and who formed the first governments of the Irish Free State. The latter won the civil war but lost subsequent elections to Fianna Fail, seeing their basic vote shrink to around 30 per cent of voters while that of Fianna Fail oscillated near 50 per cent. The main difference between the parties stemmed from their history and the personal and clientelist networks it had caused them to build up. These networks were particularly important given the small size of the country (under 3 million population), its agrarian and rural basis, and the highly personal nature of political relations. There was an incipient socio-economic cleavage between the parties, Fianna Fail being stronger among the small subsistence farmers of the west and among the small-town bourgeoisie, and Fine Gael representing the large farmers of the east and what big business there was in Dublin. With this support base Fianna Fail has been more nationalistic, severing all remaining political links with Britain by 1949. Fine Gael has always been more cautious on the nationalist issue, favouring negotiations with Britain, the major customer of its core supporters on the east coast.

Neither party has been anxious to get closely involved in the Northern imbroglio, however. The factions of the Irish Republican Army (IRA) want to overthrow established authority in the south as well as in the North, so governments of all parties have interned their members and cautiously co-operated with British forces. In other respects nationalism has faded as an issue. Both parties are enthusiastically pro-European, partly to distance themselves from the British and partly in recognition of the economic benefits and direct subsidies membership of the European Union brings—notably the first and only Irish economic boom from 1972 to 1982.

Table 2.5 Policy space of parties in Ireland, 1984

Year	Workers	Labour	Fianna Fail	Fine Gael
1984	1.8	3.6	6.3	6.8

Note 0 extreme left, 10 extreme right.

Source F.Castles and P.Mair, 'Left-right political scales', *European Journal of Political Research* 12 (1984):83–8.

In terms of left-right policies Fine Gael was originally at the right of the policy spectrum while Fianna Fail, in keeping with its populist appeal, stretched over a wide range of the spectrum from centre-right to centre-left. In seeking to counter Fianna Fail's near majority position among electors, however, Fine Gael exploited its rival's refusal to go into coalition even when it lacked a Dail (parliamentary) majority, and formed coalition governments with small agrarian-populist parties and Labour in the 1950s, and with Labour in the 1970s and 1980s. As a result—and perhaps even in anticipation—its policies moved leftward in these decades.

This rendered the major Irish parties less distinguishable than ever. The general thrust of their policies on the economy and society in a fervently Catholic country is perhaps best described as Christian Democrat, and they certainly pay great attention to the Social Encyclicals of the late nineteenth century and to current papal announcements on these topics. Abortion is effectively banned and divorce was legalized only in 1995 within the country, great stress is put on family solidarity under the leadership of the husband and father, and the Catholic Church is respected and supported.

In the European Parliament the only reason Fianna Fail did not join the Christian Democratic group was that Fine Gael joined first. Fianna Fail joined with the French Gaullists—quite appropriate, given their nationalism, populism and pragmatic readiness to intervene in society or the economy when necessary.

To some extent, the lack of party differentiation on these issues resulted from the fact that there were very few resources to distribute in Ireland anyway—a poor agrarian society on the fringe of Europe. The economic growth and prosperity of the 1970s changed that. In the late 1980s a more distinct right and left emerged on the political spectrum. The Labour Party refused to serve indefinitely in coalitions as the junior partner of Fine Gael and moved to the left. It was rewarded by increased votes, particularly in the last national election, and above all in the larger cities of Dublin and Cork.

A new right-wing liberal party, the Progressive Democrats, also emerged in the 1980s, taking support from both Fianna Fail and Fine Gael. It reduced Fianna Fail's strength sufficiently to force the party to abandon its traditional stance and enter a coalition with it. This was followed by Labour's gains in 1992 which induced Fianna Fail to enter into coalition with Labour on a distinctly left-wing programme of government intervention.

It may be, therefore, that in the 1990s we shall see a more normal European

pattern emerging in Ireland, with Fianna Fail taking the role occupied by Christian parties in the Low Countries and Italy, and choosing between governments of a left- and right-wing complexion. If Fine Gael regains strength it too may act as kingmaker in this sense. Whatever specific conjunctures may arise, the emergence of distinct left, centre and right blocs will assimilate the politics of Ireland more closely to those of Britain.

One other peculiarity of Irish politics which differentiates it strongly from Britain is the role played by direct popular referendums, which occur quite frequently on important issues and are actively contested by the parties. The 1990 presidential campaign, involving the election of a Labour-supported woman candidate (Mary Robinson), was also taken as a general mandate for change. While Britain, like Ireland, has had a nationwide referendum on membership of the European Community (1975), and Scottish and Welsh electors voted on regional devolution (1979), both occurred under a Labour government. The Conservatives have always avoided popular referendums on their policies, an attitude in keeping with their belief in authoritative if not authoritarian government, which we shall explore in the next section.

PARLIAMENT

The working British constitution (as opposed to its numerous ceremonial accretions, Bagehot 1867) is ruthlessly simple: a government supported by the majority party in the House of Commons can do anything. There is no written document to limit its scope. The government inherits all the powers of an undefined royal prerogative. The legal doctrine of parliamentary sovereignty ensures that government legislation cannot normally be challenged directly in the courts (for the one exception see p. 56).

There are of course practical limits to the powers a majority government can exercise: the trade unions are less powerful than they used to be, owing to Thatcherite legislation and high unemployment, but they and other interest groups can still thwart particular policies when they feel strongly enough. More important, central government has no direct field administration in most domains and is thus dependent on other bodies—often politically opposed to it—to implement its policies. This often renders them more symbolic than real.

Despite such practical limitations, the absence of legal and constitutional restraints does put British governments among the most powerful in Europe. Irish governments inherited the tradition of strong authoritative rule from Britain. Within their limits they have the same freedom of action when supported by a Dail majority. However, their limits are more strictly drawn, both by a written constitution—which does therefore permit legal challenges—and by the entrenched position of one of the most traditional and strongest Catholic Churches in Europe. No government would consciously risk a confrontation with the Church, and when the two have blundered into conflict, usually on social issues, the government has generally lost.

The strength of government *vis-à-vis* parliament and other bodies favours in Britain, and to a lesser extent in Ireland, the idea of the party mandate (Kavanagh 1981: Budge and Hofferbert 1992). This is the constitutional doctrine that the electoral programme of the party given the majority of parliamentary seats has been endorsed by the electorate, and that the government is entitled—indeed, required—to put its programme into action while in power. This widely held point of view severely downgrades the importance of Parliament, as it gives the government direct popular authority. It is true that such authority is conferred by obtaining a majority of seats in the House of Commons but thereafter the leadership of the majority party can go ahead on its own and feels entitled to the compliance of Parliament in enacting its programme. Similarly the rank and file of the majority party are charged only with providing loyal voting support. Withdrawing such support or persistently criticizing government is flouting the majority will.

These attitudes—widely held among both populace and political elite—secure strict party discipline in support of the government. They even ensure a compliant opposition, as it too accepts that the government has secured popular endorsement. This despite the fact that, owing to the working of the electoral system, British governments never secure the support of a majority, only that of a plurality—the Conservatives have governed from 1979 on the basis of 42 per cent of the popular vote. The mandate doctrine also has considerable ambiguities. What exactly are the policies which have been endorsed? Explicit pledges made during the election campaign? The priorities sketched out in the party manifesto? Anything the government chooses to do during its term of office?

If one analysed mandate theory in detail the exact basis of government action might be unclear. One advantage to governments of having an unwritten constitution is that its leading doctrines escape precise analysis and definition. The mandate theory can thus be invoked whenever and in whatever context the government has need of it, and by and large the claim, with all its consequences in terms of loyal party support and muted opposition, is accepted.

This vitiates other potential roles for Parliament—as a scrutinizing and revising body, for example. All parliamentary proceedings are overshadowed by the results of the last general election or by the prospect of the next. They are a forum for largely ritual debates. Approval of government measures is automatic. The purpose of parliamentary debates is not to change minds on the floor of the House but to influence public opinion for or against the government. Control over parliamentary proceedings is thus in the hands of the leadership of the two main parties and primarily in that of the government. Expressing individual opinions against the party line is difficult, as is the evolution of a purely ‘parliamentary’ ‘cross-party’ view. It can be seen that parliamentary procedures, like those of the electoral system, favour the two main parties at the expense of the others, making it difficult for the latter to get any media exposure at all through Parliament. The main party leaderships, in contrast, appear in televised debates and newspaper reports frequently.

The emphasis on authoritative government backed by popular mandate explains what would otherwise seem totally anomalous in a parliamentary democracy—the obsessive secrecy of governments and bureaucracy about what they are doing, which denies to those outside, including MPs, much opportunity for informed comment or constructive criticism of government action. The maintenance of ‘official secrecy’ is enshrined in draconian legislation which makes not only disclosure but the receipt of classified information a criminal offence. Bureaucrats are required not to disclose information to, and even to mislead, parliamentary committees investigating government policy.

These bizarre outcomes become understandable in the context of doctrines which regard governments as uniquely empowered, by election, to carry through the popular will. The major function of official secrecy is thus to protect the government from challenge, or even embarrassment, internally. In doing so the retention and selective management of relevant information is a powerful tool. The classification of what is an official secret is in the government’s and bureaucracy’s own hands, and is buttressed by ‘D notices’ to the media requiring total silence on matters defined as important for defence; certificates to judges preventing classified evidence being disclosed in court, extremely severe libel laws; and the ‘lobby’ system of briefing certain privileged journalists with ‘unattributable’ information favourable to the government’s position.

These practices have been partially breached by the practice of investigative journalism in recent years, making full and embarrassing use of increasing numbers of leaks from dissident civil servants and government members. The House of Commons has also developed the institution of semi-permanent select committees - bodies of MPs from all parties, sometimes with an opposition chairman—which ‘shadow’ a particular Ministry or department (e.g. Defence, Employment, the Environment, Home Affairs, etc.). These committees conduct investigations into important aspects of the Ministry’s work, or on particularly controversial decisions that have been made. Their reports are informative and authoritative, partly because they have the power to call civil servants and Ministers to testify.

However, their scope is severely limited by the institutional constraints mentioned earlier. In the first place they have to operate within the on-going, party-based, adversarial confrontation between government and opposition. This means that, in order to secure cross-party agreement within the committee between MPs from all sides, they cannot investigate matters at the forefront of the party debate. But these, of course, *are* the most important parts of current policy. Second, in order to secure cross-party agreement on the final report, the committee must not be too critical of the government, otherwise its supporters on the committee will dissent. And, third, the committees are as hampered by official secrecy as anyone else. Civil servants’ loyalty is defined as lying with the current government, not Parliament, and they are encouraged to be ‘economical with the truth’ in a famous phrase of the former head of the civil service, even to Parliament.

Parliament has two Houses. Besides the House of Commons with its 651 directly elected MPs there is the House of Lords, in which hereditary nobles, bishops, judges and life peers nominated by the major political parties are entitled to sit and debate. In recent years the active members, about 200 in number, have been drawn largely from these nominees. As there are people of individual weight and some news value, their speeches can have considerable impact. The Lords' debates are much less partisan than those of the Commons, as the government's survival does not depend on them. As a result their select committees have less difficulty in mustering cross-party support for their point of view, and can function better than in the Commons.

However, the influence of the House of Lords is indirect and diffuse. Its nonelective base clearly puts it in a disadvantageous position. It has merely delaying and not veto powers over legislation. While this may be strategically important in the case of governments with small House of Commons majorities or nearing the end of their term, the Lords can normally be overridden and is therefore a purely marginal factor in the power equation. (The Seanad is in a similar position in the Irish case.)

Parliament as a whole, and the House of Commons in particular, is thus to be interpreted more as a context in which government operates than as a constraint on its powers or as an independent scrutineer and critic of its activities. It provides the forum in which the partisan contenders for power meet, but in itself it is fairly neutral. The adversarial relationship between government and opposition puts a premium on party discipline and loyalty, which in turn undermines any possibility of concerted action independent of the party leaderships. The only body with a clearly recognized role independent of government is the official opposition—the other main party with aspirations to, though not possession of, governmental power.

However, the official opposition consists of only a minority in Parliament and so cannot claim to represent that institution as a whole against the government. It is much more readily identified with a (defeated) partisan viewpoint. Most of its pronouncements are aimed at winning the next election. So debate occurs only at a very general level, on set pieces of legislation and policy rather than on the bulk of government business, and in an adversarial rather than a constructive manner. It is not seriously intended to improve government policy but to present it in a bad light to the electors. In any case the government often acts under extra-parliamentary (Crown prerogative) powers, where parliamentary debate can only review something already done rather than attempt to modify it for the future.

The weakness of Parliament as an institution, the dominance of the government and the role of the official opposition as government-in-waiting have all been recognized in political and constitutional textbooks for a long time. Democracy was, however, thought to inhere in the challenge presented to the government by the opposition: government policy would thus always be constrained by the need to retain general support for the next election. In the light of mandate theory, independent parliamentary criticism or debate was felt to be irrelevant or even to

Table 2.6 British governments, 1945–96

<i>Legislature No.</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Prime Minister</i>	<i>Party composition</i>
1	1945	C. R. Attlee	Lab.
2	1950	C. R. Attlee	Lab.
3	1951	W. S. Churchill	Con.
	1955	A. Eden	Con.
4	1955	A. Eden	Con.
	1955	H. Macmillan	Con.
5	1959	H. Macmillan	Con.
	1963	A. Douglas-Home	Con.
6	1964	H. Wilson	Lab.
7	1966	H. Wilson	Lab.
8	1970	E. Heath	Con.
9	1974	H. Wilson	Lab.
10	1974	H. Wilson	Lab.
	1976	J. Callaghan	Lab.
11	1979	M. Thatcher	Con.
12	1983	M. Thatcher	Con.
13	1987	M. Thatcher	Con.
	1990	J. Major	Con.
14	1992	J. Major	Con.

Note Lab., Labour. Con., Conservative.

get in the way of the direct relationship which should exist between government and people.

Such views were, however, elaborated for a two-party system in which the main parties were evenly balanced, so that there was fairly frequent alternation in power or at least the prospect of it. Under constant electoral threat a party government may be expected to modify its policies to what is acceptable to the mass of centrist voters. The problem with the contemporary system is that it is a three-party system in which one of the two main contenders, Labour, has been seriously weakened by structural change to an extent where its electoral threat can be discounted. Concurrently the Conservative Party has found it can win elections on the basis of highly ideological appeals to 42 per cent of the vote, concentrated in one part of the country—and has done so for a series of terms of office amounting to sixteen years.

Adversarial debate between the two main parties is further weakened as an instrument of democracy by increasing Conservative control over the means of mass communication. Eighty per cent of the traditionally partisan press is estimated to favour the Conservatives and can play a crucial role in election campaigns (Newton 1994). The government has also used its long tenure of office to bully the BBC, penalize independent television companies critical of it and get sympathizers on to the control boards of both these organizations. Parliamentary debate will clearly be ineffective unless it can reach the public through the media in a relatively unbiased form. Increasing Conservative influence over the media militates against that.

Under these circumstances the system of strong government and weak Parliament no longer seems designed to respond sensitively to changes in the popular will. Rather, it operates to muffle debate and to steamroller Conservative policies through without regard to opposition—a buttress of party hegemony rather than democracy. Labour's increasing hopes of gaining office, on its own, have so far diverted criticism of the major aspects of the present system. The party is committed to certain constitutional reforms, notably opening up freedom of information and devolving powers to Scottish and Welsh assemblies. The suspicion is that, once it had power, Labour would not be over-keen to introduce changes which would make life more difficult in office. The most likely agent of change in current constitutional arrangements would be a coalition government, which under the existing electoral system is likely to emerge only from a Liberal breakthrough. This in itself is unlikely, though not totally impossible, so the probability is that the dominance of governments over Parliament, and indeed over most other political institutions, will continue through the 1990s.

The changes that frequent recourse to coalition government could make in Britain are illustrated in Ireland, where such a change did take place in the 1980s (Table 2.7). Fianna Fail governments from the 1930s subordinated Parliament to the executive, as in Britain. The trend was even exacerbated by the concern of most TDs (Deputies) with local events in their constituencies rather than national affairs. This meant that the government could often buy support, or buy off opposition, by

Table 2.7 Irish governments, 1948–96

<i>Legislature No.</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Prime Minister</i>	<i>Party composition</i>
1	1948	J. A. Costello	FG, Lab., CNT, CNP
2	1951	E. de Valera	FF
3	1954	J. A. Costello	FG, Lab., CNT
4	1957	E. de Valera	FF
	1959	S. Lemass	FF
5	1961	S. Lemass	FF
6	1965	S. Lemass	FF
	1966	J. Lynch	FF
7	1969	J. Lynch	FF
8	1973	L. Cosgrave	FG, Lab.
9	1977	J. Lynch	FF
	1979	C. J. Haughey	FF
10	1981	G. M. D. Fitzgerald	FG, Lab.
11	1982	C. J. Haughey	FF
12	1982	G. M. D. Fitzgerald	FG, Lab.
13	1987	C. J. Haughey	FF
14	1989	C. J. Haughey	FF, PD
	1991	A. Reynolds	FF, PD
15	1992	A. Reynolds	FF, Lab.
16	1994	J. Brutton	FG, Lab.

Note FF, Fianna Fail. FG, Fine Gael. CNT, Clann na Talmhan. CNP, Clann na Poblachta. PD, Progressive Democrats. Lab., Labour.

distributing local favours. Changes in the party system reduced Fianna Fail's ability to rule on its own during the 1980s. First Labour and Fine Gael formed a coalition (1982–7), then Fianna Fail found it needed a Progressive Democrat and then a Labour alliance. Coalition government now seems to have arrived in the republic, with a concomitant rise in the importance of Parliament as the site where coalitions are formed and negotiations over both personnel and policy take place. Coalitions are unlikely to be as monolithic as single-party governments, therefore the prospects in Ireland are of an increase in policy-relevant debate and parliamentary voting which has become decisive in respect of government policy.

GOVERNMENT AND BUREAUCRACY

Cabinet and Prime Minister

We have talked about 'government' in the British context as if it were an undifferentiated institution, but in fact the exact constitution of the 'government' is as ambiguous as everything else in the unwritten constitution. The one definite thing we can say about it is that all members of the government have to be drawn from one of the two Houses of Parliament, and that in practice the vast majority of them will be MPs. At one level the government is everyone occupying a position under the Crown, down to unpaid Parliamentary Private Secretaries who act as dogsbodies in Parliament for the more important Ministers. Calculating it in this way, the government has over 100 members. They are all MPs or peers of the majority party and will lose their position if they vote or speak against policy either in public or in private. They are thus important in controlling the majority party. At majority party meetings held to discuss policy, typically of around 350 MPs, the 100-odd government members only have to find another eighty or so supporters to dominate the meeting. Party members are then under intense pressure to support the agreed policy. In this way a government and 100 backbench supporters can dominate the proceedings of the 630 MPs in the House of Commons, if necessary.

Otherwise the lower-ranking members of a government do not have much weight and they will certainly not decide its policy. This is also true of middle-ranking Ministers, who may have some say in specialist matters that concern their own department or Ministry but who do not much influence government policy overall. The real core of a government is the Cabinet, the central co-ordinating and policy-making body, which meets regularly once a week under the convenorship of the Prime Minister to take major decisions and to resolve disputes and controversies which have found their way up to its level. The Cabinet is both a partisan body, consisting of the main figures in the majority party leadership, and also the effective centre of the executive.

Most individual members of the Cabinet will be in charge of one of the more important Ministries or departments into which the executive is divided (Table 2.8).

Table 2.8 Major departments and agencies of British central government

Cabinet Office	Lord Chancellor's Department
Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food	Ordnance Survey
Crown Prosecution Service	Overseas Development Administration
HM Customs and Excise	Parliamentary Counsel
Ministry of Defence	Paymaster General's Office
Department for Education	Office of Population Censuses and Surveys
Office of Electricity Regulation (OFFER)	HM Procurator General and Treasury
Department of Employment	Solicitor's Department
Department of the Environment	Serious Fraud Office
Export Credit Guarantee Department (ECGD)	Department of Social Security
Foreign and Commonwealth Office	HMSO (HM Stationery Office)
Office of Gas Supply (OFGAS)	Central Statistical Office
Department of Health	Office of Telecommunications (OFTEL)
Department of National Heritage	Department of Trade and Industry
Home Office	Department of Transport
Central Office of Information	Office of Water Services (OFWAT)
Board of Inland Revenue	Scottish Office
Law Officers' departments	Welsh Office
HM Treasury	Northern Irish Office

Source *Britain: an Official Handbook*, 1992, London, HMSO, 1992, pp. 47–51.

Thus they have a double workload deriving from departmental responsibilities on the one hand and Cabinet responsibilities on the other. A few Cabinet Ministers will be relieved from departmental responsibilities, charged, confusingly, with 'ceremonial' functions such as Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster or Lord President of the Council. Their real job, however, is to deal with non-departmental party and political business and to convene Cabinet committees to deal with specialist matters.

Besides its political importance as the final source of authority and ultimate decision-making body, the Cabinet derives its central position from the fact that it is the sole co-ordinating body in British government. This is not to say that there are not hundreds of interdepartmental committees. As we shall see, however, these can take final decisions only if all concerned agree. Where they do not, disputes even over trivial matters can go all the way up to Cabinet for resolution. Conversely, centrally important but agreed matters may not go to Cabinet at all because they are agreed and time is scarce.

Cabinet Ministers are in a paradoxical position with regard to each other and to the Prime Minister. The latter appoints them to office: (s)he can also promote them or dismiss them. Collectively, on the other hand, they can in effect destroy the Prime Minister by withdrawing their support. However, it is difficult for the Cabinet to act collectively independently of the Prime Minister. For in replacing him or her they are automatically putting one of themselves in the position—a move which will reward some and penalize others, especially the main contenders. A Prime Ministerial resignation is therefore liable to be precipitated by external events—a dramatic policy

failure, an impending or actual general election defeat—rather than by a spontaneous revolt of Cabinet members.

The relation of Cabinet Ministers among themselves is collegial and adversarial at the same time. They are colleagues in the sense that their political position depends on the success, particularly the electoral success, of the government and party to which they belong. Hence they must co-operate in ensuring that success, and in backing the Prime Minister's attempts to assert central authority over the governmental machine and over the majority party.

The constitutional form taken by collegiality is the doctrine of collective responsibility whereby each member of the government (not simply Cabinet members) is supposed to support all governmental measures and to take public responsibility for them (even should they privately disagree). While the doctrine has been vitiated by the growth of investigative journalism, which probes into internal disputes, and by the growing use of leaks and anonymous disclosure of confidential information to reporters, it is still preserved through official secrecy and the management of information. Cabinet Ministers are generally in a powerful enough position to let their dissent be made known when they want it to be. It is the middle-ranking and junior members of the government who are most under pressure to signify total agreement and to defend government policy, on pain of dismissal.

The need for Cabinet Ministers to differentiate themselves from each other and to pursue their policy disputes into the public domain reflects the adversarial side of their relationships. This is structural and stems from two aspects of their interactions with each other, one political and one institutional.

On the political side the Cabinet contains a number, usually two or three, of senior figures in the majority party who are the most likely people to succeed the Prime Minister if (s)he is forced to resign. Each of these heirs apparent has associates and supporters among other Ministers. This clearly makes for rivalry and jostling for position. If the government seems in a good position, with the party united, the economy booming and election prospects good, the Prime Minister will be safe from challenge, and this source of rivalry will subside. Sudden crises or scandals, as well as a re-emergence of internal party divisions, occur increasingly frequently, however, in the rapidly changing modern world, and they are always liable to weaken the Prime Minister's position and to reawaken rivalries in the Cabinet.

There is, however, a more everyday source of tension which arises between all Ministers but particularly between those in the Cabinet. This stems from their position as head of an agglomeration of bureaucrats and functions organized into a particular Ministry or Department of State. There are about seventy of these, of which twelve to fifteen particularly important ones are represented in the Cabinet—the Treasury (finance), Foreign and Home Affairs, Health, Welfare, Education, the Environment, Defence, and so on. As we shall see when we discuss the bureaucracy, relations between Ministries are expected to be adversarial. Very often direct clashes occur, as between the Environment, which may want to designate an area for protection, and,

for example, Defence, which wants to use it for intensive military practice. At the very least Ministries will clash over sharing out money and will confront the Treasury, which has an interest in cutting spending.

The whole style and dynamics of policy-making in Britain are geared to advocacy and opposition of policies. Policies will not get far unless they are backed by a department prepared to argue for their positive merits. A general discussion is ensured by forming a committee with other departments which declare an interest, and arguing it out, with some defending and others attacking the policy. While admirable for ensuring critical discussion, such adversarial attitudes spill over into the Cabinet when, as often happens, no agreement on the matter can be reached below that level. The lack of any significant co-ordinating mechanisms below Cabinet level means that disputes very often do spill over—though always into a Cabinet sub-committee with the interested parties represented—before reaching the full Cabinet.

Such disputes are muted and concealed by the doctrine of collective responsibility discussed above and by the common interest Ministers share in re-election. Cabinet conventions have evolved in the context of single-party government, and the effects of adversarial decision-making are usually contained by it. A look at Irish experience in the 1980s, however, shows that the strict application of Cabinet conventions to a coalition arrangement can cause permanent rupture between the partners. In the 1982–7 Irish coalition of Fine Gael and Labour the latter took the more ‘social’ spending Ministries while its more conservative partner took the ‘central’ finance Ministries. As Fine Gael was the larger partner, and British traditions of majority voting and collective responsibility applied in Cabinet, Labour had to acquiesce in silence to cuts in social programmes which it had promised, electorally, to protect. The end result was a rupture with its coalition partner of thirty years’ standing, due not just to policy disputes but to the way Cabinet conventions exacerbated them.

Recent criticisms of Cabinet government in the British case relate not only to the substance of policy but to style—the repeated ramming through of unpopular measures on the basis of an artificially constituted parliamentary majority. The long dominance of one ideological line, of a free-market, rather authoritarian, anti-welfare type, makes Cabinet government appear an institutional embodiment of Thatcherism. It is thus not enough for an alternative government simply to impose different policies through the same system. A decisive change requires alteration in the very nature of governing which would place less stress on the authoritative imposition of policy through the Cabinet and more on a wider process of consensus-building.

The experience of the Thatcherite ‘strong State’ has been to change perceptions of Cabinet government as a purely neutral mode of governing, available equally to whichever party entered power. It now appears more as the embodiment of Conservative Party dominance within the British State.

It will be easier to judge the truth of this view when we examine the bureaucracy and its workings after the series of changes initiated by Conservative governments in the 1980s and carried through to the 1990s. As these were designed both to reduce the scope of government and to render it more efficient and less costly they were clearly influenced by Thatcherite ideology. The question is whether they have created a more efficient machine to serve the purposes of whatever party government emerges, or whether they are particularly designed to serve Conservative ends.

Civil service and bureaucracy

The most notable feature of the central bureaucracy is its grouping into fairly autonomous Ministries and departments. There is no agreed list of these, but in a broad way one can say there are about fifteen centrally important Ministries represented by their political heads in Cabinet and about seventy fairly important Ministries and offices of various kinds. A list of some of them is given in Table 2.8.

Only one or two people in each Ministry are appointed by the current government: these are the MPs or peers who act as political heads and representatives of the department in the government. They may bring in a political adviser but there is no ministerial *Cabinet* supervising all aspects of internal administration—as in France, for example. More likely a new Minister will work with the permanent, non-politically appointed civil servants they find running the department, with a qualified right to choose among unknown candidates for posts in their private office. Although the Thatcher governments of the 1980s broke with tradition in favouring the promotion of civil servants most likely to advance the government agenda, politicians are exceptionally dependent on independently appointed bureaucrats not only for policy implementation but also for policy advice. This makes the nature of the civil service, as the central bureaucracy is called, their early socialization, appointment and career expectations of particular importance in understanding British government.

Of course, like all bureaucracies, the civil service is hierarchical and employs large numbers of people at the lower levels (clerical and manual workers) who hardly count in policy-making. Above them are executive officers charged with implementing already agreed policies. The more successful of these may work their way up to the level of policy-making, undertaken by the 6,000–10,000 persons at the top of the civil service hierarchy. Most of these, however, are recruited directly by the civil service itself, through competitive examination and interviews geared to the university curriculum, and within that to the model set by the elite universities of Oxford and Cambridge. There have in fact been repeated complaints, from the Fulton Commission of the late 1960s onwards, about the extent to which the top levels of the civil service are dominated by ‘Oxbridge’ graduates. Marginal changes have taken place but the style as well as the graduates of Oxford and Cambridge still dominate the upper levels.

What does this imply for policy-making? In the first place it means that higher civil servants share a particular ethos which is quite resistant to governmentally inspired change, and which to a considerable extent isolates them from the common experience of the mass of British society. This contributes to a preference for shutting off their discussions from ill-informed intervention (hence to a heavy stress on official secrecy and classified discussion) and for admitting only approved interlocutors to the policy club. It also favours a generalist approach to policy-making. Rather than having a technical education in the areas they administer, the assumption is that the non-specialist administrator will be better able to put together advice from a variety of sources, including the technical grades of the civil service itself, and come up with a better overall policy than could have been produced by any one specialist.

Higher civil servants thus transfer quite readily between jobs and even departments in the course of their career. However, they make their mark by advancing the perceived interests of their current team, whether it be a section or the department as a whole. Each Ministry is likely to have a set of policy preferences built up over the years, and known as the 'departmental view', often based on the aggrandizement of favoured interests or clients. The model civil servant regards his or her role as an advocacy one, just like a lawyer in the British courts. While in a particular department or section (s)he will promote its interests, even though the previous year, in another department, (s)he was engaged in attacking them.

Given the frequency of ministerial changes within governments, a politician can expect to spend less than two years, on average, at a particular Ministry. On arrival, mostly without previous experience or knowledge of the Ministry, (s)he depends on civil servants for information and guidance. The fact that both have an interest in promoting the importance and influence of the department immediately gives them some common ground, of course, as does the social background which Conservative Ministers in particular will share with top policy-makers. There will also, however, be potential divergences, particularly where either the Minister or the government has plans for change in important policies affecting the Ministry. On the face of it, the bureaucratic policy-makers would seem to have all the advantages in a confrontation with their Minister. They have control of the records and information about past decisions. To a large extent they control the Minister's agenda and the (civil service) personnel who service him or her, down to the level of the Private Secretary. They also control the relevant policy network which is the source of technical advice and political consensus-building round proposals.

These resources are generally sufficient to push Ministers or governments who have not thought about the policy area much, or who have only very general and vague ideas, into supporting the departmental view. This situation can be reversed, however, when Ministers have more experience, and particularly when the government as a whole is firmly committed to a particular programme which has a popular mandate, as was true for most of the 1980s under Mrs Thatcher.

New Right principles prompted a major restructuring of the civil service from 1984 onwards, under the general heading of the 'Next Steps Initiative'. It has been based both on longstanding criticism of British civil servants as deficient in hands-on management, particularly of service delivery, and on Thatcherite ideas about modelling delivery on free-market relationships (where State functions cannot be privatized or devolved to nominated bodies).

Basically the initiative involves central government departments being reduced in size and focusing on Ministers' core needs such as policy development and handling Parliament. The actual implementation of policy is then placed in the hands of autonomous executive agencies that sign contracts with the sponsoring department to provide a specified level and quality of service in return for its financing. In this relationship the core department is the customer and the agency is analogous to an outside contractor or corporation: contractual relations hold and can be enforced if either side falls down on the bargain.

Designed to meet earlier criticisms of managerial inefficiency and government overload, the initiative can be criticized for building partisan ideas of what government should be about into the very structure of the civil service. From that point of view service delivery involves purely technical functions, such as ensuring that all entitled to them get unemployment benefits, for example. These functions can all be written into the contract with the agency, leaving policy matters to the Ministry. From a non-technocratic point of view, however, one might well query whether operational decisions about who is 'properly' entitled to benefit or what resources should be devoted to 'fraud' (or how indeed 'fraud' should be defined) are all policy matters which are far from technical in nature and which should properly be handled at a political level.

Ireland inherited a traditional British type of civil service, already largely autonomous and centred on Dublin, when it received independence in 1922. Thus much of what has been said about the general style of the British civil service, particularly its division into Ministries with their own departmental view and adversarial relationships, applies also to the Irish case. The administration is highly centralized in Dublin and is largely staffed and run by graduates of the two universities there. It has perforce had to be highly conservative and restrictive during most of its existence, confining itself to the minimal functions of State, because of the general shortage of resources up to the 1970s and the financial crises of the 1980s. Social services have never developed to the British level—in part because of limited resources, in part because of the opposition of the Church to any interference in family relationships.

The exception, partly of necessity, has come in the field of industrial development. The need to develop the economy so as to stem emigration and depopulation has led to an innovative and relatively successful approach to attracting overseas firms to locate in Ireland, partly through financial inducements and partly through free-trade zones in the west. Of necessity the agencies and departments involved in industrial

policy have had to be autonomous and innovative, able to take immediate decisions free from the need to negotiate overmuch with other departments.

Other differences from Britain stem from the small size of the country and the even greater centralization on one centre, Dublin. Bureaucrats are almost all personally known to each other. It is easy to get in touch. Thus in some ways in Ireland bureaucracy is a more unified force than in Britain: it is also easier to agree on policy because the limits of the possible are much narrower. The traditional caution and financial conservatism of Irish bureaucracy are well adapted to the conditions of the 1980s and 1990s, and attuned to similar instincts in Fine Gael and Fianna Fail. The radical changes taking place in the British civil service are thus unlikely to be seen in Ireland, though some experimentation and adaptation along the lines of 'Next Steps' are likely as a result of the continuing influence of Britain as a model.

Interest groups

One of the reasons why British central Ministries evolve different policy preferences and opinions lies in their relations with outside specialists and interest groups. All Ministries have their own 'policy networks' extending down to local level, on which they rely for information and gaining compliance for their policies. In return Ministries adopt many of the views which circulate inside the network and promulgate them in government.

The advantages of this arrangement for both sides are obvious. Interest groups can hope through their sponsoring department to have an influence on government policy and legislation before it is adopted, which is much more likely to shape it in the way they want than if they were to campaign publicly after it had been promulgated. On the other hand, the department wishes to be able to say that its policies have the support of all or some of the groups they are likely to affect. They also need to have technical information, e.g. on how much a proposed environmental protection measure will cost the industries affected. In spite of having specialist civil servants—economists, statisticians, engineers—on tap, the Ministry lacks the resources to gather all the information required. The generalist nature of the civil service as a whole renders it in fact particularly dependent on advice from outside specialists and makes it generally more likely to take a reactive than a proactive role in policy-making.

It must be said, however, that this process of interaction is not an open one accessible to all who have views on the policy area with which a Ministry is concerned. There are quite strict requirements for obtaining 'insider' status with a Ministry and 'club rules' which it is essential to obey. To a considerable extent the interest groups involved become 'captives' of the civil servants. Confrontational tactics and rhetoric must be eschewed: interest groups must avoid leaks to the media and accept what comes out of the policy process. What they get on the other hand are confidential regular meetings with civil servants and politicians in which they

can argue the case for their view of the policy, and put forward the technical considerations which support it. A perfect example of the type of 'insider' relationship which can form policy is the motorists, road hauliers' and road contractors' relations with the Department of Transport, which have reinforced its support of new motorways and roads.

Past relations of the same kind have obtained between the National Farmers' Union and the Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food; between the Department of Trade and Industry and the Confederation of British Industry; between the Department of Employment and the trade unions. However, such relations are subject to change, both from overall government policy and from the entry of new groups (such as supermarket chains and food consumer groups into relations with the MAFF, for example). The Department of Employment changed under Thatcherite policies from an advocate to a controller of trade unions. In general the Conservative governments since 1979 have been suspicious of interest groups, believing that they themselves had the (free-market) answers to the problems confronting them, and that business and the unions would try to subvert these if they could, rather than accepting and enforcing them. They preferred, therefore, to break with the quasi-corporatist practices of the past and felt much less need to consult affected interests than their predecessors had done.

There may be some justification for government scepticism about the groups the civil service naturally tends to consult, particularly in the economic field. The groups tend to be 'peak' associations, federations of a widely disparate membership of other bodies. Such peak associations are well staffed, with good research departments, and are naturally well placed to get reliable information from their members. They are thus able to meet the information needs of their sponsoring department in the civil service.

What they are much less able to do is to trade consent for concessions on policy, as they have no binding sanctions over their own members. Thus wage or price limits agreed with government at the top level are always liable to be breached by individual businesses or unions, which were often successful under the weak governments of the 1960s and 1970s in extracting concessions over and above those made at the national level.

There is a certain logic therefore in the Conservative position that regulation needs to be imposed from above by a strong authoritative State, and unruly interests forced to comply by legal sanctions applied through the court system. Imposition from above worked well against the isolated and weakened trade unions of the early 1980s, which were also hit by the high unemployment produced by the government's monetarist financial policies. The limitations of intervention, on the other hand, were shown by the attempt to change local taxes from a property to an individual basis from 1987 to 1990. Labelled the Poll Tax and interpreted as direct negative redistribution from poor to rich, it met widespread resistance in the form of demonstrations, riots and evasion. Although local governments were landed with

collecting the tax and initiating prosecutions, in the hope that the opprobrium would attach to them, the blame was in fact directly attributed to the Conservative government. Its impracticability and unpopularity were the main factors in Mrs Thatcher's fall at the end of 1990.

This is a clear case where consultation before trying to implement the policy might have given prior warning of its likely effects. Another area where policy-making by imposition has produced patchy results from the government's point of view is education. The total exclusion of the teaching unions from the Department of Education has resulted in boycotts and strikes which have compelled a change in policy both on pay and on the national curriculum.

There are still advantages, therefore—even under the Conservatives—of consultation with interest groups. However, this is a long way from saying that all such groups are allowed free *entrée* even to the Ministries that do consult.

An overview of policy processes

We have shown that central decision-making in Britain brings together elected politicians, career civil servants and interest-group representatives—who may themselves be a very mixed bag of people. The relative importance of the various actors changes according to circumstances. Civil servants are always present; but in certain cases they are more autonomous than in others. The Poll Tax involved politicians very heavily. Safety and health at work are handled predominantly by the interests concerned.

Second, governments may be more or less ideological. The Conservative governments of the 1980s were unusually so. But as governments spend longer in office they tend to run out of ideas and may be grateful to civil servants who have their own agenda of problems to be tidied up. This may be more the norm in the middle and late 1990s.

Third, the importance attached to negotiations with interest groups varies from government to government. The traditional interpretation of British politics has emphasized the centralization and cohesion of the system. The Cabinet, elected on a party programme, supported by a disciplined majority in the House of Commons, aided by a highly competent, obedient civil service, is capable of making far more coherent policy than that which emerges from the coalition governments of Continental Europe or the American division of powers between the legislative, executive and judicial branches.

This view needs to be modified, for a number of reasons. British political parties, and so Cabinets, are coalitions of people of clearly differing views, who are also to a considerable extent political rivals. There are also divisions within the administrative sector itself. Departments differ in their attitudes and concerns. The Ministry of Agriculture is much more supportive of farm subsidies, as is the Ministry of Defence of military spending, than is the Treasury. As a major part of the job of Ministers is to represent the interests and attitudes of their departments, such

differences create conflict not only between civil servants but also between their Ministers in the Cabinet.

The administrative style of British government, as we shall see in more detail below, has always been to entrust the implementation of policies to other people—notables serving on nominated bodies, local authorities and, in some areas, interest groups. Such devolution limits the degree of control central government enjoys. It was traditionally said that a French Minister of Education could tell you at any hour of the day what every child in France was studying; Conservative governments have not been able to break local control of education in Britain even though they wanted to. Administrative devolution saves central government the expense and difficulty of running schools directly; it also limits the degree to which the Secretary of State for Education can make real decisions about what happens in schools. The ‘internal market’ in education will decrease this power even further, as decision-making reverts from a limited number of local governments to many more trusts and school boards.

The coherence of central decision-making has also been limited by the weakness of ‘umbrella’ interest groups speaking for broad social groups, particularly unions and employers. The CBI and TUC have very little control over their members: governments thus deal with interest groups which have not themselves achieved the same degree of unity as interest groups in, say, Austria or Sweden. In consequence they have to broker more conflicts than their counterparts in countries with more centralized interest-group systems. At times central decision-makers are themselves disoriented by contending and conflicting claims from groups.

Central decision-making still offers opportunities to politicians who know what they want and how to achieve it. The Thatcher and Major governments show that elections can indeed make a major difference in British politics. Yet behind the apparent simplicity lies the complexity of interaction between different spheres—politics, administration and interest groups. Within each sphere there is less unity than might be expected. British government is formally and constitutionally highly unified. In reality it is quite fragmented.

‘Next Steps’ and the introduction of an ‘internal market’ to State-provided services may be expected to increase this. Greater fragmentation of decision-making processes may in fact be the long-term legacy of Thatcherism to future British governments, once the driving force of New Right ideology has been removed. This is probably more of a constraint on programmes involving active government intervention than on the minimal programmes favoured by the Conservatives. At the bureaucratic level, too, State structures seem better adapted to the Conservatives’ ideological needs than to those of their opponents.

Policy outputs: patterns of government expenditure

We have discussed the processes of decision-making in Britain: what do they add up to in terms of the substantive policies which are actually adopted? We can check this

by seeing how the central government has divided its budget between different areas of expenditure in the post-war period. Expenditure is not all there is to policy—clearly the government can make important changes in the legal sphere, or in regulatory policy, or sign treaties such as those enrolling Britain in the European Community without the commitments affecting spending very much.

Admitting this, it is still the case that the share of the budget allocated to areas like social services is crucial to large numbers in the population. Most areas require some spending to make policy effective, so reductions or increases in the budget percentages devoted to them are crucial indicators of where governments put their priorities. The share of overall resources spent by British governments increased from around a third of gross domestic product in the 1950s to approaching half in the mid-1980s (Artis 1989:113), so the question of its allocation is centrally important in terms of its sheer weight in the economy. Budgeted spending has been shown to relate to the priorities stated by the government party in its election programme (Budge and Hofferbert 1992), so it is also important in a programmatic sense, as showing how the ruling party carried its policies through into action. We have calculated how percentage allocations of the budget varied in different policy areas in each year of the post-war period. By and large, the long-term trends continue regardless of whether the government was Labour or Conservative. The shares of defence and agriculture drop steadily over the whole period, while expenditure on the social areas of health, social security, education and housing generally goes up—as does the share of the police, courts, prisons and all the ‘services’ under the heading ‘administration of justice’. Of course the budget percentages do not tell the whole story about government spending, since they do not tell us directly how much is spent in each area in absolute terms. As we know that the total government share of GDP was going up, however, the relative increase signifies that actual spending on services increased sharply over the post-war period, relative to static or declining expenditures in areas like defence.

What this illustrates is how the Conservative governments of the 1950s accepted the Welfare State as they said they would. Indeed, they went further than mere acceptance, spending more and more on welfare. So did the Labour and Conservative governments of the 1960s and 1970s. With Mrs Thatcher comes a change, however. In most ‘social’ areas expenditure drops or is contained (the exception being the general area of social security, where increasing outlay on unemployment benefit as a result of privatization and industrial closures caused by other government policies kept payments up relative to other areas). The Thatcherite turnround is most dramatically illustrated in the area of subsidies to public housing, reduced to almost a fifth of their former percentage by 1985. As the government had cut its expenditure as a share of GDP from 45.1 per cent in 1980 to 42.8 per cent in 1986, this represents a real reduction in most social entitlements.

What these figures show, therefore, is that Conservative ideological commitments to ‘rolling back the frontiers of the State’ in favour of private provision and the free

market did carry through to public policy under Mrs Thatcher, just as the commitment of earlier governments to maintaining and extending the Welfare State was also reflected in allocations. Whatever the inefficiencies of the central policy process, it is clear that governments do manage to translate programmes into action, at least in broad terms and in some areas.

The general spending allocations we have described follow something of the same pattern over all Western democracies, though perhaps less markedly than in Britain. This is also true of Ireland, where expenditure in general and allocations to the 'social' side of the budget surged in the 1970s, but then experienced cuts during the economic and financial crises of the 1980s. Even though Labour was in coalition with Fine Gael for much of this period, it failed to reverse or even to modify such cuts substantially. These continued under the Fianna Fail coalition with the free-market Progressive Democrats: it remains to be seen how far Labour's influence in the new coalitions Fine Gael with Fianna Fail from 1993 onwards will sustain a promised expansion of the welfare programmes.

INTERGOVERNMENTAL RELATIONS

Local government

As has been noted at several points, British central government in London has no field administration in most policy areas. Instead it relies on other bodies, primarily local government, but also autonomous nominated boards ('quangos') and even interest groups and professional bodies, to implement its programmes in detail. Such arrangements are not unusual in European federal states such as Germany, where the *Länder* carry through the bulk of centrally inspired administration. It is anomalous, however, in a State which (at any rate in constitutional theory) is so centralized as the British.

The Republic of Ireland inherited its institutional structure from Britain, so that it has a broadly similar division of labour between the central administration and county and town councils elected locally. Popular resistance to the British administration in the late nineteenth century, however, meant that the central departments in Dublin took many more direct powers (over police and education, for example) than in Britain. As local politics are traditionally non-partisan in many areas, and Fianna Fail and Fine Gael share much the same fiscal and social policies, the kind of local-central conflicts which developed in Britain in the 1980s are absent in Ireland, and the traditional balance between centre and peripheries has thus not shifted so much in the recent past.

The absence of a direct central presence in the localities means in practice in Britain that if a policy is decided on, in education, for example, the Department of Education does not routinely implement the policy through its local offices—it has none. Still less does it send instructions direct to the schools, over which it has no

immediate authority. Instead it sends details of the new policy to the Directors of Education and the education committees of borough and county councils, requesting or requiring compliance and asking for reports on progress.

Clearly this indirect mode of proceeding is subject to delay and sometimes noncompliance, particularly if the policy has not been passed as legislation and thus has not the full force of law. Non-compliance can become full-scale obstruction, as in federal systems, if the local government is politically opposed to central government policy. Owing to the fact that local elections take place over a three-year period, and thus often when the government party is at the trough of its popularity cycle, there is an in-built mechanism in Britain for parties in control locally to differ from the one in power at the centre. After sixteen years of Conservative government almost all significant local authorities are now in the hands of Labour, or the Liberals, or both in coalition.

Where policy is generally agreed, of course, the situation does not necessarily lead to an impasse. Politicians are not the only people involved in local decision-making. Local bureaucrats are professionals and specialists in their own areas—finance, public health, sewage and so on: they have a national career pattern and will often have close links with their fellow specialists or civil servants in the relevant national Ministry. They probably indeed have closer links with their national ‘policy network’ than with fellow officials in their own local authority (Rhodes 1988: Stoker 1991).

However, even such networks, professionally predisposed to relay and implement national policies, need to be consulted and won over if the process is to go smoothly. This is even more true of the professionals’ political masters, ideologically opposed to central government anyway. As we noted, the style of Conservative governments since 1979 has not been to consult, but to impose directives with a strong ideological content. The result has been constant conflict with local government, which in many ways has represented a more effective opposition to Conservative policies than the parliamentary Labour Party.

The central government has two major weapons in trying to enforce its will at local level. In the first place it provides a third of local government revenue (another third comes from local taxes and a third from service charges). In the second place, through its control of Parliament, it can pass legislation binding on lower bodies.

In forcing compliance upon local authorities Conservative governments have relied on a variety of measures, all of them still available but which have changed in emphasis from fiscal instruments to direct intervention and then to indirect legislation over the years. The first concern in the early 1980s was to reduce public expenditure in general, and social expenditure in particular. As local government was responsible for more expenditure in these areas than central government, a prime concern was to restrict its spending. This was done by ‘capping’ the revenue of recalcitrant councils. The central government published financial targets for each authority. Those which exceeded them found their central subsidies reduced. When they tried to raise local

taxes to compensate, legislation was passed to prevent them doing so beyond levels set by the centre.

Though in theory this should have forced local councils to cut services they developed a series of tactics, such as borrowing, and selling property, which thwarted central objectives. In order to enforce these, in the mid-1980s more emphasis was placed on direct intervention, often backed up by legislation. Thus councils were forced to sell the public housing they owned (50 per cent or more of the housing stock in some areas). The larger Labour-controlled councils (metropolitan councils) were abolished outright. Then the old property-based local tax (the rates) was abolished in favour of a flat-rate 'community charge' (the Poll Tax) which the government thought would make Labour supporters more sensitive to the cost of local services and thus automatically contain them. As noted above, massive popular opposition caused this policy to backfire and brought Mrs Thatcher down without ameliorating local-central relations.

A third, less direct, policy has had more success and has been increasingly deployed in the 1990s. It consists in reducing the area of operation of local government by two means, both backed by legislation.

1. For functions which remain with local government, such as the environment and social work, 'internal markets' are to be created. The council is to be in the position of a purchaser of services and is obliged by law to put services out to tender and accept the cheapest contractor. However unwillingly, therefore, councils are to be forced to apply Conservative Value for money' market-driven values, if necessary by the government taking them to court. This policy also reduces a council's labour force and its general importance in its locality, as well as its autonomy of action.

Then the 'internal market' is also being employed to reorganize central services such as the National Health Service, putting managers (who may be expected to support Conservative objectives) in charge instead of health professionals.

2. A second policy, again backed by legislation, is to limit and transfer the functions of local governments. This has been done either by outright privatization (bus services) or by transferring the service to the control of an authority nominated by central government (police, some health functions, redevelopment and planning powers in certain areas). In education, schools under the control of local authorities (as all State schools were prior to 1989) have been encouraged to 'opt out' and form independent trusts, negotiating directly with the Department for Education.

'Quangos' (an acronym for 'quasi non-governmental organizations') have always been a feature of administration. Lacking direct agents, British governments have relied on such bodies where local governments were unable to act. Often administrative powers have been granted to professional bodies so they can regulate their members' standards and conduct. The British Medical Association, not the Department of Health, tries and disciplines doctors, as do the corresponding associations of dentists, nurses, lawyers and a string of other professions. Marketing

boards elected by farmers run purchasing policy for areas of agriculture. The National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children polices child-care legislation.

Nominated boards have also run functions for government. The board of governors of the BBC has managed a major section of radio and television for seventy years and the health authorities have always been nominated. What has changed under Conservative rule, however, is (1) that nominated boards have increased their number, responsibilities and budgets at the expense of local government, and (2) that their membership is no longer drawn from a broad, middle-class, all-party spectrum but is predominantly made up of Conservative businessmen.

The tendency towards creating a one-party sub-State is obviously to entrench Conservative policies structurally in the system, as we have seen happening elsewhere. It also enables Ministers to disclaim accountability or responsibility for many areas of national life, converting it into a technical matter. (As we saw, the creation of autonomous agencies in the central civil service has the same effect.)

A disquieting aspect of many of the new quangos is the absence of accountability to either taxpayer or customer. The various consumer 'charters' issued by government to guarantee standards of service cover only technical detail and in any case seem unenforceable and unenforced. On policy matters there is no knowing what goes on inside the new authorities, other than the scandals occasionally uncovered by investigative journalism. When these are revealed they are often covered up. A case in point is the £60 million investment in unworkable computer systems by the Wessex Health Authority, where privileged contractors were allowed to break tendering rules. Here, as in other cases, the government has every motive to protect its own nominees and use official secrecy to smother investigation. Corruption and clientelism do not seem to be widespread in the British *sottogoverno* yet, but there is enough evidence to indicate that it is spreading.

The European Union

Apart from the House of Commons and local councils, the European parliament is the only other body whose writ runs in Britain which derives its authority from direct election. As with local government, the increase in the power and standing of the EU institutions in Britain has been resented by central governments which like to think of themselves as the only arbiters of the national interest. Government rhetoric of the last sixteen years has generally portrayed the European Union as a set of foreign institutions interfering unreasonably and arbitrarily with British freedom of action. At the same time, however, governments have acceded to the extension of Community powers, notably in the case of the European Single Act of 1986–7 and the (truncated) Treaty of Maastricht forced through, despite internal splits in the Conservative Party, in 1993.

Conservative ambivalence towards the European Union can be understood in terms of their attachment to the twin ideas of 'Strong State, free market' (Gamble

1988), which are not always in accord. There would be relatively little controversy about membership among Conservatives if the free-market element came without political strings. The extension of the free market internationally is seen as the corollary of its extension internally, and British governments have been consistent in this—Britain's is probably the least protected national market in the Union, and the governments of the early 1990s were among the foremost advocates of further GATT agreements on world free trade.

Her attachment to the extension of the free market explains the otherwise puzzling episode of Mrs Thatcher's support for the far-reaching Single European Act. The Act was seen purely in terms of expanding the free European market—some-what oddly, in the light of the political institutions the Conservatives were building at home to consolidate and guarantee their own market reforms. The far-reaching political powers the European Commission acquired to enforce the single market took the government by surprise and to some extent accounted for the internal Conservative divisions over ratification of the later Treaty of Maastricht.

The division between free-marketeers and upholders of British sovereignty within Europe is the one issue which has the potential to break Conservative unity. The government was, however, let off the hook by the various crises which erupted inside the European Union itself during the 1990s, which rendered further EU development impossible until they had been resolved.

One factor stirring up even more hostility to the Union among Conservatives is the near-unanimous support given to it by Labour and the Liberals, who see it as a means of subverting or altering some of the Conservatives' domestic policies. This aspect has pulled round most of those who opposed Community membership earlier within the Labour Party and who forced the 1975 referendum on membership. The strong pressure on Britain by the other member countries to accept minimum work standards and wages (the social chapter of the Treaty of Maastricht) suits the opposition parties very well.

Liberal and Labour-dominated local councils also look increasingly to the European Union for funds to replace those cut off by the government. Bodies like the Economic and Social Council or the Council for the Regions, as well as the European Parliament itself, provide direct political platforms from which to criticize Conservative policies. The increasing volume of EU regulations which affect local government means more and more routine contact with Brussels and the development of European policy networks which supplement or displace purely British ones. Given their continual conflicts with central government in Britain, local governments find it a relief to deal with reasonably sympathetic outsiders. Once the EU has funding adequate to meet local needs, there will be few political obstacles to its penetration at that level.

One aspect of EU activity whose influence is only now being realized is the European Court. Lacking a guaranteed written constitution, Britain lacks also a court with the formal power to strike legislation down as unconstitutional. Indeed,

the doctrine of absolute parliamentary sovereignty explicitly denies British courts the right to do so. However, the European Court of Justice does operate with a constitution—the Treaty of Rome, the Single European Act, the Treaty of Maastricht—which binds member governments and in terms of which their legislation *can* be struck down.

British courts have recognized and applied rulings of the European Court which do this and hence can be said to have acquired powers of constitutional review by the back door. As the European Court takes a broad view of the rights implied by EU agreements, and defers to the European Convention on Human Rights, signed in 1953, it may well end up imposing an effective charter of individual and social rights in Britain of a kind which has traditionally been resisted as a constraint on parliamentary and government action. Moreover, as the courts do not depend on government consent to impose these rulings, their acts represent an alternative channel of political action for groups wishing to challenge Conservative policy. British interest groups excluded from consultation in Britain have in fact increasingly challenged government decisions at European level, and local government may well join them in the future.

As is generally the case at the institutional level, Irish relations with the European Union follow the British. As internal political conflict is less acute, and there is a written constitution, there has been less need to appeal against government decisions, except in the social field. There the inability of government or courts to query Catholic social teaching has meant that pro-abortion groups in particular have had a welcome opportunity to bring in the European bodies. One example involved freedom of movement for women seeking an abortion outside the republic. One political difficulty in winning the referendum on endorsement of the Treaty of Maastricht was indeed its implications for such social questions, where popular majorities oppose any extension of the individual right to decide.

On all other aspects of the Union Irish governments and parties happily accept the full implications of membership. A voice in the Commission and the parliament gives this small peripheral country an importance it would not otherwise have. Economic subsidies, particularly for agriculture, are vital to the economy. The European connection gives Ireland a chance to break out from British dominance. Traditional neutrality is something of an issue which came up in relation to the foreign aspects of Maastricht, but the inability of the EU to agree on foreign policy means that the likelihood of Ireland being called upon to act in military matters is remote.

The courts

The fact that English courts lack the power of constitutional review (the Scottish courts have sometimes asserted it) does not mean that they lack political power. Quite the contrary: they *can* wield substantial political power, mainly because

politicians want them to. That is why legislation is so often written in a vague way, positively requiring judicial interpretation. Phrases like ‘after due consideration...’ (a Minister may take a particular decision) or ‘taking into account all reasonable circumstances...’ invite the courts to interpret what is reasonable or relevant. English law moreover relies heavily on precedents from past judicial rulings and decisions, which are often weighty enough to modify interpretations of current legislation. One might well ask, who needs judicial review in a situation like that?

The political role of the courts has been enhanced by recent governments, which, rather than confront the trade unions (or, latterly, local government) directly, have preferred to pass restrictive legislation which the courts must then apply. Conservative governments can be fairly confident that the judges, chosen from an elite group of lawyers and predominantly upper-class privileged males (Griffith 1981), will generally support their legislation in such cases. As with businessmen nominated to quangos, there may be individuals who are reformist or radical in outlook, but the majority can be relied upon to follow the preferred policy line.

During the 1980s this was in fact what the courts did. They were assiduous in punishing unions financially for overstepping the limits of government legislation and in imprisoning and fining those engaged in extended picketing. In disputes between central and local government they generally found in the former’s favour. They upheld doctrines of official secrecy, whether in civil actions designed to prevent disclosure (the *Spycatcher* trials involving newspapers’ right to report information already published abroad) or in criminal cases involving imprisonment for civil servants accused of ‘leaking’ information. (Juries sometimes refused to convict because of the draconian penalties involved.)

The increasing use of the courts to enforce disputed aspects of Conservative policy has thus proved very effective from the government’s point of view. Passing structural legislation to enforce political and social change (such as competitive tendering in local government) is an effective strategy because it ‘objectifies’ such change, taking it out of day-to-day politics; makes direct opposition illegal; leaves the messy business of detailed enforcement to others; and reduces direct government responsibility for the area concerned once the legislation is in force. This is in line with other policies discussed above, such as ‘hiving off’ ministerial responsibilities to autonomous agencies.

In general, therefore, it can be said that the courts are effective agencies of (Conservative) government policy rather than autonomous actors in the political process. Given the privileged background of judges, they are likely to act as a brake on social or economic legislation passed by any non-Conservative government, as they have in the past with regard to trade union immunities. Their acceptance of the overriding authority of the European Court of Justice may yet push them into a wider assertion of individual rights and social stances which run contrary to official policy. Only hints of this have emerged from judicial decisions to date, however.

INSTITUTIONAL CHANGES AND REFORMS

It is instructive, in considering likely future change, to contrast the United Kingdom with the Republic of Ireland, as we have at many points in this discussion. Apart from its electoral system and written constitution, Ireland has almost exactly the same institutions as Britain - unsurprisingly, as they were, after all, inherited from the United Kingdom. In the Irish case, parliamentary sovereignty and Cabinet government have worked to sustain one-party rule, contrary to the influence exerted by the single transferable vote system at electoral level. The result was that Fianna Fail was able to form single-party governments over most of the period from 1932 to 1982. However, the electoral system prevented it from consolidating its position as an absolute majority party. It was often dependent on outside support in parliament and so forced into policy compromises.

Compromise was also promoted by other factors: (1) the very slight policy differences between the two leading parties, (2) the powerful position of the Catholic Church, which has always had a veto over any disputed aspects of social policy, (3) extreme resource constraints, due to the peripheral nature of the country in Europe, and (4) the need, supported by the mass of the population and almost all parties, to keep out of the conflict in Northern Ireland.

The economic boom of the 1970s facilitated the expansion of social services. With its collapse, controversy in the 1980s centred on the question of whether such expansion could be maintained, along with challenges to the hitherto dominant traditional Catholic morality (e.g. on the general position of women and on birth control). Party disputes were muted, however, as the electoral system facilitated the emergence of several parties and consequent coalition governments. Decisions about social services thus involved the (moderate) Labour Party with one or other of the two traditional parties. Compromise and coalition bargaining rather than confrontation were the norm. The traditional institutions of government, centring on Cabinet co-ordination of the Ministries, were able to cope because of the small size of the country and the relatively modest expansion of services. Within the limits of the practicable, the institutions of British government appear to have served the republic well. The sole innovation, the electoral system, has helped to soften the more confrontational aspects of British government in a useful way.

That is precisely what has not happened in Britain itself, owing in large part to the operation of its 'first past the post' system at electoral level. This has facilitated the creation of artificial parliamentary majorities and single-party governments based on a (large) minority of the electorate. Interacting with this electoral situation, party policies have become more ideological and less aggregative. Ideological certainty has given Conservative governments since 1979 a basis on which to exclude large societal interests from government decision-making, to re-establish the market as the major mechanism of economic and social decisions, despite the objections of disadvantaged groups, and to assert the overriding authority of the reduced central state over other political institutions.

These major institutional changes have been accompanied by measures which have had profound socio-economic effects: (1) massive selling off of public enterprises and property to private individuals and firms, and (2) connected with this, but also due to taxation changes and cuts in State benefit, a large increase in the wealth of the top 10–20 per cent of the population and a reduction in the standard of living of the lowest 25 per cent, partly through acceptance of permanently high unemployment.

Such changes have been as fundamental as those which created the modern Welfare State and the mixed economy under the Labour government of 1945–51. Like them the Conservative governments of the 1980s and 1990s have relied on the traditional institutions of government to put changes into effect: Ministries, with a somewhat adversarial relationship among themselves, co-ordinated by a single-party Cabinet using the doctrines of parliamentary sovereignty and the electoral mandate to enforce its own programme.

The absence of institutional innovation at the centre, particularly the lack of coordinating mechanisms other than the Cabinet, may be seen as retrogressive in political terms. Reasserting traditional Cabinet supremacy under the Prime Minister means that the Cabinet will continue to be overloaded, and that its authoritative intervention will be focused now on one Ministry, now on another, while the remainder take largely autonomous decisions in their own fields.

It is probably more logical, however, for contemporary Conservatives to retain the old structures unmodified than it was for Labour in 1945. Free-market ideology gives them a sufficient programme for minimal co-ordination and for asserting their political dominance over civil servants inside individual Ministries. Their essentially restrictive and limited aims in government—shedding services and functions as much as possible and containing expenditure—are more easily effected through the traditional institutions than are programmes involving positive intervention in economy or society. Official secrecy and the detached style of civil service decision-makers accord with Conservative ambitions to distance government from society and to make most decision-making affecting citizens technical and market-dominated in nature. In this area State institutions are better suited to the Conservatives than to their political opponents.

Inevitably the profound socio-political transformations have created many winners and losers; in so doing they have intensified political antagonisms. These centre on the territorial-class cleavage identified earlier. Essentially, Conservative policies have been aimed at pleasing the party's affluent or upwardly mobile supporters in the south-east and Midlands of England, though they also appeal to the better-off elsewhere. Conservatives still justify their actions in terms of the national interest (especially economic growth, Budge 1993), and still use a 'one nation' rhetoric inherited from the past, but they aim essentially at pleasing their core supporters: any attempt at a wider aggregation of interests has been abandoned.

A majority of electors vote for parties opposed to the Conservatives—Labour, Liberal and the various regional parties. This fragmentation of the opposition has

fostered Conservative wins under the existing electoral system. What are the prospects for the future? Will institutional change take place in the 1990s, and if so how?

Whatever change takes place, it will be peaceful and constitutional in nature. Sporadic urban riots do not shake the system but generally provoke more effective efforts to contain the trouble. When a measure arouses as much opposition as the Poll Tax any government is likely to beat a strategic retreat and achieve the same ends by less provocative means.

In this context it is likely that the Conservatives, helped by the institutions tailored to them, can continue well into the next century. Political tensions from their continued hold on power will be felt most in Scotland. For these to have much impact, however, the Scottish National Party would have to overtake Labour's Scottish vote. This is more likely to occur after rather than at the next election.

In many ways Labour is the Conservatives' best ally in maintaining the *status quo*. Its constant optimism about victory at the next election keeps it out of coalition pacts and dilutes its commitment to institutional reform. Winning another election under 'first past the post' would probably kill its tentative proposals for change to a more proportional system, as well as its support for a Bill of Rights and a written constitution, but would probably give internal devolution to Scotland and Wales, as Labour depends so heavily on the support of those areas.

A Labour coalition government with the Liberals would inevitably lead to electoral reform. Any system of proportional representation would render the parties more equal and would favour a permanent coalition, with the Liberal Democrats in the decisive centrist position. This would represent such a definitive break with current political processes that the nature of all the central institutions would change. Parliament would open up, the Cabinet would no longer attempt to be monolithic, official secrecy would break down, while the adversarial relationship between Ministries would be subsumed into wider political bargaining between coalition partners.

Coalition would substitute a more open and possibly more aggregative form of government for the heavily ideological style of contemporary Conservatism. For the reasons already outlined, however, the most likely modifications will originate from the European Union steadily increases its influence and political support in the country as a whole.

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Germany

The Grand Coalition State

Manfred G.Schmidt

Few Western nations have experienced such numerous radical regime changes in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as has Germany. In little more than 120 years the country has been governed by an authoritarian constitutional monarchy (1871–1918), an unstable democracy during the period of the Weimar Republic (1918–33), National Socialist totalitarianism (1933–45), military occupation (1945–9), two separate German States in the post-1949 period, a liberal democratic one in western Germany and a communist one in the eastern part of the country, and since 1990 a unified democratic German State.

Most observers in the early post-World War II period were pessimistic about the future of Germany's democracy. Too numerous and powerful seemed the institutional and cultural legacies of the authoritarian past and too heavy the political and economic load the country had to shoulder through military defeat, wartime destruction, occupation and the massive influx of millions of refugees and those expelled from eastern Germany during the war and in the post-war period. Yet Germany's transition to democracy ultimately turned out to be a 'success story' (Dalton 1989:4). The reasons for this were manifold. The explanatory factors that deserve to receive first mention are the democratization policy of the occupation powers, particularly the American military government in Germany, the support for democracy on the part of most West German political elites at the local and the state level, the total discrediting of alternatives of a National Socialist or communist nature, the rapid restoration and expansion of the economy in the 1950s, and the reconstruction and expansion of a Welfare State which distributed and redistributed economic resources on a massive scale to the less wealthy and socially weak groups of West German society. The success of Germany's democratic transition manifested itself not only in high levels of political stability and governability, efficient alternation of government, and relatively high levels of 'diffuse support' (D.Easton) for democracy, but also in the preference for the rapid accession of the German Democratic Republic to the West German economic and political order in eastern Germany in 1989–90. Furthermore the level of anti-system parties has remained small in the Federal Republic both prior to unification and in the early post-unification period.

ELECTIONS

Political parties and voters

The strongest party in the Federal Republic has been the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) and its Bavarian sister organisation, the Christian Social Union (CSU), with an average share of the votes in national elections of 45 per cent (1949–90) and 41.5 per cent in 1994. Politically the CDU and CSU are centre-right people's parties of a religious, interconfessional, interclass and pragmatic conservative reformist complexion. Also of the people's party type but with a major strong-hold among the unionized sections of blue-collar and white-collar workers is the second largest party in the Federal Republic, the Social Democratic Party (SPD). In elections to the Bundestag, the lower House, the SPD has gained an average share of 37 per cent of the vote in the period from 1949 to 1990, and 36.4 per cent in the election to the Bundestag in 1994. Some 10 per cent of the votes or less were mobilized by the Liberals, while the Green Party, or Bündnis '90/Die Grünen, the official name since 1993, which made its entry on to the parliamentary scene in the late 1970s in state parliaments and in 1983 in the national parliament, has won 4–8 per cent of the votes. Smaller parties have also competed for votes, but their share has been low or insignificant. In the early 1950s the German Communist Party, the Unified Germany Federation/Bloc of the Expelled and Dispossessed (GB-BHE) and regional parties, such as the Bavarian Party, have mobilized 4–6 per cent of the votes, and in the Bundestag election in 1994 the Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS), that is, the follow-up organization to the Socialist Unity Party (SED) of the former German Democratic Republic, won 4.4 per cent of the votes (see Table 3.1).

Judging by the distribution of voters by political-ideological families, the natural centre of gravity of politics in the Federal Republic of Germany falls somewhere between a centrist position and centre-right. German unification has not fundamentally altered this distribution. Although the East German electorate has adopted a somewhat more leftist position on the classical left-right ideological spectrum, the majority of the votes in the election to the Chamber of Deputies in March 1990 and in the elections to the Bundestag and state parliaments since 1990 has been mobilized by non-socialist parties, mainly of a Christian Democratic or liberal complexion.

Compared with the Weimar Republic period, the political ideological distance between the political tendencies is significantly less in the Federal Republic of Germany, and the willingness and capability of the established parties to co-operate with their opponents significantly greater. Moreover the degree of party concentration indicates a further marked contrast between the First Republic and the Second German Republic. The party system of the Weimar Republic was notorious for its high level of fragmentation, while the degree of party concentration in West Germany, and to a somewhat lesser extent in unified Germany, has been high and higher than in most other EU nations, with the exception of Greece and the United Kingdom (Brettschneider *et al.* 1992:589). Furthermore the ideological spectrum of the parties

Table 3.1 Elections to the German Bundestag, 1949–94

Year	Turnout (%)	Comm. KPD, DKP	Green	Socialist SPD	Liberal FDP	Christian CDU-CSU	Right	Other
1949	78.5	5.7	–	29.2	11.9	31.0	1.8	22.4
1953	85.8	2.2	–	28.8	9.5	45.2	1.1	13.2
1957	87.8	–	–	31.8	7.7	50.2	1.0	9.3
1961	87.7	–	–	36.2	12.8	45.3	0.8	4.9
1965	86.8	–	–	39.3	9.5	47.6	2.0	1.6
1969	86.7	–	–	42.7	5.8	46.1	4.4	1.0
1972	91.1	0.3	–	45.8	8.4	44.9	0.6	–
1976	90.7	0.3	–	42.6	7.9	48.6	0.3	0.3
1980	88.6	0.2	1.5	42.9	10.6	44.5	0.2	0.1
1983	89.1	0.2	5.6	38.2	6.9	48.8	0.2	0.1
1987	84.3	–	8.3	37.0	9.1	44.4	0.6	0.6
1990	77.8	2.4	3.8	33.5	11.0	43.8	2.1	3.4
1994	79.1	4.4	7.3	36.4	6.9	41.5	1.9	1.6

Notes Party vote is measured as a percentage of the total second vote (*Zweitstimme*). CDU-CSU, Christlich Demokratische Union/Christlich Soziale Union (Christian Democratic Union/Christian Social Union). SPD, Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands (German Social Democratic Party). FDP, Freie Demokratische Partei (Liberal Democratic Party). Communist: 1949 and 1953, KPD (banned in 1956 by a ruling of the Federal Constitutional Court); 1972–87, DKP (German Communist Party); 1990 and 1994, PDS (Party of Democratic Socialism). Green, Die Grünen (the Greens). Right major party of the right, 1949–61, DR, Deutsche Reichspartei (German Party); 1965–87, NPD, Nationaldemokratische Partei (National Democratic Party); 1990, Die Republikaner (the Republicans).

represented in the national parliament in most of the period from 1949 to 1994 has been narrower than that of the Weimar Republic and in most other democracies based on proportional representation, largely owing to the absence of an agrarian party, a secular conservative party of the Anglo-American conservative type, and a larger extreme right-wing party. A marked contrast concerns also the strength of anti-system parties in the Weimar Republic and the weakness of anti-system opposition on the extreme right and the extreme left in the Federal Republic.

How is the distribution of power between the political parties and tendencies in the Federal Republic to be accounted for? Why are the Christian Democrat parties in the position of dominant player and why are the major two political camps divided between Christian Democrats and Liberals on the one hand and Social Democrats and mainly the Greens on the other? To a significant extent, the answers to these

Table 3.2 Policy space of parties in Germany, 1984

Year	Communist		Socialist	Liberal	Christian	
	DKP	Green	SPD	FDP	CDU	CSU
1984	1.4	2.8	3.3	5.1	6.7	7.9

Notes 0 extreme left, 10 extreme right. See Table 3.1 for the full party names.

Source F.Castles and P.Mair, 'Left-right political scales', *European Journal of Political Research* 12 (1984):83–8.

questions must be based on the distinctive distribution of voter preferences on the left-right continuum, the structure of cleavages and the impact of issues and candidates on the voters' choice.

The relative strength of centre and centre-right tendencies mirrors a distinct distribution of preferences. Measured by the distribution of voter preferences on the left-right scale, German voters have been less inclined to adopt left-centre or leftist positions than voters in many other advanced democracies, such as France, Italy and Spain. Moreover, in contrast to nations with a strong centre-right or right-wing tendency, such as Ireland, the Federal Republic is rather representative of a position in the middle group (Falter and Schumann 1992; Brettschneider *et al.* 1992:564).

The advantage of the centre and centre-right tendencies over the Social Democratic tendency mirrors to a considerable extent the impact of the cleavage structure on electoral behaviour. Notwithstanding idiosyncratic voter alignments in east Germany, largely owing to reaction to the former socialist regime, the major cleavages in Germany are religion and class. Central to an understanding of politics in the Federal Republic, particularly in western Germany, is the relative strength of the religious cleavage, measured by indicators such as the religion index, and the relative weakness of the class-based division, measured by the Alford index or other measures of class cleavage. Specifically, the difference between religious affiliation and weak or absent affiliation to one of the major Churches generates a 35 percentage point difference in the Christian Democratic vote in western Germany (Falter and Schumann 1992:206), and, thus, is indicative of the powerful impact of religion. Among the larger EU member countries there is only one other with a larger impact of religious affiliation on the vote, namely Italy (Falter and Schumann 1992:206; Brettschneider *et al.* 1992:624). In contrast to this, class cleavage indicators, such as the Alford index, defined as the percentage voting socialist among the working class less the percentage voting socialist among the middle classes, and the trade unionism index, measured as the percentage voting Social Democrat among trade unionists less the percentage voting SPD among non-members of trade unions, all point to a more moderate and declining impact of class on voting behaviour in western Germany (see, for example, Gallagher *et al.* 1992:103; Brettschneider *et al.* 1992:624). The latter trend has been reinforced by the weakness, if not non-existence, of traditional class-based voting in the east German elections since 1990.

The distribution of preferences on left-right scale and the cleavage structure have been among the factors that were conducive to a somewhat weaker position of leftist parties, in general, and of the Social Democratic Party in particular. The position of leftist parties has also suffered from the relative decline in the size of the Social Democratic core constituency in the industrial sector of the economy. Moreover, since the late 1970s, the SPD's position has been challenged by the rise of the Green Party, which, by mobilizing a not insubstantial share of left-wing and post-materialist voters, has made serious inroads into SPD support and the cohesion of the left

tendency, as has the Party of Democratic Socialism in attracting 19 per cent of the east German vote in the Bundestag election in 1994.

Socio-structural trends have also posed challenges to the Christian Democratic parties, but their impact on the CDU-CSU vote has been less critical. Although there have been increasing levels of secularization in general and a relative decline in the proportion of voters with a strong religious affiliation in particular, the Christian Democratic parties have managed to compensate for much of their losses in other segments of the electoral market, mainly thanks to a comparative advantage in the types of issue salient in elections and issue competence. Furthermore, the level of competition with right-wing parties has so far been less intense for the CDU-CSU than the level of competition between the SPD and the Greens.

Socio-structural trends and the patterns of competition on the electoral market in Germany were, thus, on the whole more favourable to the non-socialist tendencies than to the Social Democratic Party. Moreover, issue competence on the part of the Social Democratic Party and the popularity of its leaders have not been sufficiently strong to compensate for the party's disadvantage relative to the non-socialist tendency. Considering the popularity of its leaders, the SPD gained a leading position relative to its major opponent only for brief periods, such as in the first three years of the chancellorship of Willy Brandt and in the era of Chancellor Helmut Schmidt (1974–82). Furthermore, in some of the major issue areas, in particular in economic policy, the CDU-CSU has long maintained a substantial lead over the SPD, while the public viewed the Social Democratic Party as more competent on 'softer' issues, such as environmental protection, citizen participation, and the adoption and maintenance of a *détente*-oriented stance in foreign policy *vis-à-vis* Eastern Europe. Of course, there have been short-term fluctuations in issue competence, such as the loss of the lead in economic policy competence on the part of the incumbent coalition in 1993, but the long-term trend has been marked by the lead of the Christian Democratic parties on 'hard' issues and the lead of the Social Democratic party on soft issues, which, generally speaking, have not outweighed the impact of harder issues on the choices of voters.

Electoral system

The high level of party concentration in Germany is at least partly attributable to cleavage structure and voters' preferences, but it also mirrors the impact of a distinctive electoral system. Germany's electoral formula is two-track proportional representation on the basis of universal suffrage for citizens of German nationality aged eighteen or over. The special feature of the electoral system is that voters have two votes, the first (*Erststimme*) for a constituency candidate, and the second (*Zweitstimme*) for the party lists. One half the 656 basic seats (*Grundmandate*) in the thirteenth legislative period of the Bundestag are allocated through relative majority votes in constituencies, and the other half through party lists in each of the sixteen states (*Länder*) of the

Federal Republic. The decisive vote is the second vote. Its distribution largely determines how many seats a party will have in parliament because the constituency seats won by the party's candidate are deducted from the total due to it on the basis of the second vote. The distribution of the second vote and the transformation of votes into seats according to the Hare-Niemeyer formula of mathematical proportions generate a high level of proportionality in the outcome.

There are, however, two restrictions on proportionality. One concerns the 5 per cent clause, the other the so-called excess seats. According to the 5 per cent clause of the Bundestag Elections Act, parliamentary seats are allocated only to parties which have won a minimum of 5 per cent of the second votes nationally or three constituency seats through relative majority in the first votes. Excess seats can result from the possibility of a party winning more constituency seats than its proportional share of second votes would indicate. In that case the party retains its excess seats, and parliament is enlarged accordingly, for example in the 1990–4 legislative period of the Bundestag from 656 to 662.

Two temporary exceptions were in effect for the 1990 Bundestag election, the first all-German election after unification, largely owing to a decision of the Federal Constitutional Court, which had pushed the case of the east German parties. In the 1990 election a party was required to secure the 5 per cent minimum in either the west German electoral area or in the east German one. The further exception in the 1990 election designed to assist the new east German parties was the right of the parties to combine their electoral lists and, thus, to form alliances in the various states. It was basically thanks to these exceptions that the PDS and the alliance of east German Greens and east German Citizen Democrats gained parliamentary seats in the 1990 Bundestag election, although they received less than 5 per cent of the national vote.

The level of disproportionality of votes and seats in the German electoral system is moderately low by international standards. The Lijphart index of disproportionality, for example, a measure of the average vote-seat share deviation of the two largest parties in national elections, indicates a particularly low level of disproportionality in Germany in the period from 1949 to 1980 (Lijphart 1984:160). However, Lijphart's measure must be interpreted together with the exclusion of a considerable number of smaller electoral parties from parliament through the 5 per cent hurdle. Taking the 5 per cent clause into account, it can be argued that the electoral system has significantly contributed to the high level of party concentration, particularly in the first three decades. However, the disproportionality inherent in the electoral system has not barred access to new parties, as is demonstrated by the rise of the Green Party in the 1980s.

Most of the political debates and most scientific studies of elections and electoral behaviour have focused on elections to the Bundestag, the lower House. That perspective necessarily underestimates the importance of federalism and the impact of elections to state parliaments in each of the sixteen states (*Länder*) on the

composition of the state governments and of the influential Bundesrat (upper House), which has played a major role in national policy-making (see pp. 75–85). The electoral systems in the constituent states of the Federal Republic differ from the rules of the game in Bundestag elections in nuance and detail but not in substance. However, a wide range of variation in party preferences and election outcomes exists between national elections and elections to the state parliaments. The CDU-CSU vote, for example, varied in the elections to state parliaments in 1990 to 1993 from a minimum of 31 per cent in Bremen to a maximum of 54 per cent in Bavaria and Saxony, while the range of the SPD vote was from 19 per cent in Saxony to 55 per cent in Schleswig Holstein, followed by 54 per cent in the Saarland and 50 per cent in North Rhine-Westphalia.

Within the context of the Federal Republic of Germany, election outcomes at the state level have a major impact on politics and policy at the national level. Consider, for example, the situation in winter 1993/4. At the national level the CDU-CSU-FDP coalition held the reins of power, but only five states out of a total of sixteen were governed by CDU-led coalitions or a single Christian Democratic party, such as the CSU. These were Bavaria and four of the five new east German states. While the SPD was the opposition party in the national parliament, it was the dominant governing party in nine states out of a total of sixteen, and the co-governing partner in a Grand Coalition with the CDU in the states of Berlin and Baden-Württemberg. The party composition in the states has a major impact on the partisan composition of the Bundesrat, the Federal Council, or upper House, composed of deputies of the state government. The coalition of CDU, CSU and FDP can count on no more than twenty-one Bundesrat seats out of a total of sixty-eight, and is thus not in a majority in the Bundesrat, while ten seats are allocated to CDU-SPD Grand Coalitions and thirty-seven seats to SPD-led governments. Owing to the powerful role of the Bundesrat in legislation—almost all important legislation in domestic affairs requires the explicit consent of the Bundesrat majority—this constellation of political forces introduces powerful Grand Coalition components and consociational elements to the architecture of government in the Federal Republic.

The practical importance of this power distribution is the alternative between blockage of the decision-making process in the Bundesrat or governance of the Federal Republic by a Grand Coalition of the federal government and the state governments and a more or less hidden Grand Coalition between the federal government coalition and the major opposition party.

PARTIES AND PARTY STRATEGIES

In the Federal Republic an alternating party system of high concentration has replaced the multi-party system of the 1950s. A centre-right people's party of Christian Democratic complexion, a centre-left Social Democratic Party and a smaller liberal party have been in parliament since the first legislative period in

1949–53, and can thus be regarded as the establishment among the political parties of the Second German Republic. Measured by indicators of political ideological heterogeneity, the German party system is a case of moderate pluralism rather than one of polarized pluralism in the Italian style, to borrow from Giovanni Sartori's typology of party systems. Furthermore, in contrast to one-party dominant 'uncommon democracies' (Pempel 1990), such as Japan under the rule of the Liberal Party, Germany's post-war democracy is marked by a moderate, albeit significant, level of alternation in the party composition of government. The major changes in the partisan complexion of national government were the replacement of the CDU-CSU-led government by a Grand Coalition of CDU-CSU and SPD in 1966, the change in 1969 from the Grand Coalition to an SPD-FDP coalition, and the substitution of a new CDU-CSU-FDP coalition for the social-liberal coalition in 1982.

The German party system has undergone major changes both in respect of the total number of effective parties and the political ideological distance between the various political tendencies. A large number of parties, a high level of fragmentation in the party system, and a complex cleavage structure (class, religion, centre-periphery, anti-communism versus communism, and native population versus refugees and exiles) were characteristic of the party system in the first and second legislative periods (1949–57). However, the total number and the relative importance of smaller parties declined rapidly, largely due to factors like rapid social change, high economic growth rates, effective social and economic integration of weaker social groups through expanding job opportunities and welfare provision, and political mobilization on the part of the CDU-CSU and the SPD. What had been a party system not too dissimilar from that of the Weimar Republic was transformed into a three-party system in the 1960s and 1970s, in which the Liberals were positioned as kingmaker. Notwithstanding its high party concentration, Germany's party system proved more open to new parties than most observers were expecting, as was demonstrated by the rise of the Green Party in the 1980s.

Policy positions

The CDU-CSU is the strongest political party in the Federal Republic of Germany. The Christian Democratic parties are the main representatives of the landowning classes and property owners, farmers, the old middle class, business and religiously affiliated voters, but they also comprise a sizeable proportion of wage earners, old-age pensioners, voters from lower-income classes and religiously non-affiliated citizens (see, for example, Mintzel 1977; Haungs 1983; Schmidt 1990). In so far as the Christian Democratic parties are organizations of an interconfessional, interclass and pragmatic conservative reformist, if not populist, character they may even be regarded as an approximation to the Kirchheimerian catch-all type of party (Kirchheimer 1965).

The policy positions of the CDU-CSU mirror the complex composition of its social constituency. The Christian Democratic Union has been described as ‘a new attempt to unite practising Catholics and Protestants in a modern centrist party, mainly in reaction to their experience of Nazism’ (Klingemann 1987:296). Given its uncompromising pro-unification policy stance, it could also be described as the attempt to unite the west German and east German populations in one near-catch-all party. The policy profile of the CDU-CSU, it has been argued, is ‘adherence to Christian values, democratic constitutionalism, a liberal social order, the social market economy, European unity and the reunification of Germany’ (Klingemann 1987:296–7). Others have emphasized the combination of pro-market and pro-welfare stances in policy which the CDU has advocated, and have argued that a ‘social capitalism’ approach is the trade mark of Christian Democratic public policy (Hartwich 1970). While the CDU of the 1950s and 1960s was in many respects mainly a *Kanzlerwahlverein*, a loose association geared to promoting the Chancellor, it was transformed into a highly organized modern people’s party in the 1970s. A heterogeneous social constituency, pragmatism and religious affiliation have also marked the CSU, the Bavarian sister organization of the Christian Democratic Party, but in contrast to the CDU the CSU has placed more emphasis on issues of regional concern, populism, a significantly higher level of state intervention and a conservative stance on civil rights issues (Mintzel 1977).

Second in strength among German political parties is the Social Democratic Party, the oldest of the political parties in modern Germany and the one with the longest democratic tradition. Originally the SPD was mainly a party of organized labour, deeply rooted in the milieu of the German working class. In the post-1949 period the SPD has been gradually transformed from a class-based mass movement party to an ideologically moderate centre-left party. The SPD has mobilized voters mainly from workers and social income earners, private-sector employees and public servants, blue-collar and white-collar workers and from materialists and postmaterialists (Lösche and Walter 1992). Relative to the centre parties and centre-right parties, the policy profile of the SPD is marked by a strong preference for state intervention, high levels of welfare, a pro-labour stance on policy, neo-corporatist co-operation between the State and organized interest groups, citizen participation and environmental protection.

The Free Democratic Party, the liberal party, is asymmetrically located between the CDU-CSU and the SPD. The liberal party, it has been argued, was for ‘people who found the CDU too close to the Churches and the SPD too close to the trade unions’ (Soe 1985:124). Its liberal economic and political ideology mirrors the interests of a social constituency which is pervaded by a middle-class entrepreneurial ideology and the predominance of secular views. The primary political goals of the liberal party, it has been argued, are to be found in the ‘preservation of individual freedom, the reunification of Germany, the rejection of socialist planning and of clericalism’ (Klingemann 1987:297). However, that picture needs to be complemented by

differences between the FDP and the bigger parties. In contrast to both the CDU and the SPD, the Free Democratic Party is not linked with the interests of the social income earners, such as old-age pensioners, and not affiliated to the trade unions. As a strong advocate of private enterprise the FDP is closer to the CDU-CSU on economic issues. However, on most civil rights issues the SPD rather than the conservative CDU-CSU is the more natural coalition partner for the FDP.

The Green Party, or Bündnis '90/Die Grünen, is an offspring of the value change from undisputed priority for materialist concerns to a more mixed pattern of materialist and postmaterialist values (Raschke 1991). Ecological issues, gender issues and protest for peace have been among the major concerns of the Green Party, although the party does not have a monopoly in these issue areas. A particularly large proportion of its voters and party members is to be found among the younger generation, the better educated, service sector workers and professionals. In so far as policy positions are concerned, the Greens are advocates of left-wing postmaterialist policies, with a major emphasis on environmental protection, citizen participation and a high degree of decentralization and autonomy in the structure of the polity. In its organizational structure the Green Party is still a fairly loose coalition of decentralized groups and factional tendencies, such as the so-called *Fundis*, or fundamentalists, i.e. proponents of an uncompromising ecologist stance in policy, and the so-called *Realos*, or realists, i.e. advocates of a more reformist and moderate approach to policy-making and coalition building with centre-left or liberal parties. The merger between the West German Greens and the East German Greens in 1993 strengthened the more moderate tendencies within the Green Party.

Policy distances and coalition strategies of the parties

According to a widely shared view, the level of competitiveness in Germany's party system has declined considerably. Otto Kirchheimer's theory of the waning of opposition and the rise of catch-all parties in the larger West European states has been inspired largely by the experience of diminished policy distances between the major German parties in the 1950s and early 1960s (Kirchheimer 1965). More recent studies of party manifestoes have supported Kirchheimer's view by pointing to the change from conflict orientation to consensus: 'In a comparative perspective...post-war German parties seem the most consensual of all' (Klingemann 1987:321). A considerable number of qualitative and quantitative studies have supported the latter view and it is indeed the case that the range between the extreme poles in the party system is smaller in the Federal Republic of Germany than in most other constitutional democracies (see, for example, Laver and Schofield 1990:240-66) and much smaller than during the period of the Weimar Republic. However, the 'waning of opposition' view has overestimated the stability of the decline and underestimated the possibility of repolarization, as, in the post-1969 period. Moreover the 'waning of opposition' view has veiled the continuity of significant policy differences between the German

political parties. On economic issues the major policy difference is an inter-bloc difference between the centre-left, the left and the Greens on the one hand and the centre-right parties and the Liberals on the other. On most civil rights issues, however, such as abortion and citizen participation, and also on many foreign policy issues, the major division is that between the Social Democratic Party and the Liberals and to some extent also the Greens on the one hand and the conservative stance of the Christian Democratic parties on the other. (It is for these reasons that aggregated policy distance measures, such as those reported in Laver and Schofield (1990:257), generate inconsistent locations for the Liberals and the Christian Democrats, depending upon the type of issue under consideration.)

The asymmetry in policy differences points to the existence of a different natural coalition in German politics. On economic policy and on other issues concerning the division of labour between the State and the private sector, the natural coalition is of Christian Democratic-liberal complexion. However, on civil rights issues and in many foreign policy areas the natural coalition partner for the Liberals is the Social Democratic Party rather than the Christian Democratic Union. A common denominator of both types of coalition is thus the existence of a considerable tension due to controversially debated civil rights or foreign policy positions, or, conversely, controversial economic policy issues.

In contrast to the majoritarian democracies of the Westminster type, coalitions have been the typical form of government in the Federal Republic. However, the German coalition pattern of the post-war period is also at variance with that of many other democratic States outside the world of the Westminster model. A wider range of variation has marked the coalition status of the federal governments in the Federal Republic. The dominant coalition type is a surplus majority government. Minimum winning coalitions were in power over a somewhat shorter period (1969–72, 1976–82 and 1987–91). Exceptions rather than the rule were single party governments (1960–1) and minority government (November 1962, November–December 1965 and September 1985). Moreover, government at the national level and in the states has been characterized by a wide variety of coalition types. All-inclusive coalitions were prevalent in the immediate post-war period. When the Cold War began, all-party coalitions were replaced by coalitions which excluded the Communist Party and, later on, by surplus majority or minimum winning coalitions of different political composition. Although a clear trend towards centre-right-liberal coalitions or, alternatively, centre-left-liberal governments emerged in the 1950s, Grand Coalitions of the CDU and the SPD have been a familiar phenomenon both at state level and, from 1966 to 1969, also in Bonn.

The rise of the Green Party in the late 1970s and 1980s also had a distinctive impact on coalition building. In the 1980s and in the early 1990s the environmentalists of the Green Party entered coalitions with the Social Democratic Party in five states: in Hesse (1984–7 and from 1991 until the present), in West Berlin from 1989 to January 1991, in Lower Saxony from 1990 to 1994 (SPD-Green coalition), in Bremen

from 1991 to 1995, and in a coalition together with the SPD and the Liberals in Brandenburg from 1990 to 1994.

The formation of an SPD-FDP coalition in 1969 and the adoption of a conflict-oriented stance in opposition on the part of the CDU-CSU marked the end of the era of *rapprochement* between the Christian Democratic parties and the Social Democratic Party. A higher level of political polarization in the party system resulted also from controversies over new politics issues and new social movements in the 1970s and 1980s, such as the environmentalists, the anti-nuclear energy movement and the peace movement. In this period, political conflicts intensified to such a degree as to resemble the bitter disputes of the early 1950s between the Christian Democratic parties' emphasis on a pro-market economic policy, rearmament and the rapid integration of West Germany into the international and supranational organizations of the West and the Social Democratic Party's emphasis on nationalist reunification, and a democratic socialist economic policy. However, owing to the coexistence of a divided government in the 1970s, that is, a social-liberal coalition in power at the level of the federal State and the opposition party in control of the majority of the seats in the upper House, the Bundesrat, the higher level of polarization had to be reconciled with the requirements of co-operative politics inherent in the structure of the political institutions of Germany's Second Republic. In practice the outcome was a combination of confrontation and co-operation, and, hence, the coexistence of competition, partisan struggles and majority rule together with consensus formation through compromises or unanimity in decision-making. From this resulted a unique confrontation-and-co-operation game and the co-governing position of the major opposition party, particularly in legislation subject to an affirmative vote of the Bundesrat. A better understanding of that game and its Grand Coalition outcome requires a more detailed study of parliament, government and federalism. It is on these topics that attention will now be focused.

PARLIAMENT

Parties in parliament

The Federal Republic has a parliamentary system of government. The head of the government, the Chancellor, is selected by the Bundestag upon the proposal of the federal President. The Chancellor is dependent on the support of the majority of the Bundestag. However, he can be dismissed from office only by a vote of constructive no confidence, that is, by the election of a successor with the majority of the members of the lower House. In contrast to monarchical forms of parliamentary government, as in the United Kingdom and in Sweden, Germany's parliamentary democracy is republican in nature. Although its executive is divided into the Chancellor, the head of government, and the federal President, the head of state, the distribution of power is biased in favour of the Chancellor. The Chancellor

holds a powerful position *vis-à-vis* both parliament and the President, while the President's role is mainly confined to the exercise of 'dignified' ceremonial functions. It is largely for this reason that Germany's parliamentary government has been described as chancellor-dominated parliamentarism or a chancellor's democracy (Niclauss 1988).

As in most other parliamentary democracies, Germany's parliamentary system is based on a powerful role for the parties in the selection of the political leaders, in policy-making and in patronage. The role of the parties is so powerful that some observers have classified Germany's Second Republic as a *Parteienstaat*, that is, a State run by political parties, or a 'party State' (see, for example, von Beyme 1993b). Although the full applicability of the 'party State' view is debatable, it is uncontroversial that the selection of candidates for elections to the Bundestag is almost exclusively controlled by the political parties. While half the total number of seats in the Bundestag are, in theory, available to non-partisan candidates, provided they gain a relative majority in the electoral districts, in practice only party candidates win parliamentary seats. With very few exceptions, deputies to the Bundestag have always been party members and have always been subject to the respective parliamentary group's discipline of vote.

Thanks to the relatively low level of disproportionality inherent in the electoral system, the distribution of parliamentary seats among the parties mirrors to a considerable degree the distribution of votes. In all but one session of the lower House (1972–6), the CDU-CSU, comprising the CDU deputies and the CSU representatives (who are separately organized in the CSU-Landesgruppe), has been the strongest parliamentary group. Social Democratic deputies have formed the second largest parliamentary group, followed by the Liberals and, since the 1980s, the representatives of the Green Party. Other small parties have held parliamentary seats in the period from 1949 to 1994 only in the 1950s, such as the Communist Party, the right-wing Deutsche Reichs-Partei and the Bavarian Party in the first legislative period from 1949 to 1953, the Centre Party in the first and second sessions and the German Party until the third session of the Bundestag, and in the post-unification period, such as the PDS.

The high level of political stability that has been achieved in Germany's post-1949 democracy is mirrored in standard indicators of governability, such as the length of the period required to form a government and the average life of the government. The mean score for the total number of days required to form a government after an election is thirty-seven, with a minimum of twenty-four and a maximum of fifty-eight (*Datenhandbuch* 1988:999). Most of the selected Cabinets have survived periods of considerable length. The mean survival score has been thirty-seven months and, thus, has been significantly higher than the survival period of Cabinets in Italy (thirteen months), Belgium (twenty-two months) and the Netherlands (twenty-seven months) (Laver and Schofield 1990). In most cases the selected government remained in office throughout the period, but there have been

exceptions to the rule, as in 1972 and in 1982 when a vote of confidence made way for the dissolution of parliament before the full term.

High survival scores of selected Cabinets are at least partly attributable to the existence of internal pluralism in the political parties combined with tough discipline and party solidarity in voting in the lower House. While migration from one parliamentary group to another has been a common phenomenon in the 1950s, the migration rate in parliament, measured as the percentage of the total number of deputies migrating between parliamentary groups, rapidly declined from 22 per cent in 1949–53 to 16 per cent, 6 per cent and 0.4 per cent in the following legislative periods, and increased only moderately subsequent to change in party composition in 1969 and 1982 (see *Datenhandbuch* 1988:989, 992).

Voting procedures in the Bundestag

Among the voting procedures adopted in the Bundestag, absolute majority and two-thirds majority rules deserve to receive foremost mention. The selection of the Chancellor, votes of confidence and the constructive vote of no confidence require the approval of the majority of the members of the lower House. Legislative changes in the constitution require two-thirds majorities in the Bundestag, the lower House, and in the Bundesrat, the upper House. Furthermore, a two-thirds majority in each of the Houses is also required for the selection of judges of the Federal Constitutional Court and for a parliamentary vote on the impeachment of the President for wilful violation of the Basic Law or any other federal law. Within the context of the party system, in which each of the parties regularly gains less than 50 per cent of the votes and seats, a two-thirds majority, in practice, requires the formation of an oversized coalition or an all-inclusive coalition, in general, and co-operation between the major governing party and the major opposition party, in particular. The two-thirds majority rule, thus, strengthens the consensus democracy component and particularly the Grand Coalition component in Germany's polity.

More detailed analysis of the legislative process demonstrates the applicability of this view also to legislative activity below the threshold of constitutional change. With respect to Bills which are subject to an affirmative vote of the Bundesrat, the upper House has veto powers. This is particularly important because six out of ten Bills and, in practice, almost all legislation on major domestic issues, are subject to mandatory approval on the part of the Bundesrat. Moreover, the Bundesrat has a qualified veto even in areas of non-mandatory legislation, although that veto can be overridden by majorities in the Bundestag of a size equivalent to the size of the veto majority. Thus the governance of the Federal Republic through legislation requires in most cases the formation of a Grand Coalition of the incumbent parties and the major opposition party, and a coalition of the federal government and the majority of the state governments.

Particularly dramatic is the impact of these requirements in a period of a divided government, i.e. a period in which the governing parties find themselves confronted by a numerical majority of the opposition party in the Bundesrat. A divided government characterized most of the period of the SPD-FDP coalition in 1969–82, and from May to October 1990, and since early 1991 also the period of the CDU-CSU-FDP coalition. In a divided government the opposition party is positioned as a co-governing party, as long as the state governments' deputies in the Bundesrat vote along partisan lines (which is the dominant practice on issues of major policy importance) and as long as the government prefers a compromise with the opposition party to a blocked decision-making process.

Legislative performance

In a famous study Max Weber (1988) differentiated between two types of parliament. One is the *arbeitende Parlament*, literally, the 'working parliament', in which the emphasis is mainly on committee work, legislation and control of the executive; the other is the *redende Parlament*, that is, a parliament in which attention is focused mainly on parliamentary debates (1988:350). The German Bundestag, it can be argued, comprises both types of parliament, but the dominant part is the *arbeitende Parlament* (see, for example, Loewenberg 1969; Ismayr 1992). For example, quantitative studies have revealed the *de facto* priority of committee work (which is mainly not public in Germany) over public deliberation in parliament. In the first ten sessions of the Bundestag, for example, 21,644 committee sessions were counted, against no more than 2,208 plenary sessions (*Datenhandbuch* 1988:993, 995). Other measures of legislative performance support the view that the Bundestag is a productive and efficient parliament. For example, the average annual number of tabled Bills amounted to 166 in the first ten sessions of the Bundestag, and the total number of Bills passed was not dramatically lower. Legislative activity is also mirrored in the duration of the legislative process, measured by the period from the date at which a Bill is tabled until the promulgation of an Act. According to this measure, legislative Acts normally span a period of 187 to 266 days (*Datenhandbuch* 1988:997).

Most legislation concerns issues and areas below the level of constitutional change and only a small minority of legislative Acts involve changes in the constitution. Most of the constitutional changes were legislated in the period between 1953 and 1957, that is, in the period of a two-thirds majority coalition of the CDU, CSU, FDP and DP-BHE (German Party/Federation of the Expelled and Dispossessed), and in 1966–9, the period of the Grand Coalition of the CDU, CSU and SPD, in which the government also presided over a two-thirds majority. A more recent wave of constitutional change was generated by the unification of West Germany and East Germany and by legislation on the implementation on the Maastricht Treaty on European Union.

The extent to which party differences have an impact upon parliamentary legislative activity has been much discussed. According to one school of thought, most Bills are passed unanimously, while others argue that the relative policy importance of a Bill makes a difference. Very important Bills or important legislative Acts, for example, rarely encounter opposition party approval. In contrast, unanimous approval or near unanimity tends to be achieved only with Bills of lesser policy relevance.

Empirically the data that are available on legislation in the 1980s are indicative of a drastic decline in the proportion of Bills that were passed unanimously in the lower House. This largely reflects the impact of an increased level of political polarization between the governing coalition and the opposition parties and a more confrontational style in opposition behaviour on the part of the SPD and, above all, the Green Party (*Datenhandbuch* 1984:672–3; 1988:676; Saalfeld 1990). However, a complete picture requires us to take into due account the legislative vote in the Bundesrat, the upper House, and in the Joint Mediation Committee of the Bundestag and the Bundesrat. It is in these latter institutions that co-operative strategies have often prevailed.

On the whole, legislation mirrors party differences, albeit to a degree which varies from period to period. For example, the high level of political polarization mainly between the SPD and the centre-right and right-wing parties in the 1950s was replaced by a period of *rapprochement* between the CDU-CSU and the SPD from the late 1950s to the late 1960s. This is the major empirical reference point for the ‘vanishing of opposition’ view and the ‘end of ideology’ hypothesis which was most forcefully developed in Otto Kirchheimer’s contribution to the study of West European party systems (1965). However, in contrast to the predicted decline of opposition in West Germany, co-operation between the larger parties and the Grand Coalition experiment from 1966 to 1969 turned out to be not the end of, but rather the overture to, a new period of intensified partisan struggles, radical protest movements and increasingly competitive and confrontational behaviour on the part of the parliamentary opposition party.

The post-1969 period was, thus, a period of intense competition and confrontation between the major political tendencies. But while the level of polarization and open confrontation was significantly higher than in the preceding period, the political institutions of the Federal Republic continued to require a large degree of co-operation, bargaining and compromise between the government and the opposition party.

The tension between co-operation in legislation and policy-making and the confrontational rhetoric and behaviour of the political parties does not necessarily obstruct the one or the other, although it is likely that the political-electoral cost of co-operative strategies for the parties participating in the co-operation-and-confrontation game is increasing. The Joint Mediation Committee of the Bundestag and the Bundesrat is a particularly instructive example of the availability of co-operative solutions to the

government and the opposition party alike. The Joint Mediation Committee has a permanent membership of sixteen representatives of the lower House in proportion to the parties' share of seats and sixteen delegates from the Bundesrat. The committee considers on appeal from the Bundesrat or Bundestag all legislative disagreement between the two Houses. *De facto* the Joint Mediation Committee has become a powerful mechanism of compromise-seeking and decision-making on the basis of Grand Coalitions between the incumbent parties and the opposition as well as between the federal government and the state governments.

Particularly important has been the role of the Joint Mediation Committee in the first session of the Bundestag (1949–53), in the era of the SPD-FDP coalition (1969–82) and since 1990. Eighty per cent of the total number of mediation procedures have been settled in the joint committee through compromises between all or almost all participants. This is a further indication of the major political actors' compliance with the co-operation requirements inherent in Germany's political institutional structures, at least partly attributable to the continuity of a fairly strong consensus among the various political elites on essential norms and values (see Hoffmann-Lange 1992), but it is also due to a more short-term-oriented cost-benefit calculation by the parties, according to which the benefits deriving from co-operation are higher, and the costs lower, than those that would accrue from non-co-operation and hence the blockage of political decision-making.

GOVERNMENT AND BUREAUCRACY

Party composition of government

In the period under investigation (1949–94), the distribution of votes and seats has placed the Christian Democratic parties in the position of the dominant player in the process of government formation. However, the Christian Democratic parties' control of the reins of power has been contingent upon parliamentary support from smaller coalition partners, with the exception of the aftermath of national election in 1957. Among these smaller parties the Liberals have frequently been strategically positioned. The Free Democratic Party has often been the kingmaker, whose coalitional strategy determined whether the CDU-CSU or the SPD gained access to the centre of power. The central position of the Liberals in the party systems is also mirrored in measures of the partisan composition of national governments. Although the FDP is the smallest of the three established parties, it has participated in government since 1949 for longer than any other party. At the federal government level the Liberals have been in office in 1949–56, in 1961–6 and from 1969 until present, with a short interval in September 1982 due to the breakdown of the SPD-FDP coalition. The FDP has thus participated in government for thirty-four years, or 75 per cent of the period 1949–94, while the Christian Democratic parties, although of an electoral strength many times greater than the Liberals, have spent

thirty-three years, or 73 per cent of the total period, in office. The Social Democratic Party has had to content itself with sixteen years in office (1966–82), equivalent to 35 per cent of the period 1949–94. However, in contrast to the single-party government of a social democratic complexion in Australia, Austria, Great Britain, New Zealand, Spain or Sweden, the Social Democratic Party has had to share power with the CDU-CSU over a three-year period and with the Liberals over a period of thirteen years, and thus has never been in the position of a hegemonic tendency in national government. Moreover, relative to its average share of votes in elections to the Bundestag, the Social Democratic Party has participated in government less than it should have, while the overrepresentation of the Liberals in office can hardly be overlooked (Table 3.3).

Somewhat less extreme patterns emerge from the application of a weighted measure of party composition which rests upon the parties' share of Cabinet seats over the whole period from 1949 to 1994. According to this measure, 53 per cent of the Cabinet seats in the period from October 1949 to December 1994 fell to the Christian Democratic parties, 25 per cent to the SPD and 18 per cent to the Liberals. Compared

Table 3.3 German governments, 1949–96

<i>Legislature No.</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Chancellor</i>	<i>Party composition</i>
1	1949	K. Adenauer	CDU–CSU, FDP, DP
2	1953	K. Adenauer	CDU–CSU, FDP, DP, GB/BHE
	1955	K. Adenauer	CDU–CSU, FDP, DP
3	1956	K. Adenauer	CDU–CSU, DP, DA (FVP)
	1957	K. Adenauer	CDU–CSU, FDP
	1960	K. Adenauer	CDU–CSU
4	1961	K. Adenauer	CDU–CSU, FDP
	1962	K. Adenauer	CDU–CSU
	1962	K. Adenauer	CDU–CSU, FDP
	1963	L. Erhard	CDU–CSU, FDP
5	1965	L. Erhard	CDU–CSU, FDP
	Oct. 1966	L. Erhard	CDU–CSU
	Dec. 1966	K. G. Kiesinger	CDU–CSU, SPD
6	1969	W. Brandt	SPD, FDP
	May 1972	W. Brandt	SPD, FDP
7	Dec. 1972	W. Brandt	SPD, FDP
	1974	H. Schmidt	SPD, FDP
	1976	H. Schmidt	SPD, FDP
9	1980	H. Schmidt	SPD, FDP
	Sep. 1982	H. Schmidt	SPD
	Oct. 1982	H. Kohl	CDU–CSU, FDP
10	1983	H. Kohl	CDU–CSU, FDP
11	1987	H. Kohl	CDU–CSU, FDP
12	1991	H. Kohl	CDU–CSU, FDP
13	1994	H. Kohl	CDU–CSU, FDP

Note See Table 3.1 for the full party names.

with other democracies in the post-World War II period, the extent to which left parties have participated in national government, measured by the share of Cabinet seats, is relatively small. It is lower than in Australia (34 per cent), Austria (61 per cent), Denmark (52 per cent), Iceland (31 per cent), Israel (43 per cent), New Zealand (35 per cent), Norway (74 per cent), Sweden (83 per cent) or Spain (61 per cent) (Schmidt 1992b:399; the data are for 1945/9–92 and for Spain for 1977–92). In contrast to the weak role of the left parties in government, the centrist tendency, or centre-right, is in a particularly powerful position in Germany, similar to that of the Benelux countries and Italy. However, the party composition of national government is also characterized by the weakness of genuinely conservative or rightist parties, and this marks a conspicuous difference between the Federal Republic on the one hand and countries such as Australia, France, Great Britain, Portugal and the United States on the other.

Parties have, of course, natural preferences for particular portfolios, depending upon the nature of their political programme and manifestoes as well as on the preferences of the social constituencies. The overall pattern of the distribution of Ministries among incumbent parties in the Federal Republic has been as follows: The largest party in a coalition takes the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, the Ministry of Defence, frequently also the Ministry of the Interior and the more State-interventionist Ministries, such as Transport, Posts and Telecommunications, and Research and Technology. In centre-right-liberal coalitions, and in centre-left-liberal coalitions, the FDP frequently gained control of the Cabinet seats of the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Economics and the Foreign Office. The Ministries in the law and order domain have, thus, mainly been within the jurisdiction of centre-right or liberal tendencies. In contrast, the Ministries at the heart of the Welfare State have been allocated to one of the more larger reformist parties throughout the post-war period, thereby restoring the centrist stance that is regarded as a characteristic of social policy in the Weimar Republic until 1930.

Political parties play an important role in the Federal Republic. In contrast to the pre-1949 regimes the constitution of the Federal Republic and legislation, such as the Parties Act, spell out the legitimate political rights of the parties, such as officially guaranteed participation ‘in forming the political will of the people’ (Article 21 of the Basic Law), and responsibilities, such as a democratic structure for the parties’ internal organization. The role of political parties is enhanced through the weakness, if not absence, of plebiscitarian arrangements at the national level. Furthermore, the political parties have fully exploited the room for manoeuvre available to them. According to a widely shared view the outcome has been a *Parteienstaat*, a party State, in which all major political decisions are taken by the parties and their deputies in parliament.

The ‘party State’ view, it must be added, tends to overestimate the importance of political parties and to neglect institutional constraints on party behaviour, such as

the impact on policy that is attributable to political administrative structures, networks existing between the State and organized interests, the momentum and selectivity inherent in intergovernmental relations, the autonomy of the judiciary, and constraints stemming from Germany's high level of integration in international and supranational organizations. It is to these constraints on the 'party State' that attention will now be focused.

Political and administrative structure

A political party which gains access to the reins of power at the national level governs a central State of modest size which is tied down by a highly decentralized state structure. More specifically, few federal Ministries have the resources to implement and monitor the policies enacted by the federal government. With few exceptions, such as defence and foreign policy, public administration is not a responsibility of central government but of the *Länder*, local government and para-public institutions, such as the Federal Employment Institute and the health and social insurance funds. The national government thus governs without having direct control over the administration of its policies.

The consequences of this delegation of administrative responsibilities are numerous. The process of implementation of most legislation brings new and old players into the game, such as the administration and governments at the state level and parapublic institutions of social and labour market policy, which all retain considerable discretion in applying federal legislation. Moreover the federal government will attempt to make legislation as detailed as possible so that its intentions will be realized in the process of implementation. Moreover the delegation of administrative responsibilities hands leverage of considerable strength to state administrations, state governments and parapublic institutions not only in the implementation of the law but early in the legislative process. This creates a strong pressure on the parliamentary majority and the government to harmonize legislation at an early stage with the expertise and the preferences of governments and administrations at the state level and the experts of the various parapublic institutions.

Following Max Weber's approach to the study of bureaucracy, some scholars have interpreted the administrative structure of the Federal Republic in terms of his hierarchical and monocratic model of public administration, derived largely from the experience of French and Prussian absolutism. However, this perspective has proved inappropriate to a better understanding of the politico-administrative structure of the Federal Republic. A more adequate perspective requires differentiation between three models of administrative intermediation of interests: (1) the French model of institutional isolation of a monocratic and centralized administrative apparatus from societal interests; (2) a fragmented multi-centre administration characterized by a low degree of isolation from societal tendencies and large number of access points for organized interests, typified by the US model; (3) the intermediate category of

the Swedish model, defined by a strong tradition of professional bureaucratic administration, similar to that of France, and implementation based on autonomous authorities, as in Sweden's labour market policy, rather than on hierarchical monocratic administration (see Lehmbruch 1987:22–6).

Within this typology the German case, overall, approximates to the Swedish model of decentralized and delegated public administration, although administrative interest intermediation in some policy areas comes closer to the French model, such as fiscal administration, or the US model, such as the public administration of agricultural policy, which has largely been captured by interest associations representing German farmers.

Regardless of the degree of formal incorporation into the administrative process, consultation by the administration with the relevant interest groups is characteristic of legislation and pre-legislative activity in practically all policy areas. The rules of procedure of the federal Ministries even require officials to consult representatives of interest groups when drafting legislation related to an interest association's area of concern. Organized interests are, thus, expected to speak for their constituency, and such participation is regarded as necessary and legitimate. Due to the decentralized state structure and the fragmentation and dispersal of political power, a wide variety of access points at the national, state and local level, as also in the parapublic institutions, are available to interest groups. This may be regarded as the institutional base of a widespread practice of bilateral consultation and co-operation between the State and private interest organizations in a wide variety of policy sectors. However, most of the interaction between administrations and interest groups in the German polity is of a sectoral nature, while cross-sectoral co-ordination is almost completely absent from the State-interest group networks.

A sectoralist bias also characterizes the structure of corporatist linkages in Germany's political economy (see, for example, Lehmbruch 1984). In contrast to fully developed neo-corporatism, as in Austria, Germany's liberal corporatism is of a sectoral nature and is confined to a limited number of policy areas, such as incomes policy (until the late 1970s) and health care.

Sectoral interest intermediation and bilateral consultation will normally generate a higher level of political integration of social groups and will improve the intelligence in State intervention, other things being equal, but it tends to be inferior to neocorporatist tripartite arrangements between the State, labour and employers' associations. Following the neo-corporatist view, according to which neo-corporatist interests' intermediation is associated with higher levels of macro-economic performance (see, for example, Crepaz 1992), it can be argued that the weakness of corporatism in the Federal Republic, and hence the absence of the cross-sectoral co-ordination of fiscal policy, wage policy and private investment required for coping with periods of economic crisis contributed to the defeat of a full employment policy in the post-1973 period. Furthermore, the absence of cross-sector co-ordination of the wage policy of the unions, the government's fiscal policy, and investment on the

part of capital, and the lack of co-ordination between these policies and monetary policy on the part of the Bundesbank, have also been major weaknesses in the process of economic restructuring in eastern Germany since unification.

INTERGOVERNMENT RELATIONS

The Federal Republic, it has been argued, is a 'semi-sovereign State' (Katzenstein 1987), that is, a central government Goliath tied down by powerful formal or informal checks and balances and co-governing institutions, such as the Federal Constitutional Court, autonomous parapublic institutions, such as the Deutsche Bundesbank, i.e. the central bank, coalition government and federalism. Federalism also merits particular attention in the context of the study of intergovernmental relations. Public policy in the Federal Republic rests upon an exceptionally high degree of intertwining of policy-making between the federal authorities and the *Länder*, comprising assured participation rights and the veto powers of the Bundesrat in major legislation, and joint planning and administration between the federal government and the state governments on a wide variety of matters that require co-operation between the federal government and the state governments and for which they have shared responsibility, as in education, financial planning, economic development, science and research, and environmental policy. Policy-making over a wide area becomes intergovernmental in character. At the same time, policy-making within the context of the federation is also shaped by the logic of party competition, and is thus characterized by the coexistence of two modes of conflict resolution: one based on bargaining, techniques of compromise seeking and consensus formation, similar to the practices of consociational democracy, whereas the other rests upon majority rule, as in a pure majoritarian model of democracy.

Germany's federalism is institutionalized in a federal government and sixteen states with a wide variety of relations between the federal government and the *Länder* governments in almost all areas of domestic policy-making. In contrast to the pre-unification period, post-1990 federalism has been marked by sharp economic disparities, mainly between the poor states in the east of the country and wealthier or rich states in the western part. Moreover the accession of the former Democratic Republic to the Federal Republic on 3 October 1990 shifted the balance between the states of the federation in favour of the more northerly and Protestant areas. Furthermore, owing to the high level of secularization in east Germany, the share of religiously affiliated voters has declined to a considerable extent. Considering the party composition of the state governments in 1995, the SPD is the dominant party in office in ten states (in two of them in coalition with the Greens), in four states there is a Grand Coalition between the SPD and the CDU, while the Christian Democratic parties—which are in federal government—are in power in two states, in Saxony and in Bavaria.

The high level of heterogeneity of unified Germany's federalism poses a twofold challenge for the states and the federal government. Economic reconstruction of eastern Germany and the creation of a common standard of living in eastern and western Germany requires over a lengthy period an west-east transfer of public resources equivalent to some 5 per cent of gross domestic product per annum. The west-east transfer has generated intensified conflict over the distribution of the costs involved between the political parties, between the federal government and the states, between capital and labour and between government and the central bank, not to mention divisions within the *Länder*. The large differences between the states in unified Germany are a particularly heavy burden on federalism, because its institutional set-up and the repertoire of strategies available to its participants at the time of unification were all premised on the assumption of a high level of homogeneity in the federation.

One implication of this is that the states have found it more difficult to form coalitions *vis-à-vis* federal government, the other is potentially greater room to manoeuvre on the part of the federal government *vis-à-vis* the states. It is conceivable, that the long-term outcome will be an increase in the level of centralization and more volatility in the strategies and choices of the state governments within the context of the structure of Germany's co-operative federalism.

Apart from the challenge stemming from unification, many of its basic structures of federalism have been maintained, and so, too, have its basic functions within the context of Germany's polity. The unique character of German federalism has often been misunderstood. In contrast to the American model, political authority is not allocated to any one level of government but is shared by the federal government and the state governments. More specifically the state governments are in charge of most areas of public administration and have a major say in legislation. All major federal legislation requires a majority in the Bundestag, the popularly elected parliament, and the Bundesrat, made up of delegates of the state governments, who cast their votes *en bloc* and according to the instructions of their state governments. Moreover the states have a considerable share of responsibility for the planning and formation of public policy through a wide variety of institutions of co-operative federalism and through self-co-ordination, such as the institutionalized quasi-governmental conference of the state Ministries of Education (*Kultusministerkonferenz*).

Due to the co-operative nature of German federalism, and the sharing of power between states and federal government, a wider range of network-like interlocking politics (*Politikverflechtung*) bridges the high level of vertical and horizontal differentiation and fragmentation of the decision-making process (Scharpf *et al.* 1976). Within these policy networks, all participants find themselves in a series of interdependent decision-making structures, and this interdependence, together with the willingness and ability to co-operate on the part of most of the major actors, has pervaded German federalism to a very large extent. The mode of conflict resolution

that has emerged in this context is extended bargaining. In most cases, techniques of consensus formation have been successfully adopted and have secured unanimous votes or near unanimity, while pure majority rule or minimum winning coalitions are rare.

Each participant in the interlocking politics network has veto power of considerable strength. Dramatic effects on policy can result from the combination of this veto power and the impact of a divided government, such as the coexistence of a CDU-CSU-FDP government based on a majority of seats in the Bundestag and an SPD majority in the Bundesrat. Within this context, Bills subject to an affirmative vote of the Bundesrat (which is standard for two-thirds of all legislative Acts and for all important legislation) force the federal government to choose between compromises with the Bundesrat's majority and, thus, with the opposition party and, alternatively, acceptance of a blocked decision-making process. The choice for the major opposition party is co-operative co-government or confrontation and acceptance of blocked decision-making processes. In practice the governing parties and the opposition party have in most cases chosen a co-operative strategy, usually after a longer period of confrontation and negotiation.

However, the risk involved in a co-operative solution is considerable. The governing coalition and the opposition will have difficulty 'selling' the co-operative strategy to their respective social constituencies and particularly to those activists who demand confrontational rather than co-operative strategies. Thus the choice of a co-operative solution, and the underlying Grand Coalition structure of these co-operative moves, may well generate political discontent, policy dissatisfaction and the exit of disappointed voters. It is therefore a natural inclination of the parties involved in the divided government game to adopt a dual-track strategy, either co-operation and confrontation in legislation and in the symbolic presentation of the choices or, alternatively, co-operation in legislation but with a confrontational style in the political rhetoric of partisan struggles.

The constitutional State

The legal structure of the Federal Republic is indicative of the extent to which the institutional design of the Second German Republic has been shaped by processes of 'learning from catastrophes' (Schmidt 1989), such as the breakdown of the Weimar Republic, National Socialist rule in 1933–45, and the collapse of the political, economic and social order in 1945. The National Socialist State in the period up to 1939 was notorious for its dual structure, i.e. the co-existence of relative predictability of the legal system in most economic affairs and unpredictability in almost all other aspects of political and social life, which was increasingly superseded by a fully fledged totalitarian regime during World War II.

The primacy of National Socialist politics over the law stands in great contrast to the legal structure of the Federal Republic. The 'founding fathers' of the constitution

placed major emphasis on the formation of a constitutional State (*Rechtsstaat*), the independence of the judiciary and the establishment of a powerful Federal Constitutional Court. The effects have been dramatic: the rule of law, a 'law- and court-minded society' (Conradt 1993a:228) and the institutionalization of the Constitutional Court as the guardian of the constitution have substituted the unpredictability inherent in the National Socialist State.

The omnipresence of the law in the Federal Republic is striking. 'There is hardly an area of human relations in Germany untouched by some rule, order or regulation,' wrote a leading US expert in German constitutional politics (Kommers 1976:50). Even more striking is the supremacy of the law over politics and policy in the institutional structure. The most central position in this context is assumed by the Bundesverfassungsgericht, the Federal Constitutional Court. The court is the guardian of the constitution, empowered to review on appeal any alleged violation, including legislative Acts, and to void laws that violate the provisions of the Basic Law. The Constitutional Court is autonomous and independent of any Justice Ministry. As in many other democracies, political parties participate in the selection of the judges of the court. However, owing to the federal structure of the Federal Republic, the states also play an important role in the process of the recruitment of constitutional judges. Half the sixteen members of the court are selected by a Bundestag committee composed of twelve deputies in proportion to the parties' share of seats, and half by the Bundesrat, the upper House, in each case on a two-thirds majority rule. The two-thirds majority threshold is built into the Act establishing the Federal Constitutional Court, while the mandatory participation of the two Houses has been made part of the constitution. The method of selecting the judges of the court ensures influential roles for the federal government, the state governments, the governing parties and the opposition party. Furthermore, the two-thirds majority *de facto* requires the formation of a Grand Coalition, or an all-inclusive coalition of the political parties, and unanimity, or near unanimity among the state governments and the representatives of the Bundestag.

Open access to the process of judicial review is a distinctive feature of the judicial system in the Federal Republic. Constitutional issues usually reach the agenda of the court through one of three routes. Most common is the route via complaints on unconstitutionality entered by an individual who claims that one of his constitutionally protected rights has been violated by a public authority. A second route is through judicial review of actual court cases that raise constitutional issues, or review of the compatibility of specific legal norms and constitutional provisions. The third route by which causes come before the Constitutional Court is through the process of abstract judicial review, that is, the review of the constitutionality of legislation as a general legal principle without reference to a specific court case. Abstract judicial review can be requested by the federal government, or by state governments, or by one-third of the members of the lower House. In practice the abstract judicial review procedure has been used by

the opponents of a Bill 'as an instrument to continue a political dispute through legal means' (Landfried 1988:13).

The court is also the final arbiter in constitutional disputes between different levels of government, such as constitutional conflicts between the states and federal government. Furthermore the Constitutional Court is responsible for protecting the constitutional and democratic order against groups and individuals seeking to overthrow it. Moreover, it is within the authority of the Federal Constitutional Court to decide on presidential impeachment, the impeachment of federal or state judges, and to scrutinize petitions for review of the process and outcome of elections.

The court is famous for an impressive record of constitutional interpretation in a wide variety of important matters, such as the treaties on the foreign policy of *détente vis-à-vis* the Eastern European states inaugurated by the SPD-FDP coalition in 1969 (*Ostpolitik*), abortion law, co-determination in industry and the constitutionality of the route to German unification, to mention just a few examples.

From a civic rights perspective, the court has been praised for its protection of human rights. From a democratic perspective, much can be said in favour of the court's role as guardian of a constitutional democracy. From a technocratic systemic point of view, it can be argued that the court has relieved parliament, government and opposition of responsibility in a wider variety of highly controversial issues, such as abortion or the reform of public radio and television. From a policy-oriented perspective, the Constitutional Court has been criticized for exhibiting a high level of judicial activism, adopting an overtly political role, usurping the legislative and policy-making prerogatives of parliament and government, and for not exercising sufficient judicial restraint (see, for example, Landfried 1988). In the view of many observers, a conservative or liberal stance is characteristic of the court's policy. Others have pointed to a more pluralist pattern of the decisions taken in the court. It has also been pointed out that the court's interference with parliamentary and government prerogatives varies with time, depending at least partly on the scope of the legislative activity of the various Cabinets and parliaments.

Although considerable disagreement exists on the details of the court's stance in policy-making, it is uncontroversial that the Federal Constitutional Court, through its decisions, but also thanks to anticipation of judicial review on the part of the legislators, has been a major determinant of the courses of action open to the legislature and government. From the perspective of a top-down model of public policy, a powerful constitutional court, such as the German Constitutional Court, can be regarded as a major restraint to policy-makers. The restraint is amplified by the impact of powerful courts below the level of the Federal Constitutional Court, such as the Federal Social Court, whose responsibilities are mainly in the area of adjudication on legal aspects of social policy, the Federal Labour Court, the major arbitrator in disputes on federal labour legislation and workers' rights, and the administrative courts, which have become controllers of public administration and

political arenas for the continuation of political disputes over high-technology policy by legal means.

The overall outcome of the powerful position held by the judicial system in general, and the Federal Constitutional Court in particular, has been the unprecedented degree of juridification of Germany's polity, economy and society. It is for these reasons perfectly appropriate to regard the supremacy of the law as one of the major pillars upon which the distinctive 'semi-sovereignty' (Katzenstein 1987) of the modern German State rests.

Trading State and European integration

The political construction of the German State and its foreign policy, it has been argued, have been characterized as 'semi-sovereignty' (Katzenstein 1987, see the next section below). The analysis presented so far supports this view. Semi-sovereignty in foreign affairs may be even more obvious. The degree of international or supranational integration, as exemplified in NATO and EU membership, is very high, compared with pre-1945 regimes and with other large countries or central powers. While conflict and co-operative partnership between the major parties, federal government and state government, as well as between labour and capital, can be regarded as the dominant principle of co-ordination in the domestic political arena, the *Leitmotiv* of Germany's foreign policy stance comprises integration into the West together with sovereignty transfer to international and supranational organizations, security partnership, and the predominance of a 'trading state' policy rather than a 'great power' approach to foreign policy (see Rosecrantz 1986).

Trading state policy and security partnership were based upon military components, such as rearmament and NATO membership, economic elements, such as the integration of the German economy into the world market, and genuinely political dimensions, such as the transfer of sovereignty rights to international and supranational organizations. Political and economic dimensions were also at the heart of the integration of the Federal Republic into the European Union: the taming of the power of the German State was a major motive for the foundation of the community of the European States in the 1950s, and so, too, was the intention to create an efficient and sound environment for economic growth, social progress and peace through economic and political European integration. Part of the deal was inevitably the transfer of a considerable proportion of national sovereignty to the supranational European level. Over a longer period, this transfer was largely confined to a few selected policy areas, particularly agricultural policy and tariff and trade regulation. Owing to the acceleration of European integration in the 1980s and, subsequent to German unification, in the early 1990s, sovereignty transfers began to involve to an increasing extent selected areas of economic policy, environmental policy and transport, as is demonstrated in the Joint Internal Market and in the efforts to implement the Maastricht Treaty on European Union, effective since 1

November 1993, in which parameters have been set for European monetary unification.

Despite the technocratic character of government in the European Union and notwithstanding the excessively high level of compartmentalization in EU policy-making, the political leadership and the established parties in Germany have been among the advocates and activists of European integration, for reasons which are at least partly attributable to the economic and political benefits that German diplomacy and German industry have derived from European integration. It is also at least partly for these reasons that acceptance of decisions taken in Brussels, and willingness and ability to implement European law and EU policy in public administration, have been remarkably high in Germany (see, for example, Siedentopf and Ziller 1988).

Generally speaking, the pro-European integration stance in policy has received considerable support from almost all major collective political actors in Germany, with the exception of half-hearted support from the German states. While the states supported the case for economic integration, they have attempted to draw the line at further expanding the level of political integration. This mirrors the apprehension of the state governments, and most politicians at the state level, that continued European political integration undermines federalism and, thus, destroys the *raison d'être* of the *Länder*. In the parliamentary debate on the Maastricht Treaty, and in legislation on that treaty, the *Länder*, however, gained substantial concessions from the federal government. The major instrument for safeguarding the interests of the states is a fundamental change in the Basic Law. The new Article 23 of the Basic Law, implemented in December 1992, allocates a variety of access points and veto points to the states on practically all issues of sovereignty transfer to the European Union of concern to the *Länder*. Thus the Maastricht Treaty has not resulted in the downgrading of the *Länder*, but rather in the upgrading of the position of the states in the policy machinery in Germany and within the network of EU institutions and national institutions. The states have not been the losers from European integration; they have, rather, been among the winners.

The extent to which the European Union, or the European Community until the Maastricht Treaty became effective, has altered the political institutional structures of politics and policy in Germany has been a matter of controversy. According to the 'internationalist' school of thought, politics and policy in the Federal Republic are nowadays largely shaped by the requirements of the European integration process and by legislative and executive acts of the European Union. In contrast, the 'nationalist' school of thought argues that national politics and national policy-making shape the parameters of the timing and substance of the EU policy-makers, and circumscribe the extent to which European legislation and EU policy are implemented in Germany. An intermediate view emphasizes a wide range of sectoral variation in governance structures at the national and EU level. According to this view, some policy areas are, indeed, governed by coalitions composed of specialized

Euro-bureaucracy and sectoralized national administrations, such as policy on trade and tariffs, and agricultural policy, while others are mainly or totally controlled at the national level, such as the core institutions of the Welfare State. There are also areas in which the particular policy of a member State determines a major part of EU policy, such as the policy of European monetary integration, which largely mirrors uncompromising commitment to non-inflationary monetary policy and the institutional independence of the central bank along the lines of the German Bundesbank.

A further point needs to be mentioned in this context. Most EU interventions are attempts to achieve a higher level of standardization, or harmonization, in some of the legal and institutional aspects of the economy and the polity of the member countries. However, to achieve this effective and legitimate standardization, or harmonization, requires a high level of standardization, or harmonization, in the structure of intermediary institutions, such as political parties, trade unions, professional groups and the mass media. This type of standardization, however, is largely lacking in the process of European integration (see, for example, Wildenmann 1991). In practice the structure of such intermediary institutions varies to a large extent. Moreover, all these institutions are organized in the context of the nation state and focus their attention and their cost-benefit calculus mainly on the national level. This may be taken as offering further support for the expanding general message that can be derived from these observations: despite the expanding role of the European Union, a considerable range of variation exists in the extent to which EU policy-making interferes with national policy. Although it is difficult to quantify the relative importance of the national component and the EU component, the evidence accumulated so far suggests, that the bulk of policy-making and legislation up to the present has been largely, though not exclusively, determined by nation State-based institutions and actors, albeit to a degree which varies from sector to sector.

Public policy and the ‘semi-sovereign State’

The Federal Republic is notorious for its high level of fragmentation and dispersal of political power. Moreover our analysis so far reveals a complex mix of majoritarian democracy and consensus democracy. In this context, the freedom of action of the federal government is heavily circumscribed. It is largely due to the impact of the restrictions on the federal government discussed in the preceding sections that most policy changes in domestic politics are mainly gradual and incremental. Dramatic changes in policy are the exception rather than the rule. This is a major obstacle to the preference for radical policy change of centre-left or left-wing governments, but it also inhibits efforts to achieve radical policy change on the part of rightist or centre-right governments. However, it is also a major hindrance to elasticity in adjustment to major exogenous shocks, such as unification (see, for example, Schmidt 1994).

The weak short-term elasticity of its political institutions, together with the consensus requirement inherent in the structure of Germany's democracy, can provoke 'voice' or 'exit' (Hirschmann) on the part of the members and voters of the parties in power and the opposition parties. This is basically due to the gap that exists between the expectations of most voters on the one hand and the structures of the political process and political outcomes on the other. Most voters expect from the party they choose the adoption of more competitive strategies and outcomes of the winner-takes-all type, and thus premise their expectation largely on a majoritarian democracy model, while the institutional apparatus of Germany's polity, in reality, is a unique combination of majoritarian and consensus democracy, and therefore generates outcomes which resemble those of a consociational democracy. Germany's democracy is thus precariously positioned midway between effective taming of State power and problems in the effort to secure support for, and legitimation of, the political parties. This may be regarded as the institutional infrastructure of the popular criticism of the political parties and the 'party State'.

Although the 'semi-sovereign' structure of the State gives priority to incremental policy change, it does not exclude the possibility of minor or major political innovation. Minor innovation is demonstrated by the coexistence of continuity in national institutions and widespread flexibility and experimentation in less visible arenas of politics, such as the parapublic institutions, in the economy, and in the networks of co-operative federalism. Major innovations occurred in the 1953–7 period, that is, during the period of a hegemonic CDU-CSU-led government, in the 1966–9 experiment of a Grand Coalition of the CDU-CSU and the SPD, and also in the politics and policy of German unification in 1989–90. Moreover, there has also been leeway for expanding the scope of government, measured by government revenue, or general government expenditure, as a percentage of gross domestic product. The percentage share of government revenue in GDP, for example, increased in the Federal Republic between 1950 (31.5 per cent) and 1990 (43.4 per cent) by only 11.9 percentage points, and thus was as modest as in Japan and slower than in Italy (21.1 percentage points), Denmark (37.8), the Netherlands (16.7) or Sweden (38.0), to mention a few examples (data from OECD 1992:68; Schmidt 1982:109). However, it must be added that German unification, together with delayed adjustment in fiscal policy, generated a steep increase in the total outlays of central government as a percentage of GDP, from 45.1 per cent in 1990 to 50.8 per cent in 1993. The growth of 'big government' manifested itself in the 1950s mainly in spending on economic reconstruction, housing, social policy and rearmament; in the period starting in the 1960s mainly in social policy, education and health; and since unification in 1990 largely in public transfers to eastern Germany.

Furthermore the institutional apparatus of the national polity has been conducive to the emergence of a distinctive pattern of public policy. Co-operative federalism may hinder dramatic and radical policy changes, but it facilitates distributive

incrementalism and secures a sufficient level of institutional elasticity. Similarly, the logic of policy-making in centre-left and centre-right quasi-catch-all coalitions is inherently favourable to welfare largesse, particularly so in periods of rapid economic growth (Alber 1989). Furthermore, while a decentralized state structure impedes fully fledged Keynesian management led by central government, it strengthens, along with the independent central bank, the aim of controlling inflationary pressure rather than combating unemployment. Focusing on the political economy, the aggregate outcome of these institutional factors and others discussed above has been a distinctive public policy in the Federal Republic: a policy of the middle way between the extremes marked by social democratic welfare capitalism along Swedish lines and North American market-oriented *laissez-faire* capitalism. Germany's 'policy of the middle way' (Schmidt 1989) is a unique combination of market-oriented liberal economic policy, policy measures of a social democratic statist nature and a policy of a Christian Democratic complexion. It is marked in particular by the coexistence of a price stability-oriented stance in monetary policy together with a high level of Welfare State intervention and a social partnership-oriented stance in labour legislation.

The political and economic outcomes of the Federal Republic, particularly in the period up to unification, have been widely regarded as a success story (see, for example, Dalton 1989; Conradt 1993a, b). However, three caveats must be entered against the 'success story' view. One concerns the limits of the policy of the middle way, such as the failure of the effort to maintain or restore full employment. Moreover, the costs involved in the policy of the middle way have differed considerably from one period to another. Particularly high has been its price in the post-unification period. Friction between the major components of the middle way policy has been greater since unification. The third caveat concerns the winners and losers from the middle way. The core group of winners consists of social classes with capital income from the ownership of firms, shares, monetary assets and land; employed persons in the primary labour market segments; old-age pensioners with a working life of thirty-five to forty-five years and few spells of unemployment or with no experience of unemployment at all and with wages or salaries above the average and, hence, a relatively high social income. It is important to emphasize—and this must be regarded as the key to an understanding of the political foundations of the middle way policy—that the core groups of the winners are at the same time the core groups in the constituencies of each established political party.

The losers from the policy of the middle way are mainly to be found among the unemployed—in particular, job-seekers with frequent spells of unemployment and the long-term unemployed, among groups with a short working life and a low income from work and, hence, a low income from social security schemes, and among post-materialists. It has been estimated that three out of ten voters belong to the core group of losers, whereas the core group of winners probably comprises over 40 per cent of the electorate (Schmidt 1989:93). Very broadly speaking, a similar distribution

seems to be characteristic of the costs and the benefits of the eastern German transition from a planned economy to capitalism and democracy.

INSTITUTIONAL REFORM

As in many other advanced democratic States, Germany's polity has been confronted with a variety of problems, such as environmental pollution, high levels of unemployment, poverty in some segments of society, political terrorism, local outbursts of violence and anomic tendencies. Moreover the Federal Republic has been exposed to unique challenges, such as the integration of eastern Germany's political, economic and social structure in a unified Germany. However, Germany has also been regarded as a 'political success story' (Dalton 1989:4). For example, by any measure of political stability, the health of democracy, macro-economic outcomes and social policy effort, the Federal Republic may be regarded as an 'effective and legitimate democratic political system' (Conradt 1993a:273; see also von Beyme 1993a, b; Hesse and Ellwein 1992).

The high level of performance of the country's political and economic institutions, and the requirement of co-operative strategies inherent in Germany's majoritarian-cum-consensus democracy model have been among the major determinants of the debate on institutional reforms, and have narrowly circumscribed the options available to practically minded reformers. Of course, there are proposals for radical reform, such as radical overhaul of the constitution, and, at the extreme, for a revolutionary breakthrough on the part of both the left and the right of the ideological spectrum. However, most such proposals are based on empirically dubious arguments about the high costs of maintaining the *status quo*, and equally dubious assumptions about the large-scale benefits and low cost of radical or revolutionary change.

More serious proposals for institutional reform have focused mainly on certain aspects of the institutional arrangements. For example, one of the most recent debates has focused on the 'party State' issue. Many critics of what they regard as a too powerful role for the political parties have raised their voices in favour of imposing more restrictions on party finances, party behaviour and party patronage, and have recommended more citizens' participation through adding plebiscitarian arrangements to the political structure. Others have opted for the improvement of the level of competence inherent in the national institutions. The nature of the recommendations varies from neo-liberal criticism of interest associations and the State-interest groups nexus to the proposals for genuinely technocratic meritocratic reform concepts and to full support for the creation and maintenance of neo-corporatist relations between organized economic interests and the State. Furthermore, radical partisans of federalism emphasize the potential threat of European integration to the individual *Länder*, the states of the Federal Republic, and demand a halt to further integration, or low-speed integration. In contrast to

this, the ‘Europeanists’ advocate accelerated economic and political European integration. There is also considerable disagreement within the ‘federalist’ camp, mainly composed of the state-level executives and deputies to state parliaments, between the defenders of the *status quo* and the proponents of radical change in the delimitation of federal territory to ensure that the *Länder* have the size and capacity effectively to discharge the responsibilities laid upon them. Moreover, a potentially explosive debate is that conducted by defenders of the Welfare State and proponents of radical Welfare State expansion on the one hand, mainly to be found among the unions, the welfare associations and the SPD, and critics of comprehensive social policy, mainly composed of business interests, the Liberal Party and neoclassical economists, on the other.

Last but not least, German unification has triggered a debate on the constitutional structure of unified Germany. The rapid accession of the former German Democratic Republic to the Federal Republic and the almost complete transfer of the legal, political and economic institutions of West Germany to eastern Germany, has avoided protracted parliamentary debate on matters of constitutional design. However, a minority, composed mainly of the centre-left and left-wing tendencies, has continued to demand radical amendment of the Basic Law.

Politically more important has been the Gemeinsame Verfassungskommission, the Joint Commission on Constitutional Reform. The Joint Commission is the product of Clause 5 of the Unification Treaty, which urges the legislature to consider issues of constitutional change raised by the unification of the two Germanies in 1990. The constituent assembly of the Gemeinsame Verfassungskommission was in January 1992, and the report of the commission was published on 6 November 1993. Within the context of the main theme of this chapter, two major characteristics of the joint commission deserve mention: the composition and the non-decisions of commission. The composition of the Joint Commission was unique. Half its sixty-four members were deputies selected in the Bundestag in proportion to the parties’ share of seats, and half were deputies of the Bundesrat, among the latter thirteen state minister presidents out of a total of sixteen minister presidents. Thus the political parties and a substantial proportion of the core of Germany’s political class deliberated on constitutional change in the Gemeinsame Verfassungskommission.

It is therefore not surprising that deliberation in the commission so far has served mainly to advance the case of the *Parteienstaat*, the ‘party State’, and the case of institutional guarantees for the German states, such as that enshrined in the new Article 23 of the Basic Law (see p. 89), while almost all proposals for constitutional reform have been disregarded, as unlikely to attract the two-thirds majority required for constitutional change in the upper and lower Houses—the proposal to add referendum democracy components to the political constitution of the Federal Republic, to mention just one example.

The decisions and non-decisions of the Joint Commission are amenable to explanation. The key to an understanding of the politics and policy of the commission

lies in its personification of an institution which is distinctive of the Federal Republic. The Joint Commission is composed of two Grand Coalitions. One of them is the Grand Coalition of the major established parties, the CDU-CSU, the SPD and the Liberals; the other consists of a broad coalition of the federal government, with its parliamentary majority and a two-thirds majority in the Bundesrat, and thus a two-thirds majority among the state governments.

‘It is impossible in Germany not to be governed by the Liberals,’ was the comment of a leading journalist in 1986 (Zundel 1986). In the light of the analysis presented in this chapter, that proposition must be revised as follows. It is almost impossible in the Federal Republic not to be governed by a formal or informal Grand Coalition of the major established parties and a formal or hidden Grand Coalition of federal government and state governments. The Federal Republic of Germany can therefore be regarded as the embodiment of the Grand Coalition State.

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France

The institutionalization of leadership

Yves Mény

The three decades of constitutional stability that France has experienced under the Fifth Republic are a record by French standards. Since 1789 only the Third Republic (1875–1940) has lasted longer. Yet there have been numerous events that might have brought down the new political regime of 24 October 1958: take-over threats and attempts on the life of its founder, General de Gaulle; the 1962 rebellion of both right-wing and left-wing members of parliament against the presidentialization of the regime; the student, and social, revolution of 1968; the uncertainties surrounding the left's accession to power in 1981 and the *cohabitation* of majority and opposition in 1986 and 1993. In short, many people expected the Fifth Republic constitution, like de Gaulle himself, to be no more than 'a bad moment to live through' (Paul Reynaud). It seemed to be a short-term solution to a short-term problem—the difficult decolonization process destroying the Fourth Republic, born and now dying amid the horrors of colonial war.

But the apparently fragile Fifth Republic did more than survive the challenge of events. It is only with hindsight that analysts can assess the capacity of institutions to resist the hazards of circumstance. At the time, observers and participants in the political game found many reasons to be sceptical about the longevity of the new institutions. Several factors combined to increase their doubts.

First, the constitution seemed made for one man, de Gaulle, who inspired it and tailored it to his shape, almost entirely on the model sketched out in his famous Bayeux speech of 16 June 1946. Paraphrasing Sieyès, who asked himself what there was in the constitution of the year VIII and replied, 'Bonaparte,' it could be said that in 1958, for many French people, the constitution was de Gaulle, the strong man rising out of the chaos. A referendum—more of a plebiscite—was held under the slogan 'Yes to the constitution means yes to de Gaulle' (28 September 1958; 80 per cent said yes). Once the first moment of euphoria had passed and the difficulties that brought down the Fourth Republic had been resolved, people expected a return to normal, a return to the republican tradition of strong parliamentary regimes in force since 1875. So there was constant reference in the 1960s to an imaginary 'Sixth

Republic' constructed according to various designs put forward by parties or individuals fond of constitutional re-engineering.

Second, the new regime, in substance as well as in the words of its founders and their acolytes, portrayed itself as a break with the preceding system. It was against excessive parliamentarianism, against the rule of parties, against parliament's monopoly of legislation, against a weak executive and against politicians. The very radicalism of this denial of the past, in words at least, made some people fear that, once decolonization had been achieved, an alliance of critics and opponents would be prepared to sweep the Fifth Republic away or at least take their turn to make sweeping changes to the form and content of the constitution. The right had not forgiven de Gaulle for his 'treason' over Algeria. Some of the left could not forget the troubled origins of the Fifth Republic (the Algerian revolt of 13 May 1958, the military pressure), the 'ultimate' in wickedness in the eyes of communists and a few Fourth Republic stars (Pierre Mendès-France, François Mitterrand). The *notables* (people of local or regional prominence) did not want to prolong a regime that threatened to reduce their influence. Political scientists pointed to the regime's imperialist features, and constitutional lawyers drew attention to the ambiguities of a system which did not fit the conventions or normal classifications of constitutional law. Was it direct democracy or representative democracy, a parliamentary or a presidential regime? French constitutional history shows that sudden changes are rarely productive. Once the enthusiasm for radical change has passed, and the pleasure of a fresh start has gone, new regimes make way for reformers and revolutionaries who, in their turn, promise better todays or brighter tomorrows. For many people the rupture of 1958 carried the seeds of failure of the new regime within itself.

Third, the idea of regime change was, it could be said, rooted in habits and minds. Within a space of twenty years French people had experienced the demise of the Third Republic and the birth of the Vichy State on 10 July 1940; the confrontation between the Vichy regime and the 'French National Committee' set up in London on 24 November 1941; the provisional government of the French Republic created under de Gaulle's authority on 24 April 1944, which ruled concurrently with the Laval government brought in by the Eleventh Constitutional Act of 18 April 1942; the referendum of 21 October 1945 confirming the French people's reluctance to bring back the Third Republic, and the simultaneous election of a Constituent Assembly; the drawing up of a draft constitution while France was governed according to the provisional regime set out in the Act of 2 November 1945; the rejection of that draft on 5 May 1946 and the drafting by a second Constituent Assembly (elected 2 June 1946) of a second version, approved on 27 October 1946 out of weariness more than enthusiasm (one-third said yes, one-third said no, one-third abstained); the revision of the constitution on 7 December 1954; and the dissolution of 2 December 1955. As if these twenty years of constitutional incoherence were not enough to give rise to a feeling of insecurity,

political events added their contribution: five years of war in continental Europe; the incessant, murderous colonial struggles in Indochina, Madagascar and Algeria; the denial of values inscribed in the preamble to the constitution to cover up torture and cleaning-up operations in Indochina, Madagascar and Algeria that were settled with hundreds of thousands of deaths (mostly of local people); the breaking of political and electoral promises (left-wing manifestoes, right-wing practices); and, finally, government instability: there were twenty-two Cabinets during the Fourth Republic including the last, that of de Gaulle, given power on 3 June 1958 in a final surprise development. As Leon Blum foretold, 'One would leave the provisional only to enter the precarious.' By voting massively for de Gaulle and the new constitution French people demonstrated their willingness to have done with the past. But that same past gave them the right to be dubious and sceptical, to retain that doubt and scepticism which made Lampedusa write in *Il gattopardo* (*The Leopard*), 'Things have to change to stay the same,' and Americans utter the cynical phrase 'The more things change the more they stay the same.'

With hindsight, events disproved the doubts. The Fifth Republic did not just innovate in the field of constitutional design. It brought in strong leadership at national level that served as a model for other social and political institutions—to the extent that authority and efficiency were promoted everywhere at the expense of pluralism and collegiality (the principal exception doubtless being university life). It contributed to the restructuring of political parties and interest groups. In addition the new institutions revealed unexpected dimensions beyond those sought by their authors. For example, the evolving role of the Constitutional Council, and the ideological and political use of the preamble to the constitution, have enhanced the state of law. However, the most fascinating aspect of this unplanned institutional development remains the way individuals and groups have manipulated it in their own interests. The technocratic elite took over the executive machinery, whereas the parliamentary elite, denied a significant input into the legislative process, withdrew to their local bastions and turned the Senate into the periphery's power base. The left-wing parties, initially hostile to the institutions, used them to their advantage when they came to power (Duhamel 1980). The voters themselves played the electoral and referendum rules like experts, giving power to the right (in 1968, for example) or to the left (in 1981 or 1988, for example), then refocusing their aim at the next election (the departure of de Gaulle in 1969, the socialist defeat in 1986 and no overall majority in 1988). The rational voter, increasingly independent of the party organizations and freer of sectoral loyalties (class and religion), has contributed greatly to the institutionalization of the regime and to its evolution. He or she gave unconditional support to the presidential leadership, tempered by some punishment when it went beyond the acceptable (1967, 1969, 1986, 1988 and 1993); inflicted a change of government (1981), and then *cohabitation* (1986, 1993), on the very parties which had argued against it in the name of the institutions; and made sophisticated use of the different types of elections and voting systems to

‘send a message’ to the political class, especially in elections where little was at stake (e.g. local and European elections). In short, the institutions, as the rules giving access to power and about the exercise of power, giving a structure to political life, are at the heart of the political game.

In consequence the French political system cannot be reduced to the rules it sets itself or to the principles it proclaims. It is the product of past and current events. It swings between the goals which inspired it and the constraints and burdens which are imposed upon it. Numerous paradoxes and contradictions affect its structure, existence and evolution. Permanent tensions between values and needs modify its internal equilibria and transform its fundamental characteristics, either imperceptibly or abruptly. The government’s strength has varied widely according to circumstances and personalities. The Constitutional Council evolved within a few years from being insignificant to having a central role. The parties have in turn been taken apart, reconstructed and weakened again, to the extent that the party system of 1958 was unlike that of 1965, and in 1990 had little in common with that of 1970. Over the last thirty years governments have been supported by coalition majorities, by a single-party majority, from 1988 to 1993 by a party with no overall majority, and since 1993 by a majority of a size unknown since the ‘unbeatable’ majority of 1815.

The constitutional rules are constraints imposed on the political players but are also resources manipulated by political entrepreneurs. It is this tension that gives the political system its specific shape.

THE EXPRESSION OF POLITICAL VIEWS: ELECTIONS AND MOBILIZATIONS

Although it is popularly believed that France is an ancient democracy, the assumption needs to be qualified. The franchise was restricted until 1848; secrecy at the ballot box was not guaranteed until 1913–14; women did not acquire the vote until 1945 and the voting age was not lowered to eighteen until 1974. There was no judicial supervision of changes in constituency boundaries until 1986 and, in the current state of the Constitutional Council’s jurisdiction, there is no control of referendum Bills. In short, although it would be absurd to deny democratic credentials to France, and to the Fifth Republic especially, it would be just as absurd to think of it as a quasi-ideal democracy.

Popular participation: referendums and elections

The Fifth Republic constitution and the Gaullists’ use of the institutions demonstrate clearly that authoritarian practices can be accompanied by constant appeals to the electorate. The period 1958–62, in particular, illustrates the mixture of charismatic and legal-rational legitimacy that made the infant Fifth Republic such a special regime. French people had to vote twice in 1958 (referendum and parliamentary elections),

once in 1961 (referendum) and three times in 1962 (two referendums and a parliamentary election), in addition to local elections. These six national polls, characterized by a high electoral turnout, always supporting General de Gaulle and the Gaullists without fail, punctuated a period of marked restrictions on civil liberties because of the Algerian war. This exceptional regime became the rule. A state of emergency, its regime hardly compatible with real guarantees of fundamental rights, was imposed from 1955 to 1962 in Algeria, and from April 1961 to May 1963 in mainland France, with the emergency regime introduced under Article 16 superimposed on it from April to September 1961. Thus, while elections and popular participation were necessary ingredients of democracy, they did not capture all its essence.

Referendums

The use of referendums is one of the innovatory hallmarks of the Gaullist regime. In France plebiscites are associated strongly with the First and Second Empires, and one can understand why republicans had a particular aversion to them during the Third Republic. The Fourth Republic used a referendum for approving the constitution, but without enthusiasm and under pressure from de Gaulle (even then). It was only after 1958 that the referendum acquired respectability. Between 1958 and 1962 it became a real governmental tool, thanks to the direct 'dialogue' it introduced between the head of state and voters, above the heads of parliament and parties. The constitution envisages the use of the referendum in three situations: to approve a Bill dealing with the organization of public authorities or institutions; to authorize the ratification of a treaty which, 'without being contrary to the constitution', would affect the running of governmental institutions; and to approve a Bill to revise the constitution, if so requested by the President, after the text, in identical terms, has been voted by both Houses. However, only the first of these three possibilities has been much used in practice, each time controversially. Since 1995 the President of the Republic has been able to call a referendum on a wider range of issues, including economic and social policy and public services reforms.

The use of the referendum under the Fifth Republic has several characteristics which differentiate its use from that in some other Western democracies. First, the process resembles direct democracy only superficially and spuriously. Although the people as a whole are asked to pronounce on a Bill, they have no power to take the initiative, either in making a proposal or in formulating the question. They have three choices only: to approve, reject, or abstain. The practice of the Fifth Republic turned the referendum into a procedure at the disposal of the executive, especially of the head of state. During de Gaulle's time the referendum was exclusively the affair of the head of state, the government's 'proposal' (or that of parliament, which was careful to avoid such initiatives!) generally ratifying a presidential decision already taken. Thanks to this instrument, General de Gaulle could obtain not only the people's full consent but full power, usually solicited by a game of double questions to which

only one answer could be given. Although de Gaulle's successors tried to use the referendum (Pompidou in 1972, Mitterrand in 1988 and 1992) they took care not to put their own authority on the line, thus contributing to the modification of the referendum as forged by Gaullist practice.

In the second place the referendums of 1962 especially, and of 1969, which would have modified the constitution without going through the revision procedure offered by Article 89, aroused intense argument between the majority and opposition parties. Recourse to Article 11 in 1962, introducing the election of the head of state by direct universal suffrage, precipitated a major crisis, defined by the president of the Senate, Gaston Monnerville, as a 'deliberate, self-willed, premeditated and outrageous violation of the constitution of the Fifth Republic'. The reform was nevertheless adopted by a majority of the French people, but only after Pompidou's government, accused of 'dereliction of duty', had been brought down, the House dismissed, and a new election held in which the well-organized Gaullist majority triumphed. The debate and arguments have gradually subsided, François Mitterrand himself admitting that a sort of 'constitutional convention' would allow Article 11 to be used to revise the constitution.

Elections

The Fifth Republic has been generous in its use of elections, which, as well as designating local and national representatives, are also a powerful device for legitimation (Hall *et al.* 1990). Periods when there is no consultation of the electorate (e.g. 1989–92) are rare.

Two contrasting periods in the use of voting mechanisms during the Fifth Republic can be distinguished. The first, extending from 1958 to 1979, was characterized by the standardization of electoral systems and their common alignment on a preferred mode, the two-round majority system, either for a single candidate or for a list of candidates. After 1958 the majority voting system was used for parliamentary elections. The 1962 reform extended its use to presidential elections, and it is also used for local and county elections.

In addition, the method of selection imposed by this voting system (Voters choose in the first round, eliminate in the second') is reinforced by provisions that encourage alliances among the left and among the right, and thus towards bipolarization. For example, in the presidential election only the two best-placed candidates in the first round can stand in the second round; and in towns of more than 30,000 inhabitants, under the 1964 Act governing municipal elections, the list of candidates obtaining an absolute majority in the first round, or a relative majority in the second round, could take all the seats! What is more, candidates or lists in municipal, county or parliamentary elections had to obtain at least 10 per cent of votes cast in the first round to be eligible to stand in the second round, a barrier raised during Valéry Giscard d'Estaing's presidency to 12.5 per cent of registered voters (which in the

case of high abstention rates can have such a devastating effect that sometimes only one candidate is left on the battlefield).

This system, which contributed to the formation of what Maurice Duverger called ‘the bipolar quadrille’, reached the peak of its perfection in the late 1960s. But its constraints quickly appeared once it no longer fitted in with the new ideological, political and social tensions created by the 1968 crisis, de Gaulle’s departure and changes in French society. With hindsight, the first indications could be seen in the presidential election of 1969, which became a contest between one candidate from the right and one from the centre, the left candidate having been eliminated. In addition, with no revision of the 1958 constituency boundaries, criticism of the distorted results of parliamentary elections became ever more heated. The left made a change to proportional representation its hobbyhorse.

Table 4.1 Elections to the French National Assembly, 1958–93 (percentage of votes on first ballot)

Year	<i>Extreme left</i>	<i>Communist PCF</i>	<i>Socialist SFIO/PS, Rad.</i>	<i>Centrist PR, MRP, UDF</i>	<i>Gaullist RPR</i>	<i>Extreme right</i>	<i>Other</i>
1958	1.7	19.0	20.2	34.6	17.6	3.3	3.6
1962	2.3	21.8	20.3	22.7	32.0	0.9	–
1967	2.2	22.5	19.0	17.8	37.7	0.8	–
1968	4.0	20.0	17.2	15.0	43.7	0.1	–
1973	3.3	21.4	22.0	25.0	24.0	–	4.3
1978	3.3	20.6	28.0	20.0	25.5	–	2.6
1981	1.3	16.2	37.5	22.0	20.8	0.3	1.9
1986	1.5	9.7	31.9	42.0	–	9.9	5.0
1988	0.4	11.3	37.5	37.7	–	9.8	3.3
1993	1.1	9.2	19.2	38.1	–	12.6	19.8 ^a

Notes Party vote is measured as a percentage of votes cast, (a) Includes 10% to the Greens.

In 1979, with the first direct elections to the European Parliament, the worm was introduced into the fruit by a curious coalition. Centrists, socialists and communists, tired of the smoothing-out effect of the two-round majority system being at their expense, were fairly favourable to proportional representation. The European Community institutions preferred proportional representation, used in all member States except Great Britain and France. The Gaullists, though in principle hostile to proportional representation, came round to supporting it because they wanted France to be a single constituency, so as to demonstrate the indivisibility and sovereignty of France! The introduction of proportional representation at the national level was the first breach in the majority system. When the socialists and communists came to power the dismantling continued. A (not very) proportional representation system was introduced for municipal elections, with prizes awarded to a list winning on the first or second round. The d’Hondt system of proportional representation was

introduced for parliamentary elections in 1985, but replaced from 1986 by the single-member, two-round majority system. Proportional representation was introduced too for regional elections (with *départements* as constituencies). In sum, the Fifth Republic now possesses a full palette of extremely varied electoral rules that have not been without influence on the ‘destructuring’ of parties (the formation of wings and factions) and alliances. Elections thought to be ‘with nothing at stake’ (*sans enjeu*, that is, not deciding a country’s general political orientation) increasingly resemble ‘mid-term elections’. Voters, freed from some electoral constraints and more aware that one election does not change much, have adapted their voting behaviour. They vote more according to the political moment and the ‘message’ they want to convey than to an increasingly weak partisan allegiance. This new fluidity, the product of a more volatile electorate, less determined by social and cultural factors (class, religion), consisting of what have been called ‘rational voters’, has harmed the main parties and allowed new political forces to emerge. The Greens and the National Front were able to burst on to the electoral scene thanks to a combination of elections ‘with nothing at stake’ and electoral rules that have a less drastic effect on minor parties than the majority rule. The municipal elections of 1983 and 1989, the European elections of 1984 and 1989, and the regional and parliamentary elections of 1986 were occasions for these ‘outsiders’ to advance at the expense of the famous ‘gang of four’ (Socialists, Communists, Union pour la démocratie française, and Gaullists).

Thus the electoral evolution of the Fifth Republic took a path of progressive bipolar restructuring of the Fourth Republic’s fragmented parties and electorate. This was followed by a weakening towards crisis-point of a system which had stabilized only on the surface. In 1988, for the first time under the Fifth Republic, the coalition in power did not obtain an absolute majority in parliament. It was unable to legislate or govern without recourse to the ingenious devices introduced by the authors of the Fifth Republic constitution in pursuit of the famous ‘rationalized parliamentarianism’, a euphemism for ‘limited parliamentarianism’.

Indifference and protest

Elections, as noted above, are undoubtedly necessary to the proper functioning of a democratic system, but not sufficient. Acknowledging that, in the absence of more appropriate methods, elections are one of the better means of expressing views, their validity depends both on the conditions and rules which govern them (e.g. voting methods, fairness) and on voter commitment.

The abstention rate is one way of measuring the acceptability of this process of expressing opinions. The abstention rate in France is always calculated in relation to registered voters. (In the United States, for example, it is measured in relation to potential voters.) Electoral registration is not mandatory (even though it is almost automatic in small towns), and it is estimated that almost 10 per cent of potential

electors are not registered. Apart from this fringe of deliberate absentees from electoral participation, the number of abstainers is regarded as fairly small. About a quarter of voters desert the ballot box in national elections, though the variation between elections is not negligible. The abstention rate can exceed 30 per cent when two elections are held close together and the second election is judged less important than the first (e.g. the parliamentary elections of 1962 and 1988). But it can fall to below 15 per cent (e.g. 13 per cent in the second round of the presidential election of 1974, and 14 per cent in 1981). On the other hand, participation is less strong in *départements* elections and in municipal elections in the case of large towns. Participation in French elections is about average for Western democracies; it is much higher than in US national and local elections or in UK local elections, and much lower than in Germany or Italy, though there is a rather general tendency towards a decline in participation. Nevertheless, the most noteworthy phenomenon of recent years has been the tumbling of participation rates in by-elections, or in polls not perceived as important by the electorate. Only a third of voters (encouraged to abstain by the right, it is true) participated in the referendum ratifying the Matignon agreements and the associated legislation on New Caledonia.

Recent polls (regional elections and a referendum in 1992, parliamentary elections in March 1993) show persistent abstention (about a third of the electorate abstained), though without enabling us to talk about a real 'exit' phenomenon. Indifference or dissatisfaction with regard to government parties is also expressed in other ways: spoilt or blank ballot papers (nearly 1.5 million in 1993) and, above all, by the dispersal of votes in favour of 'protest' parties (e.g. hunters, ecologists, the extreme right, regionalists). In March 1993 the 'government parties' received only two-thirds of the vote whereas they attracted more than 80 per cent of voters in 1981, when the Communist Party still had a monopoly of 'protest' with 16 per cent of votes.

But yet another characteristic typifies French political life: the periodic eruption of violence and protest that contradict or counterbalance choices expressed through the ballot box. Unlike societies which have succeeded in channelling violent social relations into institutions that translate them into peaceful, formal and symbolic forms (e.g. British adversarial politics), and unlike countries where violence is expressed less in the political arena than within society itself (American crime, Italian mafia), the French system has always experienced street demonstrations that bring pressure to bear on power. The peasant and urban revolts under the *ancien régime*, the *sans-culottes* of 1789, the Parisian uprisings of 1793, 1830, 1848 and 1871, the populist demonstrations of 1934, the workers' strikes of 1936, the 'political' strikes of 1947 and the Poujadists of the 1950s were similar expressions of what an American sociologist (J.Pitts) would describe as a 'delinquent community'.

The Fifth Republic does not escape the general rule (Hoffmann 1963). Governments from 1958 to 1991 were repeatedly confronted with explosions of temper as brutal as they were unpredictable, despite frequent elections and a generally supportive electorate. (Only in the parliamentary elections of 1967 and 1988 was support

‘mediocre or chancy’.) Some violent episodes had fundamental origins in the process of State reconstruction and decolonization; for instance, France experienced endemic violence from 1955 to 1962 during the Algerian war. But bombs and assassination attempts have also peppered the rebellions of small nationalist groups in Corsica, Brittany and the Basque country. New Caledonia was on the verge of civil war from 1984 to 1988. In Réunion and the Antilles radical violence flared up suddenly, even though voters there continued to legitimize the mainland authorities over the years with electoral support which increased rather than declined.

As well as these national, nationalist or regionalist ‘revolutions’, sectional protest groups used violence in a more or less spontaneous way during strikes and demonstrations without it being organized or systematic. Farmers destroyed public buildings, and tradespeople and shopkeepers sacked local tax offices as a favourite way of expressing their demands. The erection of barricades in 1968 was part of this strategy, in which symbols and emotions are put to political use. There is now hardly any demonstration which does not end in ritual destruction and clashes with the police. How can these ‘French passions’ (Theodore Zeldin) be explained? Some observers locate the roots of the phenomenon in the way French people are socialized and educated. They argue that the French, subdued from childhood (within the family, at school) by a strong authority which does not allow discussion, can choose only between submission (passive obedience) and periodic revolt. This explanation has some point. But other factors must undoubtedly be considered—for example, incapacity or at least a poor capacity to organize group activity. Parties, unions, and sectional interests have not been able to group their potential clientele into stable federations. The current fragmenting and weakening of the main ideological organizations has made the situation even more volatile. Nothing has replaced the framework provided, for example, by the Church or the French Communist Party. The trade unions are incapable of mobilizing their troops and, when discontent explodes, must adapt to the more or less confused and unrealistic demands of spontaneous ‘co-ordination’.

Finally, the State shares responsibility for the brutal assaults it sometimes suffers. From the time of the monarchy until today interest groups have been unwelcome in ‘the seraglio of power’ (Wilson 1987). Groups are regarded as scarcely legitimate (since in principle only the elected are worthy) and held at a distance. In order to be heard they must often demonstrate their representativeness through noise and anger. Then we see the paradox of a State, initially haughty and disdainful, ‘which does not negotiate with the mob’, suddenly ready to concede anything and forgive anybody because there is no other way out of the impasse. The all-powerful State is replaced by the State ready to go to any lengths to re-establish social peace (Andrews and Hoffmann 1981). Governments should learn from experience. But the phenomenon is repeated so often that it seems they do not. Social groups, on the other hand, have understood the lesson; they know violence pays and that it is more effective to smash shop windows than to participate in an official planning inquiry. One of the chief

defects of the French political system is thus revealed: it is still able to offer its citizens only a choice between two equally unsatisfactory options: individual action (e.g. ignoring or circumventing regulations and conventions) or violent revolt, since adequate channels of communication at citizens' disposal are lacking.

THE POLITICAL PARTIES

The political system is unusual among Western democracies. It is characterized by the fragility, instability and weakness of interest groups and parties. This feature is not new or special to the Fifth Republic. But the 1958 institutions and the political events of the last thirty years have given it a particular stamp.

The party system: decomposition and recomposition

Until the 1988 and 1990 Acts on the financing of political parties and electoral campaigns, parties had no special legal status. They were organized as ordinary associations under the 1901 Act, or even as *de facto* associations. They could easily fall within the category of organizations forbidden under this law or under the decree of 1936 outlawing groups that threatened the 'republican form of government'. However, legal guarantees and financial resources were not conceded to parties that could have deserved these privileges on account of their influence and the pressure they could exert. On the contrary, parties have never been so weak, so incapable of hammering out programmes, mobilizing activists or attracting the voters as in the 1990s. Is this decline inexorable? Or are we coming to the end of a period of disintegration that heralds a restructuring of the French political landscape? No answer to the question is possible at the moment because the parties have been affected in the last thirty years by such varying fortunes, including periods of decline followed by periods of popularity. Only one thing is certain: no party has been able to consolidate the gains or progress it has made at some points in its history (Bartolini 1984).

The right: from Gaullist imperialism to fragmentation

In 1958 the Fourth Republic parties 'collaborated' in the construction of the new regime more or less enthusiastically—with the notable exception of the Communist

Table 4.2 Policy space of parties in France, 1984

Year	Communist PCF	Green Ecologie	Socialist PS	Radical MRG	Centrist UDF	Gaullist RPR	Right FN
1984	1.4	2.6	3.5	3.8	6.6	8.2	9.8

Note 0 extreme left, 10 extreme right.

Source F.Castles and P.Mair, 'Left-right political scales', *European Journal of Political Research* 12 (1984):83–8.

Party, which showed almost complete hostility to General de Gaulle and his institutions. It was the right which rallied most vigorously to the colours of the new regime, but on the basis of a misunderstanding. It was persuaded, like the military and the French settler population of Algeria, that de Gaulle would retain Algeria within the bosom of mainland France. Besides, the reinforcement of the institutions in favour of the executive was bound to please an electorate attached to the values of order and authority. Nonetheless, Gaullism presented itself under its own flag and hit the bull's-eye in the parliamentary elections of 23 and 30 November 1958. The Gaullists (Union for the New Republic, UNR) obtained 20.4 per cent of votes, while the National Centre of Independents and Peasants (CNIP) increased its vote to 22.1 per cent, compared with 15.3 per cent in the 1956 elections. Thus the traditional right not only did not suffer from the emergence of Gaullism but made substantial gains from the electorate's shift to the right (the right obtained 56.2 per cent of votes as against 45.8 per cent in 1956). However, the triumph of the traditional right did not last much beyond the period of domination over Algeria.

Electoral Gaullism was climbing irresistibly to power. The UNR and its allies obtained 36.3 per cent of votes in 1962, whereas the CNIP vote collapsed (9.6 per cent). In 1967, despite the majority parties' mediocre score, Gaullist candidates bearing the 'Fifth Republic' label maintained themselves at 37.7 per cent. In the June 1968 'elections of fear' their score was unprecedented: 43.7 per cent of votes. For the first time since the Second World War, one party, the Gaullists (by now called the Union of Democrats for the Republic, UDR), had obtained an absolute majority. The right seemed, therefore, to have been comprehensively reconstituted, since extreme-right voters joined the Gaullists in favour of an amnesty for the last rebels of the Algerian war. Extreme-right candidates received a fraction of the votes: 0.13 per cent in 1968. The election of Georges Pompidou to the presidency in 1969 nibbled away part of the centre vote (Pleven, Fontanet and Duhamel supported Pompidou on the second round of the presidential election). This temporary triumph was short-lived, because the 1969 conservative advance tended to marginalize and then drive away part of the popular vote that de Gaulle had been able to attract and retain (Chariot 1971). The right took the risk of becoming a minority, since, to the defection of part of the electorate were added the internal conflicts of the 1974 presidential elections. Jacques Chirac headed a conspiracy in favour of Giscard d'Estaing and against Chaban-Delmas, the Gaullist candidate, dividing the electorate and the Gaullist movement. Having resigned his post as Prime Minister, he succeeded in August 1976 in a take-over bid for the UDR, which became a powerful machine focused entirely on promoting him and his objective: winning the 1981 presidential election. From then on he was seen as the divider of the right, against Chaban-Delmas in 1974 and against Giscard d'Estaing in 1981. The bitterness aroused by this treasonable behaviour made it difficult for him to appear as the potential organizer of a federation of the right. What was more, the leaders of the parliamentary and presidential right were the accomplices and victims of the campaigns of a right-wing press that from

1981 to 1986 gave vent to the New Right's ideas and prepared the ideological ground for nationalists and an extreme right wing promoted by an outstanding orator, Jean-Marie Le Pen.

Helped too by the coincidental timing of elections 'with nothing at stake' (by-elections, local elections, European elections) and by the introduction of proportional representation, the extreme right, enlarged by populist protest, has become solidly implanted, and now represents 12–15 per cent of the electorate. The National Front is certainly not yet able to present itself as tomorrow's dominant right-wing party. But it already constitutes the third right-wing political force, and in large measure determines the political debate and the strategies of the Gaullist party (now the Realignment for the Republic, RPR) and the UDF. Although the National Front, like the French Communist Party (PCF) of the 1950s, is a party outside the system, it has become, as the PCF did then, though in a different context, the 'ideological reference point' in relation to which the other political parties position and define themselves. The rapid growth of the National Front and its entry into the party system are striking illustrations of the fluidity and fragility of that system. In five years a small group was able to climb into the first rank of parties, almost on a level with the two large structures of the right and centre (the Gaullists and the UDF), and overtaking the PCF! The problem of the right-wing parties in power is to contain this growth and to try to win back lost voters. This imposed strategy is being translated into a 'move to the right' in programmes and policies.

The centre: in search of an indefinable identity

A centrist electorate exists. The centre has for thirty years provided political change by making the balance shift sometimes right and sometimes left. It forced de Gaulle into the second round of the presidential ballot in 1965, and in 1988 refused Mitterrand the benefit of an overall parliamentary majority. But this electorate is fickle and unstable, split between right-wing impulses and left-wing ideals. Its leaders (in parliament or in local government), unable to control it, try to steer (or follow) as best they can. Under the Fourth Republic the centre had managed to construct a relatively powerful party structure with the creation of the Republican Popular Movement (MRP), one of the three large forces produced by the Liberation period. But the MRP, despite the social concerns of its leaders, remained the prisoner of its more conservative electorate and dependent on the clerical-secular cleavage still so salient during the Fourth Republic. Even though the MRP was part of almost all government coalitions under the Fourth Republic, it did not represent much more than 10 per cent of the electorate at the dawn of the new republic (11 per cent in 1958 as in 1956, compared with 29 per cent and 26 per cent respectively in June and November 1946). It did not really gain from its support for General de Gaulle during the Algerian war, since its remaining electors were also attracted to the hero of 18 June 1940. When the MRP broke with de Gaulle over the European issue (May

1962) it was abandoned by part of its electorate, and its score fell to 9 per cent in the 1962 parliamentary elections (Wright 1992).

In spite of the surprisingly high score of the centrist candidate in the presidential elections of 1965 (he obtained 4 million votes), and its unexpected success in the presidential election of 1969, when the president of the Senate, Alain Poher, gained more votes than the left-wing candidates and went into the second round in competition with Georges Pompidou, the centre was never able to find a programme which would attract voters, or build an organization worthy of a real party. Following the departure of General de Gaulle, centre politicians aligned themselves with the decision already expressed by a large part of the electorate, and joined the right-wing camp. This process started with Pompidou, was completed during Giscard d'Estaing's presidency and confirmed with the socialist victory. After the 1988 presidential election and Mitterrand's promise of an 'opening to the centre', centre politicians made some signals of reconciliation towards Michel Rocard. But faced with Mitterrand's unwillingness to engage in a formal alliance, operation 'Opening' was limited to the seduction of a few *notables* and the entry on to the scene of a few personalities (non-political), called 'representatives of civil society' especially for the occasion.

The left: from disunity to collapse

Although out of power from 1947 until the end of the Fourth Republic, the PCF remained the main French party, a party with a relative majority that obtained more than a quarter of the votes in 1956. Affected like other parties by the Gaullist tide, it obtained only 19.2 per cent of votes in 1958, and, because of the change in the electoral system, its parliamentary representation fell to just ten deputies. But its declared hostility to Gaullism (despite some acknowledgement of the positive aspects of Gaullist foreign policy, notably the retreat from NATO's military command structure, the recognition of China, and criticism of American policy in Vietnam) allowed it to maintain its position and 'capitalize' on discontent. Thus it obtained 21.8 per cent of votes in 1962, 22.5 per cent in 1967, 20.0 per cent in 1968, 21.4 per cent in 1973 and 20.6 per cent in 1978. Until the parliamentary elections of 1973 the contrast with the Socialists (SFIO) or the Federation of the Democratic and Socialist Left (FGDS) was striking. The decline of the non-communist left seemed unavoidable despite attempts at renovation and restructuring. The SFIO just managed to survive in 1958, thanks to its support of the constitution and its participation in de Gaulle's government, obtaining 15.5 per cent of votes on 23 November 1958. But its subsequent opposition led it to fall back to 12.5 per cent on 18 November 1962. Efforts to reconstruct the radical and socialist left, with the aid of political societies ('the clubs'), allowed it to climb back, encouraged especially by Mitterrand's unexpected score in the presidential election of 1965. The FGDS, founded by Mitterrand, obtained nearly 19 per cent of votes in 1967 and so did creditably in

comparison with the communists. This federation was the result of the failure of the 'Grand Federation' initiated by Gaston Defferre in preparation for forthcoming presidential elections. In the minds of its promoters, its goals were to fight Gaullism and to set up a force comparable to, if not larger than, that of the PCF, through constructing a 'Democratic and Socialist Federation'. The federation was supposed to bring together the SFIO socialists, the radicals, Mitterrand's Convention of Republican Institutions (CIR) and the Christian Democrats (the MRP). But the opposition of Joseph Fontanet (MRP), who banned the term 'socialist', and of Guy Mollet, who waved the banner of anticlericalism, wrecked the plan. Ambitions were lower when Mitterrand took up the torch again with his FGDS. Despite a programme published on 14 July 1966 the 'Little Federation', which excluded the Christian Democrats, was hardly more than an electoral alliance whose main advantage was to reduce the number of left-wing candidates. The 1967 elections were not a success in terms of votes but, thanks to the new discipline, allowed the left to gain fifteen more seats than in 1962. However, the SFIO did not want to go further with federation. The final blow was dealt to the FGDS by the 'events' of May (from which it was absent, except for Mitterrand's unfortunate declaration of 28 May 1968, announcing his candidature for a presidential post which was not available!). The radicals left the federation, and Mitterrand resigned in November 1968. The old left was once more divided and weakened, while the Communist Party maintained its position. But the communist and non-communist left were both being harried by organizations calling themselves radical, even revolutionary, which took off during the May 'events': the Unified Socialist Party (PSU), created in 1960 by 'the new left' that fought Gaullism but was not attracted by the PCF or by the SFIO of Guy Mollet; and the Trotskyist organizations (the Communist League, the Workers' War) and Maoists.

Discussions about a *rapprochement* between the 'clubs' and the SFIO started again at the end of 1968. Personal and institutional disagreements remained so strong that the Socialist Party (PS) created at Alfortville represented the betrothal of a lame duck (the SFIO) and a scraggy lark (the UGCS of Alain Savary). Gaston Defferre was designated presidential candidate. It was a descent into hell for the non-communist left, whose candidate obtained 5.0 per cent of the vote, against 21.2 per cent for the communist candidate. From these ruins it was at least possible for Mitterrand to come back with some force to propose his idea of what the party should be and what political strategy it should follow.

The Epinay congress of 11–13 June 1971 set socialists faithful to the 'old party', grouped round Savary, against the mixed bunch who wanted a new party (without being agreed on its content or arrangements). Mitterrand defended the idea of an alliance with the PCF that would permit a rebalancing of the two families of the left. The task seemed difficult because, in contrast to the socialists, who had foundered in 1969, the PCF had maintained its position. It had reaped the benefit of the socio-economic strife of 1969 and improved its image by distancing itself from the USSR (condemning the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in August 1968) and by accepting

the principle of pluralism and alternating governments if it were elected. Despite their differences, the Socialist Party and the Communist Party reached an agreement on 16 June 1972, signing a 'Common Programme of Government'. At the same moment, the left-wing radicals separated from the Radical Party of Jean-Jacques Servan-Schreiber, forming in January 1973 the Movement of Left Radicals (MRG), which, in its turn, signed the Common Programme.

Fifteen years after the inauguration of the Fifth Republic, twenty-six years after the 1947 split, fifty-three years after the Congress of Tours, the left seemed to be on the way to turning the old myth of 'the reunification of the working-class movement' into reality. The 1973 elections did not completely fulfil the hopes invested in this venture, but the pump was primed. The socialists obtained 19.2 per cent, against 21.4 per cent for the PCF. This early progress received a strong boost at the time of the presidential election, when Mitterrand, sole candidate of the left, was only just over 400,000 votes behind Giscard d'Estaing (less than 1 per cent of voters). At the Assembly of Socialism of October 1974 this success led to the further incorporation into the PS of parts of its outlying fringes (the PSU and the French Democratic Confederation of Labour, CFDT). Michel Rocard, Robert Chapuis and a few thousand activists joined the PS despite the reservations of a final stubborn group which kept the PSU going, come what may. But the PCF found the Union of the Left no help, whereas the PS and Mitterrand reaped the reward of their strategy. In particular, in the local elections of spring 1977, the PS and the MRG advanced and profited more than did the PCF from the gains of the united left (fifty-eight towns of over 30,000 inhabitants were won by the left, thirty-five of which were run by socialists). The Communist Party used the updating of the Common Programme, which it especially wanted and which was justified by the change in economic conditions (the 1973 oil crisis), to raise its price, demanding that the nationalization programme should be considerably expanded. The break-up of the Union occurred on 23 September 1977. The 1978 elections did not seem to punish this new divide, since the PCF still obtained 20.6 per cent of votes and the PS-MRG alliance gathered a quarter of them (24.9 per cent). Nevertheless the division and quarrels within the left contributed to the success of the governmental majority.

With hindsight it was clear the small decrease in PCF votes was in fact the beginning of its descent into hell, punishment for a party incapable of adapting to the new realities, a party which remained Stalinist in numerous aspects of its internal functioning and its policy decisions. From now on, all the PCF's efforts to get out of its downward spiral only accelerated its fall, whereas the PS swept from victory to victory. The PCF vote fell to 15.2 per cent in June 1981, to 11.2 per cent in the European elections in 1984, to 9.7 per cent in the parliamentary elections of 1986 and to 6.8 per cent in the first round of the presidential elections. In 1988 it climbed back a little, winning 11.3 per cent in the parliamentary elections. At the beginning of the 1990s the PCF vote was stable at about 10 per cent, very much behind the PS and overtaken by the National Front. Over the same period the PS-MRG, bolstered

by its leader's triumph, achieved 37.5 per cent of votes and won an absolute majority of seats in 1981. Even when defeated in 1986 it still attracted 31.6 per cent of votes. It climbed to 34.7 per cent in 1988, missing an absolute majority by a few seats. Although the PCF agreed in 1981 to associate itself with the Mauroy government (it obtained only four ministerial posts), the exercise of power was no more helpful to it than opposition had been. Obligated to swallow the indignities of the austerity programme, it finally withdrew from the Fabius government in July 1984, enabling it to criticize the socialists' management more strongly. But the repercussions were not only electoral. The PCF lost its activists (its intellectuals, for the most part, had left much earlier), its local bastions and thus its logistical and financial support. Georges Marchais, famous for his television performances, became no more than a sad clown whose comments were scarcely of interest, they seemed so out of touch. The PCF either seduced or frightened. It no longer attracts, and excites, at best, indifference among its opponents (Ambler 1985; Ross *et al.* 1988).

Institutional constraints

It was thought for a long time that voting constraints (the two-round ballot system) and institutional constraints (the bipolar choice in the presidential election) had brought about a simplification of political life and imposed discipline and reorganization on the parties. In other words, these constraints were supposed to have had a beneficial effect in encouraging the parties to reform themselves. There was some evidence in support of this analysis until the 1970s. However, the argument neglected the impact of two leaders, very different, but both of exceptional stature, de Gaulle and Mitterrand. With one of them dead, and the other placed in an institutional position which did not allow him to play the role of party leader, the centrifugal forces increased, under the very same influence of the rules of the constitutional game. What in practice is the fundamental goal that is at stake? It is the presidential election, which encourages, as it ought, the competition of those who think, rightly or wrongly, that a 'national destiny' awaits them. This competition first arises inside the parties, if several leaders seem to have the makings of a future President (e.g. as suggested by opinion polls). It results in the exacerbation of personal conflict, factional strife, strategies and alliances whose contribution to party division is increased the more that outside factors (e.g. popularity ratings, media comment) intervene. For a presidential election to reinforce the parties, two conditions—not present in France—must be fulfilled: there must be two main parties only, and candidates must be subject to selection, whether in public (as in the United States) or inside the parties. In the absence of these conditions the parties become the goals at stake and the site of great, and sometimes absurd, battles. French parties, born in a parliamentary context, class-related, ideologically based, do not fit well into such a scheme. General de Gaulle was right: the head of state of the Fifth Republic needed a gathering or realignment of the people, not a party.

The posthumous revenge of the founder of the Fifth Republic is that the institutions born in 1958 have not, contrary to what was first thought, restructured and founded a modern party system.

That is why the party ‘crisis’ of the 1980s was not a short-term incident. Although it was masked for a long time by charisma and by the constraints of the electoral system, the crisis is now obvious. The progressive modification of institutional constraints since the 1980s (the changes in electoral systems) did not cause these transformations. But it revealed and promoted them. Until 1979 the homogeneity of the electoral system was total. The two-round ballot majority system was used for all types of elections, from municipal ones to the presidential election. After 1979 a combination of elections ‘with nothing fundamental at stake’ and a diversity of electoral rules offered new opportunities to voters and groups that had hitherto been marginalized. With the fall of the Berlin Wall, the collapse of ideologies, the growth of new challenges (the environment, immigration and the demands of ethnic minorities), French parties became like their European equivalents, i.e. in crisis. But the crisis is more deadly in France because French parties have never constituted the backbone of the political system.

PARLIAMENT

Rules and discipline

Parliament under the Fourth Republic, despite a few constitutional provisions soon ignored, was a parliament, it could be said, *sans foi, ni loi* (‘having neither faith nor law’). It violated even the clearest constitutional provisions with impunity, played ducks and drakes with others, manipulated electoral laws, annulled the election of candidates who displeased it (in 1956 the Poujadists), passed special laws (the state of emergency) and brought discredit on itself with its budgetary procedures, capricious motions of censure and its impotence even in the election of the President of the Republic! Since it controlled the agenda and was in charge of its own sittings and committee organization, the Fourth Republic parliament had in fact considerable freedom of action—or, rather, licence. It is scarcely surprising that the founding fathers of the Fifth Republic wanted to react against this state of affairs. It is surprising that later commentators should have measured the decline of parliament under the Fifth Republic by the standards of this model!

The Fifth Republic parliament is undeniably subject to severe—and necessary—restrictions that were applied (with excessive zeal) from the beginning. Michel Debré’s basic premise—which proved to be erroneous—was that the numerous deep cleavages across France made it impossible to aggregate opinions and votes around a majority pole on one side, and around an opposition pole on the other (as in Great Britain). What ‘nature’ could not offer had therefore to be brought about through ‘artifice’, i.e. rigid rules defining the function of parliament. In this respect the constitution

effected a true revolution by comparison with the two previous republics, because it constrained parliament within strict limits:

- 1 Parliamentary sittings were reduced to two ordinary sessions of about three months each, which were not modified to a nine-month single session until 1995.
- 2 The assemblies' standing orders had to be approved by the Constitutional Council, making encroachments contrary to the letter and spirit of the constitution difficult.
- 3 The government controlled the agenda and the organization of debates.
- 4 The number of standing committees was reduced to six, each really a 'mini-parliament' ill suited to effective consideration and amendment.
- 5 The range of parliamentary intervention is limited by Articles 34 and 37, which fix the 'domain of law' (areas in which parliament is free to legislate) and 'the domain of regulations' (issued by the executive), where parliament cannot intervene.
- 6 The financial powers of parliament are limited by Article 40, which declares out of order any Bill or amendment entailing a decrease in public revenue or an increase in expenditure.
- 7 Controls over the government (motions of confidence or censure) can be applied only according to strict provisions laid down in Articles 49 and 50.
- 8 Finally, multiple procedural provisions further reinforce the government's position by giving the executive a panoply of means to bypass or reduce parliamentary obstacles, for example the 'package' vote, and the government's power to declare that a vote on a particular text will be treated as a motion of confidence.

The 'rationalization' of parliament, the expression most commonly used to describe and justify these reforms, has been much written about and has attracted innumerable criticisms. Yet the reforms are hardly original, since they are merely an importation of British parliamentary procedures. The scandal is in the contrast with the preceding 'golden age of parliament' and in the way the procedures were applied by the first rulers of the Fifth Republic. The constitutional provisions were severe but their application was even more so (Suleiman 1986).

In fact the executive was helped in its task, particularly by public opinion and by the judgements of the Constitutional Council. The government's task was facilitated politically by the disrepute parliament earned under the Fourth Republic, a reputation carefully nurtured by the political leaders of the Fifth.

Furthermore, the humiliation of parliament was the result of parliamentary 'self-flagellation'. In effect, the reduction of the power to represent would not have been so steep and sustained had members of parliament not lent a hand. Two factors within parliament contributed to reinforcing the ascendancy of the executive at the expense of the National Assembly in particular. First, training in majority-party discipline—a phenomenon unknown in France before the Fifth Republic—was accomplished in almost military style, MPs accepting without a murmur the governmental edicts passed down by party managers. Second, parliament marginalized

itself, reducing itself almost to the role of rubber stamp through members' poor professionalism and high absenteeism.

What is parliament for? Representation, decision-making and control

The representative function

Parliament is composed of two Houses or chambers: the National Assembly and the Senate, which in a unitary system seems constitutionally bizarre. Why seek representation through two chambers? It either risks useless conflict or leads to a consensus that makes double representation pointless. The explanation owes nothing to the rules of democracy but rather to liberal political tradition. If 'the power to check' constitutes one of the essential components of a liberal regime, then the second chamber's main justification is in moderating the excesses of the lower chamber.

Though this counterbalancing principle is so ingrained that it is now hardly ever discussed, the Senate's unrepresentative character is a sword of Damocles suspended over this venerable institution. Senators are indirectly elected by an electoral college made up of some 80,000 'grand electors' (mostly directly elected local government councillors); thus the democratic element is attenuated. Its principal merit in a system of concentrated power like the Fifth Republic remains that of 'checking'. No doubt it is this characteristic that makes the Senate 'untouchable' despite its weak representativeness.

The representativeness of the National Assembly is incontestably superior, even though it is imperfect, whether from a political or a sociological point of view. Politically it is undeniable that the single-member, two-round majority system does not answer perfectly the requirements of representation. It is a 'French speciality', other democracies preferring proportional systems (with the exception of the United Kingdom and the United States, which use a one-round plurality system). Since 1958 no parliamentary majority has been based on a majority of votes (also the case in 1986 after the socialists had introduced a very disproportional proportional system). In addition, the minor parties are barred from the second round by a high 'exclusion threshold' (currently 12.5 per cent of the electorate), and the middle-ranking parties are underrepresented if they have not concluded electoral pacts. Two examples suffice to illustrate the extent of this underrepresentation, in particular for the parties positioned on the extreme corners of the political chessboard. In 1958 the PCF, which received 19.0 per cent of votes, won only ten seats, while the UNR, which received 17.6 per cent of votes on the first round, won 207 seats thanks to votes transferred on the second round! In 1993 the National Front, with 12.5 per cent of votes, obtained no seats, while the UDF, whose score was only 50 per cent higher (18.6 per cent), acquired 206 deputies. These inequalities in representation have been aggravated by the constituency map, both because constituency boundaries have been

'gerrymandered' and because demographic disparities have increased over the years. Even though the new constituency boundaries drawn in 1987 removed the most blatant discrepancies the situation remains imperfect, as witness the results of the 1988 elections. The PS and MRG almost won an absolute majority (they lacked a mere thirteen seats), though they obtained altogether only 35.9 per cent of votes in the first round (8,766,018 votes out of 24,944,792 cast). In 1993 the right, with 36.7 per cent of votes on the first round, made a clean sweep with 448 seats.

The decision-making function

Governments have always been active in the drawing up of legislation, but the weakness of the French parliament appeared in all its ingloriousness when it proved incapable not only of drawing up legislative proposals but even of simply approving them. This incapacity led to governments under the Third Republic turning to 'decree-laws', and under the Fourth Republic to 'framework laws': a symbolic case of theoretical omnipotence emerging as practical impotence.

Nevertheless, honour was saved, because infringements of the theoretical and legal use of orders were presented as exceptions or violations. The Fifth Republic was thought scandalous when it claimed to put the clock right, i.e. to reconcile law with practice: in other words, to recognize the important role of the administration and government in drawing up legislation, to constitutionalize and thus to legitimize what had been seen until then as errors or stop-gap procedures. But this endeavour (Articles 34 and 37 of the constitution) proved fruitless, since it too was founded upon a Utopian premise: the belief that it was possible to draw a line between the important and the secondary, the principle and the application, the fundamental and the subsidiary.

The best illustration of the ambiguity of parliamentary decision-making powers is without doubt the procedure for issuing regulations in Article 38, which is the constitutional codification of the practice of 'decree laws'. As with 'decree laws', the use of regulations removes almost all power from parliament, since the ratification process is reduced to the tabling of a Bill that is never discussed, and the content of regulations is only vaguely defined in the relevant enabling law. However, this dismal observation should be balanced by a reminder that enabling laws have never been numerous, they have not always been used effectively, the Constitutional Council's control over their use is increasingly vigilant and, finally, that parliament still has a right to amend regulations. More important, the use of regulations often demonstrates a sort of 'tribute of vice to virtue', since it could be said that governments of the Fifth Republic have used regulations even when they had majority support in parliament, because parliamentary debate is not as ineffective or as second-rate as it is sometimes portrayed. If parliamentary power—and the mobilization of opinion that debates can produce—was as futile as is claimed, the use of regulations would be unnecessary.

It is doubtless on budgetary and financial matters, and on foreign policy, that parliament's powers have been weakened most dramatically. Not only does the constitution forbid parliament to increase costs or decrease public revenue, but the government is reluctant to accept proposals affecting its own plans, even when they imply no extra cost, or would bring in extra revenue in ways unacceptable to the Minister of Finance. This curtailment of parliamentary powers is considerable by comparison with Italy or the United States, where the assemblies have sizeable prerogatives over revenue and expenditure.

Although the government has more room for manoeuvre than parliament (e.g. decrees for bringing forward or annulling expenditure, a 'freeze' on budgets, or staged implementation), it too has limited freedom, because it exercises real choice over an estimated 5 per cent of the budget at most. Moreover, when members of parliament resist, they can make themselves heard: the explanation of generous central government grants to local authorities is not simply central government generosity. The inextricable jungle of local taxation is partly due to multiple amendment of budgetary and other laws by elected national representatives acutely conscious of their local interests.

The role of parliament in foreign policy is much more marginal. At best parliament is called upon to ratify *faits accomplis*, though certain members (notably the chairs of the Foreign Affairs and Defence committees) are rather better informed about decisions. Under the Fifth Republic this 'Presidential reserved domain' was shared only slightly with the Prime Minister during the periods of *cohabitation* (1986–8 and 1993–5), though the competition between Mitterrand and Chirac did not profit parliament. On the contrary, majority and opposition both seemed paralysed by fear of causing their respective leaders problems. Neither the policy of *détente* nor the withdrawal from NATO's command structure, neither the Franco-German reconciliation nor the Franco-American skirmishes of the 1960s was inspired by or decided in parliamentary debate. Parliament was at best a forum for criticism or approval of a decision that had been taken or a line that had already been decided. On this point as on others the Mitterrand republic hardly differed from the Gaullist republic, as the 'management' of public opinion during the Gulf war of January–February 1991 showed. Parliamentary debate was reduced to its simplest form, representatives of the parliamentary groups being kept regularly informed by the Prime Minister. On the other hand, there were at least eleven televised interventions by the head of state between August 1990 and February 1991. Parliament is without doubt the first victim of the 'rule by the media' that has taken over in Western democracies.

The control function

Unquestionably it is in its controlling function that parliament has adapted least well to the needs of the time, in particular under the Fifth Republic.

Parliamentary control over the government can take several forms. It can be purely partisan, that is; voiced by the opposition. Its function is to criticize government activity, to condemn abuses or violations of the law and to counter with its own policy proposals. This type of 'control' may attract attention, but it is effective only under some conditions: when the government is supported by a heterogeneous group of members, with a bare minimum or no absolute majority; or when the opposition mobilizes public opinion sufficiently to force the government to withdraw under the combined pressure of internal forces (within parliament) and external forces (in the streets). These conditions have not been rare under the Fifth Republic (e.g. in 1984 the withdrawal of the Bill on private education and in 1986 the Duvaquet plan to reform the universities). But in strictly constitutional terms this 'control' is considered an empty threat since, 'by definition', the majority supports the government.

A second type of control, considered in the classic typology as 'control with a penalty', involves the transformation of the parliamentary landscape: a significant section of the majority party (or parties) decides to cross the Rubicon and vote for a motion of censure put down by the opposition. If the motion secures the majority required under the constitution the government is forced to resign, and the President must decide whether to proceed to a dissolution of parliament and put the question to the electorate. This type of control is drastic. In the constitutional field it is like a nuclear weapon as against conventional weapons: in theory it has a dissuasive effect, but it could not be used often without destabilizing the system. The Fifth Republic illustrates this situation very well: one government only, that of Georges Pompidou, was brought down, when a section of the parliamentary majority broke ranks with General de Gaulle in 1962. The consequences (dissolution of the National Assembly, and elections won by de Gaulle's supporters) show without question that the executive's power of dissuasion (dissolution) is more powerful than parliament's power of dissuasion (a vote of censure). While these techniques are still used in certain fragmented parliamentary regimes (Israel, the Netherlands, Belgium), elsewhere they tend increasingly to be stored away with other constitutional antiques. One cannot conceive of a parliamentary regime without them, but at the same time there is little illusion about their impact.

There remains a third method of control, quieter and more subtle, which does not belong wholly to the majority or to the opposition. It requires much energy, perseverance and know-how on the part of parliamentarians. It consists of detailed, thorough and precise checking of the activities of government and its administration. The ways and means are infinite: oral and written questions, oral questions with debate, committees of inquiry or of control, special inquiries, reports, hearings, and so on. But in all these cases, partisanship has to be put aside, or at least reduced, in favour of an honest, critical and comprehensive investigation. Needless to say, that is not easy in a parliamentary regime, where the system is based on the institutionalization of difference: the government, with its majority, governs; the

opposition criticizes. It is unsurprising, therefore, that the country where this method of control functions most intensively is the United States, where there is no clear, stable boundary between majority and opposition (majority and opposition determine themselves by varying continuously from vote to vote) (Mény 1993).

It is this absence of checks, more than anything else, that makes governments so powerful, particularly under the Fifth Republic. Too often the premium is on the *fait accompli* in the knowledge that control will be non-existent or ineffectual.

PRESIDENT AND GOVERNMENT: THE 'REPUBLICAN MONARCHY'

Two elements contributed to making the head of state of the Fifth Republic the 'republican monarch' Michel Debré outlined at the time of the Liberation, under the pseudonym of Jacquier-Bruère: the constitution itself, and the use subsequently made of it.

The principle: the constitution, the whole constitution, and nothing but the constitution

The President of the Fifth Republic benefits from a twofold advantage by comparison with the canons of classical constitutional law: the President has in some respects the advantages and privileges of the head of state in a presidential system; in other respects he or she enjoys the prerogative powers of a head of state in a parliamentary system. This ambiguous combination of roles ensures French Presidents their own powers, simultaneously giving them complete political irresponsibility and the strength to make decisions and pressure other constitutional bodies. Placed at the summit of a parliamentary regime, the head of state, as tradition expects, appoints the Prime Minister (Article 8) and, conjointly with the Prime Minister, appoints Ministers. The head of state can address messages to both Houses but, in conformity with 'republican tradition', cannot speak direct to parliamentarians from within the chamber. He or she may dissolve the National Assembly, and appoints three members of the Constitutional Council, including its president. To these powers belonging specifically to the President are added those shared with the Prime Minister and government, in particular the signing of regulations and decrees, appointments to various civilian and military posts as well as all measures decided in the Council of Ministers. There are no surprises hidden in this brief list of the principal powers accorded by the constitution: they descend in a direct line from the parliamentary tradition of the nineteenth century.

But added to this first list are several prerogative powers not often awarded to a head of state under a classic parliamentary regime. Under Article 11 the President can call a referendum on proposition of the government or the two assemblies. On the other hand, only the President can avoid a referendum on the reform of the

Table 4.3 Presidents of France, 1958–95

<i>Election</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>President</i>	<i>Party support</i>
1	1958	C. de Gaulle	Gaullists, centrists
2	1965	C. de Gaulle	Gaullists, centrists
3	1969	G. Pompidou	Gaullists, centrists
4	1974	V. Giscard	RPR, UDF
5	1981	F. Mitterrand	PS, PCF
6	1988	F. Mitterrand	PS
7	1995	J. Chirac	RPR, UDF

constitution by deciding to submit it to the two assemblies meeting in congress. Only the President can use Article 16. If there arises a serious and immediate threat to ‘the institutions of the Republic, the independence of the nation, the integrity of its territory or the fulfilment of its international obligations’, and if there is an interruption in the regular functioning of the constitutional public authorities, Article 16 gives the President full powers and makes him a temporary ‘legal dictator’. In the light of this extraordinary provision, without parallel in other Western constitutions, the powers in Article 15 (the President of the Republic is head of the armed forces) and in Article 52 (the President of the Republic negotiates and ratifies treaties) are almost a relief. Like the President of the United States, the President of the French Republic is all-powerful in the ordering of peace and war, of weapons and diplomacy.

The 1958 constitution is thus ambiguous or, rather, ambivalent in its terms. It leaves ample margin of manoeuvre to politicians (who are not deprived of something to bicker over) and interpreters (who are not deprived of something to expound upon). In addition this baroque structure is crowned by Article 5, which solemnly opens Section II, devoted to the powers of the President of the Republic. This provision, which ought in principle to clarify and underpin the group of technical provisions that follow, has with experience provided an ‘obscure clarity’. It has unleashed political passions and given rise to a thousand and one interpretations. ‘The President of the Republic’, proclaims the article, ‘endeavours to ensure respect for the constitution. He provides, by his arbitration, for the regular functioning of the public authorities as well as the continuity of the State. He is the guarantor of the independence of the nation, of the integrity of its territory, of respect for Community agreements and treaties.’ There have been endless quarrels over the semantics among politicians, legal experts and political scientists about the word ‘arbiter’. Some people, referring to legal tradition or sport, insist on the *neutrality* inherent in the function of arbitration. Others, especially de Gaulle’s supporters, appeal to etymology and invoked the Latin word *arbitrium*, which implies the power to decide in an autonomous manner (as in the expression *libre arbitre*, free will). But, in the end (in the absence of a *real* constitutional referee), the meaning of Article 5 was decided and imposed by the holder of the post, in particular by the first of them, General de Gaulle. The definition

Table 4.4 Governments of France, 1958–95

<i>Legislature</i>			
<i>No.</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Prime Minister</i>	<i>Party composition</i>
1	1958	C. de Gaulle	Gaullists, centrists
	1959	M. Debré	Gaullists, centrists
2	1962	G. Pompidou	Gaullists, centrists
3	1967	G. Pompidou	Gaullists, centrists
4	1968	M. Couve de Murville	Gaullists, centrists
	1969	J. Chaban-Delmas	Gaullists, centrists
	1972	P. Messmer	Gaullists, centrists
5	1973	P. Messmer	Gaullists, UDF
	1974	J. Chirac	RPR, UDF
	1976	R. Barre	RPR, UDF
6	1978	R. Barre	RPR, UDF
7	1981	P. Mauroy	PS, PCF
	1984	L. Fabius	PS
8	1986	J. Chirac	RPR, UDF
9	1988	M. Rocard	PS
	1991	E. Cresson	PS
	1992	P. Bérégovoy	PS
10	1993	E. Balladur	RPR, UDF
11	1995	A. Juppé	RPR, UDF

of presidential power results as much from the way it is exercised as from the constitutional text itself. It has been said that the constitution was tailored to fit de Gaulle. In certain respects this assertion cannot be denied (Article 16, for instance). But, essentially, the clothes have taken shape with use, as the experience of *cohabitation* from 1986 to 1988 and from 1993 to 1995, in a contrary way, demonstrated.

The practice: the use of the constitution

In contrast to the United Kingdom, whose constitution does not consist of a single, solemn document but of a multitude of texts, laws, traditions and ‘conventions’, France is very attached to the idea of a written, solemn, rigid constitution—so rigid that, if the constitution is unable to deal with some problem or other, there is a change in the regime and a new constitution is adopted that supposedly deals with the questions not resolved by the preceding version. However, this childhood illness of French constitutionalism has had a few periods of remission, of which the most important and most famous was the Third Republic.

The Gaullist interpretation and use of institutions are thus not novel. They demonstrate evidence of the capacity for institutions to be transformed by convention. From 1958 the impetus for change was in the hands of the head of state, as interpreter and actor, with the more or less tacit support of the conservative majority, and a left-wing opposition that was critical but ambushed by the hornets’ nest of Algeria. Thus

the Gaullist transformation of the constitution was made possible by a combination of favourable elements: exceptional circumstances, the complicity of government and majority, and the lack of any constitutional body to condemn violations or one-sided interpretations of the constitution. The rebellion of the majority in 1962, when the Algerian war was over, could have closed one period and one type of application of the constitution. The more or less implicit consensus was broken. But in submitting the constitutional and political issues to the people (the referendum on changing the constitution to introduce the election of the head of state by universal suffrage; the dissolution of the National Assembly and the elections of 11 and 18 November 1962) de Gaulle made the electors the judges of the legal case. By giving twice and massively the approval de Gaulle requested, the electors ratified past constitutional practices and the conventions which until that time had benefited from majority, but not unanimous, support. In July 1981 the No. 1 opponent of Gaullism, François Mitterrand, had scarcely been elected President when he ratified Gaullist presidentialism, adopting it for himself: 'The institutions were not made for me, but they suit me very well.' After Pompidou—which was hardly surprising—after Giscard d'Estaing—despite denouncing in 1967 'the sole exercise of power'—François Mitterrand, in his turn, put on the seven-league boots.

Who could resist such temptation? The head of state's powers are *indefinable* because literally *indefinite*, without finite limits. This thesis was demonstrated by its antithesis when the parliamentary right, led by Jacques Chirac, won the 1986 and 1993 parliamentary elections. The President suffered a serious loss of power. With the end of parliamentary support the powers of the head of state underwent a severe redesign process. As Mitterrand conceded in a televised interview on 2 March 1986: 'No one imposes conditions on the President of the Republic. He appoints whom he wants to. But he must do it in conformity with popular will.' He could theoretically submit a referendum to the people, but the government or parliament would have had first to propose it to him. He could summon parliament to an extraordinary session, but only at the request of the Prime Minister, or of the majority of National Assembly members. He could continue to nominate people to civil or military posts, but only with the Prime Minister's counter-signature. In short, the all-powerful monarch's unbounded domain was reduced in this new political context to the defined space which the constitution assigns explicitly to the President without imposing special conditions, i.e. the right of dissolution, the right to nominate three members of the Constitutional Council, and especially Article 16, the formidable prerogative which stops a responsible government reducing the President's military and diplomatic prerogatives to purely formal powers. This last area was the only issue on which the Chirac government did not systematically keep the President at a distance (in other areas he increased the number of Cabinet meetings chaired by the Prime Minister which the President did not attend, and restricted the minutes of meetings, which have to be sent to the President, to their essential points). The experiment of *cohabitation* was particularly fascinating on this issue, with its inextricable mixture

of politics and constitutional rules, and in the shrewd manipulation of symbolic powers and law.

The wide range of powers accorded by the constitution and, more important, those acquired by convention at the expense of other constitutional authorities, require the President to possess some means of exercising his choice and imposing his decisions. The outcome is the result of compromise. On one hand, the government instituted by the constitution has not ‘contours’, but the President can stamp his mark on it by selecting Ministers and the Prime Minister. On the other hand, the Prime Minister is surrounded by a team of faithful advisers, responsible for following up activities in the principal policy sectors, particularly issues in the presidential domain, whose day-to-day management is, moreover, the responsibility of Ministries. This system is potentially conflictual, even explosive, because it multiplies the centres of decision-making and influence: the President, his or her advisers, the Prime Minister and his or her *cabinet*, and the Ministers. Indeed, conflicts have not been lacking, but they have mostly been confined to the limited circle of decision-makers and have only occasionally boiled over into the media. It must be said that de Gaulle imposed from the outset a discipline and rigour the Fourth Republic had forgotten: conflicts are now regulated in the quiet of antechambers, or resolved by the departure of the dissatisfied or ‘dissident’ elements.

The presidential staff

The President exerts his influence and prepares himself for decision-taking through standing and *ad hoc* councils, and with the help of their advisers within the President’s general secretariat and the President’s *cabinet*.

The councils held at the Elysée (the President’s headquarters), chaired by the head of state or a close collaborator, do not have equal importance. Some councils draft policy, decide general directions or take decisions, e.g. the Defence Council, which establishes defence policy and the overall budgets for the armed forces and examines the impact of international events on strategic and military decisions. In contrast, other councils are set up as specific, provisional responses to some problem stirring public opinion. Finally, Presidents can at will set up close councils on subjects of their choice to discuss a question they think crucial, settle a dispute between members of the government or examine some topical problem requiring close co-ordination between the Elysée, the Matignon (the Prime Minister’s headquarters) and the most important Ministries. For example, in August 1990 François Mitterrand held several close councils to examine the Gulf conflict. But for most of the time, councils have less dramatic, more prosaic objectives. In policy areas where the President wishes to intervene directly they are the ultimate restricted meetings before the Council of Ministers meets. This council, chaired by the President, is neither a place for debate nor a confrontation but simply a body for political legitimization of measures settled beforehand or elsewhere. Thus there is, *de facto*, a hierarchy which lets Presidents

impose their point of view, or that of their advisers. But this hierarchy of decision centres depends on the voluntary 'compliance' of the Prime Minister. When this political agreement ceases, as was the case in 1986–8 and 1993–5, the close councils evaporate. The only ones then remaining are those explicitly specified in Article 15 of the constitution (Higher Councils and Committees of National Defence).

The President's general secretariat at the Elysée is the presidential decision-making centre. It comprises a small group of senior civil servants (between twenty and thirty), who are mostly members of the elite groups educated in the prestigious administrative schools. Secretariat members specialize in the activities of one policy sector so that they can keep the President informed, follow up issues in that sector and draw the head of state's attention to potential problems or desirable initiatives. The secretariat as a whole is placed under the direction of the secretary-general, whose function goes well beyond that of administrative co-ordination. The secretary-general is the closest collaborator of the President (the only one to meet the President daily), may represent the President in councils, and constitutes simultaneously a protective screen and an essential intermediary. This official is given delicate, discreet tasks and often plays a pivotal role in negotiations during the setting up of a new government. In delicate periods like those of *cohabitation* this role becomes crucial. In recognition of the influence and importance of the function, holders of the post have always been people of outstanding ability, entirely devoted to the head of state and of sphinx-like discretion. They have generally gone on to hold top posts, e.g. Bernard Tricot and Burin des Roziers under de Gaulle, Michel Jobert under Pompidou, Pierre Brossolette and Jean-François Poncet under Giscard, Pierre Bérégoovoy under Mitterrand.

The President's general secretariat works closely with the government's general secretariat. More loosely attached to the Elysée general secretariat is the President's *cabinet*. This *cabinet* consists of a few advisers charged with 'following' the political aspects of a particular policy sector, whether in the 'presidential domain' in the sense defined earlier, i.e. the constitutional domain, narrowly defined (diplomacy, defence), the 'reserved' domain (African questions), or on issues judged to be fundamental (finance, industry, environment) or of special concern to the President of the day.

Is this Elysian office the real government of France? Or is it rather a sort of parallel structure which 'shadows' the official government structure? In fact, it is neither: the Elysée machinery seems more an instrument for drafting and following up the head of state's orders, which, essentially, settle the broad lines of policy. It serves too, when necessary, as a supreme body for regulating conflicts that are particularly deep or important.

The government: the men of the majority

The Fifth Republic has experienced coalition government, dominant-party government and even several years of *cohabitation*. It could be said, therefore,

that all facets of the complex relationship between President, government and parliament have been explored. But one fact is constant and bears no exception: the government is always the expression of the majority in the National Assembly, an absolute majority from 1958, and—a phenomenon without precedent in the Fifth Republic—a relative majority from 1988 to 1991. The governmental structure, from this point of view, is much nearer the parliamentary than the presidential model, where the President always chooses the Ministers, whatever the majority within the legislative chambers. This formative principle of government under the Fifth Republic was hidden by the head of state's broad margin for manoeuvre in the choice of Ministers and, especially, of the Prime Minister, when supported by a faithful majority. People tended to assume the head of state had total freedom. In practice, during *cohabitation*, the President can hardly do other than ratify the Prime Minister's choice, though he can exercise a veto—but only with discretion—over inappropriate nominations. In 'normal' times the President can propose, even impose, Ministers to whom the Prime Minister is hostile.

What is the Prime Minister, therefore? Second-in-command? Chief of staff? The king's valet? On this issue, too, judgement must be qualified. Certainly the Prime Minister is the President's man or woman. Certainly the Prime Minister is subordinate to the head of state. But this relative dependence does not exclude, within the secrecy of committee meetings and offices, harsh discussion, different evaluations and even quarrels. Moreover, even when there is no dispute over principles the means of applying them remain an area of often considerable latitude in the hands of the Prime Minister and government. The Prime Minister's leeway is reinforced by the administration's ability to issue procedural decisions and interpretative circulars and to commit more funding or less. In short, the vision of a Prime Minister reduced to implementing more or less passively orders from the Elysée does not stand up to analysis. It gives too much weight to formal hierarchies and legal provisions, and completely neglects the strategy of the actors, their capacity to create autonomous space and to influence, bluff, evade. It neglects the complex meanderings of decision-making and, especially, the implementation process. It forgets the networks and alliances which can form between members of the President's and Prime Minister's *cabinets* and, even more likely, the frequent compromises that emerge from positions which at the outset were antagonistic. Without denying the President's uncontested superiority—to state the contrary would be to go against well-established facts—the role of Prime Minister and the members of the government should not be underestimated.

The Prime Minister is aided in his or her task by two institutions—one administrative, one political—that make powerful engines driving the governmental machine. The first is the General Secretariat of the Government (SGG), created in 1935 to co-ordinate government activity under the Prime Minister's authority. The Secretary General of the Government is traditionally a member of the Council of

State, benefiting from a continuity that enables him or her to play the role of ‘memory’ or ‘pivot’ of governmental action. It is a prestigious post of the first importance even though it does not attract great media attention. On its holder depend good co-ordination of the government’s legislative activity (Bills and decrees) and the smooth running of procedures (following up decisions taken in the Council of Ministers—which the Secretary General attends), collecting ministerial counter-signatures, adopting measures of enforcement, drafting the government’s submissions should the Constitutional Council request the annulment of legislative proposals. This structure of quite modest size (about 100 people) is crucial, for it is by it and thanks to it that government projects take a legal form. It guarantees their coherence, continuity and good order.

The Prime Minister’s *cabinet* is the political counterpart of this administrative machine. Here the preoccupation with continuity, legal correctness and smooth administration gives way to politics, speed and innovation. The *cabinet* officially comprises only about twenty members, under the authority of a cabinet director, assisted by deputy directors, specialist advisers and officials assigned to specified issues. The *cabinet* chief concentrates especially on the day’s political issues and ‘manages’ the Prime Minister’s political engagements. This official structure is swollen by the addition of ‘unofficial’ and ‘clandestine’ advisers, considerably increasing the number of staff. The entourage of Jacques Chaban-Delmas in 1970–2, for instance, was estimated at 200 people! The members of the Prime Minister’s *cabinet* come generally from the top civil service and especially from the *grands corps*. Other people slip in from time to time: a few academics, some members of the Prime Minister’s political team or local entourage. (Pierre Mauroy’s *cabinet* contained many people from northern regions.) The recruitment principle is simple: competence and trust (or at least a strong recommendation). Generally fairly young (thirty to forty-five years old), *cabinet* members are assigned a policy sector which they ‘cover’ on behalf of the Prime Minister, whom they inform, advise and perhaps represent in interministerial meetings. Specialist advisers and officials are the Prime Minister’s ‘functional equivalents’, in permanent contact with their opposite numbers in the Elysée and the Ministries in ‘their’ sector. Nothing is decided at a Ministry unless they have been informed and have given the green light. The functions of the members of the Prime Minister’s *cabinet* are extremely important and tend to be a staging post for those destined for high office in the public service, banking, industry and, of course, politics.

These structures of political and legislative co-ordination and organization are required for a collegiate government that is simultaneously a political body and the top of the administrative structure. Though Ministers are responsible for the policy sectors assigned to them, they have only limited autonomy under the Fifth Republic, unlike their counterparts in, for example, Germany or Italy. The Prime Minister of the Fifth Republic is not simply *primus inter pares*. He or she can impose decisions, take strong measures and force a recalcitrant Minister to submit or to resign. Good

co-ordination is necessary because a government is never, despite appearances, a united and homogeneous whole. Everything, on the contrary, encourages dispute, rivalry and competition—party or intra-party divisions, personality clashes, demarcation disputes, quite apart from the fierce struggle to obtain the maximum personnel and financial resources. The conflict is more than personal, it is structural. By the discipline they impose, the decisions they make and the method they practice Prime Ministers must ensure a cohesion made even more problematical by one of the methods frequently used to keep allies/adversaries quiet: giving them a ministerial portfolio. External peace is then paid for in conflicts that are no less fierce just because they are internal.

Each Minister is both a political leader and the head of an administration. Under the Fifth Republic a double depoliticization of the ministerial task was attempted: first by making the ministerial function incompatible with a parliamentary mandate and then by recruiting ‘experts’ from the senior civil service to numerous ministerial portfolios. Though not a total failure, these attempts have been far from yielding the hoped-for results. Although Ministers resign from parliament and are replaced by their substitutes, they have become, *de facto*, ‘super-parliamentarians’, possessing more abundant resources for their local electoral clientele than other parliamentarians. As for the experts, so numerous that on average they represent 30 per cent of the ministerial team, they rapidly converted themselves into politicians. It was thus demonstrated, *a posteriori*, that running a Ministry cannot be reduced to simple technico-administrative management.

On European issues, co-ordination of French decisions in Brussels is assured, under the Prime Minister’s authority, by a lightweight body attached to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the General Secretariat of Inter-ministries Committee for European Economic Co-operation (SGCI). Created initially to adapt central structures to the needs of economic co-operation within the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the SGCI plays a vital role in negotiations with the European Union and, according to general opinion (in France, but also abroad), has proved itself an effective instrument, allowing French negotiators to speak with a single voice to briefs previously settled in Paris.

At the summit of this strongly hierarchical structure is the Council of Ministers. Chaired by the head of state, it meets every Wednesday and takes the final decisions on Bills, decrees and individual appointments. Under the Fifth Republic it has superseded the Cabinet Council (chaired by the President of the Council—the Prime Minister—under the Fourth), except during the period of *cohabitation*, when Jacques Chirac increased the number of Cabinet meetings in order to oust the head of state. Important politically and symbolically, the Council of Ministers is nevertheless a formality. Debate or discussion is rare and takes place only with the agreement or at the request of the President. It is more a ‘recording studio’ than a place for collective work and exchanges.

The constitution of the Fifth Republic leaves us in no doubt: France is a ‘single and indivisible republic’. However, political reality is more complex than political comment or legal provision would lead people to believe. Behind the façade of unity fragmentation can be glimpsed. Behind centralization a multiplicity of centres of decision-making and influence appear. Behind the centre-periphery confrontation collaboration can be discerned.

The republic: single and fragmented

Although the statutes of all local authorities are identical and regulations are supposed to apply everywhere, analysis of practical outcomes reveals extraordinary diversity, a jungle of special institutions and *ad hoc* rules that challenge Cartesian rationality. This situation stems first of all from the attitude of local authorities to the powers that all in principle enjoy, which in a way are their ‘capital’. Some local authorities let their ‘inheritance’ lie fallow, i.e. they do not use them; others use their powers strictly and carefully; yet others adopt an ‘entrepreneurial’ strategy, exploiting to the maximum the legal, technical and financial advantages they enjoy; finally, some authorities promote ‘risky’ policies on the edge of legality, opening the way to new legal interpretations or taking the chance of being penalized by the central authorities.

To this first—inescapable—differentiation caused by variations in the use of identical legal resources must be added the potential for local governments to multiply *à la carte* the bodies through which they intervene or collaborate in providing local services. Thus there exist 12,000 joint bodies providing a single service, 2,000 joint bodies providing more than one service, 150 districts (associations of towns) and nine metropolitan associations of towns, no two of which resemble each other exactly in powers, resources, organization or mode of operation. In addition there are thousands of mixed public-private companies (which are often ‘mixed’ in name only!), offices (for cultural activities, low-rent housing, etc.) and public bodies whose number and scope are not known with any certainty.

In fact the local authorities—towns, counties and regions—form only the visible tip of the iceberg or, to use a financial metaphor, are ‘holding companies’ controlling all manner of subsidiaries. But there is no ‘consolidated balance sheet’ which might give a realistic, detailed view of this local galaxy. Looked at in another way, central government, in order to satisfy myths and symbols, has continued the absurd practice of issuing the same regulations for the counties of Lozère and the Hauts-de-Seine, the towns of Toulouse and Colombey-les-deux-Eglises, and the regions of Rhône-Alpes and Limousin. But the reality and the constraints of facts upset these neat arrangements, whose origins can be found in the Jacobin conviction that centralization and uniformity go together.

Centre-periphery: mutual counterbalance and control

To use a well-known metaphor, there is interdependence, and even, at the limit, osmosis between centre and periphery. The first evidence of this interpenetration of 'central' and 'local' is the composition of political personnel. Almost all national politicians, members of parliament and Ministers, hold a local political mandate (sometimes two) and, in addition, exercise numerous associated functions (chairing joint boards, districts and many local organizations, such as mixed companies and local public bodies). In France, as in many other countries, political careers often start at the local level. But only in France is there an almost systematic practice of accumulating elected offices. More than 90 per cent of members of parliament have at least one local mandate. In 1990 all mayors of towns with at least 80,000 inhabitants had a national mandate. The Act of December 1985 which limited accumulation to two mandates put a brake on the pathological 'capital accumulation' of politicians who were simultaneously member of parliament, mayor, councillor of a county or region and sometimes also a member of the European Parliament. The remaining accumulation (two or three mandates) is more practicable and functional.

This 'personal union' has multiple consequences, both negative and positive. The high parliamentary absenteeism rate noted above can be explained in part by the constraints of accumulation. The real power of veto, or at least strong potential for lobbying parliament on local problems, should also be noted, witness, the inability of successive governments—including those of de Gaulle in all his power—to rationalize the patchwork quilt of towns; the defeat of the referendum on a regionalization proposal in 1969; the burying of several innovative reports; and the capacity of local authorities to extract central government resources (almost 200 billion francs a year in 1990) and to mint money from their contribution to policies decided by central government. The positive contribution from this confusion of roles is the benefit local experience brings to the legislator, and the awareness of local needs introduced into central government decision-making. In other words, the accumulation of offices and the local loyalties of national politicians may provide an antidote to centralization, well described by Pierre Grémion as 'tamed Jacobinism'.

A second factor of interdependence stems from the institutionalization of local factors in national political and constitutional life. This element often goes unremarked in France, whereas no one ever fails to mention the guaranteed representation of states by the upper House in a federal system. The institutional mechanisms put in place or preserved by the Fifth Republic give local authorities much more influence than they have in some other systems characterized as 'regionalized' or decentralized.

The essential device for effecting the penetration of central power by local forces is the Senate, which can still be described, as under the Third Republic, as the 'Grand Council of the Towns of France'. In a system centralized in principle, the Senate constitutes in practice the equivalent of a federal senate. It derives its

legitimacy not from the people but from the local authorities, through the local politicians and 'Grand Electors' who elect it. It has no constitutional power of veto over edicts it considers contrary to the local interest but, *de facto*, has a real conventional power of veto. It would be a very daring government that tried to impose substantial reforms on local government against the advice of the Senate. It would be to risk a war of attrition and, if parliament finally won, to become bogged down. Since the failure of the 1969 referendum no one has been prepared to appeal directly to the people over senators' heads. The formula often used about the American constitution applies here too: the 'advice and consent' of the Senate is necessary if any reform affecting local authorities is to pass. The approximately 500,000 local government councillors are more than just one of the most powerful lobbies in the country; in contrast to many pressure groups, the local tax lobby is 'within the walls'. It was fashionable in the 1960s to denounce the 'colonization of the provinces', a view of events that had some truth. But, in doing so, people omitted to analyse a parallel phenomenon, less visible, more hidden by political rhetoric, the conquest of the centre by the periphery, a healthy and necessary rebalancing of the Jacobin (and inappropriate) legal and financial structures (Page and Goldsmith 1987).

Today, more than ever, local authorities constitute a fundamental element of the political system: not only are their existence and autonomy guaranteed by the constitution (the principle of being 'freely administered', Article 72) and by several legal interpretations of the Constitutional Council since 1982, but they have a decisive influence at the heart of the republic. National elites are also local elites. The hierarchy of their values is not always that proclaimed by grand State principles, as witness the benevolent attention paid to local authorities, and the absenteeism of parliamentarians who are more interested in their county or town hall. The financial and economic weight of local government is growing; its budget now represents 45 per cent of government expenditure (with the enormous advantage of supporting only a third of the salary burden) and their capital investment represents three-quarters of all public civil investment. In sum, everything combines to make them a key part of the system—the basic law, the constitutional 'conventions', the influence of their elites, their financial weight and their crucial importance to the implementation of public policies (Mény 1992).

CONTINUITY AND CHANGE

As emphasized at the beginning of the chapter, the Fifth Republic has shown evidence of exceptional longevity and a sizeable capacity for adaptation and flexibility. This condition is explained by the continuing support of the Gaullist institutions by the general public, and by the gradual adherence to them of those political and intellectual elites that were initially hostile. Although in the 1960s plans for a Sixth Republic burgeoned in parliament and the media, the initiatives gradually dried up in the

1970s and no longer appear except as a sort of ‘ritual obligation’ on the part of the left-wing opposition. The Common Programme of the left still suggested manifold changes, putting forward numerous measures to reduce ‘presidentialism’ in favour of a return to the more classical canons of parliamentarianism. The arrival of the left in power had two consequences: it legitimized a constitution that had at last allowed an alternation of governments, and explicitly ratified the unconditional rallying of the left to the Gaullist institutions.

The constitution has nevertheless undergone profound evolution during the thirty-five years of its existence: first, *conventions* with the Gaullist interpretations and practice and the experiences of *cohabitation* in 1986–8 and 1993–5; second, formal amendment in 1962, 1974 and 1995. The 1962 reform was radical and controversial, substituting presidential election by universal suffrage for the oligarchical method conceived in 1958 that gave power to the *notables* (the electoral college of 80,000 ‘Grand Electors’). The 1974 reform of the rules of appeal to the Constitutional Council was described with contempt as a ‘mini-reform’ but was very important for institutional development, transforming the Constitutional Council into a quasi-constitutional court. This ‘incremental’ change is worth pausing over, for it has been and remains fundamental, as much for the intellectual, ideological ‘revolution’ it has brought about as for the running of the system. French legal-political thought had been dominated by a phobia about ‘government by judges’, and by the assertion of the principle of the sovereignty of parliament and the law.

There was supposed to be no threat or check to the sovereignty of law. The law, the expression of the general will in revolutionary and then republican dogma, was by definition perfect and indisputable. This idealized vision started to be questioned during the inter-war period, when anyone could see that ‘the sovereign was captive’. The sovereignty of the people meant, in practice, the capricious, disorderly sovereignty of members of parliament. The law itself fell from its pedestal because it was mostly supplanted by ‘decree laws’, in the absence of a parliamentary majority able to forge ‘the expression of the general will’.

Certainly the object in 1958 was not to introduce control by constitution in the way that was being tried in the new Italian and West German democracies. Even less was it to import constitutional checks into a judicial system that would not lend itself well to the American tradition of control by constitution. The intention of the constitution-makers in 1958 was more specialized and precise: to safeguard the integrity of the institutional machinery of the Fifth Republic by hindering drastic revision. So a specialist body was set up to verify, first, that framework laws and regulations did not betray either the letter or the spirit of the fundamental law and, second, that parliament did not cross over into the regulatory domain, escaping from its own orbit as defined by Article 34. The Constitutional Council was set up as the guardian of the temple or, to put it bluntly, the executive’s ‘watch dog’, the opposition’s term. Only the President of the Assembly on one side, and the Prime

Minister and the head of state on the other, had the power to refer to the council a law they thought might not conform to the constitution. The Constitutional Council, not very active, and dependent on the executive, was considered a 'rump' judge, arousing indifference at best; otherwise, contempt.

The internal evolution of the Constitutional Council was accomplished in small steps, but the last stage had the effect of a thunderclap on the political class. Let us recall the facts briefly. Until the end of the 1960s constitutional judges confined themselves to dealing with norms (organic laws, ordinary laws, Assembly regulations, amendments) adopted or discussed by parliament and their effect on the constitution as narrowly interpreted, that is, as ninety-two Articles of a technical character which, essentially, organized the 'code of behaviour' of the public authorities. In contrast, the preamble which precedes the articles, referring to the 1789 Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen as well as to the preamble to the 1946 constitution ('The economic and social rights particularly relevant to our times') appeared to be a noble gesture, a declaration whose beauty and grandeur were rivalled only by their uselessness.

The Constitutional Council did not change the order of things at one stroke. To begin with, as if only in passing, it noted the existence of the preamble. Hardly anyone paid much attention. But some months later, in 1971, the government realized with horror that the preamble was now a crucial element of the constitution. The Constitutional Council from then on considered the preamble to constitute an integral part of the constitution and regarded it as part of its role to verify that laws conformed to that collection of references whose character is more politico-philosophical than strictly juridical.

This unexpected blow might have remained merely 'sword-play' if the procedures for referring cases to the council had stayed unchanged. Given the competent authorities, referral would probably have been rare, occurring only in exceptional cases, where one of the chambers disagreed with the government and its majority pressured its president to appeal to the council. The contribution of Valéry Giscard d'Estaing was to give the internal evolution of the council the scope it merited. Among numerous measures envisaged as creating a sort of 'opposition's charter' he proposed granting the right of referral to the council to sixty parliamentarians. By definition those parliamentarians would belong solely to the opposition, since it is difficult to imagine the majority who had voted for a law inviting the censure of a judge! The opposition of the day jeered at the proposal and refused to vote for this mini-reform of the constitution, not realizing that the modification would have consequences comparable to those set in train by the election of the President by universal suffrage. The Constitutional Council had become in its own way the arbiter, the guarantor of the institutions and, even more, of common values.

The combination of these internal and external transformations has set up a dynamic greeted with enthusiasm by some and with alarm by others. Whatever one's

opinion of the development, several decisive factors have emerged over the last fifteen or so years.

First, the Constitutional Council has continued to extend its scope, not only by invoking the 'fundamental principles recognized by the laws of the republic' and referring to principles laid down in the 1789 declaration or in the 1946 preamble but also by revealing general principles which had not been explicitly stated. The Constitutional Council is indisputably a creative judge.

Second, the council has widened its scope by bringing under its control the examination of old constitutional norms when they are modified by new laws. However, some regret its refusal to examine 'exceptional legislation' (the state of emergency arising from a 1955 Act) at the time of the extension of the state of emergency in New Caledonia (1985).

Third, in dealing with legislative norms which are so imprecise that the executive could use them in an abusive or overzealous way, the council has adapted the technique of 'declaration of conformity, with conditions'. It lays down the conditions of application or interpretation that would enable the law to be accepted as conforming to the constitution.

Finally, 'fear of the police being the beginning of good behaviour', the council's influence is not only negative, applied after the law has been adopted. Its body of jurisprudence, and the principles it has enunciated and applied, now constitute a 'bible' that the executive and parliament must respect if they are not to risk judicial censure.

Further reforms are under discussion. The numerous criticisms levelled at the socialist government in the early 1990s encouraged Mitterrand to distract attention by suggesting reform of the constitution, a 'tidying-up'. The sharpest criticism concerned the Council of Magistracy (the magistrates' governing body) in particular, at a time of corruption scandals, because of its dependence on executive power, and the High Court of Justice, ill suited to examine ministerial responsibility in a manner which reassured people (over the issue of contaminated blood). Mitterrand therefore decided to ask an *ad hoc* committee of experts (legal experts and political scientists with a variety of political allegiances) to draw up proposals for revising the constitution. The committee's report of February 1993 did not suggest radical reform but made a host of proposals for improving the way the institutions functioned. Two Bills deposited by Pierre Bérégovoy were hastily presented to parliament before the March 1993 elections, but the incoming right-wing government preserved only two elements, reform of the Council of the Magistracy and of the High Court of Justice. These reforms would modify nothing fundamental, just as those connected with the ratification of the Maastricht Treaty did not upset the institutional balance. Likewise the 1995 reforms enlarged both the President's power to call referendums and the parliament's powers by extending its session.

The fundamental mainspring of the Fifth Republic, despite the modifications, the party-political contingencies and the potential for *cohabitation*, remains the central

position occupied by the executive—a presidential executive in ‘normal’ times, a mixed executive in a period of *cohabitation*. Assisted by a powerful and prestigious bureaucratic elite, the executive of the Fifth Republic is at the heart of the political system, an arrangement that brings with it a certain level of ‘democratic deficit’. Efficiency, governmental solidarity, concentration of power and the authority of the leader take priority over pluralism, debate and a system of checks and balances. But few voices are raised to question seriously the fundamentals of a system that has the support and approval of the elites as well as of popular opinion as a whole.

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Italy

A democratic regime under reform

Gianfranco Pasquino

At the beginning of the 1990s the Italian political system entered a phase of turbulent transition. All the factors conducive to long-lasting underlying political stability, often close to immobilism, have been challenged (Mershon and Pasquino 1994). The Italian constitution, up to recent times excessively revered in word, though often violated in deed, has come under heavy criticism. A general consensus has largely been achieved on the general need of profound revisions, though not on which revisions and not on the procedures leading to them (Gilbert 1994).

Italian parties, the all-time dominant actors of Italian politics, have suddenly declined with reference to their ability to channel the votes. New political movements, groups and actors have emerged. Up to then organized by and within its parties, Italian society has started requesting some freedom of movement. It has become more autonomous, demanding, fragmented, and in several instances more particularistic and corporatized. Governmental coalitions blocked around the centre, mainly represented by the Christian Democrats, have lost their staying power after, and perhaps because of, the collapse of the Berlin Wall (Pasquino and McCarthy 1993). The transformation of the Italian Communist Party into the Democratic Party of the Left has introduced an additional element of mobility (Hellman 1992; Ignazi 1992). Anti-communism can no longer play the role of watershed between acceptable and unacceptable governmental partners and actors. Paradoxically, however, it may still play a role in conditioning electoral behaviour. The classic territorial North/South cleavage, nourished by some other grievances, has given birth to and has consolidated a rather powerful anti-system challenger: the Northern League (Diamanti 1993).

Italian institutions, parties, coalition governments, society, all appear on the verge of change. The Italian political system, a democratic republic which has lasted forty-five years, has probably come to the end of its historical trajectory amid a climate of widespread corruption. Nevertheless, several of the socio-economic and political forces aiming at preserving some, or much, of their considerable past power remain strong enough. Their political strength as well as some preoccupations for an unknown future are making rather difficult the transition to a different constitution, to another

republic, to a renewed political system. The outcome is still uncertain. In order to understand the past and its weight and to predict, within limits, the future, it is indispensable to analyse in depth the various components of the political system and their dynamics.

THE ELECTORAL SYSTEM

Together with the parties, the most criticized component of the political system of what I will call the First Italian Republic has been the proportional electoral system (for the best short description and evaluation see Wertman 1977). To be more precise, one ought to speak of electoral systems in the plural. There were, in fact, four different electoral systems being utilized for the election, respectively, of the Chamber of Deputies, the Senate, the councils of municipalities having up to 5,000 inhabitants, and the councils of municipalities having more than 5,000 inhabitants. They have all been reformed because, and in the aftermath, of very significant popular referendums held in April 1993.

Roughly, the electoral systems for the Chamber of Deputies and for the Senate were proportional systems differing in few, though important, clauses and details. The electoral system for the councils of municipalities having less than 5,000 inhabitants was a majority system. The party or coalition receiving a plurality of votes, would get four-fifths of the seats. The remaining seats were attributed to the party or list placed second. The electoral system for councils of municipalities having more than 5,000 inhabitants was a proportional system.

In 1993 these two systems were significantly reformed. In municipalities having less than 15,000 inhabitants the party, coalition or list winning more votes will get two-thirds of the seats. Its head of the list will automatically become mayor. The remaining one-third of seats will be distributed proportionally to the other parties, coalitions or lists. In municipalities having more than 15,000 inhabitants a majority system is utilized. It hinges on the direct election of the mayor, to be accomplished through a run-off. The voter has two ballots: one for the mayor, the other for the party, coalition or list. A candidate becomes mayor if he/she gets 50 per cent plus one of the vote. The seats in the city council will be allocated proportionally to the votes obtained by the various parties, coalitions, lists. Otherwise, the two best placed candidates will face each other in a run-off election to be held fifteen days later. The candidate receiving more votes, which, obviously, in a two-candidate race will amount to the absolute majority, is elected mayor. The party or coalition supporting the mayor will be allocated 60 per cent of the seats on the city council. The remaining seats will be distributed proportionally to the other parties.

These systems have already been applied in the election of several mayors of important cities: Turin, Milan, Venice, Trieste, Genoa, Rome, Naples, Palermo. They have produced a reshuffling of the parties, the collapse of the centre, a bipolar

confrontation. Moreover, they have put an end to the incessant negotiations among party secretaries and created substantially stable local governments.

Several scholars and many politicians have considered the proportional electoral system responsible for the fragmentation of the party system, especially in large cities and in the House of Deputies, and for ungovernability. So much so that a reform of the House electoral system was passed back in 1953. The law would have given parties which had previously declared their willingness to join a coalition and had obtained 50 per cent plus one of the votes a bonus of two-thirds of the seats. Immediately dubbed a swindle by the left-wing opposition, the law was defeated by the voters, who did not provide governing parties with the absolute majority of votes. It was probably defeated also by the ability of socialist and communist scrutineers to have a larger than usual number of ballots declared void. In any case, it was immediately repealed. This event was very important. It doomed for years to come any inclination on the part of centrist parties to reform the electoral law in a less than proportional direction. Also, it shaped a sort of proportional mentality in the ranks of left-wing politicians and public opinion that equated PR with democracy *tout court*.

The electoral system for the Senate was technically a d'Hondt system with three peculiarities. First, 315 senators had to be elected in 238 constituencies. This meant that some constituencies elected more than one senator and few constituencies elected no senator at all. Second, single-member constituencies were regrouped within each of the twenty regions. The d'Hondt system operated, then, at the regional level. Third: if one senator got more than 65 per cent of the votes in his/ her constituency he/she was declared immediately elected. Neither his/her votes nor the votes received by all other candidates could be used for the allocation of seats at the regional level. The high percentage needed to obtain immediate election was reached in few extraordinary cases—indeed, in the 1987 and 1992 elections only once: in Trentino-Alto Adige by the candidate of the Sudtiroler Volkspartei, owing to the geographical concentration of the German-speaking minority. The way the law was formulated has facilitated the request of a referendum in order to repeal a specific clause and to make the Senate electoral system based three-quarters on single-member plurality constituencies and one-quarter proportional in each region, depending on the number of senators allotted to it.

The electoral system for the Chamber of Deputies, called Imperiali with the highest remainder, was a proportional system with some remarkable peculiarities. First of all, there were thirty-two constituencies varying in size according to the population. The very large ones, Rome-Latina-Viterbo-Frosinone and Milan-Pavia, elected more than fifty deputies. The majority of the constituencies were medium-size, electing between sixteen and thirty deputies. A few were relatively small constituencies, electing fewer than ten or so deputies.

Second, about 10 per cent of all seats were allocated to the various parties according to their highest remainder by pooling the votes not utilized to elect candidates in all

the constituencies, the above-mentioned remainder. This formula allowed small parties not to waste their votes. Third, two requirements had to be satisfied in order to obtain access to parliament. Each party or list had to poll at least 300,000 votes nationally and elect one deputy in one constituency, that is, it had to receive slightly more than 60,000 votes in that constituency.

Though it is true that the two clauses were not so demanding, still in the 1972 elections several parties were denied parliamentary representation precisely because these two clauses worked effectively. Not only did the Socialist Party of Proletarian Unity (PSIUP) disappear because it was unable to elect a single deputy in any constituency, even though nationally it had polled 645,000 votes, the left as whole, fragmented as it was into several minor groups, witnessed almost a million votes go without parliamentary representation. National parties were at more of a disadvantage than regional parties with a concentrated following.

Originally these two clauses were intended to prevent the fragmentation of the party system. When the Chamber of Deputies had 567 members and the electorate was around 30 million the clauses may have had some restraining effect. When, after 1963, the number of deputies was established at 630 and the electorate grew—it is now approaching 50 million—the barriers against party fragmentation appeared exceedingly low. In fact they have proved totally unable to prevent the fragmentation of the party system. After the April 1992 elections seventeen parliamentary groups were formed in the Chamber of Deputies.

Finally, Italian voters for the Chamber of Deputies could cast, should they wish, a preference vote for a candidate in the party list they had chosen. Up to 1991 the preference votes available to Italian voters were three or four according to the size of the constituency, that is, the number of deputies to be elected. Preference votes were intended as an instrument in the voters' hands to prevent party leaders practically designating the winning candidates. That outcome is inevitable when party lists are blocked. Unfortunately, in too many cases it appeared that preference votes had become an instrument in the hands of powerful clans of candidates, electoral machines, and external groups or lobbies, opening some space to political corruption. In other cases, unscrupulous politicians, belonging especially to the governing parties, practically bought preference votes, providing several types of resources in exchange: a recommendation, intervention with the local or national bureaucracy, a pension, a job, and so on. Moreover, several candidates, especially in the Christian Democratic Party, constructed joint electoral machines that would then be transformed into factions within their respective parties and weaken parliamentary discipline with seriously negative consequences even on the government's performance.

In June 1991 a national referendum was held on the modification of the preference vote and quickly acquired the nature of a popular pronouncement in favour of or against not simply the single preference vote but a new electoral law. It was largely interpreted as a pronouncement in favour of or against a revision of

the proportional representation system to make it less proportional and more majoritarian. Despite strong opposition, especially from the Socialist Party (PSI), which openly invited the voters not to go the polls (national referendums are void if the participation rate is less than 50 per cent), but also from most Christian Democrats and from the Northern League, 62.5 per cent of the voters decided to go to the polls. More than 90 per cent of them cast their ballot in favour of this minor revision, endowed with major political significance. The outcome was correctly interpreted as a manifestation of broad popular support for an incisive electoral reform. A major debate ensued, to be dealt with below in the section on institutional reforms, leading to the establishment of a Bicameral Committee on Institutional Reforms.

The Italian electoral system of proportional representation has been widely, but by no means unanimously, criticized for many of the same reasons usually levelled against PR generally. At best, it reflects the existing political pluralism. At worst, it encourages fragmentation.

Indeed, the left has suffered considerably from this specific problem. Twice the Socialist Party was weakened by a split. In 1947 it was the moderates who left the

Table 5.1 Elections to the Italian Chamber of Deputies 1946–94 (% of turnout)

Year	<i>Social</i>								
	<i>Communist</i>	<i>Socialist</i>	<i>Democrat</i>	<i>Republican</i>	<i>Christian</i>	<i>Liberal</i>	<i>Monarchist</i>	<i>Fascist</i>	
	PCI	PSI	PSD	PRI	DC	PLI	DN	MSI	
1946	18.9	20.7			35.2				
1948		31.0			48.5				
1953	22.6	12.7			40.1		6.9		
1958	22.7	14.2			42.4				
1963	25.3	13.8			38.3				
1968	26.9	14.5			39.1				
1972	27.2	14.7			38.8				
1976	34.4	9.6	3.4	3.1	38.7	1.3		6.1	
1979	30.4	9.8	3.8	3.0	38.3			5.3	
1983	29.9	11.4	4.1	5.1	32.9	2.8		6.8	
1987	26.6	14.3	3.0	3.7	34.3	2.1		5.9	
	<i>RC</i>	<i>PDS</i>	<i>PSI</i>	<i>PSD+PRI+PLI</i>		<i>DC</i>	<i>LN</i>		
1992	5.6	16.1	14.6	10.6		29.6	8.6	5.7	
	<i>RC</i>	<i>PDS</i>	<i>PSI</i>		<i>PS</i>	<i>PPI</i>	<i>LN</i>	<i>FI</i>	<i>AN</i>
1994	6.0	20.4	2.2		4.6	11.1	8.4	21.0	13.5

Notes Communist: PCI, Partito Comunista Italiano (Italian Communist Party); PDS, Partito Democratico della Sinistra (Democratic Party of the Left); DP Democrazia Proletaria (Proletarian Democracy); PdUP, Partito di Unità Proletaria (Party of Proletarian Unity); RC, Rifondazione Comunista (Communist Refoundation). Socialist: PSI, Partito Socialista Italiano (Italian Socialist Party); PSDI, Partito Socialdemocratico Italiano (Italian Social Democratic Party); PSIUP, Partito Socialista Italiano di Unità Proletaria (Italian Socialist Party of Proletarian Unity). Liberals: PRI, Partito Repubblicano Italiano (Italian Republican Party); PLI, Partito Liberale Italiano (Italian Liberal Party); PRad, Partito Radicale (Radicale Party); FI, Forza Italia (Up with Italy). Christians: DC, Democrazia Cristiana (Christian Democracy); PS, Patto Segni (Segni Pact); PPI, Partito Popolare Italiano (Italian Popular Party). Right: DN, Destra Nazionale (National Right); MSI, Movimento Sociale Italiano (Italian Social Movement); AN, Alleanza Nazionale (National Alliance). Regional. LN, Lega Nord (Northern League).

party and created the Social Democratic Party, opposed to any collaboration by the PSI with the Communist Party (PCI). In 1964 left-wing socialists created the PSIUP in opposition to the PSI alliance with the Christian Democrats (DC) on the centre-left. A subsequent merger between the PSI and the PSDI in 1966 led to a quick resumption of their former names and identities in 1969.

Also, the supposedly monolithic PCI was affected by two splits. The first took place in 1969 and led the dissenting group of 'il Manifesto' to create their own party organization, which fared badly at the polls in 1972. The second and most damaging one took place in February 1991 in the wake of the founding of the Democratic Party of the Left. Well prepared in advance, this ideological-organizational split led to the formation of Rifondazione Comunista.

Nothing comparable to all these splits materialized on the centre-right of the Italian political spectrum. In particular, the much more composite and multi-faceted DC succeeded in remaining united, its leaders, and voters, heeding in an extraordinarily disciplined manner the repeated appeals of the bishops for unity among Catholics. Only the neo-fascist party underwent a minor split in 1976, provoked and financed by moderate political and economic forces, with limited electoral consequences.

From the point of view of the left, then, PR has proved to be very damaging to its fortunes and cohesiveness, though this assessment is not widely shared. PR has also been criticized for making difficult any attempt to create a credible coalition to oppose the long-lasting sequence of more or less centrist governing coalitions.

Indeed, in its peculiar variant, Italian PR has fundamentally accommodated the spreading out of the political forces and has provided no incentive to aggregation. The most visible casualty of this serious drawback has been the possibility of rotation in governmental power at the national level.

In the light of these glaring defects, it is understandable that there should have been an extremely limited discussion of the different costs of seats for each party and of the issue of redistricting. Proportional critics of PR have underlined that the cost of each seat for parties polling between 2 per cent and 4 per cent of the votes is around 100,000 votes, as compared with 60,000–70,000 for parties polling more than 10 per cent of the votes, but to no avail. Some of them have also stressed the importance of redistricting. Not even when the single preference vote was introduced by the referendum could agreement be reached on how to redraw the boundaries of parliamentary constituencies.

Forty-five years and eleven general elections after its adoption, PR had allowed many groups to enter parliament, had created many vested interests and had produced many supporters. However, it had also caused a crisis of rejection, so much so that not only have the voters asked for its reform, but several party leaders and many parliamentarians have worked in favour of a significantly different electoral system.

Italian parties have been as much under criticism as PR. A lot of criticism is well justified, but much of it runs the risk of overlooking some positive contributions made by the parties to the construction and initial functioning of Italian democracy.

The Italian Republic of 1948 represented the first attempt to build mass democracy on the ashes of the fascist authoritarian regime. Having defeated fascism militarily, the resistance movement, especially active in the centre and the north of the country, faced the difficult task of erasing its vestiges and of creating viable new political organizations.

Most of the old political parties reappeared and a few new ones were created. On the whole, it has been remarked, the party system of 1945 strikingly resembled that of 1922. Thanks to proportional representation, in all likelihood necessary to consolidate the burgeoning democratic regime, the party system reflected all shades of Italian public opinion.

From right to left the first party system of the new republic was composed of the Neo-fascists, the monarchists, the Liberals, the Christian Democrats, the Republicans, the Social Democrats, the Socialists and the Communists. Minor groups, such as the Action Party and the Uomo Qualunque (Everyman's Party), made a brief appearance and then vanished. For about twenty years no significant change took place in the composition of the party system.

Table 5.2 Policy space of parties in Italy, 1984

Date	Communist	Radical	Socialist	Republican	Social				
					Democrat	Christian	Liberal	Right	
	DP-PdUP	PCI	PRad	PSI	PRI	PSDI	DC	PLI	MSI
1984	0.5	1.6	2.3	3.1	4.8	5.4	5.4	5.9	9.1

Note See Table 5.1 for the full party names.

Source F.Castles and P.Mair/Left-right political scales', *European Journal of Political Research*12(1984): 83–8.

Several changes materialized in the respective strength of the parties, in the overall electoral trends, and in the dynamics of coalition governments. In particular, the Christian Democrats were slowly eroded, the Socialists continued to decline, the Communists started their slow, though constant, growth, and minor parties had few ups and several downs (Farneti 1983).

These electoral trends seemed to justify the gradual drifting of governing coalitions towards the left. They also produced some political reactions against an outcome which appeared to be a forgone conclusion. More and more the political competition looked centred on the ability of the Christian Democrats to retain the allegiance of their traditional centrist allies plus the Socialists and the success of the Communists in presenting themselves as the only viable alternative.

Focusing on aggregate data and concentrating on the period from the late 1950s to the early 1970s, too many analysts drew the premature conclusion that Italian electoral behaviour was characterized by stability, even by stagnation. The empirical evidence strongly suggests a rather different conclusion. Incidentally, only if one grasps the overall dynamics of Italian electoral behaviour does it become possible to explain subsequent important changes.

The period between 1948 and 1992 can be subdivided into four phases, and electoral behaviour has to be analysed not just from the point of view of the response of the voters but also, more accurately, from the point of view of the politico-governmental offerings of the parties (Corbetta *et al.* 1988).

If this perspective is chosen and consistently applied, then the first phase starts with the critical elections of 1948 and ends in 1958. It is characterized by a lot of electoral mobility, fundamentally because coalitions and party splits offer voters more alternatives. It is not only that the Christian Democrats appear as the anti-communist bulwark in 1948 while the Socialists and the Communists join in the ill-fated Popular Front. More fundamentally, the party system as a whole is in the process of consolidating itself.

Complete consolidation is never fully achieved, since, after all, even in the 1960s there are splits and mergers in the socialist area and in the extreme right. However, if one looks at the three polarities—the right, the centre, and the left—their electoral strength is scarcely affected by these changes. By no means should this be taken as indicating that Italian voters do not shift from one party to another in successive national elections or that they do not shift from one party or list to another in local elections.

Most of these changes are somewhat hidden when looking exclusively at national percentages. A local perspective is absolutely essential, and calculations based on the actual number of votes are indispensable in order to draw a well-rounded, convincing picture. For instance, in the 1972 national elections, usually considered as a shift to the right on the part of the electorate, this impression is disproved by a close analysis of the electoral results. Four leftist groups were barred from parliament by the above-mentioned exclusion clauses contained in the electoral system. As a consequence, the left wasted about a million votes. The so-called electoral earth-quake of 1975–6 was obviously built paradoxically upon that million previously wasted votes and was strongly affected by generational factors, more specifically by the lowering of the voting age to eighteen (Wertman 1977).

A new and lengthy period of electoral stability ensued after 1979, characterized by the decline of the PCI and to a lesser extent of the DC plus the slow growth of the PSI.

Afterwards, the elections of 1992 revealed another major change in electoral behaviour which had been in the making for some time. It was not only that a new and powerful political actor such as the Northern League made an impressive showing on the parliamentary scene. It was, above all, that never before had the parliamentary

party system appeared so fragmented. Whereas in 1976 the two major parties had polled 73.1 per cent of the votes, in 1992 the two major parties reached only 46 per cent. Finally, in 1994 their heirs gained 35.8 per cent. Moreover, there were seventeen groups represented in the House of Deputies.

By any measure, it was the end of the post-war alignment. This alignment had long been fundamentally based on DC centrality. Because of the size of their vote as well as their location in the party alignment, the Christian Democrats dominated all coalition governments from December 1945 to June 1981. They controlled the office of Prime Minister all the time but for a period of less than six years. They lost that office during the ninth parliament (1983–7), only to recover it again for the entire tenth term of parliament (1987–92). Their political and governmental centrality was long challenged, before being destroyed in the eleventh parliament (1992–4). In any case, they played the role of masters of all coalition-forming processes for forty-five years (Leonardi and Wertman 1989).

There are some visible limits and some essential components to the process of government formation. The first limit is that, for international as well as domestic reasons, from May 1947 onwards the Communist Party could never be seriously considered as a governmental partner. Dubbed the *conventio ad excludendum* (unwritten agreement to exclude), this principle worked effectively and, on the whole, shaped the relatively moderate behaviour of the PCI. The second limit is that, for constitutional as well as domestic reasons, the rather small neo-fascist party MSI was equally excluded from the role of partner in government (Ignazi 1989). Therefore the number of coalition government partners and alternatives were drastically curtailed. In a sense, five parties—the DC, PLI, PRI, PSDI and PSI—were destined and obliged to exhaust all the governmental possibilities. All these parties behaved accordingly, competing among themselves for governmental spoils and adamantly excluding the Communists and the neo-fascists.

There have been four different coalition phases. The first is known as *centrismo* (1947–63). It was the crowning achievement of the DC leader Alcide De Gasperi, who decided to construct a coalition around the DC that embraced the Liberals, the Republicans and the Social Democrats in order to go beyond the Catholic world. He succeeded in preventing a resurgence of anticlerical sentiment and at the same time contained the confessional pressure from the Church.

The need to enhance the politico-parliamentary base of the government and the attempt to isolate the Communists produced the second coalition phase. The Christian Democrats opened their arms to the Socialists and dropped the Liberals: *centro-sinistra* (1963–74).

The inability of the Socialists to cut into the Communist electorate, the stagnation of the potentially reformist drive of the centre-left, the mobilization of left-wing groups and, above all, the impressive electoral advance of the PCI made it imperative to enter a new phase called ‘national solidarity’. It was characterized by DC minority governments enjoying first the abstention, then the parliamentary

support of the parties of the centre-left plus the Communists (1976–9). The abrupt termination of this phase, decisively conditioned, or perhaps determined, by Aldo Moro's tragic murder by the Red Brigade, stopped what seemed to be an irresistible drift to the left.

The new phase was characterized by the re-entry of the Liberals into a coalition government which also included the Socialists: the five-party coalition, 1980–93. (For an intelligent overview of the entire period see Vassallo 1994.)

The logic behind all the processes of government formation has often been explored and has been convincingly illuminated (Mershon 1994). What must be stressed is that Italian coalition governments have usually been rather weak, divided along party and factional lines, often litigious, frequently caretaker minority governments (Strom 1990). Their ability to govern, that is, to make choices and implement decisions, has generally been restricted to the phase of their inauguration. Most of the duration of the parliamentary mandate has been wasted in internal bickering and jockeying for electoral position.

The classic distinction between office-seekers and policy-seekers applies only partially to Italian political actors. Offices have been extremely important, in particular for the survival of minor parties. Policies have usually been dictated by the circumstances and rarely controversial, although the differences of opinion within parties and factions have been highly publicized for electoral reasons.

Schematically, but to the point, the Italian case can be defined as characterized by unstable governments, relatively stable Ministers and Prime Ministers, lasting coalitions and stagnating policies (Hine 1993). Above all, the Italian case has suffered deeply from lack of alternation. This has produced two major negative consequences, to be considered at the same time causes and effects of a stalemate political system: governmental irresponsibility and 'consociational' (see below) practices.

The Christian Democrats effectively dominated Italian politics up to the inauguration of the centre-left in 1963. From that moment on, and especially in the subsequent period of the five-party coalition, it became impossible to determine who was responsible for the policies actually enacted and/or for the decisions and the choices practically postponed. That is, the Christian Democrats could accuse the other partners of rendering a crystal-clear decision-making process impossible. On their part, the other partners, especially the Socialists, retorted by pointing to the well-established practice of brokerage among competing and often clashing interests, none of which the DC wanted to disturb, discourage, dismiss. On top of this, both the Christian Democrats and the Socialists, particularly during the years of the centre-left, were seriously divided into factions. Cross-cutting alliances even developed among some DC factions and some PSI factions. The overall effect was to impair the decision-making effectiveness of the various coalition governments and to prevent the allocation of precise political responsibilities. There developed, at the same time, the politics of buck-passing and of outbidding. The buck never stopped being passed and no partner-in-government ever desisted from outbidding

the others, be it in terms of welfare inclination or of economic rigour (Lange and Regini 1989; Furlong 1994).

A divided governing majority was much exposed to the power of a strong, ever-present in parliament, well-organized and disciplined opposition: the one forged and represented by the Communist Party. Perfectly aware that for international and domestic reasons they could not aspire, under normal circumstances, to a governing role, the Communists were obliged to stake most of their cards on their oppositional capacity and on their parliamentary effectiveness.

Confronted with a strong opposition, internally divided, because the Socialists always remained unwilling to challenge the PCI head-on, unable to muster their parliamentary troops, government coalitions grudgingly accepted the need to deal with the PCI. That is, they decided to negotiate with the Communists. Bills and regulations, laws and decrees of some importance for the majority always contained something of interest to the Communists as well. This exchange softened Communist opposition and allowed the majority to have their Bills passed through parliament in a reasonable time. Such practices, generally dubbed 'consociational', made the political system work, above and beyond any ideological confrontation, to the satisfaction of most political actors (Morisi 1992).

The State budget, however, had to pay for them. As long as the economic pie was being enlarged by the economic miracle no major problem ensued. The simultaneous appearance of a high rate of inflation and of a high level of unemployment in the 1970s signalled the impossibility of maintaining these unwritten agreements. Consociational practices had surreptitiously slipped the PCI into the governing majority, if in a subordinate position. In 1971 parliamentary regulations had even been revised to give the opposition more bargaining power. And the PCI seemed convinced that this was indeed its parliamentary road, if not to socialism, definitely to governing power.

Two dramatic changes put an end to consociational practices. The first was the accession of Bettino Craxi, the Socialist secretary, to the office of Prime Minister and his four-year tenure of office (1983–7). The PSI had stopped being a factionalized party. It identified the PCI not as a potential source of support for reformist policies against the DC but as an available pool of votes to be drained off. No consociationalism existed between PSI-led governments and the Communist opposition, then, but head-on confrontation as signalled by the unprecedented decree cutting the indexation system in the teeth of the vehement opposition of the PCI (and the Communists in the CGIL union).

The second change was the belated realization by the Communists themselves, immediately after the 1987 national elections, that they could no longer govern, so to speak, from opposition, as they claimed. Indeed, they were considered by the voters at least partially responsible for what the government was doing and not doing. Their profile as the opposition party was no longer high and visible. Socio-political protest started being diffused and became highly fragmented. The PCI was

not picking up those votes, and at the same time it could not attract the votes of those interested in governmental effectiveness and open decision-making. Consociationalism was finally denounced by Achille Occhetto on his way to becoming the (last) secretary-general of the Italian Communist Party. The declining electoral appeal of the PCI, the deterioration of its organizational strength, and its vanishing parliamentary discipline all made the governing majority more secure in its power.

Though no more capable of producing quick and effective decisions, the five-party governing majority felt no need to bargain with the declining and ineffective PCI. Indeed, the Communists were decisively excluded from most significant decision-making areas. But governing coalitions remained almost paralysed within themselves, both because of permanent dissent on some major decisions, for instance on reform of the national health system, and because of the struggle for power being waged by the Socialists against the Christian Democrats or, better, against the left-wing Christian Democratic faction. In truth, DC centrist factions were all too willing to come to a long-lasting agreement with the PSI to share power notwithstanding the election results.

In any case, all political calculations and proper or improper exchanges of power, resources and offices came to an abrupt end with the elections of April 1992. It was not only because an important new player, the Northern League, had erupted on to the political scene that the four-party coalition government seemed seriously wounded. It was because the DC suffered a burning electoral defeat and the PSI saw its seemingly irresistible growth blocked and even reversed. Numerically the *quadri-partito* was still alive, though not kicking. Politically, it had been comprehensively repudiated by the voters.

The novelty was soon appreciated, though it took a while before it could be translated into a new type of government. The first, and at that time only, Italian government ever led by a non-parliamentarian came into being at the end of April 1993. The highly respected Governor of the Bank of Italy, Carlo Azeglio Ciampi, led what all regarded as the last government of the First Italian Republic (Pasquino and Vassallo 1994). But reflections on this type of development are better left to an exploration of institutional mechanisms and factors.

THE PARLIAMENTARY SYSTEM

Perhaps the most important of these factors is represented by the peculiar form of parliamentary government Italy has had since 1948. Theoretically, parliament ought to be a central player in the Italian political system (Manzella 1993). No government comes into being without an explicit parliamentary vote of confidence. One might also expect that no government would lose office without a parliamentary vote of no confidence. All Italian governments have been created outside parliament by an agreement between parties ratified by the President of the Republic, who according to the constitution officially appoints the Prime Minister. No government has ever

been defeated in parliament on an expressly requested vote of confidence. Indeed, all government crises have been extra-parliamentary, that is, the product of party disagreements and clashes. Such disagreements and clashes have never even been debated in parliament. Paradoxically, therefore, Italy provides us with a case of a parliamentary form of government in which parliament is not at all central to the creation and dismissal of governments. Is parliament then central to the policy-making process?

According to the constitution, the legislative initiative belongs to each individual member of parliament as well as to the government and its Ministers. In practice, members of parliament exercise their right of legislative initiative frequently and massively. However, their success rate is very limited. No more than 10 per cent of the Bills approved by parliament are initiated by individual members of parliament or even by groups of them. The government and its Ministers are mainly responsible for legislation, and perhaps that is how it should be.

Parliament's role is confined, therefore, to carrying out certain specific tasks. Of course, one is that of evaluating, amending and, in the end, approving the Bills enacted by the government. For several reasons, the parliament is not very effective in performing these tasks. The first reason is that it is not well equipped to do so from a structural point of view.

There are three structural characteristics that merit consideration. The first is that parliament is, all things considered, the last of the existing (non-federal) bicameral parliaments in which both houses enjoy exactly the same powers and same functions. This means that all legislation must pass through both Houses and even small changes have to be ratified by a vote. There are two politically significant consequences of this arrangement.

One is that the law-making process is very slow. On average a Bill of any importance will take at least nine months before being approved. Therefore no government can rely on normal parliamentary procedures to get its legislation passed. So most governments resort to decree legislation. Because even decrees have eventually to be ratified by parliament within sixty days of their promulgation, many of them will expire simply by the lapse of time. A number of them will therefore be reintroduced (Della Sala 1987). Even the most controversial ones will serve to regulate activity in some sector without ever having been approved by parliament, not least because the governing majority has been unable to agree on exactly how to regulate those very activities.

Another consequence is that the law-making process is very unreliable. It is not simply that the government cannot control the timing of its desired legislation. It does not control the content, the output, either. This lack of control over the content derives from another structural feature of the Italian parliament, and it is reinforced by a political feature as well.

The structural feature is a consequence of the fact that all legislation must be referred to rather powerful parliamentary committees. It is within those committees

that consociational practices find an easy outlet. Even more so when those committees are given the power to pass legislation without going through a floor vote. One-tenth of the members of a specific chamber and one-fifth of the members of a specific committee have the power to send legislation to the floor, so when nothing of the sort happens it is clear that the major opposition party has been squared and that some of the provisions of the Bill meet opposition demands.

The political factor is, obviously, that the majority is always divided on most issues. Indeed, three lines of division run through the Italian parliament. One is the classic division between the parliamentary majority and the opposition. The second is between the government and its parliamentary majority. The third cuts through the parliamentary majority itself, giving the opposition a welcome opportunity to exercise the clout deriving from its discipline and active participation in floor and committee votes. It must be added that this system is also congenial to a divided, undisciplined, absentee majority. What the governmental majority loses in one chamber it may recover in the other. What it loses in one committee it may recover on the floor.

Finally, the law-making process has always been somewhat erratic. There are several reasons. In the first place, too much legislation comes before parliament for approval. This is due largely to the relations of mistrust existing between the governing majorities and the opposition. An opposition aware of its practical inability to replace the governing majority is unwilling to relinquish its power of control over the Ministers. Even more so since the governing majority never accepts individual ministerial responsibility. That is, it is reluctant to penalize its Ministers for political incompetence or any sort of misdemeanour. Therefore the quantity and quality of acceptable regulations by individual Ministers is extremely limited.

Up to very recent times, all European directives had to be enacted into Italian law at the cost of a lot of time and energy. The situation has partially improved because the PCI/PDS is a pro-European unification party. In the second place, especially but not only in recent times, the most visible aspect of the Italian parliament has been its fragmentation: there exist too many parliamentary groups and too many party factions. The result is that several exchanges of all kinds, among many political and non-political actors, are possible, attempted, performed.

Finally, up to recent times, parliamentary voting procedures were a great help to all sorts of more or less organized groups but not to the governing majority itself. On practically all issues it was possible for a small number of parliamentarians to request and obtain a secret vote. After a protracted and acrimonious battle waged by the secretary-general of the Socialist Party against secret voting, mainly in order to curb DC parliamentarians' indiscipline, resort to it was severely curtailed in 1988. Today, secret voting in parliament is not only rare, it is almost exceptional. However, only in a few cases are the results of the voting tallied in such a way as to allow the public precise information on how the various members have actually voted.

The almost total elimination of secret voting has not destroyed the power of the lobbies. The most significant of them have only transferred their intervention and their pressure from the floor of the House to the committee rooms and, whenever possible, to the ministerial offices and staff rooms. This relocation of power and pressure, which was already in train, has only been accelerated by voting and procedural changes. It indicates that the parliament is, on the whole, not a significant political player on its own. The move sets the seal on the declining power of a body that is badly in need of some streamlining and restructuring, together with the very form of parliamentary government and, therefore, of the nature, structure and power of the government.

GOVERNMENT AND THE BUREAUCRACY

In many ways the best starting point for the analysis of Italian governments in their policy-making capacity and in their relationship with the bureaucracy and with organized groups is their appointment procedure.

Under the constitution, the President of the Republic appoints the Prime Minister and, on the latter's nomination, appoints individual Ministers.

In practice, that is, in what Italian jurists have called the material constitution, the procedure works in a very different manner. Only in exceptional, and so far almost unique, circumstances had the President of the Republic enough power and enough discretion to appoint the Prime Minister in reality. In most cases his role was confined to choosing from among the several names submitted to him by the Christian Democrats or he was practically obliged to accept the ready-made choices submitted by the secretaries of the parties which had agreed to join a coalition government. As to individual Ministers, they were not proposed by the Prime Minister but imposed on him by faction leaders of the various coalition parties. The President of the Republic, except on a couple of occasions, had simply to ratify those complex agreements.

If these were the selection and appointment procedures, one can understand why coalition governments never showed much cohesion or collective responsibility. And why the Prime Minister never acquired or possessed enough power to lead the coalition government and to dismiss incompetent or disloyal Ministers. Obviously, faction leaders proposed or imposed the names of Ministers who were representative of the interest groups supporting their respective parties and factions or who could promise politico-electoral advantages to come. Ministries were a reward for past groups' behaviour or a commitment to future action.

To a large extent, powerful leaders and members of factions were put in charge of those Ministers considered significant by their constituencies. As a consequence the powerful Small Farmers' Confederation, closely associated with the DC, was the successful sponsor of most if not all Ministers of Agriculture. It was impossible to become Minister of Education without the active support and the open acceptance

Table 5.3 Italian governments, 1945–96

<i>Legislature No.</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Prime Minister</i>	<i>Party composition</i>
	June 1945	G. Parri	Pd'A, DC, PCI, PSI, PLI, PdL
	Dec. 1945	A. De Gasperi I	Pd'A, DC, PCI, PSI, PLI, PdL
	1946	A. De Gasperi II	DC, PCI, PSI, PRI
	Feb. 1947	A. De Gasperi III	DC, PCI, PSI
1	May 1947	A. De Gasperi VI	DC, PLI, PSLI, PRI
	1948	A. De Gasperi V	DC, PLI, PSLI, PRI
	1950	A. De Gasperi VI	DC, PSLI, PRI
	1951	A. De Gasperi VII	DC, PRI
2	July 1953	A. De Gasperi VIII	DC
	Aug. 1953	G. Pella	DC
	Jan. 1954	A. Fanfani I	DC
	Feb. 1954	M. Scelba	DC, PSDI, PLI
	1955	A. Segni I	DC, PSDI, PLI
	1957	A. Zoli	DC
3	1958	A. Fanfani II	DC, PSDI
	1959	A. Segni II	DC
	Mar. 1960	F. Tambroni	DC
	July 1960	A. Fanfani III	DC
	1962	A. Fanfani IV	DC, PSDI, PRI
4	June 1963	G. Leone I	DC
	Dec. 1963	A. Moro I–III	DC, PSI, PSDI, PRI
5	June 1968	G. Leone II	DC
	Dec. 1968	M. Rumor I	DC, PSI, PRI
	1969	M. Rumor II	DC
	Mar. 1970	M. Rumor III	DC, PSI, PSDI, PRI
	Aug. 1970	E. Colombo	DC, PSI, PSDI, PRI
	Feb. 1972	G. Andreotti I	DC
6	June 1972	G. Andreotti II	DC, PSDI, PLI
	1973	M. Rumor IV	DC, PSI, PSDI, PRI
	Mar. 1974	M. Rumor V	DC, PSI, PSDI
	Nov. 1974	A. Moro IV	DC, PRI
	Feb. 1976	A. Moro V	DC
7	July 1976	G. Andreotti III	DC
	1978	G. Andreotti IV	DC
	Jan. 1979	G. Andreotti V	DC, PSDI, PRI
8	Aug. 1979	F. Cossiga I	DC, PSDI, PLI
	Mar. 1980	F. Cossiga II	DC, PSI, PRI
	Sep. 1980	A. Forlani	DC, PSI, PSDI, PRI
	1981	G. Spadolini I–II	DC, PSI, PSDI, PRI, PLI
	Dec. 1982	A. Fanfani V	DC, PSI, PSDI, PLI
9	1983	B. Craxi I–II	DC, PSI, PSDI, PRI, PLI
	Apr. 1987	A. Fanfani VI	DC
10	July 1987	G. Goria	DC, PSI, PSDI, PRI, PLI
	1988	C. De Mita	DC, PSI, PSDI, PRI, PLI
	1989	G. Andreotti VI–VII	DC, PSI, PSDI, PRI, PLI
11	1992	G. Amato	DC, PSI, PSDI, PLI
	1993	M. Ciampi	DC, PSI, PSDI, PLI
12	1994	S. Berlusconi	FI, LN, AN
	1995	L. Dini	PDS, PS, LN

Note See Table 5.1 for the full party names.

of Catholic associations involved in that field. The Minister of Industry had an almost symbiotic relationship with powerful industrial groups, for a long time with the National Association of Manufacturers (Confindustria). Almost as a corollary, the Minister of State Participation was representative of the major public enterprises and was closely controlled by a specific DC faction.

Long ago, two ideal types were formulated to describe the relations between Ministries and their constituencies: *clientela* and *parentela* (LaPalombara 1964). *Clientela* is the relationship between a Ministry's bureaucracy and the interests it is supposed to deal with. The Ministry's bureaucracy, for lack of competence and resources, becomes almost a client of those interests. It comes to depend on them even for technical advice. Therefore the most important decisions are really drafted, shaped, or, at least, implemented according to the wishes of powerful interests. To a large extent, according to LaPalombara, this was the case with the Ministry of Industry *vis-à-vis* the Fiat company.

Parentela is the relationship between a Ministry's bureaucracy, and often the Minister him/herself, and outside interests when they share the same perspective, the same goals, the same values. This was, and in all likelihood for long remained, the relation between the Ministry of Education and the many Catholic organizations and associations active in the education field. Especially since the Minister of Education has always, with one short-lived exception, been a Christian Democrat.

With the passing of time, *clientela* and *parentela* may have changed in intensity, but not in quality. For instance, the Ministry of State Participation was the client of all public companies and was not meant to orient their activities or to evaluate their performance, only to transmit their requests and vent their grievances. For some time the Ministry of Labour, usually allocated to a Minister with a union background or endowed with some union ties, worked in harmony with the unions. In a typical relationship of *parentela*, it transmitted their demands and supported them in the usually complex and long-drawn-out process of bargaining with the employers and their confederation. *Clientela* and *parentela*, though not uniquely present in the Italian case, were more pervasive than other patterns of interest interactions with political and bureaucratic decision-makers. For a long period of time the politics of interest groups remained dominated by political parties, their factions, their experts, whose power derived from their position as party spokesmen and not from their technocratic expertise.

In the light of the weakness of the bureaucratic apparatus, it has always seemed out of place even to speak of the possibility of iron triangles: parties, interests, bureaucrats. Often recruited according to political criteria, mostly promoted according to partisan criteria, rarely endowed with technical knowledge or abilities, utterly lacking any *esprit de corps* or professional pride, Italian bureaucrats, with the exception of a few relatively happy islands of integrity (the Bank of Italy, some branches of the Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs), were the happy prey of politics, and of defensive and rent-seeking union activities.

Their inefficiency and short working hours are paid for by job tenure and limited demands on their energies. This trade-off is, obviously, not profitable for the State when it comes to a need for active intervention in some socio-economic areas. It has been and remains highly profitable for governing parties when it comes to the acquisition of electoral consensus. Often those relatively few Ministers who want(ed) to govern—that is, to deal with interest groups on an equal footing—will bypass the State bureaucracy. They will proceed to create of their own more or less restricted staff, their own political cabinet made up of loyal and competent collaborators. But the difficulties deriving from the implementation and the policy evaluation phases will not disappear.

Overall, the policy-making process can be characterized as of the reactive type and accomplished in conditions of emergency (Dente 1990). More precisely, policy-making of some importance is rarely initiated in the political sphere. It is usually the product of demands coming from some socio-economic sectors, from international pressures, from outside actors such as collective movements or interest groups.

Policy-making of some importance is rarely the product of normal procedures and normal times. It is usually the product of emergency situations. An issue has become of burning importance. Perhaps it had been forgotten because of the lack of instruments to keep it on the political agenda. Perhaps it had been postponed for lack of consensus among the decision-makers. Perhaps it had been removed because of cultural inability to envisage a viable and acceptable solution, or because the groups pressing for a solution were not powerful enough, or because those opposing a solution were very powerful indeed.

There are several examples of reactive policies being adopted under emergency conditions. The entire story of the reform of the university system is a case in point. It continued being debated for seventeen years and became an issue only with the violent student eruption of 1977. Probably the most significant case of a reactive policy taken into serious consideration only when it developed into an inescapable emergency is represented by reform of the electoral law. Since more information will be provided below, suffice it to say here that it took two popular referendums to put reform of the electoral system on the political and parliamentary agenda.

Because the two patterns of relations between politics and organized interests that dominated in Italy were those of *clientela* and *parentela*, there was not even any debate about neo-corporatism. Imported from the international literature, the expression was first precisely utilized in the latter 1970s. In that period, characterized by high inflation and growing unemployment, the socialist-communist trade union showed signs of developing some neo-corporatist availability, quickly rejected by the Christian Democratic trade union (the CISL). Later, in 1981, a quasi-neo-corporatist agreement between the employers and all the unions was signed, thanks to the Minister of Labour. Not much progress was made in the early 1980s. Most developments were blocked and became a lost cause when the Socialist Prime Minister Bettino Craxi decided to curtail the indexation system by decree after having played with the

idea, now sponsored by CISL leaders, of tying the unions to the government in a true neo-corporatist pact (Lange 1986).

The problem with the creation of a neo-corporatist system was, however, not so much political as mainly structural. The two most important conditions for the construction and functioning of a neo-corporatist system were missing in the Italian case. The union movement remained divided along political and cultural lines. The party of the industrial working class, the PCI, was never even close to governmental power. The three main trade unions, the CGIL, the CISL and the UIL, were, and remain, closely affiliated to their respective parties, namely the PCI (-PDS), the DC and the PSI. From a cultural point of view, that is, in their bargaining strategies, they have profound theoretical and practical differences, preoccupied as they are with representing all the workers (CGIL) or only unionized workers (CISL), mainly at the national level (CGIL) or particularly at the local and plant level (CISL), pursuing economic and political goals (CGIL) or exclusively economic goals (CISL), being soft (UIL) or tough (CISL and CGIL) on the employers, soft (UIL, CISL and the socialists within the CGIL) or tough (the rest of the CGIL) on the government.

Understandably, the sheer fact that the PCI, rightly regarded as the party of the industrial working class, never had nor could legitimately aspire to a governing role prevented the establishment and consolidation of that initial condition of trust indispensable for the emergence and functioning of a neo-corporatist system. The working class was understandably suspicious of deferring its present demands in exchange for future gains, since no political player was in a position to offer a credible guarantee. The neo-corporatist attempts that were made remained half-hearted and appeared ill founded.

The nature of the relationship between unions, parties and coalition governments is still a matter of discussion, conflict and disagreement (Golden 1988). In the meantime, however, for several reasons common to West European union movements, and for some reasons peculiar to the Italian case, Italian unions have lost membership, representativeness, power. They are now a declining player in search of a role.

The Italian decision-making process is complex and cumbersome. It is bound to pass through a series of stages and to seek the agreement of several players, incessantly engaged in reversible and opaque negotiations. In the last instance, it is subject to formal approval by a divided and not very disciplined parliament. No surprise, then, that it is inevitably exposed to the interference of many illegal activities. Where a multiplicity of actors takes part in allocating a conspicuous quantity of public resources, often to be disbursed according to party criteria, the likelihood of corruption is very high. Indeed, political corruption has been widespread in the Italian case (Della Porta 1992).

There have been basically two types of corruption. The first—money paid out to policy-makers at all levels in order to influence decisions, predominated in the long

first phase of the democratic regime up to the mid-1970s. It must be added that, on the part of public companies, this money was also intended to subsidize governing parties' electoral campaigns and political structures. In the absence of any system of public funding of political parties, this kind of financing was taken almost for granted, as semi-legal.

Then, in 1974, in the wake of a major scandal involving oil importers who had bribed parties in government in order to secure higher prices on oil products following the Arab embargo, a law was passed financing political parties with public money. Among its provisions, the 1974 law forbade public companies from making donations to political parties and, to some extent, liberated, so to speak, managements from that kind of peculiar, sub-institutional obligation.

The second type of corruption became even more widespread and acquired a systemic character. This time, party secretaries and their collaborators, Ministers, under-secretaries, members of parliament and local politicians exacted kickbacks on all public contracts and public works. This scandal of massive proportions was uncovered first in Milan, then throughout the country, in 1992 and became known as *Tangentopoli* (Kickbacksville) and the corresponding investigation was called *Mani Pulite* (Clean Hands).

Its extent and depth derived from two factors. In the first place, governing parties justified their exactions to industrialists, builders and contractors in terms of the Communist threat. They claimed to represent the dam against that threat. Money was needed for ever more costly electoral campaigns to counterbalance the superior Communist Party organization.

In the second place, industrialists, builders and contractors were well aware that the same parties and, often, the same politicians had been in positions of power for a long time and had a credible chance of staying there just as long. A change of government was not in prospect and as long as there was a Communist Party not desirable from their point of view. Kickbacks to governing parties and politicians could be justified, at least partially, as the price of democracy and, to a lesser extent, as a sort of tax on their activities. Paradoxically, but understandably, some streaks of consociationalism survived for a while, so that, especially in Milan, where the PCI had been part of the governing majority along with the PSI, some money was more or less indirectly poured into Communist coffers as well.

Though conspicuous, kickbacks have not prevented political parties from running high deficits. They were largely due to rocketing electoral expenditure, but in some cases also to personal enrichment and a luxury standard of living. In Italy the relationship between money and politics has always been controversial and from the very beginning the law on the public financing of political parties had been challenged. A referendum on repeal of the law in 1978 showed at one and the same time great dissatisfaction but also the extent to which the PCI and the DC were entrenched. The two parties barely succeeded in defeating the idea: 44 per cent were in-favour of repeal, 56 per cent against. The political climate had drastically changed, and more

than 90 per cent of voters decided by a referendum in April 1993 to do away with the law, more precisely to stop the funds going directly to party parliamentary groups, not electoral reimbursement. The entire question of how to finance parties and politics has been thrown in the air, in the expectation of a new electoral law changing the nature of political competition, facilitating the appearance of nonparty players, and redrawing the constituencies.

INTERGOVERNMENTAL RELATIONS

Division of powers

In general it is somewhat inappropriate to speak of a true division of powers between the executive and the legislature. It would be better to identify a government supported by its parliamentary majority and confronted with a parliamentary opposition. In any case, the Italian situation has been characterized by the existence of a not very cohesive parliamentary majority sustaining its government versus one relatively cohesive parliamentary opposition, in the form of the PCI, and a more co-operative opposition represented by the neo-fascist party.

However cohesive the parliamentary opposition(s) could be, parliament is not endowed with the powers or mechanisms, and is not structured in such a way as to allow it, to perform the task of parliamentary control in a very effective manner. Standing committees of inquiry and investigation do exist and have been created for specific purposes—for example, on the phenomenon of Mafia; on the murder of Aldo Moro; on the causes of terrorism; on the reconstruction after the earthquake in Irpinia; on the scandal of the Banca Nazionale del Lavoro branch in Atlanta. Often the results of the activities of these parliamentary committees have been admirable, if somewhat tinged with partisan colours. Rarely have they been discussed on the floor of the House, since whenever the governing majority seemed likely to be embarrassed by the findings it would use its powers to prevent the relevant reports from being put on the parliamentary agenda.

Anyway, most of the time, partisan cleavages determine voting results. Governing parliamentary majorities have even unscrupulously exploited the possibility of providing the authentic interpretation of the constitution concerning the indispensable conditions for the promulgation of decrees: only in extraordinary instances of urgency and necessity. As anticipated, decree legislation of dubious constitutionality remains very frequent and responds to real imperatives if the political system has to continue functioning. This only means that the entire issue of government-parliament relations is bound to be a top priority among institutional reforms.

To everybody's great surprise, almost suddenly at the beginning of 1992 Italian judges launched and relentlessly pursued the famous investigation called 'Clean Hands'. What is important is not so much that *partitocrazia* (the party-ocracy) and its most arrogant representatives were incriminated and will, in due course, be tried.

What counts most is that the judges could not be stopped, despite political criticisms and attacks. At the same time, enjoying perhaps the fruits of an emulation effect, other judges in southern regions started pursuing the links between politicians and organized crime. They too could not be stopped. The activism of the judiciary suggests that judges really are in a position to behave independently of the politicians if they want to. Indeed, they are subject to few, if any, political controls. Their active independence is, however, a very recent discovery. In the past it has been exercised in a somewhat hesitant way, especially when it came to the political sphere, because the majority of judges shared the political beliefs of those in power.

For decades Italian judges were a small, moderate body of well-paid, tenured bureaucrats. It should not be forgotten that several among them had decided to enter the judiciary under fascism, accepting the loyalty oath to the authoritarian regime. The successor generation, those in their forties around 1970–5, had entered the judiciary when the Christian Democrats were solidly in power implementing a largely anti-working-class policy. Therefore most judges were not only politically moderate but outright reactionary in their outlook. They shared a conservative view of the regime and inclined towards a static, conservative interpretation of the constitution and the law.

The situation changed only very slowly and at a price. Around the beginning of the 1970s the National Association of Judges became factionalized. The judges recognized the existence of different political views within their ranks and the most ambitious of them came close to identifying with political parties. Indeed, the members of the Higher Judicial Council, chosen by parliament, are elected basically along party lines. Constitutional Court justices are elected according to the same principles, delicately termed the representation of the different cultures. Together with a relatively small group of judges seriously engaged in fighting terrorism of both left and right varieties, and struggling against organized crime, there were and still are a great majority of judges interested only in their career, enjoying the perks of high-level bureaucratic activities in the Cabinets of several Ministers, in the many *ad hoc* advisory committees, in selling their expertise in a wide range of consulting activities. Most of the judges then were tied to the political world and, to be more precise, to the permanent governing majorities. Few were in opposition to the political world, still less to the governing majorities. In the middle, so to speak, many felt the change in the socio-political climate, the dissatisfaction of ordinary Italians, especially but not only in northern areas, with partisan oppression and rampant corruption.

The now justly famous investigations were also the product of this overall climate. They could be pursued and continued because the politicians have few means of reprimanding, punishing or removing a judge. The judiciary is largely independent, and those judges quickly became something like national heroes. Some of them deserved it, those who, like Giovanni Falcone and Paolo Borsellino, and several others before them, lost their life fighting against the Mafia, organized crime and terrorism.

A minority of professionally ambitious, civic-minded, activist judges have successfully utilized their political autonomy to defy the *partitocrazia* and fundamentally to seal its demise. However, the problems of the right relationship between the government, parliament and the judiciary have simply been put aside. They are bound to reappear because neither the realm of politics nor the realm of justice is well defined under the constitution and the law.

Other actors have made inroads into the decision-making arena once exclusively controlled by the parties. It is not so much a case of the decentralization of political power from the centre to the periphery as of the transfer of power away from national governments to the European Union and its decision-making bodies, the European Court of Justice included.

Indeed, most analysts would concur that the process of political decentralization has not gone far or deep enough. Created in 1970, twenty-two years after the promulgation of the constitution, Italian regional governments have not yet succeeded in snatching real autonomous powers away from the national government and bureaucracy. Their performance has obviously been different from region to region, and the level of voter satisfaction has varied considerably (Putnam 1993).

However, a strong indicator now exists to prove that success is not exactly the word one should use to define the regional decentralization process: the percentage of votes received by the Northern League. Since the League tries hard to present itself as a federal party, since it advocates a deepening of political and functional decentralization, there is good reason to attribute much of its dramatic electoral growth, particularly among voters in the most developed areas of the country, to widespread dissatisfaction with the present allocation of political power to local and regional government. In 1992, in an unprecedented step, fifteen regional councils succeeded in calling a referendum on the abolition of several Ministries and the allocation of their functions and resources to the regions. Held in April 1993, the referendum posed questions that were approved by a very high percentage of voters. The Ministries of Agriculture and Tourism have been abolished and their functions and resources should be transferred to the regional governments. Not even this will be enough to redress the balance of powers, functions and resources as between the national government and bureaucracy and regional governments and department heads. However, it represents an important step forward. Like many other features of the First Italian Republic, the politico-administrative centre-periphery relationship is in need of serious reform.

Italy in Europe

Joining in 1949–52 the nascent European institutions (the European Coal and Steel Community) meant for Italy the recognition of her newly acquired status as a democratic country. Europe was and remains more than a commitment—a sort of safety belt and in some cases an alibi for the political and, especially, governing class.

The 'Euro-barometer' reveals that, together with the Dutch, Italians are consistently among the most pro-European unification citizens. At the same time, the hard data of the implementation rate of the European Commission directives reveal that Italian governments—and, for that matter, parliaments—are among the most unwilling and/or unsuccessful partners in complying with EU regulations and directives.

Italy is also the country most often tried and condemned by the European Court of Justice for failures of implementation and/or for outright violations. Two elements, one political, the other administrative, conspire to draw up this disheartening balance sheet. On the one hand, the European unification process has never been a top priority for Italian policy-makers. Elections are not fought on European issues, political power is not acquired on European credentials, political office is not gained through a European career. On the other hand, the Italian politico-administrative (or bureaucratic) system is simply not equipped, in spite of some important revisions, immediately to translate European directives into national regulations and laws. There is no possibility that Bills containing European directives will go through Parliament more rapidly than Bills having a purely Italian content. On the contrary, if obliged to choose, the Italian government as well as most parliamentarians of all parties would probably opt, and on occasion have in fact opted, for priority to be given to Italian Bills and their welcome district services and resources.

Finally, in recent times, the European Union has also served two additional purposes, both related to national goals. A potent alibi for Italian politicians, the imperatives of European integration are presented in such a way as to justify sacrifices to be imposed on the Italian electorate and to explain why there are constraints on the behaviour of Italian politicians and their constituencies alike.

Actively European in words, passively European in deeds, most Italian politicians interpret the mood and the expectations of their fellow citizens in an accurate but unimaginative and unchallenging manner. Hard pressed to redefine their foreign policy positions since the collapse of the Berlin Wall, Italian politicians will probably again be obliged to engage in some renewed activism comparable to that which De Gasperi meritoriously utilized in order to anchor Italian democracy in Western European trends. It remains to be seen whether this overdue revision will also improve the performance of Italian politicians and bureaucrats alike in the negotiations and bargaining processes going on in Brussels and, to a lesser extent, in Strasbourg or whether it will be shaped in such a way as to provide additional scope for reluctance and non-compliance.

For several reasons, outstanding among them the primacy of domestic politics and domestic political careers, the commissioners sent by successive Italian governments to Brussels have rarely been first class. Most, though not all, were either declining politicians or relatively powerless technicians. Obviously the results in terms of political influence exerted by the Italian government on the directives and decisions of the European Commission have been rather disappointing, and

with good reason. It is still unclear whether the realization is shared by enough Italian policy-makers, whether enough Italian politicians are willing to stake their career on the European unification process, whether positive changes are in the making or will be made only under conditions of urgency and emergency, as is customary in the Italian policy-making process.

INSTITUTIONAL REFORMS

Italian democracy has faced and survived many challenges. It has defeated the attempts of terrorism of the right and of the left, the former trying to subvert the institutions and provoke a return to an authoritarian regime, the latter working for the creation of a revolutionary situation. It has withstood insidious attacks from the ranks of its alleged defenders, such as some sectors of the secret service and the military, and from an alliance of Freemasons, politicians, journalists, judges and businessmen called Propaganda 2 (P2). It has even obliged the most powerful communist party of the West to remain within democratic bounds, to behave according to constitutional rules and, in the end, to change its name and symbol. Italian democracy is now engaged in a major, complex but largely peaceful process of transition, trying to uproot organized crime and to get rid of systemic political corruption. Technically, Italian democracy has been very stable and resilient. If there is a crisis today, it is not a crisis of the democratic framework. It is a crisis within the democratic framework, leading not to the demise, but to a renewal, of democracy itself. The various indicators formulated to evaluate the stability and performance of Italian democracy were either inadequate or misleading. Moreover, they were used in a careless and unintelligent manner.

The two most obvious and visible components of instability—governmental and ministerial instability—were far less important than the two no less visible components of overall, long-term stability: coalitional and political stability (Hine 1993). It is well known that Italian governments lasted—with few, though extremely important, exceptions—a short period of time, on average approximately ten months. Some Prime Ministers each led several governments and several Ministers either enjoyed long and secure tenure of office or made a career for themselves moving from less important to more important ministries. Moreover, practically the same parties made up all coalition governments from May 1947 to April 1993. All the important participants in the political game knew each other well. They could play the coalition game with enough information never to endanger the democratic framework, always to get the most out of it without jeopardizing their future prospects (Pridham 1988).

From time to time, when the political situation appeared to require more incisive changes, party leaders resorted to brinkmanship, that is, to challenging each other's position in an unscrupulous manner. Such was the case, for instance, in 1960, when major street disorders were provoked by the opening to the neo-fascists of a minority

DC government supported by the DC President of the Republic. It was the case in 1964 when the remaining reformist elan of the centre-left was broken by the threat of an impending military *coup d'état*. It was the case in 1972 when parliament was dissolved prematurely for the first time in order to reward the neo-fascist party for having voted the DC candidate to the presidency of the republic as well as to stop neo-fascist electoral growth. Finally, it was the case in 1976 when a Christian Democratic monocolour government enjoying Communist parliamentary abstention was presented as 'the last beach'. In the meantime, and in spite of these attempts to turn the clock back, Italian democracy seemed to progress and to open spaces of political influence to the opposition.

Without alternation in power among competing coalitions, however, the problem appeared to be less a matter of the instability of democracy. It became the problem of the stagnation of the political class, of the failure to change of policies and programmes, of the existence of too close a relationship between governing parties and interest groups. In essence, the real problem was political ossification. It is true that most of these problems, if not all of them, could be traced back to political factors, domestic or international. After all, it was neither readily conceivable nor generally acceptable to have parties alternating in power in a country where the left-wing coalition was going to be dominated, if not hegemonized, by a communist party, albeit of a peculiar nature. It is also true that the constitution and the institutional arrangements came in for some serious criticism, paradoxically for not being flexible enough and yet, at the same time, not rigid enough either. Not flexible enough to accommodate the PCI, not rigid enough to exclude it from enjoying some of the fruits of power without facing up to its responsibilities: obviously, these criticisms came from different sources. And different proposals for change and reform followed.

For quite a long period of time the constitution was unquestionably regarded with affection and admiration as the very foundation of democracy. Every ten years, up to 1978 inclusive, it was officially celebrated both for its progressive content and for the collaboration among different political forces and cultures which had produced such a significant document. If there was ever a debate on the constitution it was kept alive by the left and its uppermost slogans.

In the first twenty years the struggle of the left was waged against the appropriately defined 'filibustering of the majority', that is, the unwillingness of the government's forces to put into practice the most innovative elements of the constitution: the Constitutional Court and regional decentralization. In consequence the left-wing slogan was: 'Implementation of the Constitution'. Thereafter, in the light of serious evasions of important constitutional principles by the majority, for instance those intended to regulate the processes of government formation and resignation—always decided outside parliament by party secretaries—and the dissolution of parliament, the left resorted to a different slogan: 'Return to the Constitution'. Against government violations of the constitution, the left called for full implementation of the articles

giving more power to the President of the Republic in the formation of the government and to the President and the speakers of the Senate and the lower House in the dissolution of parliament.

Previously, and for a long time, it was the right wing that never fully accepted and always wanted to reform or, better, subvert the constitution, for instance by replacing the parliamentary form of government with presidentialism. The right advocated a reduced role for parliament and an enhanced role for the government. It even stressed the importance of changing the proportional electoral system in the direction of a plurality system applied in single-member constituencies. Its goal was the destruction of the polluted water of *partitocrazia* together with its grown-up babies: Italian political parties. On the contrary, for the left and, to a lesser extent, the Christian Democrats, the proportional electoral system was tantamount to democracy.

As long as the Christian Democratic Party occupied the centre of the political alignment and dominated coalition governments, the drawbacks of the Italian variant of parliamentary government could be hidden or kept under control.

From the late 1960s on, when the Christian Democrats succumbed to faction and lost their hegemony over governing coalitions, all the constitutional and institutional drawbacks emerged into the full light of day. Multi-party governing coalition became prone to compromise with powerful interest groups. Serious internal conflicts developed, and clientelism became the commonest form of relationship with sizeable groups of voters. Governmental decision-making effectiveness became very limited. Prime Ministers were obliged to mediate between conflicting interests and to reward the most powerful of them through the allocation of public resources and money. A hypertrophic bicameral parliament whose two chambers enjoyed the same powers and functions, proved very cumbersome in its functioning, slow in producing decisions and passing Bills, permeable by a myriad organized and less organized interests. The proportional representation system witnessed and accompanied the fragmentation of the party system. In some cases it even encouraged and facilitated that fragmentation, then duly accommodated in Parliament.

Not even the office, the role or the powers of the President remained immune. So much so that in 1978 President Leone was obliged to resign in the wake of a major financial scandal: the (US) Lockheed company having bribed several Ministers, and following a vote almost repealing the law on public financing of political parties. This vote was almost unanimously and correctly interpreted as a popular demand for a cleansing of the political palace.

Above all, it was the difficulty of creating a new, cohesive governmental coalition in the national solidarity phase (1976–9) and of setting up the institutional foundations of alternation in power which pushed some Socialists to stress the need for a Great Reform. Even though the highly instrumental content of the Great Reform became more and more apparent, the Socialists had struck a sensitive chord. Once installed in the office of Prime Minister in 1983, Bettino Craxi continued

periodically to stir up the issue of a Great Reform. In practice he did not want to introduce any reform except to strengthen the law-making powers of the Prime Minister and completely to abolish the secret ballot in parliament, essentially to prevent Christian Democratic deputies from sinking his own government. Anyway, the issue of institutional reforms was rightly considered important enough and not just partisan but systemic enough to justify the appointment of a special bicameral committee.

Endowed with the limited powers of submitting only recommendations to parliament, sabotaged by the Socialists, seen with suspicion by the Communists, who feared losing their significant parliamentary strength, the bicameral committee floundered (November 1983–January 1985). Nevertheless the issue remained afloat. Indeed, it received additional momentum from the traumatic dissolution of parliament at the end of the record-breaking government led by Craxi (1,060 days, August 1983–June 1986) and the traditional inauguration of the new legislature with weak and short-lived governments led by Christian Democratic politicians. In the meantime Craxi had succeeded in drastically curtailing and practically abolishing secret ballots though with no visible or significant consequences for the solidity and effectiveness of coalition governments. The Socialists seemed to be joined by the President, Francesco Cossiga, in their request for a presidential form of government. The decisive push to the debate and a qualitative change to its rather inconclusive nature resulted from a request to submit to a popular referendum some sections of the electoral laws for the lower House, the Senate, and city councils.

When the mechanism through which Christian Democratic and Socialist politicians had built and reproduced their political and governmental fortunes was challenged, the first reaction of both parties was to have the referendums declared inadmissible, and indeed the Constitutional Court admitted only the least significant of them, asking for a reduction in the number of preference votes available from four to one. Then they tried to make it void. A referendum is void if less than 50 per cent of registered voters actually go to the polls. Craxi invited voters to abstain and spend the day at the seaside. On a rather sunny Sunday in June 1991, however, 62.5 per cent of Italian voters decided they could eventually manage both. The overwhelming vote in favour of that small electoral reform was widely interpreted as a vote against proportional representation and against *partitocrazia*, as a vote for an electoral plurality or majority system and for voters to be able to choose between competing governmental coalitions (Pasquino 1993).

The ensuing two years were marked by a sharp confrontation over the issue of electoral reform. Following a dissolution of parliament and new elections in April 1992 which sounded the death knell of the four-party coalitions, yet another Bicameral Committee on Institutional Reform was created. After several months of unproductive, acrimonious and often obscure debate the committee's activities were completely superseded and overshadowed by the new electoral referendum. Phrased in a slightly different way, the question to be submitted to the voters was declared admissible by

the Constitutional Court. It was itself a sign that the political climate had changed considerably. Sunday 18 April 1993 marked a watershed in the institutional history of the First Republic. By all means, the voters decided to repeal the proportional electoral system utilized for the Senate. Their 83 per cent 'yes' vote gave a potent indication of the direction to be followed for the reform of the PR used for House elections as well.

Under the pressures of the popular referendum and the commitment of Ciampi's government to seeing reform of the electoral law go through quickly, parliament was obliged to draft the new electoral laws. The results were not impressive because, of course, the incumbent parliamentarians and the old parties were defending their offices and their political rents. Once it was decided immediately to accept reform of the Senate electoral law as derived from the referendum, it became more difficult to produce innovations for the lower House. For instance, the French-style run-off majority system was hastily rejected.

To cut a long and complicated story short, two principles were applied. First, 75 per cent of members are now elected in single-member constituencies through a plurality 'first past the post' system. Twenty-five per cent of them are elected through PR. While PR is applied on a regional basis for the Senate, allowing parties, coalitions and lists to utilize for that purpose only the sum of the votes polled by their losing candidates, the system is slightly different for the lower House. Only parties, coalitions and lists that have polled at least 4 per cent of the national vote are allowed to participate in the proportional distribution of seats. Moreover the voter has two ballots. The first is used to elect the preferred candidate in the single-member constituency, the second to choose his/her favourite party, coalition or list. Then, in larger regional or sub-regional constituencies, all parties, coalitions or lists that have polled 4 per cent of the national vote are allocated a proportionate number of seats through a complex system. The various parties, coalitions and lists will create a pool of votes in each regional or sub-regional constituency. This pool is made up of all the votes of their losing candidates plus the number of votes arrived at by subtracting the votes won by the various candidates placed second from the votes obtained by their winning candidates. The seats are then allocated in proportion to the resulting total, utilizing the d'Hondt system (for more and better details, see Katz 1994).

Applied during a phase in which the old parties were rapidly declining, traditional electoral loyalties were disappearing and new political movements had come to the fore, the new electoral laws have facilitated an unexpected outcome. The coalition created by Forza Italia and including the Northern League and National Alliance polled 42 per cent of the vote and won an absolute majority of seats in the lower House. With only 34.6 per cent of the votes the progressives suffered a serious defeat, and the formerly dominant centre plummeted to its lowest level ever, around 15 per cent. These dramatic electoral results are certainly opening the way for the Second Italian Republic.

As expected, the debate on the reform of the electoral law was strictly intertwined with the debate, the proposals and the activities undertaken in order to shape another republic. The slogan of large, but by no means all, sectors of the left and of the progressives is now 'Reform of the Constitution'. More precisely, what appears in need of reform is that part of the constitution pertaining to the form of government, not the one concerning the Bill of Rights. Any reform whatsoever, but particularly a further reform of the electoral system, will have important consequences for the entire political system, on its political actors and on the citizenry.

Understandably, all political actors evaluate reform proposals on the basis of partisan considerations, advantages and disadvantages. Therefore what was going on in 1993 and what will be going on for a while, in the transition towards a new republic, is a political struggle of major importance. At stake one can discern the possibility of creating a streamlined, rationalized, transparent political system in which alternation in power among competing coalitions will be the rule, or, on the other hand, the stabilization, with a limited amount of institutional adjustment, of a political system in which there will again be a dominant centre.

It is as yet unclear whether a centre of that kind has already materialized. What is clear is that a centre-right coalition won the March 1994 elections decisively. Silvio Berlusconi's newly founded political movement successfully played the role of a linchpin between the Northern League and the National Alliance, the direct descendant of the neo-fascist Italian Social Movement. Moreover, Forza Italia has accommodated several Christian Democrats. It has rescued what remains of Craxi's Socialists. It has welcomed former Liberals.

Since the progressive option has clearly lost, there will not emerge a stronger parliamentary form of government and the Prime Minister will not really become the leader of his/her coalition, only a broker between conflicting interests. Political parties will not be obliged to form coalitions to sustain their government and Ministers. Since the conservative or rightist option has prevailed, the parliamentary form of government will remain more or less as it is. The party system will be only partially reshaped. There will be little streamlining in the functioning of the system and, despite pressure from the Northern League, a limited amount of political and fiscal decentralization.

Though presidentialism has not totally disappeared from the political debate, there exists only a faint possibility that the supporters of a presidential form of government will have their way. Political scientists are not astrologers. They cannot, and should not, predict the future. Nonetheless, a sober evaluation of the two most widely entertained options suggests that in the short run there will be limited change. But in the medium run the political system will approximate those political systems where rotation in power is possible, the Prime Minister governs and the opposition prepares for the day when it will replace him/her in an orderly democratic manner, where voters utilize the ballot to ensure the circulation of the political class, to decide the

alternation of governmental coalitions, and to introduce and maintain the dynamism of a viable democratic regime.

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Spain and Portugal

Rule by party leadership

Josep M.Colomer

Except for the brief and distant period of union of Portugal with the Spanish Crown in 1581–1640, the peoples and rulers of the two countries of the Iberian peninsula have followed a long tradition of ignoring each other. After the loss of the greater part of their colonial possessions, and during a large part of contemporary history, Spain and Portugal have endured authoritarian regimes and have remained cut off from the outside world. Even in their comparatively few commercial, cultural and media external relations, Spain has been more in touch with other countries of continental Europe, and Portugal with Great Britain, than the two countries with each other.

Despite this mutual ignorance, the two neighbouring States have followed rather parallel courses in the struggle between authoritarianism and democracy in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. If we take a simple working definition of democracy as a political system with civil liberties and competitive elections by universal suffrage, in Spain we have to record a republic which lasted eleven months in 1873, a moderate monarchy between 1890 and 1923 and another five years of republic from 1931 to 1936. The rest of the time has been taken up by an oligarchic monarchy and two military dictatorships, that of General Miguel Primo de Rivera (1923–9) and that of General Francisco Franco (1939–75), the latter preceded by a bloody civil war. For its part, the Portuguese monarchy of the nineteenth century also swung between legitimist, moderate and liberal constitutionalist phases, but a democratic republic existed only between 1910 and 1926, and that, as in the Spain of the following decade, was highly unstable, ending in military insurrection. After a series of military governments, António de Oliveira Salazar installed a long-lived authoritarian and corporatist regime, from 1933 to 1974.

For many Spaniards of the second half of the twentieth century the first news from Portugal to catch their attention was precisely the overthrow of the dictatorship by the armed forces' insurrection of April 1974, which was styled a 'liberation by *coup*'. A year and a half later, in November 1975, the death of General Franco opened the road to democracy in Spain, albeit via the monarchy which legally succeeded him. The two countries thus followed different routes in the transition

from their respective authoritarian regimes. In Portugal the sudden collapse of authoritarianism, in large measure provoked by the final colonial crisis, gave way to the formation of a provisional government made up of opposition parties which up to that time had barely been organized, then to a period of instability during which a new and extensive constitution was approved with a strong social reform content, and finally to a moderate stabilization. In Spain, by contrast, reform of the authoritarian regime was begun by the monarchist government itself in negotiation with the continuists of the Francoism, and only after the first competitive election was a constituent process initiated with alternative negotiations taking place between the reformists and the opposition (Colomer 1990, 1991, 1995).

The historic isolation of the two countries had left them on the margins of the Second World War, which allowed the two authoritarian regimes to survive and which also explains their later almost simultaneous entry into the United Nations Organization in 1955. Nevertheless, Spain and Portugal managed to establish normal foreign relations only after they had consolidated their democratic systems, and although the anglophile Portuguese had been persuaded to join a free-trade agreement between various countries of the European periphery (EFTA), they did not jointly become members of the European Community until 1986.

There are some basic similarities and some striking differences between the institutional choices of the Portuguese and Spanish democracies. In both countries, uncertainty about the future during the first phase of the transition, together with the wish to establish a democratic system that would include minorities, as a reaction against the former exclusive authoritarianism, led to the adoption of electoral rules based on proportional representation. In both cases these rules have allowed the formation of moderate multi-party systems, although with a tendency to bipolarization.

On the other hand, while in Portugal the influence of the Armed Forces Movement, which had overthrown the dictatorship, introduced the institution of a directly elected President, in Spain the monarchy inherited from Franco's rule could make itself compatible with democracy only through the establishment of a parliamentary system. Thus the first democratic generation in Portugal saw a high degree of conflict between the President, the Prime Minister and the Assembly, as well as a great deal of government instability, while in Spain the first fifteen years after the constituent period produced the greatest government stability in Europe. Finally, while the relatively small size and homogeneity of Portugal permit a unitary State structure, centralized in Lisbon, the greater extent and diversity of Spain are the bases of substantial regional decentralization.

These institutional differences, however, did not prevent the governments of the two countries adjusting to moderate public policies dominated by the attractiveness of centrist political positions; in particular, they adopted 'orthodox' economic policies towards stabilization and liberalization. An important common feature of the two systems, which offers a useful perspective for comparative analysis, is the lack of

institutionalization of the paths of negotiation and conflict resolution; for the most part these are undertaken in direct relations between the leadership of the major political parties. This ‘party democracy’ is a consequence of the still brief life span of democracy in the two countries and is, therefore, an indirect expression of the parallels in their recent history.

THE ELECTIONS

Before going on to analyse political institutions, it is useful to provide a brief introduction to the context of voter preferences in which these institutions are set; this context in turn is partly an expression of the economic and cultural structures of society.

Political ideology

Many Spanish and Portuguese citizens are quite capable of locating their political preferences on a symbolic left-right continuum. This ideological representation basically reflects two issue dimensions. One is socio-economic, ranging, on the one hand, from a preference for State intervention (public spending and redistribution) to the market (tax reductions and free enterprise), on the other. The second dimension is moral and social, with the two opposites favouring pluralist tolerance or traditional values. Religious issues can also be included on this dimension.

In the Spanish case it seems that a relatively high level of material well-being has accorded less ideological relevance to social class than in other historical periods, while at the same time diminishing polarization on the socio-economic dimension and augmenting a consensus favourable to economic growth and the general prosperity of society. Some surveys in the late 1980s even show the moral and social dimension assuming greater importance in the way the electorate identifies itself ideologically, especially among the young.

In the Portuguese case importance is also attached to foreign policy (this is true, although less intensively, in Spain as well) and there is a range of support given to the first constitutional schema as opposed to its later moderating revision, although these two issue dimensions could basically be included on the left-right ideological dimension mentioned previously.

Of course, citizens’ preferences in the issue dimensions we have referred to—socio-economic, moral and religious, foreign policy, regime support—do not always coincide, but the limited choice offered by the political parties tends to reduce the available alternatives and confine them to one single dimension. Thus in Spain the main alternatives offered by the parties are located on an axis whose poles represent, on the one hand, positions more favourable to State intervention and moral pluralism (close to the social democratic tradition) and on the other, positions more favourable to the market (albeit with notable elements of protectionism and government

assistance) and to traditional Catholic values (near to the social Christian tradition). Typically liberal combinations of economic market and moral pluralism are, by contrast, weaker.

The distribution of Spanish citizens' preferences on the ideological and synthetical left-right dimension is unimodal. The mean of individual preferences is situated slightly to the left of centre, as in neighbouring countries such as France and Italy, and in contrast to the majority of other European countries, where it is located rather more to the right. Specifically, the surveys periodically carried out by the Centre of Sociological Research (CIS) between 1980 and 1993, which use a left-right scale of 1–10 on which the centre corresponds to the position of 5.5, show an average self-location by citizens of 4.7. Regional averages do not show any great differences. At one extreme there is the Basque country, with an index of 3.9, due to the fact that many Basques weigh their national identity when placing themselves on the left-right spectrum and that leftist tendencies in this case are associated with more nationalistic Basque attitudes. At the other extreme are the Balearic Islands, the Spanish 'autonomous community' with the highest income *per capita*, whose score of 5.4 comes almost in the exact centre.

Alongside the left-right ideological dimension of the parties, within which, as we have seen, a variety of issues can be fitted, there is another relevant dimension, namely the national identification to which we have already referred and within which political issues such as decentralization and multilingualism are reflected. Together with Belgium and Switzerland, Spain is one of the European countries in which this dimension explains a large part of citizens' preferences. In some communities such as the Basque country, and to a lesser extent Catalonia, one can even observe greater ability on the part of citizens to place themselves on the national dimension than on the left-right dimension. This two-dimensional aspect is reinforced by the existence of their own political parties within these communities (Lijphart 1987; Lijphart *et al.* 1988; Díez Medrano *et al.* 1989; Montero and Torcal 1990; Laver and Hunt 1992).

The limited data available on the distribution of preferences among Portuguese citizens show less consensus than in the Spanish case. While the strongest trend is again centrist, and the mean appears to be located almost exactly in the centre (5.3, according to a 1984 survey) there are other lesser modes or poles of attraction to left and right (3 and 8 respectively, in the same survey; see Bacalhau 1988).

Altogether, the basic political-ideological space of citizens' preference, unimodal in the Spanish case and generically centrist in both Spain and Portugal, imposes moderation and centripetal strategies on the political parties.

Stabilizing electoral rules

Certain basic criteria of electoral representation were established in Spain even prior to the first election in 1977, and these were mostly consolidated later on. As has

been mentioned, a generic criterion of proportional representation was adopted for the lower chamber, but the wish on the part of the reformists in power to use their advantageous position in favour of the government candidacies of the Union of the Democratic Centre (UCD) led to the overrepresentation of rural areas and strong correctives to the principle of proportionality, as well as the creation of a second chamber which, was initially intended largely as a place of rest for elderly members of the Franco regime.

Thus, the first election was subject to a decree law of March 1977 which, as was anticipated, favoured the most voted electoral lists, namely the UCD centre-right, and the second party in terms of the number of votes cast, the centre-left Spanish Workers' Socialist Party (PSOE). The 1978 constitution, drawn up by a wide consensus among the parliamentary parties, confirmed the criterion of proportional representation for the Congress and extended it to the regional parliaments. In 1985, when the PSOE had an absolute parliamentary majority, an organic law was approved which confirmed many of the elements of the decree law of 1977.

In accordance with these regulations the Congress of Deputies is relatively small in size: 350 seats (although the constitution allows up to 400). The seats are allocated according to the D'Hondt formula, with a threshold of 3 per cent of the votes (which is effective only in large districts). The element of the system which has the biggest political consequences is the magnitude of the electoral districts, which is determined by allocating a minimum of two seats to each province, with an additional number according to the population; the average is 6.7 deputies per province, but with wide variation. In fact, among the total of fifty-two electoral districts a dual system operates: on the one hand there are thirty-four districts with fewer than seven seats, which function as in a plurality system and which elect over 40 per cent of all deputies; on the other, there are just eighteen districts with seven or more seats, which elect the remaining 60 per cent of deputies, which permits a degree of multipartism. This

Table 6.1 Elections to the Spanish Congress of Deputies, 1977–93 (% of votes)

Year	Turnout (%)	Communist PCE/IU	Socialist PSOE	Nationalist		Liberal		Conservative AP/PP	Other
				Basque PNV	Catalan CiU	CDS	UCD		
1977	79.1	9.4	29.3	1.7	2.8	–	34.6	8.3	13.9
1979	68.3	10.7	30.5	1.7	2.7	–	35.0	6.0	8.9
1982	80.2	4.1	48.4	1.9	3.7	2.9	7.1	26.2	5.7
1986	70.4	4.7	44.4	1.5	5.1	9.3	–	26.2	8.8
1989	70.0	9.2	39.6	1.3	5.3	7.8	–	25.4	11.4
1993	77.3	9.6	38.7	1.2	5.0	–	–	34.8	10.7
1996	78.1	10.6	37.5	1.3	4.6	–	–	37.5	8.5

Notes Communist: PCE/IU, Partido Comunista de España; since 1986 Izquierda Unida (Communist Party of Spain/United Left). Socialist: PSOE, Partido Socialista Obrero Español (Spanish Workers' Socialist Party). Catalan nationalist: CiU, *Convergència i Unió* (Convergence and Union). Basque nationalist: PNV, Partido Nacionalista Vasco (Basque Nationalist Party). Liberal: CDS, *Centro Democrático y Social* (Democratic and Social Centre). Centre: UCD, *Union de Centro Democrático* (Union of Democratic Centre). Conservative: AP/PP, *Alianza Popular*; since 1989 *Partido Popular* (Popular Alliance/Popular Party).

duality nearly coincides with that between the thirty-eight rural districts and the fourteen predominantly urban districts, whose numbers of seats are respectively overrepresented and underrepresented in comparison with their populations. As a result, one can have such extreme cases, for example, as the province of Barcelona having four times as many electors per deputy as the province of Soria. One consequence of this unequal representation is that it is possible to obtain an absolute majority of deputies with only one-third of the votes cast, so that a party well established in the rural districts could gain a greater number of deputies than another, more urban-based, party which might receive more popular votes.

Fear of introducing instability into the democratic system acted as a disincentive to repeating certain elements of the electoral model of the republic of the 1930s, such as open lists, which had allowed a noticeable proportion of candidates from extreme minorities. For this reason, personal relations between the voters and their representatives are very low, and in fact Spain and Portugal are the only European countries with proportional representation in which the lists of candidates are closed and blocked.

These rules reward the two biggest parties and penalize, above all, the small and medium-size national parties. On the other hand, since the rules operate fairly neutrally as regards the big regional parties, they allow, as we have said, the electorate to express itself at the nationalist dimension and also promote the issue of decentralization on the political agenda.

The electoral deviation from proportionality averaged 14 per cent in the period 1977–93, the highest among all countries with proportional representation and almost equal to the deviation produced by the plurality system in Great Britain.

In most districts only two parties achieve representation; these were the UCD and the PSOE in the 1977 and 1979 elections, and have been the PSOE and the Popular Alliance (later renamed the Popular Party, AP/PP) since 1982. The advantage share of these parties (their proportion of seats compared with their proportion of votes cast) was 136 per cent for the UCD (1977–9), 116 per cent for the PP (1982–93) and between 104 per cent and 126 per cent for the PSOE (in each of the two periods mentioned). By contrast, the shares of the Communist Party of Spain (PCE) and its successor the United Left (IU), and of the liberal Democratic and Social Centre (CDS) have been around 50 per cent. The proportionality profile shows that a party can only achieve overrepresentation in seats if it obtains at least 20 per cent of the votes.

If we measure the effects of the electoral rules another way, we find that the effective number of parties in terms of votes cast is 3.8, whereas the effective number in terms of seats is 2.7; that is, there is a difference of 1.2 and a relative reduction in the number of parties (as a quotient) of 31.6 per cent; both these values are the highest in Europe.

Besides their mechanical effects upon proportionality and the number of parties, the electoral rules have important psychological effects, particularly favouring the strategic vote—commonly known in Spain as the ‘useful vote’—on behalf of the

big parties. According to a number of surveys, over 70 per cent of the voters who said they were 'near' to the PSOE in the period 1977–93 and to the AP/PP in the period 1982–93—that is, to one of the two major parties—said that they had actually voted for them, whereas less than 40 per cent of those who considered themselves 'near' to the PCE/IU and CDS actually voted for their favourite party. It would seem, therefore, that voters anticipate the consequences of the electoral rules and adapt their behaviour accordingly. This perceptiveness also expresses itself in different behaviour in the two kinds of district indicated previously; thus in 1979 AP, at that time a minority party disadvantaged by the electoral rules, obtained the votes of only 19 per cent of its sympathizers in the districts with fewer than seven seats, whereas it won the votes of 39 per cent of its sympathizers in the bigger districts; analogously, in 1982 the PCE obtained the vote of only 29 per cent of its sympathizers in the small districts but 61 per cent of those in the big ones. According to these data, the adherents of the smaller parties would vote sincerely—that is, in accordance with their preferences—in twice as big a proportion in the large electoral districts as in the small ones.

Besides those already mentioned there are other entry barriers to electoral competition, especially funding for the parties from the State budget, and access to the mass media, which are distributed according to the proportion of seats allocated by the rules and not on the basis of the proportion of votes bestowed by the electors. All these elements act as self-reinforcing mechanisms of the restrictive aspects of the electoral system. (For the political effects of the electoral rules see Sani and Gunther 1986; Gunther 1989; Colomer 1990: chapter 7; Montero 1992; Montero *et al.* 1992; Rae and Ramírez 1993.)

As regards the Senate, the electoral rules tend even more to reduce the political supply. A fixed number of senators are elected in each province, independently of population size (four in the peninsular provinces, three in each of the three big islands, one in each of the seven small islands, two in Ceuta and two in Melilla), giving a total of 208, to which are added forty-seven senators representing the Autonomous Communities (normally elected by their parliaments); that is, 255 altogether. The overrepresentation of rural areas is reflected in this case in the fact that the number of electors per senator is forty-five times greater in Barcelona than in Soria. It would thus be possible to obtain a majority of senators with only one-sixth of the popular vote.

The Senate ballot gives each elector a limited vote, that is, less than the number of seats up for election in the constituency. However, the voter is not obliged to elect a fixed number of candidates but can choose between one and three in the districts with four seats, between one and two in the districts with three seats, and one in those with one or two seats, so that this procedure might be called a limited approval vote. (For the approval vote see Brams and Fishburn 1984.)

This rule would incline each party to present the same number of candidates as the maximum number of votes at the disposal of each elector (for example, three in

the districts with four senators). If, however, the big parties were to present as many candidates as seats up for election, they could run the risk of their followers dispersing their votes among these candidates, so that each might win fewer votes than the party. Likewise, if the small parties were to present only one or two candidates, they would be encouraging their followers to cast some of their votes for other parties' candidates. Because of these risk-adverse party strategies, very few individual candidates have managed to get elected by calling upon their followers to vote for them alone (Lijphart *et al.* 1986).

As a result of the rules and the strategies they induce, local two-party systems are formed in the Senate elections. Usually the two parties share the seats out, three for one party and one for the other, or two each if the result is nearly a draw. Altogether, greater deviation from proportionality results than in the case of the Congress, and also different possibilities of winning parliamentary coalitions than in the lower chamber.

The rules for the election of the Autonomous Community parliaments vary, since they have been established autonomously, but they are very homogeneous. The electoral districts are usually the provinces, with smaller areas in some single-province Autonomous Communities (Asturias and Murcia) and the islands in the Balearic and Canary archipelagoes. In five Autonomous Communities the average size of the districts is less than seven seats. Here too one can see a disparity in representation in favour of the rural areas, with an extreme case in the Basque country, where the number of inhabitants per seat is four times greater in the province of Vizcaya than in Alava. In every case the d'Hondt formula is used, lists are closed and blocked, and there are thresholds (3 per cent in nine cases, 5 per cent in seven—although in some the limit is applied to each province—and 20 per cent in each of the Canary islands).

In political terms the main difference between the Autonomous Communities is that between the four which were set up between 1980 and 1982, which hold their elections separately and which can dissolve their parliaments and call new elections (the Basque country, Catalonia, Andalusia and Galicia), and the other thirteen communities which since 1983 have held their elections on a fixed date and at the same time as the municipal elections. In the first four communities it is much easier for the regional parties to develop specific strategies, while in the second group the all-Spain parties have more opportunity to apply a global strategy. In general, representation in the autonomous parliaments is more proportional than in the Congress of Deputies, but less so than in the regional parliaments of other European countries.

Municipal elections are held in single local districts, using the d'Hondt formula, with a threshold of 5 per cent, and closed and blocked lists (except in municipalities with under two hundred and fifty inhabitants, where the limited approval vote is used, with a maximum of four individual votes for five seats). These rules foster a sincere vote among the citizens to a greater extent than in the parliamentary elections

and have allowed greater pluralism on the town councils than in the other institutions referred to above.

In Portugal, too, the electoral rules have remained basically unchanged from the first election in 1975 to the constitution of 1976, the electoral law of 1979 and the later revisions of the constitution. In fact the constitution expressly excludes the possibility of revising the criterion of proportional representation.

Only the single-chamber Assembly, elected for a period of four years, has seen its size reduced, from 263 seats in 1975 to 250 in 1979 and 230 in 1991. As in Spain, the seats are allocated according to the d'Hondt formula, but without a threshold and with a distribution of districts which advantages the more populous and urban areas.

These rules have given the two biggest parties, the centre-left Socialist Party (PS) and the centre-right Popular Democratic Party, now known as the Social Democratic Party (PPD/PSD), over-representation in terms of number of seats in comparison with proportion of votes cast, while being fairly neutral towards the two smaller parties, the leftist Communist Party of Portugal (PCP, which usually presents itself in coalition with other leftist groups) and the right-wing Democratic and Social Centre, Popular Party in 1995 (CDS/PP). Only the smallest parties have regularly suffered, and they have hardly achieved representation.

As a consequence of the electoral rules and of the learning experience of the voters themselves, successive and frequent elections have seen a growing concentration of votes on just a few candidacies. In other words, the effective number of parties, measured in votes, has been reduced from 4.2 in 1975 to 3.1 in 1995; in the latter year there was a difference in relation to the effective number of parties measured in seats of only 0.6 (that is to say, a relative reduction in the number of parties of 24 per cent). In general the electoral deviation has been around 8 per cent (a little over half the Spanish case).

Table 6.2 Elections to the Portuguese Assembly, 1 1975–95 (% of votes)

Year	Turnout (%)	PCP–MDP	PSP	PRD	PPD–PSD	CDS–PP	Other
1975	91.7	12.5	4.1	37.9	26.4	7.7	11.4
1976	83.3	14.6		35.0	24.0	15.9	10.5
1979	87.1	19.0		27.4		42.2	11.4
1980	83.9	16.8		27.8		47.6	7.8
1983	77.8	18.1		36.1	27.2	12.6	6.0
1985	75.4	15.5		20.8	18.0	30.0	9.7
1987	72.6	12.2		21.2	4.9	50.2	4.3
1991	70.0	8.8		29.1		50.6	4.4
1995	67.1	8.6		43.9		34.0	9.1

Notes Communist: PCP, Portuguese Communist Party. Leftist: MDP Portuguese Democratic Movement (since 1976, merged with the PCP under the names of APU, Unitary Popular Association, and, since 1987, CDU, Unitary Democratic Candidacy). Socialist: PSP, Socialist Party of Portugal. Presidentialist, centre-left: PRD, Renewal Democratic Party. Liberal: PPD/PSD, Popular Democratic Party/Social Democratic Party. Christian: CDS, Democratic and Social Centre.

By contrast, electing the President of the Republic directly has introduced an important element of inter-institutional tension. The President is elected every five years by absolute majority in two rounds. Both the distinct electoral procedure, which allows multi-party activity in the Assembly while inducing bipolarization in the presidential polls, and the fact that the temporal mandates of the two institutions do not coincide, mean that the parliamentary and governing majority has always been different from the coalition of parties which has supported the winning presidential candidate from 1975 to 1995.

Spanish and Portuguese voters have respectively elected sixty and twenty-four deputies to the European Parliament since 1986 (sixty-four and twenty-five since 1994). Given the relatively small number of seats up for election, in 1987 Spain established a single electoral district for this kind of election, at the same time reproducing the criteria of the d'Hondt formula and closed and blocked lists. The single constituency encourages the formation of 'federal' candidacies between regional parties. On the other hand, it results in greater proportionality than the Congress and Senate elections. Nevertheless, the low visibility and complex mediations associated with representation in the European Parliament have incited expressive and protest votes, especially against the national party in government.

Finally, Spanish citizens can manifest their preferences through referendums on matters of special importance, although the results are not binding. The referendum mechanism was used during the transition to initiate political reform in 1976, to approve the Constitution in 1978, and to approve the first four Statutes of Autonomy, already mentioned, in 1979–81. In the post-constituent framework, the consultative process has to be called on the initiative of the President of the government and authorized by a majority of the Congress, as happened in the referendum which confirmed Spain's membership of NATO in 1986.

THE POLITICAL PARTIES

Political parties in Spain have a very low membership and a highly centralized organization, which concentrates a lot of decision power in the hands of the party leadership. Two factors, above all, explain this situation. In the first place, the political transition and the drawing up of the democratic constitution were marked by negotiation between the political elites, which gave rise to a high degree of personalization of the political options. This high decision power of the leaders in the political process helped them strongly to control the parties' internal decisions, including the centralized nomination of electoral candidates. Second, as we have seen, the institutional rules erect strong entry barriers to electoral competition and at the same time inhibit intra-party competition for the electors' votes by establishing closed and blocked lists of candidates.

As a result, membership of political parties is very low, less than 4 per cent of all voters. Within these limits, different models of party organization and functioning can be distinguished.

The activities of the groups and congresses of the socialist PSOE and the excommunist IU, for example, are usually of an assembly type, with very little specialization between the members and without much concession to members' active participation; in some organs of the conservative PP, by contrast, there are quasientrepreneurial criteria of work for labour division allocating responsibilities, vertical hierarchical relations, and priority given to efficacy; while in the nationalist parties like the Catalan Convergence and Union (CiU) and the Basque Nationalist Party (PNV) one can observe a fairly stable division of roles between the professional politicians and the rest of the membership, with many activities similar to those of a sporting or cultural club. Nevertheless, all the Spanish parties possess important characteristics in common which distinguish them from the big European mass parties. First of all, holders and seekers of public office make up a large proportion of the membership. Second, the elected office holders who work in the various representative State institutions usually have to submit to tight discipline from party headquarters—although paradoxically this control has also indirectly inflamed disagreement into conflict and provoked migrations of representatives to groups different from those by which they were elected.

The public financing of the parties reinforces these tendencies. On the one hand it reduces the subjective value attached by the leadership to the members' contributions (which in fact, account for less than 5 per cent of the parties' resources). On the other hand the prohibition of private financing, the weak judicial control of party finances, and the lack of publicity about many aspects of the parties' internal affairs have given rise to irregularities which have been the focus of numerous corruption scandals. Among these one may single out large debts in respect of bank loans obtained on pre-election expectations of later public financing; the tendency to inflate spending, especially during election campaigns; the informal agreements between parties and business which have provided hidden funds in exchange for concessions, contracts and licences granted by the public administrations under party government control; and the setting up of fictitious companies as party instruments for collecting contributions.

These Spanish traits of social isolation and organizational rigidity are replicated, although not to such a high degree, in Portugal's political parties. The sudden disappearance of the authoritarian regime in 1974 and the consequent institutional void gave enormous opportunities to the party leaderships, which they used to create new institutional rules in their own favour—such as the closed and blocked electoral lists—and to establish an overwhelming party presence in public offices, State enterprises, social institutions, including the trade-union movement, and the media. The Portuguese parties are basically financed out of public funds, although the sums depend on the number of votes obtained. The fact is that they have increased their

membership since 1975 up to nearly 10 per cent of the voters. Internally they too are restrained by a highly centralized discipline, which reaches its greatest level in the case of the Communists.

A moderate multi-party system

In Spain the relative autonomy enjoyed by the party leaderships has conferred upon them a notable capacity to change and adapt their strategies, without, however, being able to create a party system which might be considered completely consolidated and stable. There has been a tendency among academics and experts to interpret the frequent party manoeuvres and the instability of the party system as a result of opportunistic or 'catch-all' strategies (which have been attributed to almost all the parties at one time or another). Nevertheless, it is possible to set the various party options in a narrower context, defined by voters' preferences and the institutional incentives outlined above.

In the first stage of democracy, after the elections of 1977 and 1979, the multi-party system which was created was coherent enough to arouse expectations that it might be consolidated. It was made up of two big parties, the centre-right UCD (which obtained 35 per cent of the votes) and the centre-left PSOE (which gained around 30 per cent), both competing for the centre ground. There were two other parties on the flanks, the right-wing AP and the left-wing PCE (with less than 10 per cent of the votes each), which acted as supporters of the big two parties while at the same time pulling them towards the extremes and maintaining some distance between them. Each of the two blocs, the UCD and AP on the right and the PCE and PSOE on the left, totalled an almost identical number of votes, while various regional parties were also represented. Under this system the UCD could form a minority government, under the presidency first of Adolfo Suárez and then of Leopoldo Calvo-Sotelo, seeking parliamentary support alternately from the AP, the Catalan nationalists of the CiU and other regional groups, and even from the PSOE on questions of the constitution and regional autonomy. (An early analysis which emphasized the limited institutionalization of this party system can be found in De Esteban and López-Guerra 1982.)

This situation came to an end with the 1982 election, when there was a notable realignment of voting preferences, provoked particularly by the self-destruction of the UCD—which passed from being the party of government to complete dissolution in just a few months. Also influential was the internal crisis of the communist PCE and the consequent attractiveness of the socialist PSOE as a new alternative capable of facing up to the challenges of democracy, which manifested themselves in an attempted *coup d'état* in February 1981 (see Linz and Montero 1986).

The crisis of the UCD, almost without parallel in other countries, is still one of the great mysteries of Spanish democracy. Among the factors which might explain it, one has to point out, first of all, a lack of cohesive organization. This organizational

weakness may be attributed to the party's origins in the previous government system, which meant that it did not have the experience of action based on its own efforts and resources which might have contributed to its internal strengthening, as well as to the rivalry between its 'barons', that is, the visible heads of the small groups which made up the party.

Second, the UCD also lacked ideological consistency, being an inharmonious mix of conservative, Christian democrat, liberal and moderate social democratic politicians (almost the whole German Bundestag in one single party, as was said at the time). This heterogeneity was converted into internal dissent over policies and strategies for forming parliamentary coalitions, especially in building a consensus over the constitution and in negotiating approval for the regional statutes of autonomy.

Third, these internal conflicts, including those between members of the government, were accentuated by the strong pressures which some interest groups, such as the Entrepreneurs' Confederacy and the Catholic Church, brought to bear in favour of policies suiting their interests (in fiscal matters and on moral questions such as divorce and religious schools, respectively) (see Huneus 1985; Gunther 1986; Hopkin 1993).

The factionalism of the UCD ended by provoking numerous desertions to the AP and the PSOE, while its first leader, Adolfo Suárez, set up a new small party, the Democratic and Social Centre (CDS), already mentioned, which itself disappeared in the early 1990s.

The communist PCE, for its part, suffered a severe internal crisis during the same years following the new constitution. The outstanding role which the party had played in the anti-Franco movement had equipped it with a relatively numerous and highly ideological militant membership, as well as optimistic electoral expectations. (Its leader, Santiago Carrillo, thought he might achieve the same number of votes as the Italian Communist Party, which at that time exceeded 30 per cent.) However, the frustration of these expectations, together with a far-reaching critical revision of communist ideology in the intellectual circles around the party, gave rise to a series of internal conflicts which ended in numerous expulsions, members fleeing to the PSOE, and the ephemeral creation of various communist groups.

As a result, in the 1982 elections the PSOE attracted a wide spectrum of centre and left voters—largely old supporters of the UCD and PCE—and gained 48 per cent of the votes cast and 202 deputies. In this way it achieved an advantage of over 22 percentage points over the next largest party, the AP, which—having also absorbed some of the old supporters of the UCD—saw its position suddenly changed, from that of a right-wing party in a supporting role to that of principal opposition party. The PSOE also won an absolute parliamentary majority in the 1986 and 1989 elections, and a relative majority in 1993, with 39 per cent of the vote, compared with the PP's 35 per cent, the latter having absorbed and concentrated the votes of the centre-right in one single candidacy. At the same time, however, the United Left

(IU) coalition recovered an electoral base similar to that which the PCE had enjoyed, although more concentrated among voters of a closer ideological affinity, so that the total votes obtained by the PSOE and the PCE-IU remained approximately constant from 1982 to 1993.

This party configuration has been given various labels, such as 'bi-party' (a term already used in the first period, 1977–9, by Martínez Cuadrado 1980; see commentaries by Cotarelo 1989), 'one predominant party' (Gunther *et al.* 1983) and even 'an unclassifiable system' (Caciagli 1986). Characterizing the system as multi-party and taking into consideration, above all, the multiplicity of regional parties, others have stressed its 'polarization' (Linz 1980, Maravall 1984:38, regarding the first period). However, competition between the Spanish parties is characterized, as we have seen, by a basic consensus and strong centripetal tendencies, induced as much by voters' preferences as by the electoral rules. The degree of fragmentation rates about average for Europe (72 per cent in votes and 63 per cent in Congress seats in 1993) and the distance between the extreme parties is very similar to that in France or Italy. Consequently, the party system has also been described as one of 'moderate pluralism' (Maravall 1981; Bar 1984; Ramírez 1991).

The Spanish party system in the mid 1990s cannot be considered stable or in equilibrium, in so far as there are incentives for some parties to modify their position in the ideological spectrum, or to create new parties. This is true above all on the right, where an alternative PP government is seen by voters in general as rather extreme and where, after the disappearance of the CDS, the moderate centre-right space has been only partially occupied by a few nationalist and regionalist parties, especially Convergence and Union (CiU) and the Basque Nationalist Party (PNV), which had acted as parliamentary support groups for the PSOE government in 1993–5. In reality, in the first fifteen years of constitutional democracy there has not existed a stable party system favouring the alternation of parties in government, bearing in mind that the change of government in 1982 was the result of a change in the party system itself.

This failure to consolidate had its origins in tactical errors committed at the beginning of the 1980s by the leaders of the centre-right, who oscillated between the temptation to consolidate a slightly centre-left pivotal position based on the mean of voters' preferences and an attempt to create a 'natural majority' in alliance with the right wing, and ended up by causing the disappearance of the UCD. Bear in mind that in 1982, despite the realignment of votes in favour of the PSOE and the AP, the two centrist candidacies of the UCD and CDS would have doubled their number of seats had they offered themselves to the electorate jointly (Sani and Gunther 1986). Since that date the entire strategy of the AP has been dedicated to trying to reconstitute the attraction which the UCD had for centrist voters before it self-destructed, including the 'refounding' of the party and its change of name to Popular Party in 1989, affiliation to the Christian Democratic International, the retirement of its leader, Manuel Fraga (still remembered by many voters as one of

Franco's former Ministers), and his replacement by the young José M. Aznar, various pre-election coalitions with small centrist and regionalist parties, and a new array of priority campaign issues (with special emphasis on government 'corruption') (Montero 1986, 1989; Beltran 1993).

Meanwhile the PSOE, still in opposition, had embarked upon the course of ideological moderation, abandoning its statutory identification with 'Marxism' in 1979. Since acceding to power in 1982 it had managed to maintain its hold over the centre by, above all, a moderate economic policy oriented towards growth rather than redistribution, the leadership qualities of Felipe González, and fear on the part of many voters of a right still often associated with the authoritarian past. Nevertheless the socialists' moderate stance has given rise to tension between some of their left-wing supporters and government policy, between the socialist trade union, the General Union of Workers (UGT), the party and the government, and between different factions within the party itself.

Among the main issues in election campaigns have been social security, moral-cum-religious questions, law and order, but in successive elections other issues have gradually assumed greater importance over which it is harder to adopt left-right positions, such as the record in government of the party in power, especially as regards economic growth, and the probity of the parties and candidates. These matters are of greater interest to centre voters, that is, to people who are relatively indifferent to other questions involving clearer left or right policy alternatives.

As a consequence of this process of formation of the present party system, Spain does not fully display the tendency, general elsewhere, for the party leadership to profess more centrist attitudes than the average supporter among the electorate, and the latter, in turn, to be more centrist than the average party activist. Since 1982 the leadership of the PSOE has managed to situate the party in a moderate position, so much so that by the beginning of the 1990s it rated 4.5 on a scale of 1–10, that is,

Table 6.3 Policy space of parties in Spain, 1978–93

Year	Communist PCE-IU	Socialist PSOE	Basque nationalist PNV	Liberal CDS	UCD	Catalan Nationalist CiU	Conservative AP-PP
1978	2.5	3.8			6.0		8.5
1979	2.2	3.7				7.0	8.0
1982	1.8	3.5		5.7	6.2		8.5
1986	2.0	3.8		5.5			8.5
1989	2.2	4.1		6.0	6.6		8.4
1990	2.4	4.3	4.8	5.8	6.7		8.2
1993	2.5	4.5	5.5	5.4		5.8	7.9
1984	2.7	3.6	6.7		7.1	6.6	8.4

Notes 0 extreme left, 10 extreme right. See Table 6.1 for the full party names.

Sources 1978–93: poll data of the Centre for Sociological Research; 1984: F.Castles and P.Mair, 'Left-right political scales', *European Journal of Political Research* 12 (1984):83–8.

only a few decimal points from the mean of the electorate in general. The PP, on the other hand, has always been perceived as occupying a more extreme position than its own voters—specifically, rating 7.9 at the same date, that is, over three points distant from the mean of the electorate and considerably more to the right than other European Christian democrat and conservative parties.

As we have seen, the main factor which allows us to speak of a multi-party rather than a bi-party system is the existence of numerous regional parties. In point of fact the national party system interrelates with different arrangements in the Autonomous Communities.

In eleven of the communities we can speak of imperfect bi-party systems, since the two major parties, the PSOE and the PP, together always account for over 80 per cent of the vote, although there are always small or regional parties which gain some representation, at least in the autonomous parliaments.

In another four communities there are moderate multi-party systems. In Catalonia, in particular, the two main groups are the Socialists' Party of Catalonia (federated to the PSOE) and the centre-right nationalist coalition, the CiU, flanked on either side by the left-wing Initiative for Catalonia (federated to the IU) and the conservative PP. The nationalist dimension has also produced a fifth radical nationalist group, the Republican Left of Catalonia (ERC), but its parliamentary strategy of exchanging votes usually places it between the PSC and CiU. This two-dimensional characteristic of the Catalan ideological space can be seen above all in the practice of 'differential abstention' in the Autonomous Community elections by comparison with the Spanish elections on the part of voters who see themselves as more Spanish and less bilingual than average; this phenomenon mainly works against the PSC and the PSC (Montero and Font 1991; Padró-Solanet and Colomer 1992). In the other three communities alluded to above there is a system of basically three parties: PSOE, PP and a regional party, which is rightist in Aragon, leftist in Galicia and centrist in the Canary Islands.

It is only in the Autonomous Communities of the Basque country and Navarra, where the national dimension is the most relevant one, no less in general than in regional elections, that one can observe a greater degree of multipartism, fractionalization and bi-polarization. The two parties with the biggest vote generally collect only some 50 per cent of the votes. On the national dimension there are ideological contiguities between the Socialist Party of Euskadi (federated to the PSOE) and the PP, on the one hand, and the nationalists of the PNV and the Basque Nationalists (EA) on the other, but the strategies employed to form coalitions show a centrist connection between the PSOE and the PNV and an affinity between the latter and the PP, allowing a glimpse of a latent two-dimensional relationship. To this scenario must be added an anti-system party, the radical nationalist HB, which supports the terrorist organization ETA (Llera 1985; Linz *et al.* 1986).

From a multi-party system towards a dominant party

In the initial phase of Portuguese democracy, also, a four-party system appeared to be establishing itself, but subsequently there has been an increasing concentration of votes. In 1975 and 1976 the centre-left PS obtained the greatest number of votes (around 36 per cent) followed by the centre-right PPD (with 25 per cent). These were flanked by two smaller parties, the left-wing PCP and its allies (with around 15 per cent of the votes) and the right-wing CDS (between 8 per cent and 16 per cent). In this situation each party seemed to occupy the ideological space attributed to it in the voters' range of preferences, leaving the two largest parties to engage in a degree of competition for the centre ground.

Table 6.4 Policy space of parties in Portugal, 1986

Year	Communist PCP	Socialist PSP	Liberal PPD/PSD	Christian CDS
1986	1.8	4.7	7.1	8.5

Notes 0 extreme left, 10 extreme right. See Table 6.2 for the full party names.

Source T.C.Bruneau and A.MacLeod, *Politics in Contemporary Portugal*, Boulder, Co.: Rienner, 1986.

This state of affairs continued during the 1979, 1980 and 1983 elections, the only crucial difference being that in 1979 and 1980 the PPD and the CDS, as well as the small monarchist party, the PPM, joined in a single candidacy as the Democratic Alliance (AD), headed by Francisco Sa Carneiro and, after his death in an apparent accident, by Francisco Pinto Balsemão. The AD coalition was the most voted-for list in the two elections and, thanks to the electoral rules, was rewarded with two absolute parliamentary majorities. This change of leading party was thus the result of the unifying strategy of the centre-right, contrasted with the divisions and confrontation between the two parties of the left, rather than of any shift in preference by the voters, since according to surveys some 84 per cent of the electorate remained faithful in their voting behaviour from 1975 to 1983 (Oppello and Claggett 1984).

One of the keys to the evolution of the Portuguese party system has been the anti-system strategy of the Communist Party. In the first two years after the fall of the authoritarian regime, in collaboration with the Armed Forces Movement, the PCP was the driving force in the plan for the revolutionary transformation of the country, which was in part reflected in the 1976 constitution. Even at that time the PCP, led by Alvaro Cunhal, was distinguished by its ideological extremism, which distanced it from the 'Euro-communism' of its Italian and Spanish counterparts, with its implied acceptance of a democratic institutional framework. Subsequently the PCP has never been a party of government, nor has it accepted the later amendments of the constitution.

Finding it impossible to enter into a coalition with those to its left in parliament, the PS, led by Mario Soares, tried to extend its room for manoeuvre by an erratic policy of pacts. In 1978 the PS formed a government with the right-wing CDS (in a coalition with no connection on the left-right dimension, since it left out the PSD) at the same time as it confronted the then President of the Republic, Colonel Ramalho Eanes, who stood for retaining military control of the political process. Yet in 1980 the PS broke with the Christian Democrats of the CDS and allied itself with the Communists in supporting the presidential re-election of Eanes, by then a general. In 1983 the PS again confronted Eanes and this time formed a government with the centre-right PSD, the so-called 'central bloc' coalition.

This new socialist strategy, and the constitutional reforms of 1982 which lessened the powers of the president, provoked the formation of an 'Eanist' party, the Democratic Renewal Party (PRD), which in 1985 contested seats in the Assembly with marked success, obtaining 18 per cent of the popular vote. Although the PRD apparently hoped to become a centrist pivot of the party system, 73 per cent of the votes it won came from former supporters of the Socialist Party so that, in consequence of this new division of the centre-left vote, the centre-right PSD gained a plurality of votes and was able to form a government by itself.

In the later elections of 1987 and 1991 the PSD, led by Aníbal Cavaco Silva, obtained over 50 per cent of the votes and was easily able to form single-colour governments with a parliamentary majority. The only way Mario Soares could compete for the presidency of the republic was by distancing himself from the PS; as President he acted as independent referee between the various institutions rather than as the leader of a party not in government (Oppello 1985; Bruneau and MacLeod 1986; Aguiar 1988).

Thus the institutional conflict and frequency of elections which characterized the first period of Portuguese democracy, when there were several alternations of parties and government coalitions, seem to have served as a learning experience for the voters and some party leaders, eventually consolidating the system of representation, to some extent, by the way of an absolute majority in parliament and government. Although, to judge from the few figures available, the distribution of voters' preferences along the left-right dimension may have maintained some distance between the parties, and although the party system was initially polarized by the existence of an anti-system party, the unifying and centripetal strategy of the PSD helped to consolidate political equilibrium around the moderate centre. This outcome was facilitated by the reduction of the constitutional powers of the President, which had been a source of conflict and government instability in the first ten years of elections. Accordingly, in spite of proportional representation, fractionalization is relatively low in Portugal (67 per cent in votes and 60 per cent in seats, in 1995, less than the European average), while the first two parties, the PSD and the PS, both inclined towards the centre, have come to total almost 80 per cent of the popular vote. The repeated absolute majorities of the PSD and its advantage over the second party had

allowed the system to be called multi-party with 'a dominant party' (Fernández Stock 1988) before the new victory of the PS in 1995.

PARLIAMENT

In Spain the two-chamber structure of the parliament (*Cortes generates*), made up of the Congress of Deputies and the Senate, dates from the political reform of the Franco regime, carried out in 1976–7, by which the incumbent rulers tried to secure positions for themselves in the second chamber and ensure varied representation. The two-chamber system was consolidated in the 1978 constitution, although it is strongly weighted in favour of the Congress.

Although there is a widespread consensus about the inefficiency of the Senate in the present institutional structure, there has not been enough agreement between the political parties to turn it into a federal chamber, as in other decentralized European States. Some senators, as we have seen, are nominated by the Autonomous Communities, but the upper chamber plays no formal role in the relationship between central State institutions and the regional governments. In practice, negotiations between the central and autonomous governments proceed along extra-parliamentary paths, above all through the heads of the governing parties. In the legislative field the Senate reproduces the work of the Congress. The two chambers can introduce and modify Bills, but if there is disagreement between the Congress and the Senate the former has the last word, so that in fact the Senate has scarcely ever exercised legislative initiative.

In the post-constitution periods in government of both the UCD and the PSOE decisions taken in the parliament have largely been determined by the agenda of the government and, in practice, of the leadership of the governing party. The 1982 parliamentary rules, which superseded the provisional norms operating since 1977, further restricted the role of parliament, penalizing any group indiscipline on the part of individual deputies and also any fragmentation of parliamentary groups, while at the same time favouring government stability. In fact the existence of a single party with an absolute parliamentary majority for over ten years impaired the pluralism which had been envisaged in setting up the constitution and strengthened the restrictive aspects of the parliamentary rules. This relationship can be seen in detail in the way that parliamentary groups function, in the work of the commissions and boards, and in the reduced role of individual representatives.

To form a parliamentary group in the Congress of Deputies requires fifteen deputies elected on the same platform, or a smaller number if they have been elected on a nationwide candidacy list and have gained at least 5 per cent of the votes cast, or have been elected on a regional list which has obtained at least 15 per cent of the votes and five deputies in the area concerned. The remainder of the deputies who are not included in these groups, although they may have competed with them in various lists, make up the 'Mixed Parliamentary Group', which is usually large, heterogeneous

and inoperative. Parties which have established an electoral coalition can form only a single parliamentary group. Consequently, in the legislatures governed by the 1982 rules only four parties have ever been able consistently to form their own parliamentary group, namely the PSOE, the PP, the CiU and the PNV, while the UCD managed it in 1982, the CDS only in 1986 and 1989, and the IU only in 1989 and 1993. There have thus been five parliamentary groups in each legislature (six in 1989), while in the Mixed Group there were deputies from four to seven different electoral lists, most of them regional. The leaders of the main lists and parties are also the leaders of the principal parliamentary groups in the Congress.

As regards the Senate, ten senators are required to form a group. This is a figure which only the same four parties already mentioned—the PSOE, the PP, the CiU and the PNV—have achieved since 1986. No Autonomous Community can promote the formation of a regional group composed of senators returned by its own electorate. Only regional sub-groups of parliamentary groups are permitted, and only if they are formed by at least three senators of the same Autonomous Community, a figure which has been reached only by the PSOE and, in some communities, by the PP. This has allowed these nationwide parties to appear as regional counterparts of the regional parties.

The principal parliamentary organizations are the Boards (*Mesas*), the Commissions and the Committee of Spokesmen (*Junta de portavoces*). Each of the Congress and Senate boards is composed of a president, elected by absolute majority in the first round or by plurality in a second round, several vice-presidents (four in the Congress and two in the Senate) and four secretaries; in these elections every member of parliament has a vote limited to one candidate for vice-president and one candidate for secretary. Through these procedures a parliamentary plurality can elect a majority of the boards (Colomer 1990: chapter 13). The commissions, which are made up of around a tenth of the total number of members of parliament, carry out the greater part of legislative discussion and control the work of the House. They are composed of representatives of the various parliamentary groups and are nominated by the heads of the groups, so that the possible winning coalitions are the same as in the full chamber. The Committee of Spokesmen sets up the agenda and calendar of parliamentary work and is formed by a representative of each parliamentary group, which has a vote weighted according to the number of deputies in it.

Given this rigid organizational structure, the activities of individual members of parliament are very limited. Only the parliamentary groups are authorized to introduce Bills, while any amendment proposed by an individual member has to be endorsed by the spokesman of his or her group. There is strong voting discipline at the heart of each group, maintained through instructions and controls. Furthermore, there is little continuity among the individual members of any single commission, which prevents them from acquiring specialist expertise in any field and keeps them dependent on the decisions of the group leaders (Morán 1989). The great majority of members have neither assistants nor advisers (except in technical and juridical

matters). Altogether, the real parliamentary business of discussion, negotiation and the drawing up of alternatives is monopolized by the chairmen and spokesmen of the groups. For most members their presence in parliament is above all an opportunity to be recruited for other posts, and the main qualification for attaining such promotion is usually adherence to the discipline of the party. The leaderships of the major parties thus control the deputies and through them dominate the parliament (Capo *et al.* 1990).

Nevertheless, as we have already noted, the other side of the coin and indirect consequence of these restrictions upon individual members are desertions and bitter conflicts within the groups, so that although deserters within the Congress are not allowed to join any parliamentary group other than that which they assigned themselves to when the chamber was constituted, and to the Mixed Group, members frequently desert. Between 1977 and 1989 eighty-nine deputies moved in this way (some of them several times, making 180 crossbench moves altogether) and in the legislative periods beginning in 1977 and 1982 the Mixed Group came to be the third largest in the chamber in terms of number of deputies (Colomer 1990: ch. 16). Some of these desertions were the result of the wider crises of the UCD and the PCE which we have outlined above, but in general it seems clear that the hierarchical and centralized structure of the parties and the rigidity of the rules governing parliamentary activity help to sharpen tensions in the heart of the parliamentary groups and to turn disagreements into serious conflicts (including, for example, the confrontation between the PSOE government and the UGT trade union).

Comparatively speaking, the Spanish parliament has produced a relatively small number of laws: an average of 100 per year in the period 1977–82, when the UCD had a relative majority, and a smaller average, some seventy per year, in the period 1983–93, when the PSOE had an absolute majority. Most legislative initiatives, especially the laws which receive final approval, are the work of the government, which intervenes markedly in the agenda and calendar of the parliament. As regards the subjects of the legislation, most laws have been about regulating the government's own institutions, and public finances (37.1 per cent and 23.2 per cent respectively, in the period 1977–88). Among the remainder there are more general regulations than public policies or regulation of private interests.

The laws are usually approved by oversized legislative coalitions—larger, that is, than is numerically necessary in order to win. At first, this was due to the broad negotiations and consensual agreements which characterized the drawing up of the constitution and the institutionalization of democracy. In the second phase, the large majorities have been occasioned by the scant relevance of many of the laws approved, which incites the parties to behave and vote more for electoral reasons, and to take up generic positions on the ideological spectrum, than for any reason to do with the foreseeable limited effects of the legislation. One can measure the relative size of a legislative majority by the relationship between the yes votes and the number of

votes of the party in government, so that a value of 1 means that the government party approves a law by itself, and anything over 1 indicates the degree of enlargement of the majority. The average size of majorities in the period 1977–82 was 1.9 and in the period 1983–9 it was 1.5. In particular, 45 per cent of the laws were approved unanimously, and very few by votes of the government party alone, even at those times when one party had an absolute majority, with the single exception of the annual budgets (Capo 1990).

The Spanish political system, as we have said, is a parliamentary monarchy, but the rules of executive appointment and control concede only a limited role to the parliament. The President of the Government is nominated by the Crown, after having been elected by an absolute majority of the deputies in a first round or by a plurality in a second round, which means that an early dissolution of the chambers can be avoided if no candidate gets majority support.

The parliamentary constituents of 1977–8, worried by the danger of democratic instability, chose to limit the possibility of censure to only ‘constructive’ censure motions, after the model of the Federal Republic of Germany (which was established in the post-war period as a reaction to the governmental instability of the Weimar Republic, which has frequently been compared to the Second Spanish Republic in studies of the breakdown of democratic regimes in the 1930s; see, for example, Linz 1978). In accordance with this system, the President of the Government can be deposed only by a motion which includes an alternative candidate, is sponsored by 10 per cent of the deputies (a figure which has been available only to the leading opposition party) and has obtained the approval of an absolute majority of the members of the two chambers. The presidential candidate is not obliged to present the members of the government to the parliament, nor can the latter move motions of censure against particular Ministers.

As a result of these rules, it is possible for governments in a parliamentary minority to survive if, as occurred from 1977 to 1996, the adversaries of the party with most votes are sufficiently divided on both left and right. In this way a high level of governmental stability has been achieved; if we exclude the constituent legislature which began in 1977, the four following legislatures have lasted on average forty-two months (against a legal maximum of forty-eight), the highest average in Europe. In practice the censure motions which have been moved (by the PSOE in 1980 and by the PP in 1987) have been mere denunciations of the government and party propaganda exercises in front of the electorate.

The powers of the Portuguese Assembly are even more limited than those of the Spanish Cortes, since, besides the dominance of the executive and the tendency for decisions to be made by the parties, the Assembly has to share its placing or withdrawal of confidence in the Prime Minister with the President of the Republic. Nevertheless, parliamentary powers have been increased since the revision of the constitution in 1982, with the diminution of those of the President and the widening of the Assembly’s budgetary procedures.

Individual Portuguese members of parliament are also subject to strong party discipline and can act only through their groups, whose existence is actually envisaged in the constitution. No deputy may change group. Nevertheless the various parties which have formed the same electoral coalition can set up different groupings (*agrupamientos*), which have similar powers to those of the groups, except in moving government censure motions. The parliamentary agenda is established by the Leaders' Conference, which in practice means that parliamentary life is dominated by the party leaderships. There are frequent extra-parliamentary negotiations between the leaderships, and these were decisive in promoting and approving such decisive laws as those on agrarian reform, national defence, the Constitutional Court and the amendments of the constitution.

The Assembly is subject to the power of dissolution held by the President of the Republic, but on the other hand the Assembly can override the presidential legislative veto if it can muster a two-thirds majority, and in exceptional circumstances can initiate the process of removing the President.

As regards the government, given its twofold dependence, there is no proper parliamentary election of a Prime Minister; however, in practice the person designated submits himself to a vote of confidence in the chamber. In 1977 the socialist Mario Soares failed to obtain such a vote to form a government, and resigned. On the other hand, 25 per cent of the members of the Assembly can present a censure motion against the Prime Minister, which has to be approved by an absolute majority, without having to put forward an alternative candidate. The first censure motion was presented by the PCP against the 'presidential' Prime Minister Mota Pinto in 1978; it was followed by the motions of the PS against Sá Carneiro in 1980, of the CDS against Soares in 1983 and of the PS against Cavaco Silva in 1989—all of them more for propaganda than effective purposes, since the governments of all the censured Prime Ministers had majority backing in the chamber. Exceptionally, in 1987, a motion presented by the PRD and supported by the PS and the PCP managed to overthrow the Prime Minister, Cavaco Silva, who at that time was in a minority position, but he obtained an absolute majority in the following elections. One can see, then, that in practice only those governments which could count on majority support in the Assembly have been able to survive (Oppello 1978, 1986; Braga and Lobo 1988).

THE GOVERNMENT

The Portuguese dual executive

Under the Portuguese constitution of 1976 the President of the Republic possessed strong powers, which were later reduced. In the first place, he presided over the Council of the Revolution, a military organization which claimed to be the guarantor of the revolutionary process and with which he shared the political direction of the

State. The Council of the Revolution, besides advising the President and having the power of veto in military matters, acted as constitutional court. For his part the President of the Republic nominated and could remove the Prime Minister and the government, dissolve the Assembly, exercise the legislative veto, and postpone the approval of legislation.

This power structure, characteristic of the 'semi-presidential' model which also exists in countries like France and Finland, was modified by the constitutional revision carried out in 1982 by the Assembly, without reference to—and against opposition from—the President. In the first place, the Council of the Revolution was abolished and replaced by a Council of State composed of the President of the Assembly, the Prime Minister, the President of the Constitutional Court and representatives of other institutions, with the task of advising the President of the Republic. The latter lost his power to delay legislation and nominate Ministers, although he retained the right to designate and remove the Prime Minister and—with some limitations as to timing—to dissolve the Assembly, but his legislative veto became inoperative if it were opposed by a qualified parliamentary majority. With his authority to refer laws and government decisions to the Constitutional Court, the President of the Republic became a referee between institutions, while remaining head of the armed forces and guarantor of national unity.

For its part the government, which is responsible to both the President and the Assembly, was converted into the organization in charge of the general direction of the country's policies, as well as being the highest organ of public administration. At times when a single party has had an absolute majority—for instance, since 1987—the government has held considerable legislative power in its hands, being able in practice to dominate the Assembly through the governing party.

The structure of the government revolves around the Council of Ministers and is complemented by the secretaries and under-secretaries of state. As in the French

Table 6.5 Governments of Portugal, 1976–96

<i>Legislature No.</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Prime Minister</i>	<i>Party composition</i>
1	1976	M. Soares	PSP
	1978	M. Soares	PSP, CDS
	1978	A. Nobre da Costa	'Presidential'
	1978	C. Mota Pinto	'Presidential'
	1979	M. L. Pintassilgo	'Presidential'
2	1980	F. Sá Carneiro	AD (PSD–CDS)
3	1981	F. Pinto Balsemo	AD (PSD–CDS)
4	1983	M. Soares	PSP, PSD
5	1985	A. Cavaco Silva	PSD
6	1987	A. Cavaco Silva	PSD
7	1991	A. Cavaco Silva	PSD
8	1995	A. Guterres	PSP

Note See Table 6.2 for the full party names.

model of relations with the bureaucracy (which has also been adopted in Spain), the private personal assistants of the Ministers, who in practice are recruited from the ranks of the governing party, stand between them and the directors-general and other high officials (Lucas 1988).

As mentioned already, the executive dualism of the Portuguese system is regarded by scholars as a 'semi-presidential regime' (Duverger 1986). It fits the model as regards the way the President is directly elected, the double accountability of the government and the President's power to dissolve parliament. It differs from the model, however, in the limits upon the President's power to nominate the members of the government and to veto legislation.

The diminution of the President's powers and the shift in the balance of power between the parties which—as we have remarked more than once—are the main actors in Portuguese politics, have provoked different interpretations of and labels for the institutional structure. After the constitutional revision of 1982 it was called a 'semi-parliamentary' system (Oppello 1985:158), and when the PSD achieved an absolute majority, some authors went so far as to catalogue it 'prime ministerial presidentialism' (Moreira 1988).

This dualism of the President and the government has traditionally been conceived as a mechanism of control and reciprocal moderation which ought to prevent an excessive concentration of power, but it can also bring with it factors leading to instability and inter-institutional conflict. In the Portuguese case, these have taken various forms: first, the almost permanent existence, already mentioned, of two different majorities supporting the President and the Government (although both of these have always included a sector of the 'central electorate', that is, of the PS or the PSD, which acts as the pivot of Portuguese politics); second, attempts to keep various 'presidential' Prime Ministers in power without parliamentary support, during the period 1978–9 when the President possessed greater constitutional powers; and finally, the belligerence of President Eanes and his parliamentary arm the PRD, as a result of which the Assembly was dissolved on four occasions and early elections had to be held (in 1979, 1983, 1985 and 1987).

The legal scope of government intervention in society has changed considerably since the beginning of the democratic period. While the 1976 constitution prescribed a transition to socialism through the collectivization of the principal means of

Table 6.6 Presidents of Portugal, 1976–96

<i>Election No.</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>President</i>	<i>Party support</i>
1	1976	Col. R. Eanes	PSP, PDP, CDS
2	1980	Gen. R. Eanes	PCP, PSP
3	1986	M. Soares	PSP
4	1991	M. Soares	PSP, PSD
5	1996	J. Sampaio	PSP

Note See Table 6.2 for the full party names.

production and pronounced the nationalization process irreversible, the revisions of 1982 and, above all, 1989 took away constitutional obstacles to the development of a market economy which, in fact, had never ceased to exist.

More significant, however, are some survivals of the former authoritarian corporatism, which have been partly reconverted into a democratic neo-corporatism. Together with the government, the main actors in the consensus are, on the one hand, the industrial, agricultural and commercial employers' federations which have been grouped together in the National Council of Portuguese Entrepreneurs (CNEP) since 1979. In competition with the CNEP are the industrial associations which since 1980 have combined in the National Council of Entrepreneurs' Associations (CNAE) with the intention of speaking to the government directly without getting involved in social negotiations. The main agricultural and industrial trade unions, on the other hand, which have grown up from the strongly communist-influenced Intersindical of the early years of the transition, go by the name of the General Confederation of Portuguese Workers (CGTP). Alongside the CGTP, since 1978, is the General Union of Workers (UGT), supported by socialists and social democrats, and mainly concentrated in the service sector.

The principal neo-corporate institution for negotiating economic policy is the Permanent Council of Social Negotiation, set up in 1984. It brings together, under the chairmanship of the Prime Minister, six trade union representatives (three from the UGT and three from the CGTP, the latter having refused to occupy seats for several years because they regarded membership as incompatible with the class struggle), six from the employers' confederations, and six Ministers with economic and social portfolios. However, since 1986 there have also been direct agreements between the industrial associations and the UGT on matters affecting incomes policy and vocational training (Lucena 1988).

With a view to the coming European single market, the majority PSD government began drastic economic reforms in 1988, privatizing State industries and promoting free enterprise. This economic plan was opposed by the trade unions, who held a day's general strike in 1988 and subsequent strikes and protests (very much in line with the attitude of the Spanish trade unions in the same period). While the agrarian and fiscal reforms were carried through, other measures approved by the government and the Assembly, such as those making it easier to dismiss workers, were later annulled by the Constitutional Court.

The Spanish government

Among the most important powers assigned by the constitution to the Crown are: to represent the country abroad, the leadership of the armed forces, and the right of pardon. However, activities of the government are in fact directed by its president, who (with the approval of the Crown, which is merely a matter of protocol) can

nominate Ministers, call elections, dissolve the parliament, call consultative referendums, declare war or peace, and sign international treaties.

From 1982 to 1996 the President of the Government, Felipe González, added to his position of head of a monochrome executive the roles of secretary-general of the PSOE and president of the socialist parliamentary group (which had an absolute majority up to 1993). Until 1990 González shared this power with Alfonso Guerra, who was both Vice-president of the Government and vice-secretary-general of the PSOE, but Guerra was removed from his government post after being accused of responsibility for selling favours. Given that the majority of Ministers do not occupy executive posts in the PSOE, the connection between the government and the party—which in turn designates and disciplines its members of parliament—has been almost exclusively in the hands of its principal leader (López Garrido 1985; Heywood 1992).

The President leads the Council of Ministers, which meets with pre-established regularity. The government's delegated commissions, interministerial commissions and under-secretaries' commissions work in parallel, adopting many agreements and decisions which are put before to the council for ratification.

Table 6.7 Governments of Spain, 1977–96

<i>Legislature No.</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>President of Government</i>	<i>Party composition</i>
1	1977	A. Suárez	UCD
2	1979	A. Suárez	UCD
	1981	L. Calvo-Sotelo	UCD
3	1982	F. González	PSOE
4	1986	F. González	PSOE
5	1989	F. González	PSOE
6	1993	F. González	PSOE
7	1996	J. M. Aznar	PP

Note See Table 6.1 for the full party names.

The government also directs the public administration, the traditional structure of which was inspired by the French model of a centralized bureaucracy relatively independent of the interest groups in society. Nevertheless, this model has undergone some modifications in the democratic period: political control of the higher levels of administration has increased, especially through Ministers nominating people to politically responsible posts—such as directors-general and deputy directors-general—to carry out assignments which in other countries would be the responsibility of senior civil servants; some administrative corps have been heavily decentralized with the creation and consolidation of the Autonomous Communities; and some administrative agencies have been put more directly in touch with the social groups most affected by their powers and responsibilities.

The size of the public bureaucracy has grown rapidly since the second half of the 1970s, until in the early 1990s it had reached proportions comparable with the EU average.

The growth of the bureaucracy since the introduction of democracy can be attributed to two factors. First, particular interest groups and citizens in general have both had greater opportunity to express their demands for public intervention. Such demands are especially heavy in a society such as Spain's, which has traditionally embraced a 'subject' culture, disposed towards protectionism and State assistance. Second, the efficiency of the bureaucracy has increased, thanks to better education among civil servants and improved technical and organizational capacity. Thus, in comparison with the pre-democratic situation, there has been a reduction in the number of juridical regulations and in the corps and scales of civil servants, and the salary and incentives systems have been clarified, all of which has increased productivity. But the well-known paradox has manifested itself whereby greater efficiency has allowed certain sectors of the administration wider margins to expand by themselves absorbing the public benefits of their activities. Also, since the traditionally low turnover of civil servants in their postings has scarcely been modified, any attempt to channel personnel appointments to different activities or services has tended to lead to an increase in staff.

Quantitatively, public spending has risen from 20 per cent of GNP in 1960 and 25 per cent in 1975 to 46 per cent in 1993 (compared with an EU average of 50 per cent), while the number of civil servants, which was around 10 per cent of the active population in 1980, was approaching 15 per cent in 1993 (as against an average 17.5 per cent in the EU).

The Spanish constitutional norms, which, as we have seen, were drawn up by consensus between the various political tendencies, lay down varied criteria for government intervention. On the one hand, they make formal allowance for planning and for a high degree of regulation of economic activity; on the other, they establish a free enterprise system within the framework of a market economy—stating specifically, for instance, that taxes shall not be confiscatory and that public spending will be guided by criteria of efficiency and economy (Brennan and Casas 1991).

There are certain institutional mechanisms for negotiation between the government and groups in society, especially as regards the direction and execution of economic policy, although in practice they have had a very limited effect. To understand the basic features of relations between the government and social groups in economic and social matters, it has to be borne in mind that while the Spanish Confederation of Entrepreneurs' Organizations (CEOE) groups together over 90 per cent of employers, albeit in a very decentralized structure, the trade unions—mainly the Union of General Workers (UGT) and the Workers' Commissions (CCOO)—have a membership of fewer than 15 per cent of wage earners (barely half of whom are up to date with their subscriptions).

The trade unions have based their negotiating power on the existence of works committees elected by all the company's workers irrespective of their trade union affiliation, and on the legally binding nature of the agreements between social

organizations and government for all firms and employees, whatever their links or independence. This 'inclusive' model of trade union negotiation is distinct from other traditions (for example, the British) in which only their members are bound by the deals agreed by the unions. While the latter 'exclusive' model gives the unions a strong incentive to increase their membership, in Spain the automatic binding of all workers to the terms of an agreement is a disincentive to active participation and union membership, which to workers seems an unnecessary expense. While their bases of organized support are increasingly concentrated among civil servants, the low level of membership causes the unions to give priority to action by their organizing leaderships, which gives rise to a vicious circle.

Social negotiation, then, is poorly institutionalized. Although a certain amount of literature on neo-corporatism, based on experience in Central and Northern Europe, was imported during the 1980s, it was not until 1992 that Spain set up an Economic and Social Council, composed of a chairman, twenty employers' representatives, twenty trade union representatives, and twenty experts representing other groups (farmers, consumers, fishermen, co-operatives), which has a purely consultative status.

Up to that time, at least, two stages can be distinguished in relations between the government and social organizations. In the first period, 1977–84, in the midst of economic crisis and mostly with minority centre-right governments in power, the keynote was consensus and agreement. The first agreements on economic and social matters, known as the 'Moncloa pacts', were signed in late 1977, after the first political election. These pacts, aimed at stabilizing the economy and institutionalizing labour relations, were conceived of as a contribution to consolidating democracy and were signed, in fact, by the government and the parliamentary political parties, since entrepreneurs and trade unions were still in the first stages of getting themselves organized. Later on, most of the agreements between employers and trade unions, although they concentrated on fixing rates of wage increases, also had a markedly political character. The trade unions, on the one hand, undertook to moderate claims and strikes, while the government, on the other, legislated on workers' rights and provided public funding for the unions. In line with this generic orientation, the CEOE and the UGT signed the Inter-confederal Basic Agreement in 1979, the Inter-confederal Framework Agreement (AMI) in 1980, the AMI-2 and the Employment National Agreement (ANE) in 1981, the Inter-confederal Agreement (AI) in 1983, and the Economic and Social Agreement in 1984. For its part, the CCOO trade union joined the ANE, known as the 'pact of fear', only because it was signed shortly after the attempted *coup d'état* of 1981, and the AI, a few weeks after the formation of the first PSOE government.

The second stage began in 1985, initially in a period of economic growth and then, after 1991, in recession, and under governments of the centre-left. The keynotes of this stage were conflict and the absence of agreement, to a point where the unions have called several general strikes since 1988 against government economic

policy. The explanation of this paradox—social pacts with centre-right governments and social conflict with centre-left governments—can be found in some aspects of the political game which have been outlined in previous sections. In the period of UCD governments, consensual negotiations between the parties predominated, especially on constitutional matters, and this climate extended to negotiations on economic policy with the social organizations. During that phase of incipient democracy, the government made important political and institutional concessions to the trade unions.

The PSOE governments, by contrast, soon found themselves facing a major contradiction between the need for social negotiation, on the one hand, and the requirements of electoral popularity and medium and long-term economic rationality, on the other. The remarkable social independence of the Socialist Party leadership and its fusion with the government leadership, plus command of an absolute parliamentary majority, allowed the PSOE to give the electoral game priority, that is, the PSOE tried to maintain the positions which made it attractive to a significant band of moderate and centrist voters, recruited from wide sections of the middle class, and showed a preference for economic policies aimed at growth, in defiance of protests from the less competitive sections of society and the trade unions' demands for redistribution. Unlike other European socialist parties, the PSOE could maintain this 'orthodox' direction of economic policy without seriously discrediting itself precisely because, when it came into government for the first time, the Keynesian approach which had characterized centre-left government management of the economy in other countries had already fallen into crisis, so that the PSOE, by contrast, did not have to contradict any of its own previous policies.

Nevertheless the conflict between the government and the trade unions carried its costs, both electoral and economic. Precisely because most of the legal and institutional concessions to the unions had been made in the previous stage of agreements with the centrist governments, the socialist governments from the mid-1980s onwards found themselves left with few resources to placate the unions. This relative weakness of the government was clearly shown after the general strike of December 1988, when it had to accept a marked increase in social spending, which in turn led to budget deficits and helped to put the brakes on economic growth. Thus the PSOE government, despite its absolute parliamentary majority, ended up having to give in to extra-parliamentary pressures against a background of weak institutionalization of relations between the social partners. The consequent expansionist trend in economic policy coincided with a new period of dwindling private investment and increased unemployment, and it also had a negative effect on government popularity. In the years 1989–93, therefore, the economic cycle ceased to be influenced by the electoral cycle; social conflict, albeit not very institutionalized, intervened, with negative consequences for both economic growth and the party in government (Dehesa 1988; Zaragoza 1988; Colomer 1994).

INTERGOVERNMENTAL RELATIONS

Decentralization

The biggest institutional innovation of the 1978 Spanish constitution, with respect to the outline political reforms begun in 1976, was the decentralization of public powers. Since 1979 this trend has included the democratization of over nine thousand town councils (a much larger figure than in other European countries, in relation to population), fifty provincial councils (some of which were later abolished when they became single-province Autonomous Communities), and the councils of the islands, as well as the creation of seventeen Autonomous Communities between 1980 and 1983. This decentralization is the principal element of pluralism and the devolution of power in the Spanish institutional structure, while at the same time being a notable stage for competition and negotiation between the political parties governing the various institutions.

Initially, two paths were laid down for forming the Autonomous Communities. On the one hand, there were the so-called 'historical' communities (those which had held plebiscites on autonomy in the 1930s), which held referendums to approve their statutes of autonomy, which secured greater powers from the very beginning, and which hold separate autonomous elections. These communities are the Basque country, Catalonia and Galicia, to which was added Andalusia via a referendum promoted by its town councils. The other thirteen Autonomous Communities hold their elections jointly and at the same time as the municipal elections.

Every Autonomous Community has a parliamentary system. Its president is elected by the autonomous parliament through a two (or more)-round procedure, with an absolute and relative majority respectively, very similar to that for the election of the President of the central Government by the Congress of Deputies.

The constitution established two lists of areas (rather than legislative and executive powers properly speaking) which delimit the minimum activities of the central and autonomous institutions respectively. Among the latter are urban policy, public works, transport, agriculture, the environment and culture.

Although the first group of Autonomous Communities—the Basque country, Catalonia, Galicia and Andalusia—initially received greater powers (specifically including linguistic and cultural responsibilities in the case of the first three), some of the second group of communities, such as Valencia, the Canary Islands and Navarre, soon obtained powers over similar areas, including education and health care. There has also been a transfer of powers in other areas from the central government to the Autonomous Communities, outstanding among which is security in the Basque country, including the creation of an autonomous police force with responsibility for combating terrorism. As a result of an 'autonomous pact' between the two major political parties, the PSOE and the PP, since 1992 additional powers have been transferred to all the Autonomous Communities so that they are almost on a par with the first group (except in the field of health).

Most powers and responsibilities are shared or concurrent between the central government and the Autonomous Communities, although there has been a tendency for the central government to reserve basic legislation to itself, even in fields attributed to the Autonomous Communities, leaving to the latter the development and execution of the legislation. The autonomous governments, for their part, have kept up constant pressure for the central government to transfer further powers.

Each of the autonomous parliaments has approved ten laws per year on average, although the first seven communities mentioned, that is, those which enjoyed most powers in the initial phase, have approved 60 per cent of the total of autonomous laws, with Catalonia in the lead with 20 per cent. As in the Spanish parliament, about 60 per cent of these provisions are self-regulatory, since they are about financial, institutional and administrative matters.

When decentralization began in 1979 the distribution of public spending (excluding retirement pensions, which were paid by Social Security) was 90 per cent by central government and 10 per cent by the town councils. Fifteen years later it was 60 per cent by central government, 25 per cent by the Autonomous Communities (expected soon to reach 30 per cent) and 15 per cent by town councils (that is, a level of decentralization greater than in Italy but lower at the local level than in Germany). It should be borne in mind that this decentralization has been accompanied by a notable growth in overall public spending, the resources available to the Autonomous Communities representing almost 15 per cent of GNP. The Basque country and Navarre have their own funding formulas, which give them more resources per inhabitant. In the other Autonomous Communities the greater proportion of autonomous finance comes from central subsidies and more than half has conditions set upon its use; thus, in the seven communities which carry such responsibilities, about 30 per cent of the budget is dedicated to education and another 30 per cent to health. In 1993 the distribution of civil servants was 42 per cent to the central government, 36 per cent to the Autonomous Communities and 22 per cent to town councils.

As well as financial and administrative decentralization it is interesting to measure political decentralization, that is, the degree of disparity between the governing party at the centre and those governing in the regions. According to Riker's (1975) 'decentralization index', one can see an average decentralization of 50 per cent between 1983 and 1995, with a tendency to increase (from 37 to 56 per cent between the dates mentioned) at the same time as the PSOE has been losing seats in successive autonomous elections. This figure is very similar to the average in Italy (49 per cent in the period 1970–85) and Germany (53 per cent in 1951–90) (Batlle 1994).

Whereas in Italy it has normally been the case that the governing party coalitions at the centre have been replicated in the regional governments, via explicit post-election nationwide pacts, and in Germany the governing parties of the federation and in the *Länder* negotiate all the important decisions, in Spain the Autonomous Communities have been widely used by the opposition parties as a platform for

action and claims against the central government. These party tensions have often been reflected in changes in parliamentary majorities in the Autonomous Communities, the result of censure motions as in Galicia, Cantabria, the Rioja, the Canary Islands and Aragón, in several cases helped by desertions from the governing party.

The town councils, provincial councils and island councils have also been the arena of tactics by parties whose goals are quite distant from their local fields of responsibility. In part this has been facilitated by the rules of institutions which have no legislative powers but which nevertheless behave in a typically parliamentary fashion. Specifically, mayors are elected indirectly by an absolute majority of councillors supporting the person heading one of the lists of election candidates, and if no single candidate obtains such a majority the name at the head of the list which has attracted most popular votes is designated. (Only the mayors of small municipalities with open councils, and the mayors of districts smaller than municipalities, are directly elected by plurality.) Although a single party has won an absolute majority of councillors in more than a third of the elections held for the biggest town councils, in many cases the rules have allowed winning coalitions to be formed which have elected a different candidate from the one who attracted most votes. These strategies were successful, above all, in 1979, when the PSOE, the PCE and various regional parties reached agreements to oust the most voted-for candidates of the governing UCD (which produced, in passing, a high number of oversized coalitions), and again in 1991, via various local coalitions against the most voted-for candidates of the PP and, to a lesser extent, the PSOE (out of a sample of the seventy biggest municipalities, mayors other than the candidate most voted for numbered sixteen in 1979 and seventeen in 1991: Batlle and Martínez 1992; Colomer and Martínez 1994).

At local level as well as in the Autonomous Communities censure motions have introduced instability and have encouraged councillors to desert to new winning coalitions. We thus have the paradox that certain features characteristic of some parliamentary systems, such as exchanging votes between parties and post-election coalitions, have been evident with greater intensity in the autonomous parliaments, and even in executive and administrative bodies such as town and provincial councils, than in the national parliament. These practices have favoured the proliferation and consolidation of regional and local parties, many of which are willing to come to terms with the PP and the PSOE alternately and thus acquire strong powers of negotiation even though they are in an electoral minority.

Intergovernmental relations, then, have largely been replaced by direct relations between the parties, in a framework of low institutionalization. Typically the nationalist parties which govern in some Autonomous Communities employ a double-edged weapon—more or less veiled threats of secession or independence accompanying negotiation and co-operation—and are met, in turn, with restrictions, concessions and reprisals by the central government.

There have been a significant number of conflicts over powers between the central government and the Autonomous Communities which have been referred by the Constitutional Court. The court adjudicated an average of sixty-six cases per year in the period 1980–91 (compared with an annual average of twelve disputes in the German Federal Republic), 70 per cent of which involved the Basque country or Catalonia. Nevertheless, there has been a clear downward trend in the number of such controversies. For instance, 25 per cent of the laws passed by the Catalan parliament were referred to the Constitutional Court in the period 1980–4, but only 5 per cent in 1988–92. Given that the extent of disagreement between the governing parties at the centre and in Catalonia was very similar in both periods, the decrease suggests that there was more controversy over laws on institutional matters in the first period, when the Autonomous Community was being set up, and that later on the legislators benefited from the learning experience.

There are very few bodies to negotiate and arbitrate between the central government and the Autonomous Communities, apart from the Constitutional Court. Unlike truly federal States, as we have seen, the Senate in Spain is not organized in such a way as to enable it to contribute decisively in this role. In law the Autonomous Communities have the power to initiate legislation before the national parliament but in practice they never exercise it. The central government has a delegate in each Autonomous Community, but he is usually busier trying to safeguard central powers than co-ordinating the activities of the various administrations. The main instruments of co-operation between the central government and the Autonomous Communities are the Fiscal and Financial Policy Council and the meetings which some Ministers hold periodically with the corresponding autonomous councillors in the same areas of responsibility (Aja 1990; Ballbé and Ferret 1991).

As with the rivalries and disputes, the greater part of such negotiations and agreements as there have been between the centre and the periphery have been the work of the leaderships of the parties governing in each sphere. Thus in 1982 the main negotiations over decentralization took place between the UCD and the PSOE, which drew up an agreement on the ‘harmonization of the autonomy process’ intended to work to the detriment of the nationalist parties (which was largely annulled by the Constitutional Court); ten years later, as we have seen, the PSOE and the PP agreed on greater uniformity of the Autonomous Communities’ powers; the central government negotiated with the Federation of Municipalities and Provinces, led by the mayors of the biggest cities, belonging to various parties, on municipal finances; and there have been bilateral agreements between the PSOE on the one hand, governing the country at large, and the nationalist CiU, PNV and Canary Coalition, on the other, governing in their respective Autonomous Communities, resulting in concessions to the autonomous governments in exchange for nationalist support for the central government in parliament, especially after the PSOE’s loss of an absolute majority in the legislative election of 1993.

Some features of these kinds of intergovernmental relations may perhaps be considered nearer to a model of 'executive' federalism (theorized about in countries like Canada) than to the more traditional German 'co-operative' federalism. Specifically, relations between the central government and the Autonomous Communities in Spain are based, not so much on German-style co-operative institutions, composed of specialists from each sector of the administration and founded on rules of decision-making by unanimity or consensus, as on a high concentration of power in the hands of the leaderships of the governing parties, the leading role of a small number of generalist politicians, and a great deal of publicity surrounding the negotiations, all of which make for behaviour and agenda-setting guided more by electoral and image considerations than by governmental efficacy.

The European Union

Like all the political relations analysed so far, those between the Spanish and Portuguese States and the institutions of the European Union suffer from a lack of appropriate institutionalization. The two Iberian countries joined the European Community in 1986, since when their governments have maintained permanent representatives in Brussels and participate in the Council of Ministers, the Commission and the other EU bodies. Following on an indirect form of representation provisionally established in 1987, Spanish and Portuguese citizens have taken part in elections to the European Parliament since 1989, under the electoral procedures described previously.

Nevertheless, most relations between each of the two states and the EU are articulated through their governments. In Spain, although co-ordinating organizations exist, such as that of the Secretary of State for the EU, part of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the Interministerial Commission on Economic Affairs relating to the EU, almost all decisions touching the European Union are taken by the Council of Ministers or by its Delegated Commission on Economic Affairs. A joint commission of the Congress and Senate, charged with bringing public policies and State legislation into line with EU provisions, has achieved little importance.

Nor have the Autonomous Communities been formally incorporated into relations between the Spanish State and the EU (in contrast, for example, to the German *Länder*). Nevertheless, several communities such as the Basque country, Catalonia, Galicia, the Canary Islands, Valencia and Murcia have permanent delegations in Brussels, with the task of advising their economic agents. The autonomous governments are also represented in the Committee of European Regions, and several of them have subscribed to inter-regional agreements with regional governments in other European countries.

Altogether, Spain has one of the lowest levels of institutional, political and legislative integration in the European Union. By 1990 State legislation had adopted only about two-thirds of EU directives. The European Commission, for its part, had begun

proceedings to enforce the implementation of such directives, not least in such controversial fields as environmental policy.

Justice

Spanish administration of justice is among the slowest in Europe. When judgement is pronounced years after the facts have been submitted for consideration—as often happens—it is very difficult to remedy the injury, establish adequate compensation or impose an effective or exemplary sentence. As a result, the justice system finds it hard to fulfil its role of guaranteeing impartially the rights of citizens in their relationships and disputes; instead it contributes to social inefficiency. In many lawsuits between individuals, between members of the public and institutions, and even between institutions themselves, there are often incentives for some of the parties to adopt fraudulent or abusive attitudes, since there is little likelihood of receiving a punishment proportionate to the harm inflicted and, above all, judgement is so far off that it is likely to involve a sanction significantly less than the unilateral benefit deriving from such conduct.

In Spain the independent body responsible for the administration of justice is the General Council of Judicial Power (CGPJ), an institution based on the French and Italian models. The council nominates the presidents of the Supreme Court and its lower courts, the national and regional High Courts, and the High Courts of the Autonomous Communities, and is charged with the training and discipline of judges. In this context the Ministry of Justice has very little power of decision, except in providing finance for the service. Nevertheless the institutional procedure for designating the main organ of judicial governance does not guarantee its real political independence. Under a 1980 regulation, twelve of the twenty members of the CGPJ were to be elected by the judges and magistrates themselves, and the other eight by parliament (half by the Congress and half by the Senate). But, given that this meant that the justice administration was almost bound to give rise a conservative majority, in 1985 a new regulation promoted by the PSOE parliamentary majority established that the twenty members of the council would be elected by the parliament (again, half by each chamber). According to its promoters, this new regulation sought to achieve ‘political coherence’ between the judicial power and the governing parliamentary majority, although—as the Constitutional Court subsequently reasoned—the partisan logic of distributing posts in proportion to the parliamentary force of each party has tended to frustrate the constitutional objective of pluralism.

One of the institutions which exists in both the Spanish and the Portuguese democracies, and which follows the example of the Federal Republic of Germany and other recent democracies, is the Constitutional Court. This is charged with hearing appeals on *habeas corpus*, rights and liberties, laws which contravene the constitution, and conflicts between State institutions—especially, in the case of Spain, between the

central government and the Autonomous Communities, and in the case of Portugal, between the President and the Assembly. The Spanish Constitutional Court is composed of eight members elected by the parliament, two by the government and two by the CGPJ, a procedure which has also produced partisan majorities in favour of both UCD governments, in an earlier period, and PSOE governments later. Analogously, the Portuguese Constitutional Court is formed of ten members elected by the Assembly and three co-opted members.

TWO PARTY DEMOCRACIES

The principal institutional features of the Spanish and Portuguese democracies stem from the choices made during the transition from authoritarian regimes in the mid-1970s. Among these were the parliamentary monarchy in Spain and the semi-presidential republic in Portugal, as well as electoral systems based in both cases on criteria of proportional representation.

The transition and the constituent period in Spain were dominated by the fear of civil confrontation, which induced the adoption of various precautions to avoid the pluralism of society generating an excessive degree of electoral fragmentation and political conflict. Outstanding among these precautions were:

- 1 The 'corrective' measures included in the electoral rules, which tended to produce a marked deviation of actual representation from proportionality in votes, and a great reduction in the number of parliamentary parties.
- 2 Electoral candidacies presented in the form of blocked lists.
- 3 Public financing of the parties.
- 4 The rigidity of parliamentary rules.
- 5 The 'constructive' censure motion.

All were intended to confirm the political parties as the main actors in the decision-making process and to favour governmental stability.

Despite these restrictive measures, Spanish democracy has allowed a certain pluralism to be expressed through a moderately multi-party system. The main institutional factor in this pluralism, and the principal novelty of the 1978 Spanish constitution compared with the provisional structure at the beginning of the transition, was the introduction of widespread decentralization, especially the creation of the so-called 'State of the Autonomies'.

However, the long period of eleven years from 1982 to 1993 with one party commanding an absolute majority in Parliament, and monochrome socialist governments, far from contributing to institutionalizing pluralism, instead concentrated power and increased the 'majoritarian' aspects and interpretations of Spanish constitutional arrangements. Thus parliament was subordinated to the government, and the latter in turn to its President and to the leadership of the majority party; the Senate or upper chamber played a junior role to the Congress and has not

functioned as a federal chamber for negotiations between the central and autonomous governments; the lack of a stable framework of social negotiation has given rise to a good deal of conflict between government and trade unions; the judicial system has found it difficult to establish itself as an independent force; and in general political relations, whether in dispute or negotiation, have been monopolized—as in the transition period—by the party leaderships. ‘Majoritarian’ features, that is, the concentration of power, have prevailed over the pluralist elements in the institutional arrangements of Spanish democracy in this period.

Since the PSOE has lost its parliamentary majority, the negotiations and search for consensus which characterized the transition and the early democratic period have had to be resorted to again in the 1990s as a means of arriving at decisions. Nevertheless, agreements between the various parliamentary groups, between the central, autonomous and local governments, and between the government and organized social groups, continue to be reached—as during the transition—in a framework lacking institutionalization. The period of ‘majority’ dominance did not help institutional procedures for decision-making to function better or provide an apprenticeship for a new style of political relations which would be both representative of social plurality and sufficiently effective.

In Portugal, too, one can see the parties playing a strong leading role, often acquiring or discharging responsibilities which, under the constitution, ought to be the concern of independent institutions. Political and governmental stability in Portugal were not attained until more than ten years after the change of regime, with a period of serious conflict between 1975 and 1987 largely provoked by the existence of an anti-system communist party, and by the division of executive power between the President and the government, with consequent rivalry between different political majorities. The revisions of the constitution in the 1980s, on the one hand, moderated its original socialist and revolutionary tenor and, on the other, reduced the powers of the President of the Republic, facilitating the political dominance of the centre-right and the consequent moderate stabilization of the democratic system. This path of evolution, however, served only to reinforce the decisive role of the parties, which were the authors of the constitutional reforms and the new equilibrium of electoral representation.

In both countries, then, we have a situation in which democracy has been consolidated, in the sense that there are no internal or external enemies to endanger the system of political freedoms and elected governments established after long periods of authoritarianism. Nevertheless, it seems clear that the two countries of the Iberian peninsula share a certain weakness in their democratic institutions, in the sense that their institutional capacity to regulate and co-ordinate the various interests and attitudes of society depends strongly upon the cohesion and stability of the political parties in government at the time. Despite important differences in their institutional structures, Spain and Portugal thus reflect common features of their contemporary history and of their still recent adoption of democratic regimes.

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The Low Countries

Confrontation and coalition in segmented societies

Hans Keman

Since the mid-1960s a political debate has been conducted in Belgium and the Netherlands on their institutional features and related performance in terms of solving societal problems. This need not surprise us, since in both countries the existing political systems appeared unable to cope with the changing circumstances. What once were recognized as comparatively stable polities appeared to be in a situation of flux.

It appears that between 1960 and 1970 there was a watershed in the political development of the Benelux countries. Apart from the question of whether the causes of this situation were merely surfacing during this decade, or were in fact the culmination of deep-seated problems already simmering within society, it may be concluded that there is a *communis opinio* among most observers that the existing political institutions appeared not to be able to cope with the developing problems. Instead of *coalescence* as the main pattern of political behaviour, the name of the game appeared to be developing into political *confrontation* (Daalder 1987a:231–42; Huyse 1987:29–30, 119–20).

In the Netherlands this process was reflected in a change of the informal rules of the game which, in turn, gradually changed the working of the political system. In Belgium, however, adjusting to this new situation within the existing formal body of political institutions appeared impossible and eventually led to a radical overhaul of the polity.

In this chapter I shall argue that, although the institutional configurations of both countries have on the surface been similar, the behaviour of the political actors involved has been different. These developments may well explain the different patterns of politics in Belgium and the Netherlands, which have led to different outcomes in terms of political performance and related processes of institutional change.

In the comparative and national literature, the pursuit of political order in the Benelux countries has been labelled, more often than not, under Lijphart's denominator: 'consociationalism', or as he now calls it, 'consensus democracy'. This change in terminology should not go unnoticed, since it implies that the focus

of explanation has also shifted: the former concept focuses mainly on the societal structure that necessitates coalescent behaviour for effective political decision-making; the latter concept places greater emphasis on the political institutions *per se* which facilitate effective decision-making under adversarial societal conditions (Lijphart 1989). Hence consociationalism is primarily explained as a form of sociological functionalism, whereas consensus democracy can be viewed as a form of institutional engineering. In this chapter I shall follow the latter approach, asking in what way existing political institutions and their working have changed over time in these countries and to what extent the changes can explain the divergent political behaviour.

Answering these questions not only implies the analysis of institutions and the way in which they have helped to solve societal conflict by including socio-political actors, but also the extent to which socio-economic actors have access to the political system. For one of the major characteristics of the politics of decision-making in Belgium and the Netherlands has been the inclusion of societal interests by means of political organizations, representing them on the basis of cultural divisions. Yet one of the features of the 'watershed' of the 1960s has been that these organizational links have become weaker or have even ceased to exist. Instead of one, albeit complex, system of intermediation a second came into being: corporatism.

This development has been noted by various observers of Dutch and Belgian politics and, more often than not, differently interpreted. Luc Huyse, for instance, sees corporatism as a successor to polarized politics; Daalder describes it as 'old wine in new bottles'; whereas Lijphart recently claimed that corporatism is merely a dimension of consensus democracy. In my view this development is not only more complex than these authors think, but also implies a fundamental institutional shift. Before 1970 the 'polarized' political organizations represented almost all societal interests and dominated the decision-making process. After that time, societal actors acted more independently and gained access to the political and administrative system, leading to new institutional arrangements. The 'segmentation' of politics shifted slowly from its socio-cultural origins and foundations to socio-economic ones, although it did not mean that the old style of politics disappeared altogether (Keman 1993b).

The analysis of political institutions in the Low Countries must therefore be viewed and analysed in a twofold way: as rules that formalize the interactions between actors, and, given its historical context, as constraints and options of political action to come to effective and efficient modes of collective decision-making. Rather than focusing on sheer description, I shall attempt to analyse the role of politics in the Low Countries as a result of the interplay between the formal and informal institutionalization of the political process that is characterized by a pendulum of conflict and consensus.

First of all, we shall focus on the relationship between the electoral systems and parties as well as on its consequences for the division of the respective party systems,

particularly after 1970. In the next section we shall elaborate the institutional development and working of the decision-making process, which is characterized by adversarial and coalescent behaviour simultaneously. The following section (pp. 222–36) is devoted to the formation and functioning of party government, in particular in terms of its mediating role between societal conflict and political co-operation by means of Cabinet decision-making. Whether or not this results in feasible and effective policy formation will be discussed. Both the role of bureaucracy and corporation will therefore be examined at pp. 236–42. Attention will then be paid (pp. 243–8) to the so-called tendency towards a ‘diffusion of politics’, which appears to develop as a result of the political changes after 1970 in Benelux and is seen as an outcome of intra-national developments as well as of the process of European integration. Finally (pp. 248–51) we shall pull together the main findings with respect to institutional developments in the Low Countries and assess to what extent these changes have been inevitable and why they have led to different patterns of ‘structure-induced disequilibria’ in Belgium and the Netherlands.

ELECTIONS

Electoral system

The right to vote was introduced and enshrined in the constitution of the Royal Kingdom of the Netherlands in 1814. In the Netherlands and Belgium a bicameral system exists (First and Second Chamber in the Netherlands; Senate and Chamber of Representatives in Belgium, since 1831). The Dutch Second Chamber (150 seats) and the Chamber of Representatives in Belgium (212 seats until 1995, since then 150) are directly elected by the electorate (at least) every four years. In both countries this occurs on the basis of proportional representation, using the d’Hondt formula. In Luxembourg there exists a unicameral system (Chamber of Deputies, sixty seats) and the electoral system is based on multiple limited constituencies employing the Hagenbach-Bischoff formula. In terms of proportionality these electoral systems are quite ‘true’ and access for new parties is relatively easy, since there is barely any electoral threshold (Carstairs 1980; Nohlen 1989).

The Senate of the Netherlands, as the First Chamber is also called, is indirectly chosen through the provincial legislatures. In practice, however, this indirect type of voting has been abolished, since the outcomes of the regional elections (based on the PR principle) are conducive to the allocation of seats in the First Chamber or Senate. In the Belgian Senate 106 members are elected directly, the remaining seventy-five seats are allocated by the nine provinces (fifty seats) and by means of co-operation (twenty-five seats). Luxembourg has a unicameral system which is elected directly every five years.

The electoral systems of the Low Countries therefore resemble one another, but there are some significant differences between them. In Luxembourg the deputies are

selected by means of an open list instead of a closed list, as in the Netherlands, and are not allocated by multi-member constituencies, as in Belgium. This means that the Netherlands—the only country in the world, apart from Israel, with a nationwide constituency—provides the maximum proportionality for its voters and the parties concerned. In Luxembourg and Belgium this is not the case, but—especially in Luxembourg—the voter has a bigger influence in selecting a candidate (i.e. *panachage*). The rate of proportionality varies, owing to these differences, slightly in favour of the Dutch system.

But what do these differences mean to the influence of the electorate and the chances of those competing for office? To put it quite simply: access to parliament for new parties is relatively easy in the Netherlands and more difficult in Belgium and Luxembourg. However, single candidates have a better chance of being elected in Luxembourg, regardless of their ranking on the list, and the number of votes needed is low. Given these facts, it can be concluded that the electoral systems in the Benelux countries rank high in terms of proportionality and reflect the preferences of the population at large.

The development of the electoral system of a country, and hence of the institutional choices made, to a large extent reflects the ruling ideas about the principal goals of representative democracy (cf. Therborn 1977). Contrary to the English-speaking world almost all European countries choose to follow the PR trajectory. In most cases, including Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg, the majoritarian electoral system based on plurality was replaced around the turn of the century in conjunction with the granting of male universal suffrage, which took place during or shortly after World War I. Female suffrage was established in Luxembourg and the Netherlands in 1919, whereas Belgian women had to wait until 1948 to gain full voting rights. It was half conceded in 1921 as being a possible reform in the future, but since a two-thirds majority was needed to implement it, it took a long time (Carstairs 1980:56–7). The underlying idea of not granting voting rights to the female electorate was that ‘progressive’ political forces feared that women would vote ‘conservative’. This was the case in Luxembourg, the Netherlands and Belgium.

All in all, one could say that the process of democratization by means of the enfranchisement, or the extension of voting rights to the population in Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg took shape around World War I and was laid down in an electoral system that enables mostly already established minorities to be represented on the national level in parliament, to which governments were responsible. The type of electoral system chosen reflected not only the extant division of power in these countries, but also to some extent the historical roots of these countries: it assisted in a new form, i.e. parliamentary democracy, the idea of a ‘republican monarchy’. In these polities the rights as well as the influence of minorities were respected, and in turn, these gained political room for manoeuvre. Hence the institutionalization of democracy in the Netherlands, Belgium and

Luxembourg took a specific trajectory and—as they were partially designed as political institutions to match societal divisions—it is worthwhile to examine the consequences.

The consequences of electoral systems have been widely discussed in political science. Not only the underlying argument for choosing a particular system, but also its consequences for the division of parties within parliament, has been a topic of debate.

The most frequently mentioned effect of a PR electoral system concerns the fractionalization of both the electorate and parliament, producing unstable voting behaviour and a fragmented party system in which the major parties are weak. The degree of fractionalization among voters and parliamentarians is indeed comparatively high in the Benelux countries. Electoral fragmentation in the period 1945–90 was on average 0.84 in the Netherlands, 0.74 in Belgium and 0.71 in Luxembourg, whereas parliamentary fragmentation is slightly less. In Luxembourg and the Netherlands the degree of fractionalization decreased somewhat after 1970, but increased in Belgium. Henceforth the number of political parties in parliament was relatively high. Before 1970 Belgium had six parliamentary parties and afterwards eleven. The Netherlands is quite stable in this respect; on average ten parties were represented throughout the post-war period, whereas in Luxembourg the number rises from four and a half to six after 1970.

A comparison of the Benelux countries with other European countries with a PR system shows that the average number of parties in Luxembourg is by and large similar to them and in Belgium and the Netherlands slightly higher. (Gallagher *et al.* 1991:111 report a European average of 6.3 parties before 1970 and 7.7 afterwards.) Taking into account the relative strength of the first and second largest parties in parliament, however, it appears that the fractionalization has less severe consequences: before 1970 these parties polled on average 65 per cent of the legislative vote (in Luxembourg even 70 per cent); after 1970 these figures are 60 per cent for Luxembourg and the Netherlands. Only Belgium is exceptional in this respect: the legislative strength of the two largest parties decreases to 45 per cent after 1970. This change in terms of fractionalization of electoral support and subsequent fragmentation of the legislature in Belgium is partially a consequence of constitutional requirements and partly due to party political developments.

The Belgian constitution requires that legislation on territorial matters concerning socio-cultural issues must be passed by a qualified majority and that it must be reaffirmed by a new parliament. In particular, after the ‘Egmont pact’ in 1970, this institutional requirement had its effect on parliamentary decision-making which was, more often than not, postponed or delayed, and has been politicized during elections since then. By means of the political room for manoeuvre—available through the Belgian electoral system—language-territorial or ‘communal’ issues cut across the existing party divisions. It led to a separation of the main parties (Socialists, Christians and Liberals) on the basis of language and to the rise of territorial parties, exclusively

representing Flanders, Wallonia and Brussels, during the 1970s (see MacRae 1986:135–8; Dewachter 1987 297–302).

In conclusion: the electoral systems of the Low Countries do not yield particularly dramatic differences regarding the number of parties. In particular the effective number of parties is, comparatively speaking, not exceptionally high. Over time electoral volatility in Benelux has been limited and—apart from the Belgian experience since 1970—the effects upon the party system have been only temporary and thus the party systems appear to be relatively stable. At the same time, it can be concluded that the tendency to produce disproportional electoral results is quite low, and parliamentary representation of major societal segments is quite well secured by comparison with a number of other polities in Western Europe (Bartolini and Mair 1990).

The extent to which there has been change in the Low Countries will be analysed in more depth by examining the relation between elections and parties regarding the changing divisions of the respective party systems.

Electoral developments and party system change

Electoral systems based on the PR principle are not so susceptible to manufactured majorities, but in such systems it is also difficult to earn a majority for a single party. This happened only once in Belgium, in 1950 (CVP: 108 of the 212 seats), almost in Luxembourg in 1984 (CSP: twenty-six of the, then, fifty-two available seats) and never in the Netherlands. Hence, although Christian Democratic parties have been quite dominant electorally, they were hardly ever in a hegemonic position. Furthermore after the mid-1960s their electoral fortunes dwindled in Belgium and the Netherlands, though not in Luxembourg.

Proportional representation supposedly mirrors societal differences, if not change, better than majority or plurality electoral systems. Hence it can be expected that the cleavage structure in the respective countries is reflected in their electoral results. In Tables 7.1–3 the electoral shares of parties in the Benelux countries are shown. Rather than attempting to discuss the voting patterns in relation to the individual voter, the focus will be on the electoral development of parties in relation to the division of the related party systems. This makes perfect sense, since the electorate in a PR-listwise electoral system votes for parties rather than for individual candidates. Parties are thus the crucial actors of the political game in Belgium and the Netherlands, as well as in Luxembourg.

The literature on the relation between parties and elections suggests two aspects of this process: (1) the cleavage structure of society and (2) the ideological roots of parties.

Whereas a cleavage is a sociological concept, the ideological dimensions are directly related to politics. The main ideological differences of today, however, appeared after the cleavages in society were politicized and partially assimilated into the political

Table 7.1 Elections to the Belgian Chamber of Representatives, 1945–95

Year	Turnout	KPB	RW	VU	PSB	BSP	FDf	PSC	CVP	PRL	PVV	Ecologist	VI.B.	Other
1946	90.3	12.7	-	-	-	32.4	-	-	42.5	-	9.7	-	-	2.7
1949	94.4	7.5	-	2.1	-	29.8	-	-	43.6	-	15.3	-	-	1.7
1950	92.6	4.7	-	-	-	35.5	-	-	47.7	-	12.0	-	-	0.1
1954	93.2	3.6	-	2.2	-	38.7	-	-	41.1	-	12.9	-	-	1.5
1958	93.6	1.9	-	2.0	-	37.1	-	-	46.7	-	11.8	-	-	0.5
1961	92.3	3.1	-	3.5	-	36.7	-	-	41.5	-	12.3	-	-	2.9
1965	91.6	4.6	1.0	6.7	28.3	-	1.3	-	34.5	-	21.6	-	-	2.0
1968	90.0	3.3	3.4	9.8	28.0	-	2.5	9.4	22.3	-	20.9	-	-	0.4
1971	91.5	3.1	6.7	11.1	27.2	-	4.5	8.2	21.9	5.6	9.5	-	-	0.6
1974	90.3	3.2	5.9	10.2	26.6	-	3.8	9.1	23.3	4.8	10.4	-	-	1.5
1977	95.1	2.7	3.0	10.0	26.9	-	4.3	9.8	26.2	5.9	8.5	-	-	1.2
1978	94.8	3.3	2.9	7.0	13.0	12.4	4.3	10.1	26.0	5.3	10.3	0.4	-	2.8
1981	94.6	2.3	1.7	9.8	12.7	12.4	2.5	7.2	19.3	8.6	12.9	4.8	1.1	4.7
1985	93.6	1.2	0.2	7.9	13.8	14.6	1.2	8.0	21.3	10.2	10.8	6.3	1.4	3.1
1987	93.4	0.8	0.2	8.0	15.7	14.9	1.2	8.0	19.5	9.4	11.5	7.1	1.9	1.8
1991	92.7	0.2	0.1	5.9	13.5	12.0	1.5	7.7	16.8	8.1	12.0	10.0	6.6	5.6
1995	88.7	-	-	4.7	11.9	12.6	-	7.7	17.2	10.3	11.8	4.0	7.8	4.1

Notes: The ordering of the parties is according to the left-right dimension as developed by Laver and Budge (1992). KPB, Communist Party; RW, Rassemblement Wallon (French-language Party); VU, Vlaamse Unie (Dutch-language party); PSB/BSP, Socialist Party (Social Democrats: French/Dutch); FDF, Francophone Democratic Front; PSC/CVP, Social Christian/Christian People's Party (French/Dutch); PRL/PVV, Radical Liberals/Freedom Progress Party (conservative liberals); VI.B., Vlaams Blok (Flemish bloc (Dutch)). Other, small parties, mostly language-oriented.

Table 7.2 Elections to the Luxembourg Chamber of Deputies 1945–94

Year	Turnout	KPL	LSAP	CSV	DP	Other
1945	NA	11.1	23.4	44.7	18.0	2.8
1948	91.9	14.3	37.8	36.3	11.6	0.0
1951	90.8	3.0	33.8	42.1	20.9	0.0
1954	92.6	7.3	32.9	45.2	12.3	2.3
1959	92.3	7.2	33.0	38.9	20.3	0.5
1964	90.6	10.4	35.9	35.7	12.2	5.8
1968	88.6	13.1	31.0	37.5	18.0	0.4
1974	90.1	8.8	27.0	29.9	23.3	11.1
1979	88.9	4.9	22.5	36.4	21.9	14.4
1984	88.8	4.4	31.8	36.6	20.4	6.8 ^a
1989	87.3	4.4	26.2	32.4	17.2	19.8 ^a
1994	86.7	1.7	25.4	30.3	19.3	24.3

Notes (a) Includes votes for the Green parties (1984, 4.2%; 1989, 8.5%; 1994:9.9%). NA, not available. KPL, Communist Party. LSAP, Socialist Labour Party (Social Democrats). CSV, Christian Social Union (Christian Democrats). DP, Democratic Party (Liberals).

movements organized within the cleavage structure. This means that parties belonging to the socialist and liberal/conservative ‘familles spirituelles’ developed as electoral parties in a specific context, which affected their organization and strategies. One could therefore say that parties in Belgium and the Netherlands are based on societal differences and are at the same time differentiated according to well-known divisions in ideological ‘blocs’: Christian democracy, social democracy and (conservative) liberalism. Historically two cleavages have been prominent in Belgium and the Netherlands:

- 1 *Religions or moral dimension.* In the north this division was based partly on rivalry between Protestantism (which was by many considered as an informal ‘State Church’) and Catholicism (which saw itself as an emancipatory minority), but they both shared an interest against the State regulation of social life, which was expressed, particularly, in the issue of education. In the south this division was shaped much more by the process of secularization of social life, acquisition of individual rights (i.e. civil society) and opposition to the overwhelming influence of Catholicism and its clerical organization (although the principal issue also centred on the educational system).
- 2 *Left-right dimension.* In Belgium and the Netherlands the socio-economic division emerged in the wake of the concurrent processes of industrialization and urbanization. It was based on ‘class consciousness’, which developed more strongly and rapidly in the south than in the north, owing to its earlier and more encompassing pattern of industrial activities. In both countries the major socialist party was reformist and preceded the formation of a nationwide trade union federation. Hence the political party led the way, mainly through its campaign for universal suffrage and a wish to enter government. Together with the fact that other cleavages played an important role in the Low Countries, this meant that the sheer ‘class’ division was not strong.

Table 7.3 Elections to the Netherlands upper House (Tweede Kamer), 1946–94

Year	Turnout	CPN	PSP	PPR	PvdA	D66	KVP	ARP	CHU	VVD	Small right ^d	Other
1946	93.1	10.6	—	—	28.3	—	30.8	12.9	7.8	6.4	2.2	1.0
1948	93.7	7.7	—	—	25.6	—	31.0	13.2	9.2	7.9	3.7	1.6
1952	95.0	6.2	—	—	29.0	—	28.7	11.2	8.9	8.8	5.8	1.4
1956	95.5	4.7	—	—	32.7	—	31.7	9.9	8.4	8.8	2.9	0.8
1959	95.5	2.4	1.8	—	30.3	—	31.6	9.4	8.1	12.2	2.9	1.3
1963	95.1	2.8	3.0	—	28.0	—	31.9	8.7	8.6	10.3	3.0	3.7
1967	95.0	3.6	2.9	—	23.6	4.5	26.5	9.9	8.1	10.7	2.9	7.4
1971 ^a	79.1	3.9	1.4	1.8	24.6	6.8	21.8	8.6	6.3	10.3	4.3	10.0
1972	83.5	4.5	1.5	4.8	27.3	4.2	17.7	8.8	4.8	14.4	4.9	7.0
1977	88.0	1.7	0.9	1.7	33.8	5.4	—	31.9 ^b	—	17.9	4.2	2.4
1981	87.0	2.1	2.1	2.0	28.3	11.1	—	30.8	—	17.3	4.5	1.8
1982	81.0	1.8	2.0	1.7	30.4	4.3	—	29.4	—	23.1	4.0	2.5
1986	85.8	0.6	1.2	1.3	33.3	6.3	—	34.6	—	17.4	3.6	1.6
1989	80.2	—	4.1 ^c	—	31.9	7.9	—	35.3	—	14.6	4.1	2.1
1994	78.3	—	3.5	—	24.0	15.6	—	22.4	—	19.9	4.8	8.8

Notes (a) Compulsory vote abolished, (b) Parties merged into CDA, (c) Parties merged into Green left (including EVP, which is under 'Other' until 1986), (d) Concerns only small orthodox religious (Catholic and Protestant) parties. CPN, Communist Party. PSP, Pacifist Socialist (radicals). PPR, Radical Party. PvdA, Labour Party (Social Democrats). D66, Democrats (Progressive Liberals). KVP, Catholics. ARP, Anti-revolutionary Party (reformed Protestant). CHU, Christian Historical Union (liberal Protestant). VVD, Freedom and Progress (conservative liberals).

All in all, it can be concluded that up to 1960 these two cleavages and related ideologies dominated political life and to a large extent electoral developments. It was only then that in Belgium a third cleavage became politicized: the language-territorial cleavage, which more or less tends to overshadow the original ones. The existing ideological differences remained, but were now more or less organized within a territorial party system.

In the Netherlands the religious cleavage became less prominent and during the 1970s and 1980s electoral campaigns focused more on new issues in combination with the socio-economic conflict dimension. It could even be said that the traditional cleavages vanished and that the ideological differences became prominent in Dutch politics (Dittrich 1987).

Present-day electoral politics is largely influenced by a two-dimensional space of voters—religious-moral and socio-economic—and the emerging party system is characterized by three distinctive party ‘families’ or blocs: Christian Democrats (religious and capitalist), Liberals (secular and capitalist) and Social Democrats (secular and labour).

Until the 1970s the three party families dominated political and social life in Belgium, Luxembourg and the Netherlands. As has been widely discussed and well documented, the main parties politically representing the cleavage structure in Benelux have had a tight relationship with their grass roots. Their differences concern their ideological homogeneity and strategic behaviour regarding elections and participation in government. It seems that under similar conditions, each system allows different patterns of behaviour.

The Christian Democratic bloc was represented by several parties in the Netherlands, whereas in Luxembourg this has never been the case. In Belgium the preponderance of the Flanders versus Wallonia conflict after 1960 has produced an organizational and electoral division, whereas in the Netherlands the process of secularization and depolarization led to the unification of the Christian Democratic party family into one party: the Christian Democratic Appeal (CDA).

Both the Social Democratic and Liberal party families remained roughly the same throughout the post-war history of Luxembourg and the Netherlands. Of course, there have been splits within these blocs, but these have mostly been temporary (see Tables 7.2–3). The major shift that can be observed in all three party systems is the modest rise of Green parties. Yet this new party family has not been able to distance itself in a clear way from the left-right dimension.

Belgium’s, as already stated, is the only system in which a fundamental and lasting change has taken place. This was a change that divided the party blocs which existed before 1965. Until then there were four parties in parliament representing the left (Social Democracy and the Communist Party), the centre (Christian Democracy) and the right (Liberals). However, territorially based parties exclusively representing the language-territorial or ‘communal’ cleavage received more and more electoral support (see Table 7.1). Around the mid-1970s the traditional parties followed suit

and organized themselves along this cleavage. The result has been that the Belgian party system had fourteen parties in which each territory—Flanders, Wallonia and Brussels—was represented by the common ideological party families and by parties representing the language-territorial issue. After 1975 the latter parties gradually lost support (apart from the Flemish Union) and at present there are eleven parties in parliament: a Flemish and Wallonian party for each of the traditional ideological blocs, one larger and a few small language-territorial parties, and, since the 1980s, two Green parties. All in all, it appears that the Belgian party system has drastically changed over time. Yet the traditional blocs still have a large share of the votes, albeit divided territorially.

In Luxembourg the party system has remained remarkably stable and only during the 1980s were the Green movement and a radical left-wing party able to gain access to parliament. The total number of parties rose from four during the 1950s to six in the 1980s.

In the Netherlands the biggest change occurred during the late 1960s, when a number of splits came about among the Social Democrats and the Christian Democrats. However, the most important change was the foundation of Democrats'66—a progressive Liberal party—which gained a lasting, albeit volatile, position within the Dutch party system. During the 1980s the situation again became consolidated through a number of mergers (resulting in the CDA and the Green left). In fact the effective number of parties is six, identical to the situation in the 1950s.

It is clear from this overview that the Dutch and, to some extent, the Luxembourg party systems have gone through a period of transition (1965–75), but can now be regarded as being 'back to normal': the three main families are quite homogeneously organized into ideological blocs, reflecting the main party differences in terms of left, right and centre. In Belgium the dominant cleavage is not left-right but instead the language-territorial or 'communal' one. And, obviously, this has led to a situation in which, since the 1970s, the overall number of parties has doubled and the original party blocs are split according to this cleavage (Dewachter 1987:289–91). Instead of one, it is no exaggeration to suggest that today *two* party systems exist in Belgium, representing the party families in separate ideological blocs in Wallonia and Flanders (Deschouwer 1992:121).

The extent to which these developments in the respective party systems have influenced the behaviour of parties will be scrutinized below.

PARTY SYSTEMS IN A CONSOCIATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

Before discussing the ideological differences between parties as well as their issue-guided behaviour, we will briefly describe the development of the major parties within each party system.

Among the Benelux countries, Belgium has the longest history of a full parliamentary democracy in terms of a directly elected parliament to which government is responsible. It took until 1868 to reach this stage in Luxembourg and the Netherlands, when the principle of responsible government was introduced *de facto*. Hence parties emerged first as parliamentary groups as well as electoral organizations between 1846 and 1885 in Belgium (Dewachter 1987:287), whereas in Luxembourg and the Netherlands the process of party formation took a different course.

Most present parties, except the Social Democratic ones (which were founded between 1893 and 1902), came into being after the Second World War. Although the Protestant parties of the Netherlands were also formed before or around the turn of the century, they have now ceased to exist (the Anti-revolutionary Party, ARP, was created in 1879, being the first Dutch party organization, but it merged with the Catholic People's Party, the KVP, founded in 1946, as the CD A in 1977). The Catholic parties re-emerged as genuine people's parties after the war. The Liberal parties of today were founded between 1944 and 1950 in all three countries as a result of a regrouping of previous separate Liberal parties. The main difference between the pre-war and post-war Liberal parties is due to populist tendencies. It can be concluded thus that, although the ideological and organizational roots of the main parties in Benelux go back to the nineteenth century, the present type and related behaviour have developed only since the Second World War.

As has been noted already in the introduction to this chapter, after 1970 parties had to transform themselves in order to maintain their electoral support and at the same time they had to find the means to achieve optimal outcomes in terms of decision-making. To some extent both aims were contradictory or at least seem to have been inversely related. In order to remain viable political parties, the main parties of the Dutch and Belgian systems under review here had to cope with societal developments and also re-establish links with the population. This led them consequently to rearrange the mode of interaction with other parties. This line of reasoning not only explains the transformation of the party system as an institution of collective decision-making, but also sheds light on the changing style of the politics of accommodation in the Low Countries. In order to understand this process of adjustment, we shall now focus upon party differences in terms of issues and ideology before and after 1970, i.e. the development of the party systems and parties in a consociational environment towards a situation of adversarial conditions.

Adversarial politics and coalescent party behaviour

Political parties in Benelux are required to develop a dual strategy. On the one hand, parties must convince the electorate that they are the best choice for realizing the voters' desires individually. On the other hand, parties must take into account the feasibility of future government participation. Hence parties must seek an optimal

Table 7.4 Policy differences between Social Democrats, Christian Democrats and Liberals, 1945–90

Country/Family		SD	CD	Lib.	Range
Belgium	(< 1970)	0.71	-0.02	-0.51	1.22
	(> 1970)	0.42	-0.22	-0.50	0.92
Luxembourg	(< 1970)	0.75	0.37	0.42	0.38
	(> 1970)	0.42	-0.28	-0.26	0.70
Netherlands	(< 1970)	0.39	-0.23	-0.53	0.72
	(> 1970)	0.36	-0.17	-0.62	0.98
Average	(< 1970)	0.62	-0.19	-0.34	0.96
	(> 1970)	0.40	-0.22	-0.46	0.86
Cross-national (overall)		0.49	-0.10	-0.46	1.05

Notes Minus sign (-): right-wing; plus sign (+): left-wing. SD, Social Democrats. CD, Christian Democrats. Lib., Liberals. Range: sum of left and right-wing scores.

Sources MRG data set: A.Volkens, *Content Analysis of Party Programmes in Comparative Perspective*, Berlin, WZB, 1992. Computation: P.Pennings and H.Keman, "Links" en "rechts" in de Nederlandse politiek", in G.Voerman (ed.) *Jaarboek van het Documentatiecentrum van Nederlandse Politiek Partijen 1993*, Groningen, Xenon, 1994.

strategic position by means of an adversarial type of electoral competition and a coalescent attitude towards coalition formation. In other words, each party's problem is to reconcile its strategy concerning electoral competition and co-operation in decision-making with an eye to policy pursuit.

Originally, vote-organizing rather than vote-seeking as an electoral strategy of parties was based primarily on societal cleavages, but since the late 1960s this option is no longer feasible. Parties must direct themselves in campaigning on the basis of issue salience. That is to say, parties compete on those policy-related issues on which they will be distinguished from other parties without making co-operation impossible. The relevant parties have to solve the paradox of policy-ideological distance and connection in gaining access to government at a later stage.

One way of looking into this problem is to examine the extent to which parties differ in terms of their election programmes. To that end we here use a comparative left versus right scale (Laver and Budge 1992), which shows the ideological differences between the three party blocs-cum-families that are relevant within the countries under review. From the analysis in Table 7.4 it may be noticed that electoral politics in Belgium and the Netherlands is conducted in an identical way and shows a similar pattern of development, particularly after 1970. At the same time important differences can be observed within this pattern: in Belgium the Liberals (i.e. PVV/PRL) remain constant in terms of a left versus right distinction, whereas both the Social Democrats (i.e. BSP/PSB) and the Christian Democrats (i.e. CVP/PSC) show a tendency to shift from a left to a right-wing position. In the Netherlands an opposite movement can be observed: the Liberals (i.e. VVD) are moving to the right, and the Social Democrats (PvdA) and Christian Democrats (KVP/CDA) remain where they are. Hence, it can be concluded that in Belgium and the Netherlands

Table 7.5 Policy space of parties in Belgium, 1984

<i>Communist</i>	<i>Socialist</i>			<i>Ecologist</i>	<i>Christian and moderates</i>				<i>Liberal</i>		<i>Right</i>	
	<i>PCB/KPB</i>	<i>PS</i>	<i>RW</i>		<i>SP</i>	<i>A/E</i>	<i>DFD</i>	<i>CVP</i>	<i>PSC</i>	<i>VU</i>		<i>PRL</i>
1.4	2.5	2.6	2.9	4.5	5.6	5.8	6.3	6.8	7.6	7.8	9.2	9.8

Note 0 extreme left, 10 extreme right. PCB/KPB; Parti Communiste/Kommunistische Partij (Communist Party). PS; Parti Socialiste (Socialist Party–Wallon)/SP: Socialistische Partij (Socialist Party–Fleming). A/E; Agalev/Eco (Ecologists). RW; Rassemblement Wallon (French Language Assembly). FDF; Front Democratique des Francophones (Democratic Front of French-speakers). CVP; Christelijke Volkspartij (Christian Social Party–Fleming)/PSC; Parti Social Chretien (Christian Social Party–Wallon). VU; Volksunie (Dutch-language People’s Union). PRL: Parti Reformateur Liberal (Reformer Liberal Party–Fleming)/PVV; Partij voor Vrijheid en Vooruitgang (Party for Liberty and Progress). RAD/UDRT; Respect voor Arbeid en Democratie/Union pour la Democratie et le Respect du Travail (Union for Democracy and Respect for Labour). VB; Vlaams Blok (Flemish Bloc). Source F.Castles and P.Mair, ‘Left-right political scales’, *European Journal of Political Research* 12 (1984):83–8.

there is a tendency to move from left to right. At the same time a convergent tendency of the party system (indicated by the range of the party differences) can be observed in Belgium, whereas in the Netherlands the party system becomes more divergent after 1970. However, in comparative perspective the party differences are not very great.

Luxembourg is clearly a deviant case. Christian Democrats are here on the right-hand side, whereas the Liberals lie somewhere in between Social Democrats and Christian Democrats. As will be shown later on, the reason for this can be found in the fact that their issue priorities are shaped differently from those of fellow liberal parties. Over time, however, the Luxembourg party system appears to develop into one that is more comparable with the other party systems.

Furthermore, it can be noted that it is difficult to locate a party at the centre of any of the party systems in the Benelux countries. In the Netherlands the centre is occupied by the CDA, and in Belgium by the CVP/PSV, but they are not close to the median. In Luxembourg, as we have seen, the centre is not really occupied by any party. The movements of parties in the Low Countries are less straightforward than is suggested in the literature; it is rather volatile (Dittrich 1987; Dewachter 1987). Parties do change their ideological positions over time and this is reflected in their electoral movements.

Table 7.6 Policy space of parties in the Netherlands, 1984

<i>Left soc.</i>	<i>Comm.</i>	<i>Radical</i>	<i>Socialist</i>		<i>Christian</i>	<i>Liberal</i>	
<i>PSP</i>	<i>CPN</i>	<i>PPR</i>	<i>PvdA</i>	<i>D’66</i>	<i>CDA</i>	<i>VVD</i>	<i>RPF</i>
0.6	0.8	1.6	2.6	4.4	5.7	7.4	9.2

Notes 0 extreme left, 10 extreme right. PSP, Pacifistisch Socialistische Partij (Pacifist Socialist Party). CPN, Communistische Partij (Communist Party). PPR, Politieke Partij Radikalen (Radical Political Party). PvdA, Partij van de Arbeid (Labour Party). D’66, Democraten’66 (Democrats’66). CDA, Christen-Democratisch Appel (Christian Democratic Appeal). VVD, Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie (People’s Party for Freedom and Democracy). RPF, Reformatische Politieke Federatie (Evangelical Political Federation).

Source F.Castles and P.Mair, ‘Left-right political scales’, *European Journal of Political Research* 12 (1984):83–8.

After 1970 new parties entered the electoral arena in the Netherlands: D'66 and the Green Left (a merger of small left parties in 1989). In particular D'66 has significantly changed the electoral game in the Netherlands, since it competes with both the CDA and the PvdA; whereas the Green Left has clearly been a threat to the PvdA by organizing a homogeneous party bloc on the left of that party. In Belgium the party differences were well organized by the parties, in particular the BSP/PSB and CVP/PSC. Only after 1970 did the language-territory or 'communal' cleavage gain weight. This development is less reflected in the left-right distance than in the reorganization of the main parties into Flemish and Walloon blocs. This was typically a strategy to limit the electoral room for manoeuvre of territorially based parties in Flanders (VU) and Wallonia (FDF/RW) in order to maintain their electoral share and thus uphold their own position within the changing party system.

Salient issues

Party systems in the Benelux countries have changed over time in terms of party differences and this also implies a change in the way parties interact with each other. An important feature of party interaction is not only how far apart they are ideologically, but also what this means in terms of issue salience. As we stated before, issue salience is, in addition to ideology, an important feature of the working of the party system as an institution of parliamentary democracy. Party differences with respect to issues are a more direct indicator of the extent to which parties are capable of coalescent behaviour, which is central to the process of government formation. Issues point more directly to a party's position in terms of policy-making. What parties stress as their salient issues may also be expected to shape their agenda, if and when they enter government after elections (Budge and Keman 1990).

European cross-national comparisons demonstrate that the programmatic contents of the three party 'families'—Social Democrats, Christian Democrats and Liberals—show considerable overlap. It demonstrates that there is indeed limited room for manoeuvre for each party to compete, but also that a lot of common ground is covered by each party family (Gallagher *et al.* 1991: tables 3.2, 3.9, 3.13; Budge *et al.* 1987: tables 10.1, 11.1, 12.1).

Christian Democrats strongly emphasize the provision of social welfare services in Belgium, Luxembourg and the Netherlands. However, it should also be pointed out that within the Christian Democrat family, values related to societal permissiveness or traditional morality are strongly emphasized in Luxembourg, whereas in the Netherlands and Belgium this is also a salient issue compared with other parties, but to a lesser extent. Belgian Christian Democrats have the least salient issue profile, stressing all kinds of issues, but hardly any in a specific way. One policy priority is absent, however, in the European pattern, which is prominent in Benelux Christian Democratic and Social Democratic parties: social justice (indicating the importance of solidarity and egalitarianism).

The European pattern of Social Democracy fits the national profiles of the Benelux countries. Yet in this case it is noteworthy that issues relating to economic goals (e.g. full employment) hardly appear to be a priority. This is even more surprising if one takes into account the dramatic rise in the rate of unemployment since 1975 in these countries. Less surprising is the fact that all Social Democratic parties in Benelux obviously stress the development of the Social Welfare State, a policy concern they share with Christian Democracy.

The Liberal parties of the Low Countries are more different from the European pattern than the other two party families. It appears that the Democratic Party of Luxembourg shows much more concern regarding the development of the Welfare State than its counterparts in Belgium and the Netherlands. These Liberal parties (the PVV in Belgium and the VVD in the Netherlands) have an issue profile that is much more oriented towards capitalist values and goals. In fact their profile better resembles the ideological priorities of the European conservative parties, in which economic orthodoxy is a prominent feature (Gallagher *et al.* 1991:75).

It can be concluded, therefore, that the main party differences, expressed in terms of issue salience in the Low Countries, to a large degree match the European pattern, with the exception of the Liberals. These parties are more inclined to a conservative ideology. This is an important conclusion, for it points to the fact that, despite the salience of the moral-religious and the left-right dimensions, the degree of co-operation and conflict within each of the party systems can be viewed as taking place basically within a two-dimensional space with two main issues: the economy and social welfare. This pattern enables each party representing these issues considerable room for manoeuvre in building coalitions within parliament and with respect to government formation. It is essential to understand this, since it shapes the process of collective decision-making in these multi-party systems and thus helps us understand why politics in the Low Countries can be characterized as a pendulum between coalescence and confrontation in order to compete successfully for a maximum share of the vote, without losing sight of the other aim of parties, that is linked with this one: government participation.

PARLIAMENTARY GOVERNMENT AND COALITION FORMATION

Given the structure of party politics in the Benelux countries, it goes almost without saying that in terms of collective decision-making party government is the paramount institution. Whatever description of politics in the Low Countries one examines, the formation and functioning of government are considered to be vital in explaining politics in those countries. Most important of all is that most writers focus on the role of parties, in particular of their leaders, with respect to the formation and subsequent behaviour of government in terms of policy pursuit and outcomes. Hence within this context the process of government formation is essential.

Below I shall first describe the process of government formation in Belgium, Luxembourg and the Netherlands. This description revolves around three elements: first, the main actors involved; second, the primary objectives of those actors; third, the outcomes of the formation process. After that, we shall focus on the decision-making process of the coalition governments in Belgium and the Netherlands. This is important, for it is there that the paradox of the politics of confrontation and coalescence comes to the fore. Cabinet decision-making seeks to solve adversarial policy issues, thereby shaping the executive-legislature relationship and, of course, to a large extent determining the policy performance. This performance is often characterized as 'inert'. To understand this, it is necessary to pay attention to the informal process of policy-making, which can be depicted as immobile.

Features of coalition formation

Party governments in the Benelux countries are almost always coalitions. Unlike in Scandinavian countries, for example, governments must rely on a parliamentary majority. The exceptions to this rule are the so-called caretaker governments, which, however, function with clipped wings regarding policy-making. Caretaker governments are meant to pave the way for new fully fledged coalitions, mostly by preparing for new, often anticipated elections.

The Netherlands and Luxembourg fit the European average duration of governments quite well (680.6 days) and the composition of government is almost always a multi-party coalition. The prevalent type of coalition government is minimum winning (MWC, with no superfluous members to form a majority), particularly after 1970. Over time the major change is that Christian Democrats appear to have become a very powerful actor after 1970, holding more often than not the premiership. Another development that is worth noting is the fact that the parliamentary action of withdrawing legislative support from government is hardly utilized any more. This development points to a diminishing role of parliamentary politics and a shift in the executive-legislature relation. From this overview of the features of party government in the Benelux countries it appears that, particularly in Luxembourg and the Netherlands, they are comparatively stable, tend to be minimum winning and have developed a relatively dominant position with respect to parliament.

However, it must be noticed that there is a striking contrast between Belgium on the one hand and Luxembourg and the Netherlands on the other as far as the features of coalition government are concerned. In virtually all respects Belgian governments differ from Dutch and Luxembourg ones: they do not last as long and particularly after 1970 have been increasingly shaped by an oversized format (i.e. containing more parties than strictly necessary with respect to a legislative majority). Furthermore, they also tend to be terminated for reasons that either have to do with internal dissent or with losing parliamentary support, rarely with elections. All these features

Table 7.7 Governments of Belgium, 1945–96

<i>Legislature No.</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Prime Minister</i>	<i>Party composition</i>
1	1945	A. van Acker	CVP–BSP–PVV–KPB
2	1945	A. van Acker	BSP–PVV–KPB–DU–Independent
3	1946	P. H. Spaak	BSP–PVV
4	1946	A. van Acker	BSP–PVV–KPB
5	1946	C. Huysmans	BSP–PVV–KPB
6	1947	P. H. Spaak	BSP–CVP
7	1948	P. H. Spaak	BSP–CVP
8	1949	G. Eyskens	CVP–PVV
9	1950	J. Duvieusart	CVP
10	1950	J. Pholien	CVP
11	1952	J. van Houtte	CVP
12	1954	A. van Acker	BSP–PVV
13	1958	G. Eyskens	CVP
14	1958	G. Eyskens	CVP–PVV
15	1960	G. Eyskens	CVP–PVV
16	1961	T. Lefevre	CVP–BSP
17	1965	P. Hamel	CVP–BSP
18	1966	P. Vandenboeynants	CVP–PVV
19	1968	G. Eyskens	CVP–PVV
20	1972	G. Eyskens	CVP/PSC–BSP
21	1973	E. Leburton	BSP–CVP/PSC–PVV
22	1974	L. Tindemans	CVP/PSC–PVV/PRL
23	1974	L. Tindemans	CVP/PSC–PVV/PRL–RW
24	1976	L. Tindemans	CVP/PSC–RW–PRL
25	1977	L. Tindemans	CVP/PSC–BSP–FDF–VU
26	1978	P. Vandenboeynants	CVP/PSC–BSP/PSC–FDF–VU
27	1979	W. Martens	CVP/PSC–BSP/PSB–FDF
28	1980	W. Martens	CVP/PSC–BSP/PSB
29	1980	W. Martens	CVP/PSC–BSP/PSB–PVV
30	1980	G. Eyskens	CVP/PSC–BSP/PSB
31	1981	G. Eyskens	CVP/PSC–BSP/PSB
32	1981	W. Martens	CVP/PSC–PVV/PRL
33	1985	W. Martens	CVP/PSC–PVV/PRL
34	1987	W. Martens	CVP/PSC–PVV/PRL
35	1988	W. Martens	CVP/PSC–BSP/PSB–VU
36	1991	W. Martens	CVP/PSC–BSP/PSB
37	1992	J.-L. Dehaene	CVP/PSC–BSP/PSB
38	1995	J.-L. Dehaene	CVP/PSC–BSP/PSB

Notes.../...indicates that these parties represent Flemish/Wallonian counterparts of the same party family. See Table 7.1 for the full party names. The first party mentioned is the Prime Minister's party.

Source J.J.Woldendorp, H.Keman and I.Budge, *Handbook of Democratic Government*, Dordrecht, Kluwer, 1993, p. 23.

of Belgian party government point to a low degree of governmental stability, whereas governments in Luxembourg and the Netherlands remain quite stable. The average rate of survival is 59.6 per cent for Luxembourg, 54.2 per cent for the Netherlands and 33.4 per cent for Belgium between 1945 and 1990, the cross-national average of the OECD countries being 45.9 per cent. Also in other respects there is a vast difference

Table 7.8 Governments of Luxembourg, 1945–96

<i>Legislature No.</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Prime Minister</i>	<i>Party composition</i>
1	1945	P. Dupong	CSV–SDP–DP–KPL
2	1947	P. Dupong	CSV–DP
3	1948	P. Dupong	CSV–DP
4	1951	P. Dupong	CSV–SDP
5	1953	J. Bech	CSV–SDP
6	1954	J. Bech	CSV–SDP
7	1958	P. Frieden	CSV–SDP
8	1959	P. Wemer	CSV–DP
9	1964	P. Wemer	CSV–SDP
10	1967	P. Wemer	CSV–SDP
11	1969	P. Wemer	CSV–DP
12	1974	G. Thorn	DP–SDP
13	1979	P. Wemer	CSV–DP
14	1984	J. Santer	CSV–SDP
15	1989	J. Santer	CSV–SDP
16	1995	J.-C. Juncker	CSV–LSAP

Note See Table 7.2 for the full party names.

Source J.J.Woldendorp, H.Keman and I.Budge, *Handbook of Democratic Government*, Dordrecht, Kluwer, 1993, p. 84.

Table 7.9 Governments of the Netherlands, 1945–96

<i>Legislature No.</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Prime Minister</i>	<i>Party composition</i>
1	1945	W. Schermerhorn	PvdA–KVP
2	1946	L. J. M. Beel	KVP–PvdA
3	1948	W. Drees	PvdA–KVP–CHU–VVD
4	1951	W. Drees	PvdA–KVP–ARP–CHU
5	1952	W. Drees	PvdA–KVP–ARP–CHU
6	1956	W. Drees	PvdA–KVP–ARP–CHU
7	1958	L. J. M. Beel	KVP–ARP–CHU
8	1959	J. de Quay	KVP–ARP–CHU–VVD
9	1963	V. G. M. Marijnen	KVP–ARP–CHU–VVD
10	1965	J. M. L. T. Cals	KVP–PvdA–ARP
11	1966	J. Zijlstra	ARP–KVP
12	1967	P. S. de Jong	KVP–ARP–CHU–VVD
13	1971	B. W. Biesheuvel	ARP–KVP–CHU–VVD–DS70
14	1972	B. W. Biesheuvel	ARP–KVP–CHU–VVD
15	1973	J. M. den Uyl	PvdA–KVP–ARP–D'66–PPR
16	1977	A. A. M. van Agt	CDA–VVD
17	1981	A. A. M. van Agt	CDA–PvdA–D'66
18	1981	A. A. M. van Agt	CDA–PvdA–D'66
19	1982	A. A. M. van Agt	CDA–D'66
20	1982	R. F. M. Lubbers	CDA–VVD
21	1986	R. F. M. Lubbers	CDA–VVD
22	1989	R. F. M. Lubbers	CDA–PvdA
23	1994	W. Kok	PvdA–VVD–D'66

Note See Table 7.3 for the full party names. The first party mentioned is the Prime Minister's party.

Source J.J.Woldendorp, H.Keman and I.Budge, *Handbook of Democratic Government*, Dordrecht, Kluwer, 1993, p. 87.

between Luxembourg and the Netherlands, where the number of parties in government decreases after 1970 and there is a tendency to form minimum winning coalition types of government, and Belgium.

In Belgium and the Netherlands, finally, one should note that the internal cohesion of coalition government decreased after 1970. It is apparent that conflicts between parties tend to be fought out within the government, rather than in parliament. This may indicate the decline of traditional politics of accommodation. Which way one looks at it, it seems that the structure and behaviour of governments have changed over time—although not in Luxembourg—and that they are quite different from each other. This is surprising, if one takes into account that the principal actors within the three party systems under review, as well as the way these party systems work, are quite similar. Again, as we already surmised, similar institutions do not appear necessarily to induce similar processes and related outcomes. Let us now therefore turn to the process of government formation in the Benelux countries.

The process of government formation: a long and winding road

The formal and informal rules are structured in more or less the same way in Belgium and the Netherlands. Apart from short clauses/articles in the constitution pointing to the right of the Crown to appoint and dismiss Ministers, there are few differences in a formal sense. The basic procedure is as follows. After the termination of government for whatever reason the monarch decides whether or not he or she will accept the resignation. Prior to 1970 it was habitual to delay this decision in order to look into the possibility of restoring the old government by means of a reshuffle of either Ministers or parties. It has been suggested, particularly in the Netherlands, that a new informal rule has been introduced: when a government is terminated, elections are anticipated in order to record the legislative distribution among parties before actually forming a new government.

The next step of the head of state is to appoint an *informateur*, or mediator, whose task is to find a viable combination of parties to form the next government. This is an important stage in the process, since he or she clearly steers the process of forming a government by laying the foundations on the basis of a policy agreement among the potential parties of government.

On the basis of this agreement a *formateur*, an organizer, who is in fact nowadays the Prime Minister designate, is appointed by the monarch. It is the *formateur's* task to find the proper candidates and to finalize between them and the parties involved the policy programme of the new government. This protracted process has become more time-consuming in the last two decades for two reasons: first, the inter-party bargaining used to be secretive and among party leaders only; today the media receive more information about what is going on. Second, parties themselves state more clearly what they want out of the negotiations and have preserved the right to have the policy agreement ratified by their party decision-making bodies.

Again, most of these procedures are not formal rules, but they are nevertheless adhered to. These informal rules explain why the process of government formation in Benelux countries can take quite some time (particularly in the Netherlands; Daalder reports it took, on average, sixty-five to ninety-five days in the period 1946–70, and afterwards 164 to 207 days; Daalder 1987:200–1). These rules have, of course, a certain meaning: they are intended to bring about a stable government and a party combination that is primarily founded upon policy-seeking behaviour rather than on office-seeking motivations alone.

From the preceding section it is clear that the formation of coalition governments is a game in which two motives drive the actors or parties involved: office-seeking and policy-seeking. Second, it must be noticed that the number of relevant parties is limited and that the government formation game in the Benelux countries is strongly influenced by both the initiating and the mediating role of the Crown and the *informateur*. They are in a position to include and exclude parties, albeit restrained by certain ‘habits’ or informal rules. However, the outcome of the negotiation process is decided by the parties themselves, and particularly by the party elites representing and controlling the parties they represent.

Another aspect of government formation, particularly since policy agreements are a crucial feature of this process, is the extent to which parties and their leaders stress policy pursuit. Again in Luxembourg and the Netherlands this is considered as a prime motive for behaviour, whereas in Belgium this is less the case. To put it differently: parties are supposed to give up their partnership with government, rather than policy objectives. In Belgium this latter tendency is less pronounced. It may be concluded thus that party leadership in these countries has a strong influence on building governments and that in Luxembourg and the Netherlands they tend to trade off policy against office. It is therefore relevant to know what policies are considered important to the respective parties, for with such knowledge it is also possible to understand and to appreciate the final outcome of the coalition that is formed.

From pp. 216–21 it emerged that two issue dimensions appear to be important in each of the party systems: socio-economic left-right and matters of religion-morality. Social Democratic and Liberal parties are divided with respect to socio-economic issues, and Christian Democracy takes up a position in between these two party families. Morality is clearly a core policy concern of the centre party in most governments: Christian Democrats. In addition, language-territory is an issue particularly relevant to the Belgian case. It can be concluded therefore that each party bloc (left, centre and right) is in pursuit of a salient issue, and it may be expected that this multi-dimensional division will spill over into the bargaining game related to the process of building a viable coalition government.

Having established the policy priorities of the parties, it should be stressed that these players are constrained in their strategic behaviour in various ways. A number

of formal and informal rules figure in each system and define the room for manoeuvre, partly independent from their priorities. The following rules apply in Benelux:

- 1 Small and/or extremist parties are excluded from participation.
- 2 No formation of minority governments.
- 3 Without a policy agreement between parties, no government is formed.
- 4 Without the approval of the representative bodies of each party involved, there is no participation.
- 5 Policy preferences are expressed in obtaining related qualifying Ministries.
- 6 Distribution of offices in government must be proportional to the share of seats of participating parties in parliament.

In addition to these general rules, there are a few specific ones, particularly in Belgium. First of all, faced with the need to find solutions with respect to the language-territorial issue, governments are wise to look for two-thirds support in both legislative bodies, making constitutional changes possible. Second, after 1970 linguistic parity of Ministers in government is constitutionally required. Third, after 1980 it was felt necessary to have a corresponding political majority in the regional councils, which reinforces the fact that in Belgium decentralization is an important issue.

In the Netherlands, no government was in practice exclusively based on either side of a cleavage dimension. Since the mid-1960s this is *de facto* no longer conceivable, due to the electoral support of each party bloc.

Examining the eventual outcomes of this process we can assess the working of the six informal rules.

Rules 1 and 2 have been relevant in all Benelux countries since the beginning of the Cold War. Before that time, the communist parties were part of government (or were at least considered as potential government allies).

In the Netherlands Rule 1 was not applied during the hectic period of the early 1970s. The reformist Social Democrats of DS70 were part of a centre-right coalition because the 'normal' parties of government had lost their majority after the elections. In 1972 the Radical PPR, a very small party, became part of a centre-left coalition—in this case, however, in consequence of being participant in a 'progressive alliance' (with the PvdA and D'66).

In Belgium the situation has been similar. Since 1974 mainly owing to the constitutional changes we referred to earlier, it was essential to have linguistic parity within the Cabinet and to form oversized Cabinets to be able to introduce new constitutional arrangements. This led to the forced inclusion of territorially based parties (the VU, RW and FDF). Yet, more recently, owing to the organizational splitting of the parties representing the main party families, this has no longer really been necessary and the original rule appears to be again in operation.

It can be concluded, apart from caretaker governments and the temporary inclusion of small parties in the 1970s, that Rules 1 and 2 have generally been followed in Belgium and the Netherlands.

According to Rules 3 and 4, policy agreements are vital, for two reasons. First, to ensure a majority in parliament in order to find approval. In Luxembourg and the Netherlands there is no formal rule of investiture, as there is in Belgium. Yet a legislative vote is always held on the contents of the Government Declaration, and this procedure is functionally equivalent.

The second reason is that in Belgium and Luxembourg parties participating in government are obliged to get the approval of their representative bodies. *De facto* this is merely a 'rubber-stamping' procedure and shows, *inter alia*, the powerful position of the party leaders. In the Netherlands this latter procedure is not obligatory, but most parties follow this practice. Only on two occasions has the outcome of the procedure led to eventual failure to round off the intended formation of government. In 1969 the socialist Luxembourg LSAP blocked the formation of government, and in 1977 the Labour Dutch PvdA did the same.

In respect to Rules 5 and 6, we have pointed out that policy-seeking and office-seeking are related motives in the countries under review. Recall also that policy pursuit is particularly emphasized in Luxembourg and the Netherlands, and that in Belgium office-seeking is on a par with policy pursuit (which can be understood from its rather strict requirements regarding the proportional representation of linguistic communities). In addition, there are two conflict dimensions in terms of policy priorities in all three countries: social welfare and morality or societal permissiveness. From this it follows that certain parties are in a better position than others to coalesce and co-operate in government. In particular the Christian Democratic parties have a pivotal position in this respect: in terms of left versus right they almost always control the median legislature, and they almost always have the larger share of seats in parliament.

Christian Democrats benefit most from Rules 5 and 6. First of all they have almost always been in government as well as having a leading role by taking the premiership, especially after 1970. Second, more often than not these politicians have controlled those Ministries that are relevant to their policy-aims, i.e. Education, Justice and Social Welfare. Third, the ratio between legislative size and ministerial representation has been quite high in all three countries (i.e. between 64 per cent and 72 per cent; see Budge and Keman 1990: tables 4.5–7).

The other partners in government score much lower in this respect. In Belgium Social Democrats participated in 60 per cent of post-war governments, but the Liberals participated only in 23 per cent of all Cabinets. In the Netherlands the left and right were both equally represented: both the PvdA and VVD participated in half the total number of governments formed. Yet these parties quite often held the Ministries relevant to their policy concerns, representing the left-right dimension. Hence Rule 5

appears to work quite well, whereas Rule 6 turns out to be more beneficial to the Christian Democrats.

It can be concluded that the actual process of coalition formation in the Benelux countries is the result of the working of the party system, and the existing procedures or rules of the game. It appears that many rules have been developed to facilitate a government formation process in which parties play a crucial role. It is obvious that the Christian Democratic party family gains most from this game. It can be concluded that the interaction between the actors involved and the institutions results in viable and often lasting governments in Luxembourg and the Netherlands. In Belgium the results appear less effective. The next question is what this means in terms of governmental decision-making and policy performance.

Party government and Cabinet decision-making

The vital link between government and parliament with respect to decision-making lies in the policy agreement between the parties in government. Over time this document has acquired almost sacrosanct status in the Netherlands and binds parties of government in parliament. In Belgium the government programme is equally binding on the participating parties, but here the party leaders have more room to manoeuvre to deviate from it. In contrast to the Netherlands, the party chairman has a strong influence on Cabinet decision-making, as he regularly meets every week with the most prominent government Ministers in the party. All this means that in both countries the balance between the executive and legislature is tilted in favour of the Cabinet. Yet, at the same time, there are important differences between both countries regarding how decision-making takes place and thus how effective partisan control of government is in terms of policy pursuit.

In the Netherlands Ministers are constitutionally part of the Queen's government and bear responsibilities that go beyond party. Of course, Ministers are answerable to parliament, which, in practice, can dismiss them. However, as can be seen in Table 7.10, this has not happened since 1970. There is no separation of powers as, for instance, in the United States, nor are the powers fused, as in Great Britain. Ministers cannot be members of parliament, nor can they assume other public offices at other levels of the State. Both members of parliament and Ministers can introduce legislation but most if not all initiatives come from the government. Hence government is clearly the most powerful policy-making agent in the Netherlands (Andeweg 1988).

Apart from the increasing binding force of the policy agreement between parties in government, the relations between government and parliament have in another way changed over time. Until the 1970s Ministers and supporting parties remained quite independent of each other, since, for instance, the parliamentary leaders rarely took up a post in government. After 1970 this situation changed, and instead of 'specialist technocrats' more and more generalist politicians have become Ministers

Table 7.10 Comparative features of party government in Belgium, Luxembourg and the Netherlands

Feature	Belgium	Luxembourg	Netherlands
No. of governments (total)	18–18 (36)	10–5 (15)	11–11 (22)
Average duration (days)	516.3–391.9	847.3–869.0	830.3–743.4
No. of parties in government	2.2–4.3	2.2–2.0	3.6–2.9
Party of Prime Minister (%):			
Christian Democratic	56–94	100–80	64–90
Social Democratic	44–6	0–20 ^a	36–10
Type of government (%):			
Minimum winning	72–53	90–100	18–50
Oversized	17–34	10–0	64–30
Minority and caretaker	11–13		18–20
Political colour (right: 1; left: 5)	2.18	2.09	1.96
Reason for termination (%):			
New elections	33–18	60–100	65–50
Parliamentary action	28–24	20–0	27–0
Internal dissent	39–58	20–0	9–50

Notes , before-after 1970. (a) DP.

Source J.J.Woldendorp, H.Keman and I.Budge, *Handbook of Democratic Government*, Dordrecht, Kluwer, 1993, pp. 23, 84, 87.

in the Netherlands (Keman 1991). This development has led to a reduced role for the party leadership outside government. This gradual change in the recruitment of Ministers may explain, together with the increased status of the policy agreement, why termination of Dutch governments is less often the result of parliamentary action of internal dissent. Political co-operation and conflict over policy is by and large a matter of politics within the Cabinet.

Another feature of Dutch Cabinet government that has changed over time is the position and role of the *Premier*. Until the 1970s his position can best be described as *primus inter pares*. Yet today, although he still has few formal powers, he is influential in the decision-making process. The *Premier* draws up the agenda and chairs all the meetings of the Cabinet and its committees. He casts the deciding vote when there is a tie, and is increasingly regarded as the referee concerning disputes within the Cabinet. A final characteristic of the decision-making of Dutch Cabinets is that all members are collectively bound by the final outcome.

From this description it is clear that party government is not only dominant in the Netherlands with respect to policy-making but also well organized as a result of a number of formal and informal rules.

The formal institutionalization of Cabinet decision-making in Belgium is very similar to the Dutch system. Ministers are in principle appointed by the Crown and are responsible to parliament. Yet there are a number of differences which are important for understanding Belgian Cabinet decision-making and the related policy performance.

The major differences concern the position and role of the individual Minister in relation to the government as a ruling body. In addition the role and power of the *Premier* are quite different. Each Minister holds an individual responsibility and is not bound by definition by the collective decision-making of the Council of Ministers. In actual fact, no such council exists in the constitution, nor is it organized by means of Standing Orders (as the Dutch Cabinet has developed over time). Dewachter (1992:165) remarks that the Belgian government is in fact a political body in which decision-making is dependent on consensus rather than on majorities (i.e. Ministers have a kind of veto power).

Parties in Belgium have more influence on the decision-making process and governmental actions through the role of the chairmen of the participating parties and by means of parliamentary action. In short, the Ministers have a stronger position individually and each party has a strong influence, owing to the rule of consensus decision-making. In part, this explains the greater number of governments, and also the higher degree of government termination due to parliamentary action and internal dissent than in the Netherlands.

It can be concluded that Belgian Cabinet government is the apex of the political arena, in which parties *per se* play a dominant role with respect to decision-making. The Belgian government can be considered as a party government and its system of decision-making as 'party-ocracy'. It goes almost without saying that the style of decision-making of Belgian governments is therefore different from the Dutch style. Although every government is also formed on the basis of a policy agreement between the participating parties, it is less binding. Parties (i.e. their chairmen) and their individual Ministers feel freer to deviate from this agreement. Moreover, not all government actions need to be sanctioned by the Cabinet. The role of the *Premier* appears therefore to be less powerful than that of his Dutch counterpart and more dependent on his personal and political skills than on his formal position. The Dutch *Premier* has developed into a 'supreme referee', whereas his Belgian counterpart remains a 'co-ordinator-mediator'. All this has reflected the degree and quality of the policy performance in both countries. To this we now turn our attention.

PARTY GOVERNMENT AND ACCOUNTABLE POLICY-MAKING

The preceding section allows us to assume that the impact of parties in government is quite strong and, in terms of policy formation, is largely shaped by the policy agreement drawn up by the parties in government. From this it follows that the electoral programmes of parties function as policy guidelines for government action. However, it seems that governmental policy-making in the Netherlands will by and large reflect the policy pursuit of the parties in government, whereas this is less likely to be the case in Belgium. Furthermore, given the coalitional type of government, it is a tenable proposition to suggest that policy-making is affected by the fact that the

eventual decision-making is a compromise between parties and sometimes leads to non-decisions and often to incremental policy-making. This latter point means that much of the policy formation tends to be expensive in budgetary terms, as well as time-consuming in terms of change.

Government and parliament: emerging osmosis

In both countries parliamentary activism has increased over time, in particular since 1970. This is a paradoxical development. First, the number of governmental law-making initiatives in Belgium increased from 100 before 1970 to 500 per year in 1990 (in the Netherlands the average was 275 between 1970 and 1990), whilst the number of parliamentary initiatives was relatively low (11 per cent in Belgium, 5 per cent of the total initiatives in the Netherlands). Second, the success rate of initiatives by the government is quite high, namely 90 per cent in Belgium and 95 per cent in the Netherlands. This implies that parliament is increasingly a rubber stamp with very little policy-making capacity. Yet it shows a lot of activity, which is, however, limited to its controlling functions. One may speak of an emerging osmosis between governmental parties in parliament and governmental action in parliament. As a consequence, parliament has shifted its activities from policy-making to controlling and adjusting governmental initiatives. These parliamentary activities have, however, decreased the speed of the decision-making process.

Dewachter (1992:23) reports that in Belgium, between 1976 and 1988, 93 per cent of all budgets were not approved in time and thus had to be approved afterwards. In the Netherlands—as Van Schendelen (1991) reports—approval of the budget comes almost always within the formal limits of twenty-four months, but the law-making process is extended in time. Hence, regardless of the rate of success, which is very high, the period of accepting an initiative and turning it into a law takes longer than a year, whereas it used to take a maximum of ten months prior to 1970.

Another proposition discussed concerns the extent to which government policy reflects the party's preferences in terms of policy pursuit, i.e. 'accountability'. Recent research has investigated this relationship by relating the content of electoral programmes to patterns of budgetary allocations (Klingemann *et al.* 1994). The result of this analysis has been that in the Netherlands the relationship is positive, and thus more or less accountable. In Belgium, however, the relationship is more or less absent. Moreover, it appeared from the analysis that in the Dutch system the left-right distinction was a relevant indicator, meaning that centre-left coalitions showed a distinctive pattern of policy-making compared with centre-right coalitions. Therefore in the Netherlands alternating party combinations do matter regarding policy-making, whereas in Belgium policy formation appears to be dominated by the language-territorial cleavage. In short, in Belgium ideological party differences do matter less with regard to actual

policymaking. In this sense there appears to be a kind of policy sclerosis, or, as it can also be called, paralysis.

Looking at the budgetary developments in both countries, it appears that indeed the decision-making costs related to finding co-operation and consensus are high as well as difficult to alter. In Belgium government total outlays were 53 per cent of GDP in 1993, of which 50 per cent was devoted to social welfare (excluding spending on education). In the Netherlands government spending is slightly higher: 55 per cent of total outlays, of which 60 per cent is on social welfare. Over the past twenty years these ratios have hardly changed, although governments and parties in both countries have publicly stated that this level of public expenditure, particularly concerning the Welfare State, had to be curbed.

It can be concluded that in reality governmental power in Benelux is stronger than that of parliament, regardless of the latter's formal powers. Second, government decision-making is characterized by cumbersome procedures. This seems inevitable, owing to the fact that multi-party coalitions are necessary to form viable governments. Yet governments do govern, albeit constrained by policy agreements in the Netherlands and hampered by a lack of uniform Cabinet decision-making in Belgium. Finally, although these factors appear to arrest policy-making, it is clear that, in so far as decisions on policies are made, the Netherlands shows a positive record in terms of accountability (the relation between a party's policy stance and policies made) by comparison with Belgium. In that country, actual policy pursuit is limited (Dewinter 1989).

Governments in Belgium and the Netherlands tend to make policy on the basis of political co-operation and by finding societal consensus. However, almost by definition, this induces often high levels of spending, leading to incrementalism and policy immobilism. In Belgium the situation is aggravated by the perennial problem of language-territorial 'communalism', whereas in the Netherlands the major parties seem to be captured by various organized interests which do not allow much policy change either. This brings us to another two aspects of policy formation in the Benelux countries: the role of the bureaucracy and corporatist arrangements.

The role of bureaucracy and corporatism

Policy-making in Belgium and the Netherlands is politically a complex process, but to make a policy work is equally complex. Two institutional *modi operandi* play an important role in the process of policy implementation: on the one hand, bureaucracy, on the other, corporatism. Particularly interesting is the extent to which these institutional *modi operandi* have a bearing on political decision-making and facilitate policy implementation. One could assert that although the formal structure of bureaucracy in both countries is by and large identical, the way it works is not similar: in Belgium, so it seems, the bureaucrats are captured by politicians, whereas in the Netherlands the bureaucracy appears to be more or less captured by interest

groups. The extent to which this is a tenable proposition may well explain the policy performance of those countries, and may shed light on the degree of policy immobilism.

Belgium and the Netherlands have in common the fact that their State structures can be described as 'unitary decentralization'. Like labelling their political system as 'republican monarchies', this denotes a paradox. From the constitutions of Belgium and the Netherlands it is obvious that the ultimate regulating powers rest with the central authorities, i.e. in The Hague and Brussels. This formal aspect of the unitary State is reinforced by the fact that, for instance, the main source of State income, tax revenue, is collected by the central State. In Belgium 93 per cent of all tax revenue is organized through central government and in the Netherlands the figure is 98 per cent. Hence the central State allocates and regulates public policy from the centre, in which, of course, the bureaucracy has an important role to fulfil. Why then should the term 'unitary decentralized' State be used instead of simply depicting both countries as unitary and centralized?

Three reasons can be noted. First of all, 'unitarianism' is constitutionally defined, but the organization of the public administration is a three-tier system: central State, provinces and municipalities. Much of the policy organization is both functionally and, particularly in Belgium, territorially decentralized. Toonen (1992:268) points out that the 'lower' tiers act both as partners and as opponents. In the Netherlands the countervailing power lies predominantly at the level of the municipalities, whereas in Belgium, until the 1980s, the provincial tier was quite important. Hence policy implementation is by and large decentralized, whereas decision-making and allocation remain to a large extent centralized. Second, the size of the central bureaucracy is relatively small in both countries. The number of central civil servants in Belgium and the Netherlands does not exceed 280,000 (5.5 per cent of the total working population) and 330,000 (6.5 per cent) respectively (Dewachter 1992:228; Keman 1993a:195). In most other European countries the figures are higher. Hence in terms of manpower the bureaucratic State is not highly developed, particularly not for a 'unitary' State. Third, apart from territorial decentralization and the concomitant delegation of authority, both bureaucracies are to a large degree functionally decentralized (e.g. by means of 'parastatals' in Belgium and by departmental autonomy in the Netherlands) or, with regard to implementing policies, are dependent on other agencies (e.g. trade unions, employers' organizations, professional associations, etc.). One could say therefore that there has been a development towards policy networks that have been institutionalized over time and in due course have gained executive powers, i.e. a certain institutional autonomy *vis-à-vis* the central State.

Bureaucratic autonomy of the central State is thus in practice limited, owing to the decentralization of its organization of implementation, the relatively small size of the central civil service and the emergence and structural growth of policy networks. Bureaucratic power is further limited because of its 'culture' or, to put it differently,

the way it operates. In this respect the Belgian and Dutch bureaucracies differ considerably: in Belgium the civil service is captured by politics, whereas in the Netherlands this is not the case. Here the top civil servants are considered as quite influential with regard to policy-making and implementation. Another difference is the fact that in the Netherlands appointments are by and large non-political; in Belgium they are highly politicized (not like a 'spoils system', but on the basis of 'polarization' and language proportionality). Unlike Belgium, Dutch Ministers hardly have a political Cabinet, let alone a separate political staff. Apart from tensions between the departments, the loyalty and continuity of the bureaucracy are not questioned in the Netherlands. It does mean, however, that important civil servants are often considered quite influential. In Belgium, opposite developments have occurred and, in consequence, the bureaucracy is merely an apparatus for implementation in a technocratic fashion and has little influence on policy-making.

Hence the relation between political actors, bureaucrats and (organized) societal interests is quite different in both countries and affects the nexus between the formation and implementation of public policies.

In contrast to the bureaucratic style, within the concept of corporatism the emphasis is placed less on formal structures and how these actually work than on the informal procedures that have developed over time and have led to the institutionalization of relations between the State and organized interests.

Two types of corporatism can be distinguished: centralized and sectoral corporatism, which depict the organizational level of interactions, respectively between State agencies and actors representing nationwide organized interests and between public and private agents on the level of sectorial interests and specific departments (e.g. Health Care, Housing, Infrastructure). These differences have much to do with the types of interest represented and what is to be achieved by concerted policy action. For instance, in Belgium and the Netherlands social and economic policy formation, as well as industrial relations, is organized at the level of the central State. Corporatist intermediation is then meant to find co-operation by means of bargaining between the State, employers and trade unions. In general, if a bargain is struck, it leads to a set of arrangements which are binding on all concerned, i.e. policy-making is by concertation (Braun 1989). Conversely, sectoral corporatism is based less on antagonistic than on shared interests. Here the function of corporatist intermediation is co-determination in policy formation and delegation of implementation. An example is the Dutch social security system, which is organized on a regional level and is composed and controlled by public and private agents. In Belgium one can observe the same development—for instance, in the organization of health insurance. Instead of devolution of authority, as is the case in the decentralized State, one might denote this type of policy implementation as 'contracting out' on the basis of shared interests and mutual responsibility.

In contrast to Belgium, where after the Second World War the foundations of corporatist policy-making were laid in the so-called 'social pact' which bound the

social partners voluntarily, corporatism in the Netherlands was slowly institutionalized by means of formal regulations and the creation of three-party bodies (e.g. the Social Economic Council in 1950). It can be put forward, somewhat exaggeratedly, that Dutch corporatism can be characterized as 'statist', whereas the Belgian type could be labelled 'societal' corporatism.

Summarizing our discussion of corporatism as an institutional design, it appears that this type and style of policy-making and implementation not only exists in both countries, but also amplifies the notion of 'unitary decentralization', as both central and decentralized types of corporatism exist simultaneously. The central system of corporatism regarding public-private concentration is seen as facilitating socio-economic policy-making at the national level, whereas the decentralized type occurs regularly on the intermediate level in order to facilitate sectoral or functional policy implementation by means of devolution (in the Netherlands) or contracting out (in Belgium). This decentralized style of corporatism can be considered an institutionalized part of both polities. However, this conclusion cannot be drawn for the centralized *modus operandi*. It appears that attempts at concerted policy-making have become increasingly ineffective, owing to lack of consensus and are quite often burdened by increasing negotiation costs (e.g. in the form of tax exemptions, wage indexation, and allocations by means of transfer payments). Decentralized corporatism, however, appears by and large to be operating effectively but, again, at a high cost. The institutionalization of organized interests by means of corporatism has led to the perverse situation that existing arrangements, particularly in the realm of the Welfare State, appear difficult to change, let alone reverse. Political inflexibility, together with policy incrementalism, has led to a situation of 'institutional sclerosis' and to policy paralysis (Braun 1989).

Policy paralysis: the State as supertanker

Pulling the threads together concerning the institutional organization of policy-making and the related performance has made it clear that the process is not only complex but also constrained by the working of the relevant institutions. Although party government is the predominant locus of decision-making, it is constrained in various ways. Coalitions are built and maintained on the basis of policy agreements and the way in which Cabinet decision-making is institutionalized. Particularly in times of social and economic adversity, decision-making tends to lead either to nondecisions or to stalemate. Essential in this respect is the role of the Prime Minister and, especially after 1970, the role and position of Christian Democrats in both countries. All this means that there is limited room for manoeuvre as regards policy change.

Second, we have elaborated the institutional relations between decision-making and the actual process of policy-making. It appears that both polities can be characterized as 'unitary decentralization', signifying a double circuit of policy-making

and implementation. The bureaucracy operates relatively independently as a consequence of territorial and functional types of decentralization, but is also to a large extent subject to central guidelines (delegation of authority, rather than devolution in the Netherlands, whilst in Belgium devolution is more developed but in effect limited, owing to the 'politicization' of the bureaucracy) and is thus constrained in its actions. Hence policy implementation is by and large devolved and difficult to control.

Corporatism as a style of policy-making and implementation, shows strong features of institutional autonomy and countervailing behaviour. We have distinguished two modes of corporatism in Belgium and the Netherlands: a centralized one, which concerns mainly socio-economic policy-making by concertation, and decentralized corporatism concerning mainly the implementation of social welfare by means of mixed public and private organizations. However, instead of facilitating optimal policy performance, it can be suggested, the corporatist structures induce suboptimal or even counterproductive policy-making. Hence policy formation becomes rigid and to a large extent inert.

In summary: policy-making and policy-implementation, as they have been institutionalized since the Second World War in Belgium and the Netherlands have become less effective and less efficient in terms of performance since the mid-1970s (Braun 1989:301-12). Instead of flexible policy-making, there is incrementalism and inertia. The interaction between multi-party government, bureaucratic complexity and corporatist co-determination, steering State-society relations in Belgium and the Netherlands, can be likened to a supertanker: plenty of time is needed to change course, particularly in stormy weather, and things become more difficult if the skipper is dependent on a multifarious crew with mixed motives and interests. It is not surprising, therefore, that policy performance nowadays can be characterized as paralysed and ineffective.

THE DIFFUSION OF POLITICS: INTRA-NATIONAL AND TRANSNATIONAL DEVOLUTION OF AUTHORITY

Today national sovereignty as well as the institutional autonomy of the central State has become more and more questioned. Again, there is a paradox. On the one hand, political life is still enshrined in constitutional rules which define the autonomy and authority of the democratic State. On the other, public regulation by law appears to be reduced in practice. This is not only a consequence of decreasing legitimacy, but also a result of change in the actual use and scope of rule from the centre. The Benelux countries are no exception to this general trend. On the contrary, the devolution of power as well as the ruling behaviour of, for instance, local authorities and the judiciary are increasingly mentioned as factors that limit the assumed and historically defined powers of the central State. The extent to which this is the case

(no less if it is only believed to be so!) implies a tendency towards the diffusion of politics. This process assumes a changing relationship between State and society, public and private, and a different meaning of the political chain of command. In other words the loci of power tend to become dispersed and hierarchical relations within these polities seem to become less effective.

In this section we shall discuss the decentralization of political administration (and, in particular, the development of federalism in Belgium). In addition the changing role of the judiciary, which is considered to have become more important in co-determining formal legislation, will be investigated. Finally, we shall discuss the role of the European Union as a transnational actor influencing the room for manoeuvre of the nation State in terms of subsidiarity. These developments can be considered as indicators of institutional change, manifesting a tendency towards a diffuse politics.

Regional autonomy and local authority

In legal terms the organization of public administration in the Benelux countries is defined according to the principles of a central State hierarchy. Budgetary autonomy is somewhat restricted in Luxembourg and the Netherlands, as is the regulatory potential (Furtak 1981). Belgium differs only slightly from the other Benelux countries in that its nine provinces did possess more institutional autonomy than Dutch provinces and Luxembourg districts. Constitutionally, provinces, and to some extent municipalities, have more room for manoeuvre in Belgium, because these bodies have the constitutional right to deal with everything that is of interest solely to the territory and not already covered by the central State (Delmartino 1988:390). However, owing to the politicization of the Belgian bureaucracy, and the relatively strong position of Ministers and their departments at the central level, this means little in terms of institutional autonomy. Hence, apart from the transformation of the Belgian unitary State into a federal one during the 1980s, local and regional government in Belgium is slightly more powerful.

As far as decentralization occurs, it appears to be instrumental to policy-makers and the bureaucracy but not to local politicians, nor is it a matter of much interest to citizens, who hardly notice it, let alone see local government as a point of reference with regard to their own interests. It will not come as a surprise that local politics is not causing any great stir in the Low Countries.

Local politics, and in particular its democratic quality, is a contested notion in Benelux. Recently a debate has developed about the meaning and possibilities of local democracy (Leyenaar 1993:229). The main issue is the contradictory situation that local and regional representatives are elected by the citizens of a territory but local government is held responsible by (or it is dependent on) central government and public administrative rules. Hence the electoral chain of command is short and

weak. Without doubt this situation impairs democratic quality at the sub-national level.

The Netherlands can serve here as an illustration: since compulsory voting was abolished in 1970 the participation rate in local and regional elections has steadily declined by comparison with general elections. Between 1970 and 1989 on average 82 per cent of the electorate participated in the elections to the upper chamber, whereas in the municipal elections the participation rate dropped from 76 per cent to 60 per cent in 1989 (on average; in the larger cities the rate is close to 50 per cent). This situation has led to many proposals for institutional reform in the Netherlands. On one hand, these initiatives focus on increasing the institutional autonomy of provinces and municipalities by means of devolution (enabling independent policy formation); on the other, an attempt has been made to create smaller units of local government and to hold referendums at the municipal level. So far, the devolution of central powers has not gone very far and attempts to involve the electorate have not improved the participation rate.

In Belgium and Luxembourg local democracy is less of a concern or an issue. Given the size of Luxembourg, this is hardly surprising. But why not in Belgium? First of all, because local politics has been the foundation of many a political career. Success in local or regional politics is a stepping stone to a national career. Second, more offices (e.g. mayor and alderman) are contested in elections. Third, national parties are well organized at the levels of local and regional politics, and consider it important to have a balance of power at all intra-national levels of decision-making (Delmartino 1988). Together with the rule on compulsory voting, these reasons can explain a higher level of party activism at the regional and local level, albeit perhaps not always motivated by interest in local politics and government *per se*.

In conclusion: local authority in terms of institutional autonomy is somewhat limited in Benelux. The central State defines the room for manoeuvre and devolved policy-making is responsible to the central public administration in most of its activities. In effect, this implies that democratic decision-making and control by locally or regionally elected bodies are limited, and—in the view of the electorate—border on being almost meaningless. All in all, it implies that political authority and democratic legitimacy in these unitary decentralized States are dim. Only in Belgium is the situation different, owing to the role of the ‘party-ocracy’, and because local and regional politics have been part of the evolution towards a ‘federal unionist’ State. A process of transition in which the devolution of political and administrative power was instrumental to language-territory issues or ‘communalism’ has led to a complex institutional structure of regions and communities, still, however, under the aegis of a hierarchical national polity.

The federal organization of Belgium is in fact the last stage in a long process of solving the perennial political issue of ‘communalism’. The recent agreements on the institutional transition to a federal polity can be seen as a compromise

between the 'unionists' and the 'independents'. This outcome has been aptly described by Witte as 'a strikingly original concept' and she claims that 'there will be never any danger of Belgium being cited as the classic example of a federal State' (1992:115). Instead of the development of a clear division and devolution of political authority, the federalization of Belgium has been the result of centrifugal tendencies which have eroded the unitary State. The main difference between Belgium and other federal States is that there exist three conflict dimensions which have made political solutions hardly ever feasible: economic structure and development; closed linguistic communities; territorial 'bones of contention' (i.e. the language boundary and the geographical position of the capital, Brussels). These differences have led to political compromises which reflect the asymmetries inherent in each conflict dimension. As a consequence, the federalization of Belgium is shaped to institutionalize divergence, rather than to unite diversity within one State.

The resulting complexity, laid down constitutionally between 1980 and 1992, clearly favours the 'independents'. A system has been developed which compromises a huge variety of institutions, in which congruence is usually absent. The division into three regions with competence in social affairs and economic matters, and four communities with competence in cultural matters and individual rights, forms the structure of the federal State. The fundamental disparity is that Flanders is homogeneous and economically prosperous whereas in Wallonia this is not the case.

All in all, it is clear that Belgium is no longer a unitary decentralized State like the Netherlands. It is a federal state in which various competences are functionally decentralized within the two main territorial parts, Flanders and Wallonia. At the same time central government still holds competences by which the regions and communities can be controlled, in particular in budgetary matters. In addition, the central authorities, including the Senate, are conceived to function as umpire with regard to disputes between regions and communities. Finally, the judicial review of political and administrative actions is organized at the level of the central State. Nevertheless, the devolution of power is clear and regional self-government has become a fact.

In sum, it can be concluded that the role and position of local government and the extent of decentralized institutional autonomy are somewhat limited in Luxembourg and the Netherlands. This also applies to the Belgian case, if one regards the regions and communities as functionally equivalent to states within the federal State. Competences and decision-making are still hierarchically organized within the constituent parts of Belgium. Yet it may be disputed to what extent the institutional autonomy of central government in terms of policy-making is still present in Benelux. Recent developments with regard to European integration and the role of international treaties (if ratified by national legislatures) appear also to have diffused the role of politics within these nation States.

The limits of the nation State: judicial review and subsidiarity

Judicial review is a major and important institution of any liberal democracy. It defines the way the separation of powers works in a democratic society and the extent to which State power is limited. This separation serves the purpose of safeguarding the constitutional rights of the citizen.

Two recent developments make the role of judicial review in the Benelux countries particularly interesting. First, unlike countries such as the United States, Germany and France, there is no separate and superordinate judicial institution with the power to review ordinary laws in the light of the constitution. Instead, the only option open to a citizen is to contest the procedures embodied in the law or related to the law-making process. However—and this is the new development—with the ratification of, for example, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1945) and the Treaty of Rome (1957) the legal opportunity exists to review national regulations and laws on the basis of these international treaties.

Second, it is suggested by legal observers that the role of the judiciary is tending to become a more active one. There appears to be a shift from a strictly formal type of review to a more normative and material type of judicial review (Ars Equi 1992). Changing societal values and norms of social justice have become part of judicial deliberations and have resulted in judgements that affect legislative practice. In addition, it can be observed that, particularly in the Netherlands, there is a tendency to bring forward test cases representing political issues (e.g. the right to abortion or euthanasia; the exercise of the right to strike; the admissibility of organizations like fascist or radical movements). Some see this as wrongful interference by the judiciary, others see it as a positive development enhancing the position of the citizen *vis-à-vis* the State. It can be concluded, then, that the ratification of international treaties and a change in the attitude of the judiciary both appear to influence the institutional autonomy of the nation State.

The Benelux countries were among the ‘founding fathers’ of the European Community in 1957. This represents the common point of view of these small nations, held since the Second World War, that upholding their sovereignty is by and large dependent on international integration and military co-operation. Hence international co-operation and integration have become the key words for the Benelux countries in the post-war world.

The paradox of this attitude is, of course, that the aim of national sovereignty was to be achieved by means of subsidiarity to international politics. However, unlike other members of the EU, both the politicians and the population do not appear to view this as jeopardizing their status as a nation State. For example, in 1990 a public opinion poll revealed that 60 per cent of the respondents in the Benelux countries were in favour of a European government, and 56 per cent would be disappointed if the EC did not grow into the European Union (Gallager *et al.* 1991:308). Yet the development of the European Union, in particular towards a single market, has severe

implications for national institutions in relation to political decision-making. Moreover, this development is not yet matched by a simultaneous development of democratic control of EU decision-making processes. It can be put forward, thus, that Europeanization implies a decrease in political control as well as a decline in autonomous policy-making.

These developments can be observed particularly in the working of EU regulations and the role of the European Court, on the one hand, and the creation of a single market since 1987, on the other. All regulations accepted by the Council of Ministers oblige member States to follow and enforce them at the national level. As we have seen above, this implies a change in State-society relations: citizens, as well as associations and interest groups, may use the national judicial system to enforce the implementation of EU regulations (as, for instance, is regularly the case in the Netherlands with regard to environmental matters and labour market regulations). Conversely, both the EU administration and citizens can appeal to the European Court to enforce EU regulations at the national level. As the court's decisions are binding, and override those of domestic courts, this means that the scope and range of national and sub-national decision-making are constrained as far as they concern matters dealt with at the European level. It should be added, however, that judgements of the European Court are merely declaratory and have not (yet) had executive force, other than by sanctions eventually mediated through domestic courts. Hence EU regulations do confine the scope for national policy formulation, but it takes complex and often lengthy procedures before it takes effect, if and when national and sub-national governments do not co-operate.

With the move towards a single market and, eventually, the adoption of a single currency, it appears inevitable that political decision-making within the member States will be affected and to a large extent subjected to EU policy formation. It has been calculated, for instance, that measures emanating from the Single Market Act mean that around 75 per cent of national legislation will be directly or indirectly affected because national legislation is conflicting, or because the policy directive simply does not exist (Toonen 1992).

Apart from the direct consequences of European integration within the context of the EU, what is of interest here is that this will inevitably lead to institutional changes in the Benelux countries. Although 'federalization' is perhaps too strong a word, it is obvious that the trend to subsidiarity implies a shift towards a European government, i.e. the idea that policy issues are either taken up by the EU or concern issues that cannot adequately be dealt with by national authorities should be organized at the level of the community. This trend is strongly supported by Christian Democrats, as well as by Social Democrats, albeit more hesitantly (Van Kersbergen and Verbeek 1994).

Along with the effects on national legislation and related institutional procedures that have already been mentioned, this development also affects the modes of interest representation and may well lead to the sectoralization of policy-making. Hence a

diffusion of politics and policy formation appears inevitable. Agriculture and the environment are good examples of this process of diffusion. Interest groups have changed their strategy for influencing policy-making away from the national level (e.g. lobbying in parliament) to Brussels. Simultaneously departments responsible for these policy areas are more concerned to comply with directives and measures emanating from Brussels. In short, the development of a single market heralds an increase in transnational policy-making which has consequences for the organization of national decision-making and processes of implementation. At the same time it also has strong implications for the relation between societal interest aggregation and representation and national political decision-making. The loci of power are shifting and with them the legitimacy of national institutions.

In this section we have discussed the relation between local and regional government and national politics, the role of the judiciary, and the impact of Europeanization on the central State. It appears that, apart from the federalization of the Belgian State, local and regional politics do not play a major role in the Benelux countries. However, the independent role of the judiciary as well as the birth of the European Union can be considered as changing the nature of the institutional autonomy of the State and reducing its capacity for solving societal problems.

SIMILAR POLITIES, DIFFERENT TRAJECTORIES

In this chapter we have described the political institutions of the Low Countries and have analysed the way in which they shape political life. As has been set out in Chapter 1, institutions can be viewed as the 'building blocks' of political life. Institutions are, so to speak, the rules of the game which mould and direct the behaviour of the players, and conversely the players make use of these institutions to attain their ends. In the introduction to this chapter it was emphasized that politics in Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg can be viewed as the pursuit of political order or stability by means of democratic decision-making.

This game is conceptualized in Chapter 1 as a 'structure-induced equilibrium'. It is pursued by the main political players (i.e. political parties and organized interests) of the Benelux countries by means of two simultaneous strategies: adversarial or confrontational politics, on the one hand, and coalition or consensual decision-making, on the other. This structure-induced equilibrium is a potential outcome of either political strategy and can be conceived of as a pendulum between societal conflict and political consensus. Throughout history, social conditions prone to instability appear to have dominated Belgian and Dutch politics, but at the same time it has appeared possible to develop relatively stable systems. That is, until the 1970s. Since then, so it seems from the analysis, things have changed. It may be suggested, therefore, that the nature of politics in these countries has changed: from co-operation between political elites, based on the support of passive and silent social segments, towards an open model of adversarial party politics in which coalescence has become a final

consideration instead of a point of departure. There has been a shift from a co-operative to a non-co-operative style of politics. This change in the style of, for instance, electoral politics has taken place under the same institutions which made it possible to play the original game, labelled by Lijphart the 'consociational' type of politics. This is an interesting finding: the electoral formula did not prevent a change of politics and apparently allows old and new players room for manoeuvre.

In Belgium this process has been manifested in the development of two parallel party systems since 1970—one Flemish and one Walloon—and, in turn, this was accompanied by constitutional changes later on that reinforced the situation. In the Netherlands one can observe a reorganization of the parties after 1970, as well as reorientation of their ideologies and salient issues. As a consequence not only the faces of parties changed, but also the political exchange between the parties. In addition, new parties secured a position within the party system. This change occurred within the existing electoral system and, if one is not mistaken, will permit relatively large changes in forthcoming elections.

It can be concluded, therefore, that political change has taken place in both countries, yet in Belgium it led eventually to constitutional change (i.e. federalization of the unitary State), whereas in the Netherlands the institutional structure has persisted. In other words, societal change is and can be manifested in differential political behaviour under similar conditions, but has led to divergent trajectories in terms of institutional change. Despite strong popular support for political reform in the Netherlands, very little has actually taken place. Conversely, in Belgium institutional reform appeared inevitable, but why?

The answer to this question must be sought in the nature and effects of the political change that took place after 1970. In Belgium the original 'structure-induced equilibrium' was based on co-operation among an elite which shared a common interest, namely a 'unitary' Belgian State, but it became increasingly ineffective. Instead of facilitating decision-making, the existing institutions appeared to function as instruments forestalling that process. Several minor adaptations of political institutions, introduced to meet demands related to the language-territory or 'communal' conflict, turned out to induce highly unstable outcomes in terms of decision-making and negotiation costs and in the end have led to policy paralysis. The nature of the game has shifted from co-operation across the language segments in society to non-co-operation, which was made possible precisely through these institutional changes, as, for example, the requirement of bilingual parity in government composition, and the constitutional requirement of a qualified parliamentary majority to solve 'communal' problems.

In the Netherlands a new equilibrium could be established within the existing institutional structures. Yet the nature of the game has also changed. Instead of 'depoliticizing', the new trends were political decision-making by means of behind-the-scenes bargaining by party elites and leaving the implementation of the resultant agreements to government. Hence in the Netherlands a mixed game developed after

1970: the confrontation and coalescence game. On the one hand, this was due to a shift from a two-dimensional type of party competition to a predominantly one-dimensional division of the party system: adversarial politics guided party behaviour with respect to elections as well as in parliament. On the other, government formation became the central political arena, where, by means of seemingly endless negotiations, policy agreements were struck and spelled out for implementation by government. Through this development the Cabinet became a pivotal force in the Dutch political system based on co-operation. This has led to new informal rules concerning the legislative-executive relationship: the government governs—although strongly bound to its predetermined policy agreement—and, throughout its electoral period, is supported by its parties.

It can be asserted therefore that societal change has transformed politics in Belgium and the Netherlands, but the difference between the two polities is clear: in the former, institutional reform appears to be inevitable, whereas in the latter the rules of the game could be changed within the existing institutional framework. These institutional changes were in part, then, as we observed, a consequence of societal change, which in turn was reflected in the changing behaviour of the political players involved in the game. These changes have clearly affected the process of decision-making in the Low Countries, in particular its efficacy and the quality of policy-making by multi-party government.

In Belgium the threat of withdrawal by parties or individual Ministers (i.e. veto power) and the predominance of the issue of ‘communalism’ have induced very high negotiation costs and have led to policy paralysis. In the Netherlands policy-making appears to have been more effective, but has in turn been paralysed by the influence of the predetermined policy agreements to which governments are bound and by the system of centralized corporatism. Both institutions impair effective decision-making and thus impede quick responses to societal problems and have induced a high level of incremental and inert policy formation.

The institutional framework of policy formation and implementation on the surface looks alike in both countries, but differs considerably at the end of the day. Yet, at the same time, the results appear identical: decisions are made at relatively high cost and produce precious little. It should be added, however, considering the socio-economic and cultural structure of society in the Low Countries, that it is difficult to see whether this ‘structure-induced disequilibrium’ could have been shaped differently or would have produced other outcomes.

Perhaps this counterfactual question will be answered in the near future as a result of the institutional changes that take place in view of the Europeanization of national politics and policy-making. We have labelled this progression towards the political integration of Europe as a part of the ‘diffusion of politics’. The reason for this is that one can observe a dual development in the ‘vertical’ organization of the Belgian and Dutch polities: a trend, on the one hand, towards decentralization and policy segmentation; on the other, towards transnationalization of politics and of

policy co-ordination. Both developments imply institutional changes through which the political chain of command is becoming less dominated by national political actors, reducing the option of regulating matters concerning the *res publica* autonomously.

It appears that the advent of the European Union in particular is the foremost force to challenge the institutional autonomy of national politics. On the one hand, political and legal subsidiarity affects the room for manoeuvre in domestic policy-making; on the other, the binding force of EU regulations enables national political actors, especially sectoral and regional organized ones, to defy or to hold up implementation of policy by national authorities. Hence political power is increasingly dispersed and political support within such nations becomes diffuse and therefore changes the nature of the political game.

All in all, it can be concluded that the political institutions of the Low Countries have a largely identical complexion which, over time, has produced a political process of collective decision-making that could once be typified as 'consensus democracy'. Yet, particularly after the 1970s, this peculiar model did not appear capable of producing lasting 'structure-induced equilibria' in the Benelux countries. Constitutional and institutionalized *modi operandi* have been quite similar across the Low Countries, but increasingly the quest for new and better-performing political institutions has led to divergent patterns of politics and policy-making in Belgium and the Netherlands.

Perhaps the lesson that can be drawn from political and institutional developments in the Low Countries is that institutions matter with regard to politics. However, the way they do so depends on the extent to which societal interests and related problems become politicized. The way in which such problems are transferred to the political scene and the extent to which institutions allow political actors to contribute to societal problem-solving is thus, in the final analysis, the touchstone of the effectiveness and efficacy of the institutionalization of political life in Benelux.

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The Nordic countries

Contention, compromise and corporatism

Jan-Erik Lane and Svante Ersson

'Norden' is the label for the five countries situated in northern Europe comprising Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden. The land area covered by these five nation States is quite extensive, especially if one adds Greenland (2,186,000 sq. km) and the Faroe Islands (1,399 sq. km), which belong to the Danish State.

The Nordic countries have strong links with each other, economically and politically. They co-ordinate their policies by means of the Nordic Council, formed in 1952, which has resulted in the harmonization of regulations and a free labour market. They also to some extent act in a collective fashion in international bodies, although their membership of various supranational bodies varies. Thus Denmark became a member of the EC in 1973, at the same time as it and Norway joined NATO. Sweden and Finland entered the European Union in 1995.

The Danish, Norwegian and Swedish languages are quite similar, whereas Finnish in particular but also to some extent Icelandic are distinct. All the Nordic countries are ethnically homogeneous, although there exist substantial minorities, in particular immigrants but also small Sami (Lapp) populations. They all have advanced economies mixing a market economy with large Welfare State programmes.

'Scandia' was the old Latin name for the three countries of northern Europe: Denmark, Norway and Sweden (the 'Scandinavian countries') that had already formed States during the high Middle Ages. Finland was ruled by Sweden up to 1809, then came under Russian rule but declared its independence in 1917. Iceland remained under Denmark up to 1944. It should be pointed out that Denmark ruled Norway from 1385 to 1814, when Sweden conquered the country. It became independent again in 1905.

The standard model for the interpretation of Nordic politics is the so-called Scandinavian model. In the international literature it has been pointed out that Nordic politics does not fit conventional democracy models such as the Anglo-Saxon Westminster model or the Continental consensus model (Lijphart 1984; Elder *et al.* 1988). The Scandinavian model comprises a distinct set of institutions, covering the State and local government, the party system, interest organizations and the economy (Esping-Andersen 1985; Heclø and Madsen 1986; Lewin 1988; Damgaard 1992b).

It is not easy to unpack the concept of a specific governance model in Norden, and its features vary somewhat from one country to another. The Scandinavian model emerged out of the Great Depression of the inter-war years around 1935, became hegemonic after the Second World War but has run into increasing difficulties since the early 1980s, particularly in Sweden. Its core is a blend of adversarial and compromise politics, where party competition is nested together with political and social co-operation. Scandinavian-model politics was initiated by red-green co-operation in Denmark (*Kanslersgadeforliket*) and Sweden (*Kohandeln*) in 1933, in Norway (*Kriseforliket*) in 1935 and in Finland (*Punamulta*) in 1937.

The Scandinavian model developed from small-scale political co-operation across the deep cleavage between the socialist and the non-socialist camps into a large-scale institutional blueprint combining a universal Welfare State with an efficient capitalist economy (Einhorn and Logue 1989). The Scandinavian model involves a substantial policy commitment dating back to the 1930s, when a social pact was agreed upon by the major players, replacing the conflict between capital and labour with a compromise that protected the institutions of the market economy but allowed large-scale state activity in relation to unemployment and social security. What distinguishes the Nordic Welfare State is the generality and comprehensiveness of the programmes (Esping-Andersen 1990).

Politically speaking, the institutions of the Scandinavian model express compromise politics while at the same time the overall constitutional frame is of the Westminster type. The exact balance of adversarial politics and compromise politics may vary from one country to another in Norden as well as shift with time. Resort to compromise politics is evident in the use of special institutional mechanisms such as broad public investigations, bargaining in the parliamentary committees as well as corporatist practices. Institutionally speaking, the Nordic State is a unitary State with a parliamentary system of government. Nordic politics is party government on the basis of a multi-party system expressing a multi-dimensional cleavage structure, to which must be added a strong dose of corporatism. It combines Westminster government characteristics with compromise institutions.

Finnish politics has been somewhat different, as it has housed so-called consociational devices (Lijphart 1977). Not only is there a strong tendency towards oversized government coalitions, but specific constitutional rules have called for qualified majority decisions on a regular basis (Anckar 1992). Up to 1992 a third of the MPs in the Finnish Edesunta (sixty-seven out of 200) could delay the passage of a Bill adopted by parliament until parliament assembled again the next year. This extraordinary consociational device was paralleled by a requirement of a two-thirds majority for tax decisions. Both these institutions were abolished in 1992.

Nor can Finland be described as a strictly parliamentary system of government, owing to the formally strong position of the President (Anckar 1992). The Finnish constitution is based upon a separation of powers between the executive and the legislature, i.e. 'dualistic parliamentarianism'. Real presidential power has been

reduced, to the advantage of the Premier, in the 1980s and early 1990s. Iceland is also led by a President, but political power is concentrated in the Premier and the Alltinget.

All the countries have written constitutions. As the Norwegian constitution is the oldest, dating back to 1814, it comprises the obsolete rules of a constitutional monarchy and lacks formal recognition of the principle of parliamentarianism. Iceland's basic law of 1944 outlines a republic based upon parliamentarianism. The Danish constitution of 1953 contains a strong referendum institution which requires a referendum for constitutional changes, whereas the Norwegian basic law stipulates a two-thirds majority in the Stortinget for such decisions and since 1919 the Finnish constitution has demanded a majority, then a two-thirds majority, with an election in between, or a five-sixths majority followed by a two-thirds majority decision confirmation. In Sweden the 1974 basic law states that constitutional changes may be brought about by two majority decisions by the Riksdag with an election in between.

The referendum institution undoubtedly plays a prominent role in Danish politics. Whereas in Norway, Sweden and Iceland the referendum is only consultative and facultative, it is obligatory and decisive in Denmark. Thus far, Sweden and Iceland have had four referendums and Norway only two after 1945, but Denmark counts ten.

The judicial branch of government in Norden is framed upon the conception of the sovereignty of parliament. There is room only for a significant independent legal review by the ordinary courts in Norway. No country has a constitutional court, though human rights have constitutional protection. All the five countries have unicameral National Assemblies. All forms of public power derive ultimately from Acts of parliament, which principle of legislative supremacy has not prohibited a fairly extensive system of local government autonomy.

The chief characteristic of Nordic politics—the combination of Westminster politics with compromise politics—does not involve a once-and-for-all fixed structure of political institutions. The actual working out of the combination of adversarial and compromise politics shifts over time and differs from one country to another in Norden, the adversarial atmosphere sometimes dominating, at other times the compromise climate.

ELECTIONS

Scandinavian democracy rests upon an election system strongly geared to proportional representation, underlining both extensive citizen participation in elections and the capacity of minorities to organize and become represented. The Scandinavian model does not accept any form of majoritarian electoral formula, as all the States attempt to achieve as high a level of correlation between votes and seats as possible. The minimum voting age is eighteen years.

The mechanism of adversarial politics, the plurality formula, has not attracted much attention in the five Nordic countries. Although discussed somewhat at the time of the introduction of democracy around the end of World War I, the election formula has recognized the typical feature of the party systems, that is a large degree of fractionalization. The general emphasis is upon strict proportionality, as a system of regional mandates is used to correct for lack of proportionality in the election results. Only Sweden employs a rather high 4 per cent threshold to counteract excessive fractionalization, with the Danish Folketinget using a 2 per cent threshold. It has been argued that the political parties dominate the elections to the exclusion of personal choice, which has been promoted by recent changes.

The process of translating social cleavages into political life is closely tied up with the development of the political institutions constituting Nordic democracy. Rokkan identified three thresholds that were crucial to the establishing of a democratic regime: extension of the franchise, proportionality in representation and executive control (Rokkan *et al.* 1970). The timing of these three thresholds in Norden was:

- 1 Male suffrage: 1915 (Denmark), 1906 (Finland), 1915 (Iceland), 1898 (Norway), 1909 (Sweden).
- 2 Female suffrage: 1915 (Denmark), 1906 (Finland), 1915 (Iceland), 1913 (Norway), 1921 (Sweden).
- 3 Proportional representation: 1915 (Denmark), 1906 (Finland), 1959 (Iceland), 1907 (Sweden).
- 4 Parliamentarianism: 1901 (Denmark), 1919 (Finland), 1904 (Iceland), 1884 (Norway), 1917 (Sweden).

The electoral systems in use in Norden really result in proportional outcomes. Two measures of electoral system proportionality may be employed. The first measure means that the closer to 100 the more proportional is the outcome (Mackie and Rose 1982), whereas the second measure shows the highest degree of proportionality when it approaches zero (Bartolini and Mair 1990). Thus, for Denmark we have 95 per cent and 0.8 in 1990, for Finland 93 per cent and 1.2 in 1991, for Iceland 95 per cent and 0.9 in 1991, for Norway 94 per cent and 1.1 in 1991 and finally for Sweden 96 per cent and 1.0.

Since Iceland introduced proportional representation (PR) in 1959 there are very minor differences in the degree of proportionality between the various electoral systems. The overall impression is that the Scandinavian systems displays a high degree of proportionality, employing the Sainte-Lague formula, with Finland scoring marginally lower, as it uses the d'Hondt formula, which Iceland also employs.

There can be little doubt that the strong institutionalization of proportionality in Nordic election rules has been conducive to multipartism as well as a high level of electoral participation. Starting with the latter, the average rate of participation has hovered around 85 per cent in Norway and Sweden, with Norway about 81 per cent, whereas Finland has a lower average score of about 78 per cent. There is a

downward trend in electoral participation in the most recent years (1985–90) in Denmark (81 per cent) and Finland (72 per cent), but the average score is up for Norway (83 per cent) and Sweden (88 per cent). The decline in participation in Finland has been interpreted as a manifestation of increasing apathy (Martikainen and Yrjönen 1991).

From the introduction of democratic regimes around World War I the typical feature has been the five-party system with some variations between nations and over time. To the left there were the social democratic and the communist parties, while the non-socialist parties typically comprised conservative, liberal and agrarian parties. One measure is to look at the number of political parties in the national assembly, whereas another takes the size of the parties into account, focusing on the effective number of parties.

Considering the mere number of political parties represented in parliament the average figure for the years 1945–90 is higher for Denmark and Finland, or 7.8 and 7.6 respectively, than for Norway, with 6.1, and Sweden, with 5.1. There is a clear trend towards an increase in fractionalization, as for 1985–90 we have 8.5 for Denmark, 9.0 for Finland, and 6.0 for Norway as well as Sweden.

Typical of Nordic politics is moderate fractionalization, which appears in the measures of the effective number of parties that hover around 5.0. Thus Sweden has the lowest average scores, with 3.4 for 1945–90, which Norway comes close to with 3.9 as the average score. Denmark and Finland score higher, 4.8 and 5.5. respectively. Again we note the trend towards more fractionalization, the scores for 1985–90 being 3.8 for Sweden, 4.2 for Norway, 6.1 for Finland and 5.8 for Denmark. All the Nordic countries fall outside the Westminster two-party model, which has not prevented the occurrence of both adversarial politics and catch-all strategies in order to form minimum winning majority coalition governments.

The Nordic political cultures have an activist civic orientation as expressed in high levels of electoral participation and in the strong backing for several political parties. Similarly, in Iceland electoral participation has hovered between 87.4 per cent in 1946 and 91.1 per cent in 1963, with a score of 87.5 per cent in 1991. And the number of parties in parliament was four in 1946 but five in 1991. Tables 8.1–4 show the election results from 1945 and onwards.

From the very beginning of the democratic regime the socio-economic cleavage or left-right division has been dominant in Scandinavian politics. Political parties have been formed according to this dimension and several of the political issues have developed around this cleavage. Against the socialist bloc comprising a social democratic party plus one more left-wing party, a left socialist party or a communist party, has stood a non-socialist bloc consisting of a conservative party plus a few centre parties. Only in Finland has polarization been high, reflecting the fact that the Communist Party scored over 20 per cent support here.

The size of the social democratic parties varies from the large ones in Sweden and Norway to smaller ones in Denmark, Finland and Iceland. The left socialist parties

Table 8.1 Elections to parliament in Denmark, 1945–94

Year	Turnout	Com.P. DKP	Lef.S. SF	Soc.D. SD	Lib. RV	Relig. KRF	Agrar. V	Cons. KF	Pop. FRP	Ethn. SP	Green Grö	Other
1945	86.3	12.5	–	32.8	8.2	–	23.4	18.2	–	–	–	5.0
1947	85.8	6.8	–	40.0	6.9	–	27.6	12.4	–	0.4	–	5.9
1950	81.9	4.6	–	39.6	8.2	–	21.3	17.8	–	0.3	–	8.2
1953.1	80.8	4.8	–	40.4	8.6	–	22.1	17.3	–	0.4	–	6.4
1953.2	80.6	4.3	–	41.3	7.8	–	23.1	16.8	–	0.4	–	6.2
1957	83.7	3.1	–	39.4	7.8	–	25.1	16.6	–	0.4	–	7.6
1960	85.8	1.1	6.1	42.1	5.8	–	21.1	17.9	–	0.4	–	5.5
1964	85.5	1.2	5.8	41.9	5.3	–	20.8	20.1	–	0.4	–	4.5
1966	88.6	0.8	10.9	38.3	7.3	–	19.3	18.7	–	–	–	4.8
1968	89.3	1.0	6.1	34.1	15.0	–	18.6	20.4	–	0.2	–	4.5
1971	87.2	1.4	9.1	37.3	14.3	2.0	15.6	16.7	–	0.2	–	3.3
1973	87.7	3.6	6.0	25.6	11.2	4.0	12.3	9.2	15.9	–	–	12.2
1975	88.2	4.2	5.0	29.9	7.1	5.3	23.3	5.5	13.6	–	–	6.1
1977	87.9	3.7	3.9	37.0	3.6	3.4	12.0	8.5	14.6	–	–	13.3
1979	85.6	1.9	5.9	38.3	5.4	2.6	12.5	12.5	11.0	–	–	9.9
1981	83.2	1.1	11.3	32.9	5.1	2.3	11.3	14.5	8.9	–	–	12.7
1984	88.5	0.7	11.5	31.6	5.5	2.7	12.1	23.4	3.6	–	–	8.9
1987	86.8	0.9	14.6	29.3	6.2	2.4	10.5	20.8	4.8	–	1.3	9.3
1988	75.8	0.8	13.0	29.8	5.6	2.0	11.8	19.3	9.0	–	1.4	7.3
1990	83.0	–	8.3	37.4	3.5	2.3	15.8	16.0	6.4	–	0.9	9.4
1994	84.0	–	7.3	34.6	4.6	1.6	23.3	15.0	6.4	–	0.5	6.5

Notes Leftist: VS, Venstre Socialisterne (Left Socialists). Communist: DKP, Kommunistiske Partei (Communist Party). Left socialist: SF, Socialistilernerne Folkeparti (Socialist People's Party). Socialist: SD, Socialdemokratie (Social Democrats). Liberals: RV, Radikale Venstre (Radical Left). Centrist: CD, Centrumdemokraterne (Centre Democrats). Christian: KRF, Kristeligt Folkeparti (Christian People's Party). Agrarian: V.Venstre (Liberal). Conservative: KF, Konservative Folkeparti (Conservative People's Party). Populist: 7 RFB, Justice Party; FRP, Fremskridtspartiet (Progress Party). Ethnic: SP, Swedish Party. Greens: Gröna (the Greens).

Table 8.2 Elections to parliament in Finland, 1945–95

Year	Turnout	Lef.S. TPSL	Com.P. SKDL	Soc.D. SDP	Agrar. KESK	Lib. LKP	Pop. SMP	Relig. SKL	Cons. KOK	Ethn. SFP	Green	Other
1945	74.5	–	23.5	25.1	21.4	5.2	–	–	15.0	8.4	–	1.5
1948	78.2	–	20.0	26.3	24.2	3.9	–	–	17.0	7.7	–	0.8
1951	74.6	–	21.6	26.5	23.3	5.7	–	–	14.6	7.6	–	0.9
1954	79.9	–	21.6	26.2	24.1	7.9	–	–	12.8	7.0	–	0.4
1958	75.0	1.7	23.2	23.2	23.1	5.9	–	0.2	15.3	6.7	–	0.8
1962	85.1	4.4	22.0	19.5	23.0	5.9	2.2	0.8	14.6	6.4	–	1.2
1966	84.9	2.6	21.2	27.2	21.2	6.5	1.0	0.4	13.8	6.0	–	0.0
1970	82.2	1.4	16.6	23.4	17.1	5.9	10.5	1.1	18.0	5.7	–	0.2
1972	81.4	1.0	17.0	25.8	16.4	5.2	9.2	2.5	17.6	5.4	–	0.0
1975	79.7	–	18.9	24.9	17.6	4.3	3.6	3.3	18.4	5.0	–	4.1
1979	81.2	–	17.9	23.9	17.3	3.7	4.5	4.8	21.7	4.6	–	1.7
1983	81.4	–	14.0	26.7	17.6	–	9.7	3.0	22.1	4.9	1.4	0.6
1987	75.9	–	9.7	24.1	17.6	0.9	6.3	2.6	23.1	5.6	4.0	6.1
1991	72.1	–	10.1	22.1	24.8	0.8	4.8	3.1	19.3	5.5	6.8	2.7
1995	68.5	–	11.2	28.3	19.9	0.6	1.3	3.0	17.9	5.1	6.5	6.2

Notes Leftist: TPSL, Töväen ja Pienviljeilijöin Sosialidemokraattinen Liitto (Social Democratic League of Workers and Smallholders). Communist: SKDL, Suomen Kansan Demokraattinen Liitto (Finnish People's Democratic League). Socialist: SDP, Suomen Sosialidemokraattinen Puolue (Finnish Social Democratic Party). Agrarian: KESK, Keskustapuolue (Centre Party). Liberal: LKP, Liberaalinen Kansanpuolue (Liberal People's Party). Populist: SMP, Suomen Maaseudun Puolue (Finnish Rural Party). Christian: SKL, Suomen Kristillinen Puolue (Finnish Christian League). Conservative: KOK, Kansallinen Kokoomus (National Coalition). Ethnic: SFP, Svenska Folkpartiet (Swedish People's Party). Greens: VIHR, Vihrevät (Greens) Leftist: VL, Vasemisto-Litto (Left-wing Alliance).

Table 8.3 Elections to parliament in Norway, 1945–93

Year	Turnout	Com.P. NKP	Lef.S. SV	Soc.D. DNA	Green	Lib. V	Agrar. SP	Relig. KRF	Pop. FRP	Cons. H	Other
1945	76.4	11.9	–	41.0	–	13.8	8.0	7.9	–	17.0	0.3
1949	82.0	5.8	–	45.7	–	13.1	7.9	8.4	–	18.3	0.7
1953	79.3	5.1	–	46.7	–	10.0	9.1	10.5	–	18.6	0.0
1957	78.3	3.4	–	48.3	–	9.6	9.3	10.2	–	18.9	0.2
1961	79.1	2.9	2.4	46.8	–	8.8	9.4	9.6	–	20.0	0.2
1965	85.4	1.4	6.0	43.1	–	10.4	9.9	8.1	–	21.1	0.0
1969	83.8	1.0	3.4	46.5	–	9.4	10.5	9.4	–	19.6	0.2
1973	80.2	–	11.2	35.3	–	3.5	11.0	12.3	5.0	17.4	4.3
1977	82.9	0.4	4.2	42.3	–	3.2	8.6	12.4	1.9	24.8	2.3
1981	82.0	0.3	4.9	37.2	–	3.9	6.7	9.4	4.5	31.7	1.4
1985	84.0	0.2	5.5	40.8	–	3.1	6.6	8.3	3.7	30.4	1.4
1989	84.7	–	10.1	34.3	0.4	3.2	6.5	8.5	13.0	22.2	1.8
1993	75.1	–	7.9	37.0	0.1	3.6	17.0	8.0	6.3	16.7	3.4

Notes Communist: NKP (Norwegian Communist Party). Leftist: SV, Sosialistisk Venstrepartei (Socialist Left Party). Socialist: DNA (Det Norske Arbeiderparti (Norwegian Labour Party). Liberal: V, Venstre (Liberals). Agrarian: SP, Senterpartiet (Centre Party). Christian: KRF, Kristelig Folkeparti (Christian People's Party). Populist: FRP Fremskrittspartiet (Progress Party). Conservative: H, Høyre (Right).

in Denmark and Norway are not insignificant. The non-socialist party spectrum covers a conservative party, a liberal party and an agrarian party, complemented recently by protest parties and Green parties in the 1980s. The electoral outcomes of the so-called bourgeoisie parties have fluctuated considerably over time.

Table 8.4 Elections to parliament in Sweden, 1944–94

Year	Turnout (%)	Com.P. V	Soc.D. SAP	Green MP	Agrar. CP	Pop. NyD	Relig. KdS	Lib. FP	Cons. MOD	Other
1944	71.9	10.3	46.7	–	13.6	–	–	12.9	15.8	0.7
1948	82.7	6.3	46.1	–	12.4	–	–	22.7	12.3	0.1
1952	79.1	4.3	46.0	–	10.7	–	–	24.4	14.4	0.1
1956	79.6	5.0	44.6	–	9.5	–	–	23.8	17.1	0.1
1958	77.4	3.4	46.2	–	12.7	–	–	18.2	19.5	0.0
1960	85.9	4.5	47.8	–	13.6	–	–	17.5	16.6	0.1
1964	83.9	5.2	47.3	–	13.5	–	1.8	17.8	14.4	0.0
1968	89.3	3.0	50.1	–	16.3	–	1.5	15.5	13.7	0.0
1970	88.3	4.8	45.3	–	19.9	–	1.8	16.2	11.5	0.5
1973	90.8	5.3	43.6	–	25.1	–	1.8	9.4	14.3	0.5
1976	91.7	4.8	42.7	–	24.1	–	1.4	11.1	15.6	0.3
1979	90.7	5.6	43.2	–	18.1	–	1.4	10.6	20.3	0.8
1982	91.4	5.6	45.6	1.7	15.5	–	1.9	5.9	23.6	0.3
1985	89.9	5.4	44.7	1.5	9.9	–	2.5	14.2	21.3	0.5
1988	85.9	5.8	43.2	5.5	11.3	–	2.9	12.2	18.3	0.7
1991	86.7	4.5	37.7	3.4	8.5	6.7	7.1	9.1	21.9	1.0
1994	86.8	6.2	45.3	5.0	7.7	1.2	4.1	7.2	22.4	1.0

Notes Communist: V, Vänsterpartiet (Left Party). Socialist: SAP, Sveriges Socialdemokratiska Arbetarparti (Swedish Social Democratic Workers' Party). Greens: MP, Miljöpartiet-De Gröna (Environmental Party—the Greens). Agrarian: BF, CP, Centerpartiet (Centre Party). Populist: NyD, Ny Demokrati (New Democracy). Christian: KdS, Kristdemokratiska Samhällspartiet (Christian Democratic Society Party). Liberals: FP, Folkpartiet-Liberalerna (People's Party—the Liberals). Conservative: MSP, Moderate

The left-right dimension still has an impact on Scandinavian politics, although there are indications that it has decreased over time. One major post-World War II trend is the decline in class voting. It may be measured by the proportion voting for the left, i.e. socialist or communist parties, among the working classes. In Denmark the decline is from 73 per cent (1957) to 63 per cent (1988), in Finland from 81 per cent (1958) to 59 per cent (1991), in Norway from 78 per cent (1957) to 58 per cent (1989) and in Sweden from 73 per cent (1956) to 57 per cent (1991). If one employs the Alford class voting index the same trend is found, as class voting is down from 48 to 25 in Denmark, from 64 to 33 in Finland, from 44 to 16 in Norway and from 51 to 25 in Sweden (Gilljam and Holmberg 1993).

That class voting is on the retreat is a long-run tendency that admits short-term fluctuations. Thus one may expect a rise in class voting in periods of economic crisis, as in the early 1990s. Still, it is a fact that the socio-economic cleavage, based upon material foundations, tends to be replaced in Norden by another kind of cleavage, summarized in the theme of post-materialism or new politics. Data indicate that post-materialist values have an anchor, especially among the post-war generations (Knutsen 1989). However, the other major trend since 1945, besides dealignment along the class cleavage, has been the realignment of the electorate (Lane *et al.* 1993).

PARTIES AND PARTY STRATEGIES

Party government is institutionalized in Norden, political action being overwhelmingly dominated by political parties, which channel electoral participation by means of list voting. All States have systems for the public funding of political parties. The Nordic party systems are multi-dimensional, involving one very strong alignment between the left and the right and less strong additional alignments expressed partly by the parties in the non-socialist bloc.

A majority of the parties operating on the Nordic political scene date back to the 1920s and earlier, including the liberal and conservative parties as well as the social democratic parties. The Norwegian Venstre and Høyre were formed back in the 1880s, while the Danish Venstre goes back to 1871. The Swedish and Finnish nonsocialist parties are more recent, as they were built up in the years around 1900. The social democratic parties were founded around the same time, with the Danish party the oldest (1871) and the Finnish party the youngest (1899). The agrarian and the communist parties made their appearance shortly before and after the First World War respectively. The Finnish agrarian party is the oldest (1907) and the Norwegian agrarian party the youngest (1920), while the Swedish Communist Party was the oldest (1917) and the Norwegian Communist Party the youngest (1923).

These parties, representing six different party types if the Swedish-language People's Party in Finland is added, have played a dominant role since the early 1920s. Looking at electoral support for these parties, here called the 'traditional' parties, from the 1940s to the 1990s one may establish that these parties totally

dominated the political scene until the phenomenon of new politics arrived in Norden in the 1970s.

In the 1940s the traditional parties reached very high levels of support, roughly 94 per cent in Denmark, 99 per cent in Finland, 91 per cent in Norway and 99.5 per cent in Sweden. They more or less managed to retain that support level until the 1970s, when the overall pattern starts to change. The average scores for these parties are much lower already in the 1970s for Denmark and Norway, at 70.5 per cent and 73.3 per cent. It is not until the early 1990s that their share of the vote is sharply down in Finland and Sweden, scoring 83 per cent and 82 per cent. One of the most conspicuous aspects of recent Nordic politics is the dealignment as well as the realignment of the electorate around new parties. The process of increasing instability has involved a few major changes in the party systems up to the early 1990s: (1) the decline of the social democratic parties; (2) the introduction of new political parties. As a result (3) volatility is up sharply.

Size of traditional parties

Breaking down the set of traditional parties, the key division is the left-right cleavage between the socialist parties (social democrats and communists) on the one hand and the non-socialist parties (conservative, liberal and agrarian) on the other. With the exception of Finland and Iceland, the social democratic parties have been the largest party in terms of electoral support, while among the non-socialist parties the weakest link is the liberal parties, which display a continuous decline in terms of electoral support.

The average support for social democratic parties between 1945 and 1990 was as high as 46 per cent in Sweden and 43 per cent in Norway, whereas the average scores were clearly lower in Denmark, at 36 per cent, and in particular in Finland, at 25 per cent. The Finnish exception depends upon the high level of support for the Communist Party, being as high as 20 per cent on average. In the Scandinavian countries the communist parties rallied far less support, at 3 per cent in Denmark, 3.5 per cent in Norway and 4.8 per cent in Sweden during the period 1945–84. In the early 1990s support for former communist parties transformed into left-wing parties has declined, with one percentage point support in Denmark, 10 per cent in Finland and 5 per cent in Sweden.

Among the non-socialist parties the conservative parties have managed to attract considerable support from one election to another, amounting to almost a fifth of the electorate, with an upward trend since the mid-1970s. Between 1945 and 1984 the average outcome was 16 per cent in Denmark, 17 per cent in Finland, 21 per cent in Norway and 16 per cent in Sweden, where the conservative party reached 22 per cent in 1991. The trend has been slightly modified during the last few years, with 16 per cent support in Denmark in 1990 and 19 per cent in Finland in 1991 at the same time as the Norwegian conservative party suffered a setback, from 30 per cent in

1985 to 17 per cent in 1993. The overall trend for the liberal parties in Norden is in the opposite direction. Average support in 1945–84 was much lower in Denmark, with 8 per cent, Finland, with 5 per cent, and 8.5 per cent in Norway, with Sweden the only exception, with an average 16 per cent support for the liberal party. The trend between 1985 and 1993 was a large further reduction in electoral support.

One of the distinctive traits of Nordic politics is the strong political institutionalization of an agrarian movement. Not only were special agrarian parties organized early in the process of introducing mass politics, but they have been successful in retaining considerable electoral support, especially since they identified themselves as centre parties. The strongest centre party is to be found in Finland, where the average level of support between 1945 and 1984 was 20.5 per cent. Also the Danish agrarian party (Venstre) is large, relatively speaking, with 19 per cent support on average, whereas the Swedish centre party, with 16 per cent on average, has shrunk considerably in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Around 1990 the centre party was also standing strong in Norway, where it had risen from 7 per cent in 1981 to 17 per cent in 1993, leading the opposition to Norwegian entry to the European Union. The issue of EU membership gave rise to profound conflict within the electorate and among the political parties and was decided by a referendum.

Introduction of new parties

The transformation of Nordic politics follows from the setbacks for the traditional parties, beginning with the 1973 ‘earthquake’ elections in Denmark and Norway, and continuing in the 1991 election in Sweden. The first new parties on the political scene were the religious parties (beginning with the KRF in Norway) and the left socialist parties (starting with the SF in Denmark). The other new parties entering the political arena were populist parties on the one hand and the Green parties on the other.

There are now religious parties in all the four major Nordic countries. They are larger in Norway and Sweden than in Denmark and Finland, scoring support of 8.5 per cent in Norway and 7 per cent in Sweden in the early 1990s against 2.5 per cent and 3 per cent in Denmark and Finland respectively. The rather large left socialist parties in Denmark and Norway, scoring support of 8.5 per cent and 8 per cent in the early 1990s respectively, have not suffered from the decline of communism, as they had already marked their distance from other communist parties in the 1960s. The populist parties received support in the early 1970s in Finland (Vennamo), Denmark (Glistrup) and Norway (Lange, later Hagen), while it was only in 1991 that a populist party (Ny Demokrati) entered parliament in Sweden. Support for discontent parties in the early 1990s was between 5 per cent and 6 per cent, but the Ny Demokrati lost its mandates in 1994. The Green parties have met with limited success and received most support in Finland in 1991, at 7 per cent. In Sweden the ecologists entered the Riksdag in 1988, did not reach the threshold in the 1991

election but returned to the Riksdag in 1994. Nordic politics has been much focused on the major changes taking place within the party systems from the early 1970s onwards. The rise of new parties and the decline of the traditional parties are signs of increasing instability in the party systems.

Rise in volatility, both gross and net

Looking at data over net as well as gross volatility gives support to such a conclusion, gross volatility measuring how the voters move from one party to another and net volatility measuring the resultant changes in overall support for a party. One aspect of Scandinavian exceptionalism by comparison with the Continental countries in Europe was a long period of low volatility scores, beginning in the late 1940s and ending in the early 1970s in Denmark and Norway and in the 1980s in Finland and Sweden. Each country has its particular election year when instability surfaced.

In the 1950s net volatility amounted to 6 per cent in Denmark and 3.5 per cent in Norway, but during the 1970s it rose to 15.5 per cent in both countries, gross volatility reaching 31 per cent in Denmark and 24.5 per cent in Norway. For Sweden and Finland net volatility was very low in the 1950s, at 5 per cent and 4 per cent respectively. However, in the early 1990s the picture changed dramatically, as net volatility was up to 15 per cent and 12.5 per cent respectively. Gross volatility has risen from 7 per cent in the 1950s to 19.5 per cent in the 1980s and to 30 per cent in the early 1990s among the Swedish electorate. The volatility scores remain high for both Denmark and Norway in the recent elections.

In general, measures of net and gross volatility go together, but the rise in volatility is portrayed in a more straightforward way in the data than gross volatility. This is particularly true of the data referring to Norway and Sweden, where the estimates of gross volatility are the most reliable.

The tendency towards party system instability has been attended by a reassessment of the pros and cons of party government. There is more scepticism about political parties, which is expressed among other things in a decline in party membership (Katz and Mair 1992). There is a general downward trend in most parties. Let us look only at data on some of the major parties in each country, the social democratic party and the conservative party from 1960 to 1989. Since 1989 the Swedish SAP has admitted only individual members, a move which reduced the number of members in 1992 to 259,000 from roughly 1 million in 1990.

Although there have been important changes in the party systems during the last few years, the traditional parties still have a strong standing. The general ability of these parties to adapt to changing circumstances is of major importance, but one crucial institutional factor is the introduction of public funding of political parties. Legislation allowing State funding of political parties was introduced first in Sweden in 1965, followed by Finland in 1967, Norway in 1970 and Denmark only in 1986 (Gidlund 1991:175–7). It holds true that the smaller the party the more it is dependent

upon public funds. With regard to small parties 80 per cent or 90 per cent of their budget is covered by public funds, while overall dependence on public funding ranges somewhere between 50 per cent and 60 per cent.

The strategies followed by the political parties may be characterized in terms of the distinction between ideology (reliance on the party programme) and tactics (maximization of parliamentary influence and impact on the executive). Important for the choice of strategy has been on the one hand the size of the party in parliament, and on the other the political relevance of the party, i.e. its position on the left-right political scale. Parties stressing tactics are to be found among the traditional parties, with the exception of the communist parties. The new parties underline ideology more, although the religious parties have recently underlined tactics more than ideological purity.

Looking at some major issues during the post-war era, it is evident that the ideological dimension has played a minor role and the tactical component the decisive role in deciding the party orientation to these issues. The social democratic parties and the conservatives have adopted catch-all strategies.

Table 8.5 Policy space of parties in Denmark, 1984

Year	Left VS	Comm. DKP	Social-lef. SF	Socialist SD	Liberal RV	Centre CD	Christian KRF	Agrar. V	Cons. KF	Pop. FRP
1984	0.8	1	1.9	3.8	4.8	5.7	6.2	6.7	7.3	8.7

Notes 0 extreme left, 10 extreme right. See Table 8.1 for the full party names.

Source F.Castles and P.Mair, 'Left-right political scales', *European Journal of Political Research* 12 (1984):83–8.

Yet the long-term data on party policy alignment show that the right-left dimension is still the prevailing mode for the voters to position themselves in relation to the political parties (Tables 8.5 and 8.6). Table 8.8 shows how voters placed themselves in Sweden from 1979 to 1991. The distance between the voters has shrunk a little in terms of how they identify the position of their parties along the left-right dimension. Similar findings are reported from the other Nordic countries, as by Henry Valen in his election research in Norway (Table 8.7).

An issue of rising political relevance is how to develop policy-making in the field of immigration. As the Nordic countries are facing a larger number of foreign residents

Table 8.6 Policy space of parties in Finland, 1984

Year	Comm. SKDL	Socialist SDP	Centre KESK	Liberal LKP	Agrar. SMP	Ethnic RKP	Christian SKL	Cons. KOK
1984	1.8	3.0	5.2	5.6	5.8	6.1	6.8	7.2

Notes 0 extreme left, 10 extreme right. See Table 8.2 for the full party names.

Source F.Castles and P.Mair, 'Left-right political scales', *European Journal of Political Research* 12 (1984):83–8.

Table 8.7 Policy space of parties in Norway, 1973–94

Year	Left SV	Socialist DNA	Liberal V	Agrarian SP	Christian KRF	Populist FRP	Conservative H
1973	2.6	3.2	3.7	4.1	4.6	4.5	5.3
1977	2.1	3.8	3.9	4.6	4.9	5.3	5.6
1981	2.1	3.5	3.3	4.5	4.8	5.3	5.1
1984	1.2	3.0	4.0	5.8	6.1	9.4	7.7
1985	2.8	3.8	4.6	6.2	6.6	8.8	8.5
1989	2.5	3.9	4.3	5.3	6.5	8.9	8.2
1993	2.5	4.2	–	5.1	6.1	9.0	8.3

Notes 1973–81, 0 extreme left, 9 extreme right; 1984, 1985–93, 0 extreme left, 10 extreme right. See Table 8.3 for the full party names.

Sources 1973–81: H. Valen, *Valg og politikk- et samfunn i endring*, Oslo, NKS, 1992, p. 219; 1984: F. Castles and P. Mair, 'Left-right political scales', *European Journal of Political Research* 12 (1984):83–8; 1985–93: H. M. Narud, 'Coalition termination in Norway', *Scandinavian Political Studies* 18 (1995):1–24.

entering their countries, there is more heterogeneity in the social structure. Foreign residents as a percentage of the entire population have increased rapidly so that they amount to 3 per cent in Denmark, 1 per cent in Finland, 3.5 per cent in Norway and 5.5 per cent in Sweden. At the same time the Nordic countries have extended citizenship to large proportions of the immigrants (Fassman and Münz 1992:457), so that the share of the countries' populations of foreign descent is much larger than these figures suggest.

The Nordic countries have been seen as prototypes for the Lipset and Rokkan (1967) theory of frozen party systems in Western Europe. Yet the relevance today of the frozen party hypothesis is no longer what it used to be. Profound developments both among the political parties and in the social structure have resulted in processes of dealignment as well as realignment (Damgaard 1974; Borre 1980; Pedersen 1987, 1988; Valen, 1992a, b; Gilljam and Holmberg 1993; Martikainen and Yrjönen 1991). New parties have been formed, such as Christian parties, Green parties and discontent parties. And the old parties dating back to the introduction of mass politics in a democratic polity have been transformed considerably, such as the agrarian and

Table 8.8 Policy space of parties in Sweden, 1979–91 and 1984

Year	Comm. V(PK)	Socialist SAP	Green MP	Agrar. CP	NYD	Christian KDS	Liberal FP	Cons. MSP
1979	2.0	3.4	–	5.9	–	5.5	5.9	7.3
1982	2.4	3.5	4.8	6.2	–	5.7	6.0	7.6
1985	2.6	3.6	5.0	6.2	–	6.5	6.2	7.7
1988	2.5	3.7	4.6	5.9	–	5.6	6.4	7.7
1991	2.6	3.9	4.5	6.1	6.3	6.4	6.4	7.5
1984	1.2	2.9	5.0	6.2	–	6.5	5.5	7.7

Notes 0 extreme left, 10 extreme right. See Table 8.4 for the full party names.

Sources 1979–91: M. Gilljam and S. Helmsberg, *Væljarna inför 90-talet*, Stockholm, Norstedt, 1993, p. 137; 1984: F. Castles and P. Mair, 'Left-right political scales', *European Journal of Political Research* 12 (1984):83–8.

communist parties, or have witnessed a sharp decline in their electoral support, like the liberal parties. These conspicuous developments have cut the links between party support and position in the social structure, as gross volatility is up sharply.

The political parties in Iceland differ somewhat from the prevailing Scandinavian model. They include a large conservative party—the Independence Party, formed in 1929 as a reaction to Danish rule. Its share of the electorate has hovered around 35–40 per cent. The second party is the Progress Party, which is a rural party with an average support around 20 per cent. The Social Democratic Party has never equalled the Nordic social democratic parties in size, at about 15 per cent. As a matter of fact the Left-Socialist Party in Iceland has received slightly more support than the Social Democrats. The most conspicuous party is the Women’s Alliance, scoring 8.3 per cent in 1991.

PARLIAMENTS

The Nordic countries have strong parliaments both on paper and in reality. Explicitly, their constitutions provide the national assemblies with exclusive legislative powers and formally or informally with the power to dismiss governments which lose their confidence. The political systems of the Nordic countries embrace the principle of the sovereignty of parliament, meaning that all exercise of public power must go back to institutions enacted in the representative assembly, which amounts to yet another Westminster model trait (Pappi and Schmitt 1994).

Finnish constitutionalism departs from the Scandinavian practice. It includes a presidential system of government where the powers of the President are truly impressive. However, it is another matter whether Presidents have managed to employ those powers. Whereas Kekkonen was stronger than the Premier and the Cabinet over a long period of time (1956–82), recent developments under Koivisto (1982–94) have strengthened Finnish parliamentarianism at the expense of presidential rule at the same time as a procedure for directly electing the President was introduced; this trend will most probably continue with the Ahtisaari presidency (1994–). Recent constitutional changes have reinforced the power of the Premier, e.g. the President can no longer dissolve parliament without such a proposal from the Premier.

The amount of parliamentary activity as well as the political significance of such activity has increased since the Second World War. As minority governments have come to prevail in Denmark, Norway and Finland there has been a major shift towards so-called committee parliamentarianism, i.e. policy-making has been negotiated in the standing committees of parliament (Damgaard 1992b; Romettvedt 1982; Sannerstedt and Sjølin 1992; Anckar 1992). More and more the government needs to bargain with different parties from one policy area to the other, where the crucial decisions are hammered out in parliamentary committees. The standing committees

number twenty-three in Denmark, thirteen in Finland, twelve in Iceland, thirteen in Norway and sixteen in Sweden.

It is true that the real political power of Nordic parliaments is heavily dependent upon the nature of government formation, a majority government being conducive to 'Minister Caesarism', whereas in 'committee parliamentarianism' the standing committees of the national assembly have the final responsibility for drafting the policies that parliament will vote upon. During periods of majority government the Nordic national assemblies in reality constitute rubber-stamp bodies, approving policies that have been drawn up elsewhere, in iron triangles where corporatist practices loom large. Clearly, the recent trend is towards committee parliamentarianism.

In the Nordic national assemblies policy-making is formalized into a semi-rational structure involving the creation of a commission of inquiry whose reports are sent out for review by all concerned, then end up in parliament for committee scrutiny and final legislation. The attempt at comprehensive policy-making is combined with consultation procedures, resulting in opportunities for expressing various opinions as well as for compromise among interested parties. Starting an inquiry into matters for legislation may also be initiated by the opposition parties in parliament, calling on the government to appoint a commission with a broadly based representation.

The Scandinavian Welfare State—*Folkhemmet*—was gradually built up on the basis of a consensualist policy style that delivered broad reform proposals backed by all except the small extremist parties. When it worked, at its best, it combined high economic growth with low unemployment and much redistribution by means of public transfer programmes.

In the late 1970s and early 1980s the Scandinavian model began to malfunction; inflation increased, as did the number of working days lost in strikes (Ruin 1982; Damgaard and Svensson 1989; Sundberg and Berglund, 1990; Lane 1991). The strong membership increase in several trade unions organizing the public sector created more difficulties in bringing about collective action to secure (for example) economic growth. The power of distributional coalitions was strengthened along with the expansion of the public sector. In the 1980s came more institutional sclerosis in the sense that strong policy networks could mobilize special interests to a considerable extent.

The Nordic parliaments have been a vehicle for deprived groups ascending to political power to employ public policies to change society. In Denmark and Sweden the working-class movement rapidly became influential in the lower chambers of the Riksdag and the Folketinget, Denmark moving to a one-chamber system in 1953 and Sweden in 1970. The Norwegian Stortinget divides into two sections, Lagtinget and Odelstinget, on legislative matters. Now the gender dimension in the representative assembly is the focus of much attention.

There has been a substantial growth in the number of female MPs in all Nordic countries. In 1950 the relative size of female representatives was 8 per cent in

Denmark, 9 per cent in Finland, 3.5 per cent in Iceland, 4.5 per cent in Norway and 9.5 per cent in Sweden. In 1990 the corresponding figures had climbed to 31 per cent in Denmark, 31.5 per cent in Finland, 20.5 per cent in Iceland, 36 per cent in Norway and 38 per cent in Sweden (Janova and Sineau 1992:117). Since 1970 there has been steady growth in female representation, meaning that in 1990 roughly one in three MPs is a woman. The situation of women in Iceland is different, but the low representation of women may be one factor of major importance for the foundation of the women's party in Iceland in the early 1980s.

GOVERNMENTS

Although the culture of Nordic politics emphasizes compromise, the goal of forming a majority government has been in no way irrelevant. In Finland there is frequent resort to oversized coalitions, but in the Scandinavian States both left and right aim to achieve a simple majority government either by means of a minimum winning coalition among the non-socialist parties or by means of a real majority situation in parliament for the social democratic parties, supported tacitly by other left-wing parties, such as the former Communist Party in Sweden. Only in Finland are there typical so-called consociational devices like consensus governments and minority protection, whereas government formation in Scandinavia involves much adversarial politics between the socialists and the non-socialists, again a Westminster model characteristic.

Looking at the composition of governments between 1945 and 1990, different kinds of government have been formed in the various Nordic States. Majority single-party governments can only be found in Norway (36 per cent of the time) and in Sweden (4 per cent). As a matter of fact, it has become increasingly difficult to form this kind of government, which also applies to majority coalition governments in Denmark, Norway and Sweden. The classic example of a one-party majority government is the long period in power of the Gerhardsen social democratic government in Norway.

Majority coalitions have been formed in all the Nordic countries, but they occur very often only in Finland (77 per cent) and in Iceland (96 per cent). It must be emphasized, though, that oversized majority or 'surplus' governments are formed almost exclusively in Finland. In the other countries the majority government coalitions tend to be minimum winning. In Sweden the non-socialist parties have formed majority coalition governments a couple of times (21 per cent), which is also true of Norway (18 per cent) and Denmark (27 per cent). The other major type of government is a social democratic one-party minority government, as in Sweden (70 per cent), in Norway (40 per cent) and Denmark (48 per cent). Over time, it has become increasingly difficult to form majority governments in Scandinavia, especially in Denmark, where there are more and more minority coalition governments (25 per cent).

Table 8.9 Governments of Denmark 1945–94

<i>Legislature No.</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Prime Minister</i>	<i>Party composition</i>
1	1945	K. Kristensen	V
2	1947	H. Hedtoft	SD
3	1950	H. Hedtoft	SD
	1950	E. Eriksen	KF, V
4	1953	E. Eriksen	KF, V
5	1953	H. Hedtoft	SD
	1955	H. C. Hansen	SD
6	1957	H. C. Hansen	SD, RV, RFB
	1960	V. Kampmann	SD, RV, RFB
7	1960	V. Kampmann	SD, RV
	1962	J. O. Krag	SD, RV
8	1964	J. O. Krag	SD
9	1966	J. O. Krag	SD
10	1968	H. Baunsgaard	RV, V, KF
11	1971	J. O. Krag	SD
	1972	A. Jörgensen	SD
12	1973	P. Hartling	V
13	1975	A. Jörgensen	SD
14	1977	A. Jörgensen	SD
	1978	A. Jörgensen	SD, V
15	1979	A. Jörgensen	SD
16	1981	A. Jörgensen	SD
	1982	P. Schlüter	KF, V, CD
17	1984	P. Schlüter	KF, V, CD
18	1987	P. Schlüter	KF, V, CD
19	1988	P. Schlüter	KF, V, RV
	1989	P. Schlüter	KF, V
20	1990	P. Schlüter	KF, V
	1993	P. Nyrup Rasmussen	SD, CD, RV, KrF
21	1994	P. Nyrup Rasmussen	SD, RV, CD

Note See Table 8.1 for the full party names.

Table 8.10 Governments of Finland, 1945–95

<i>Legislature No.</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Prime Minister</i>	<i>Party composition</i>
1	1945	J. A. Paasikivi	KESK, SDP, SFP, LKP, SKDL
1	1946	M. Pekkala	SKDL, KESK, SDP, SFP
2	1948	K. A. Fagerholm	SDP
	1950	U. Kekkonen	KESK, SFP, LKP
	1951	U. Kekkonen	KESK, SDP, SFP, LKP
	1951	U. Kekkonen	KESK, SFP, LKP
3	1951	U. Kekkonen	KESK, SDP, SFP
	1953	U. Kekkonen	KESK, SFP
	1953	S. Tuomija	Caretaker
4	1954	R. Törngren	KESK, SDP, SFP
	1954	U. Kekkonen	KESK, SDP
5	1956	K. A. Fagerholm	SDP, KESK, SFP, LKP
	1957	V. Sukselainen	KESK, SFP, LKP
	1957	V. Sukselainen	KESK, SFP

<i>Legislature No.</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Prime Minister</i>	<i>Party composition</i>
	1957	V. Sukselainen	KESK, TPSL, LKP
	1957	R. von Fieandt	Caretaker
	1958	R. Kuuskoski	Caretaker
6	1958	K. A. Fagerholm	SDP, KESK, KOK, SFP, LKP
	1959	V. Sukselainen	KESK
	1961	M. Miettunen	KESK
7	1962	A. Karjalainen	KESK, KOK, SFP, LKP
	1963	A. Karjalainen	KESK, KOK, SFP, LKP
	1963	R. R. Lehto	Caretaker
	1964	J. Virolainen	KESK, KOK, SFP, LKP
8	1966	R. Paasio	SDP, KESK, SKDL, TPSL
	1968	M. Koivisto	SDP, KESK, SFP, SKDL, TPSL
9	1970	T. Aura	Caretaker
	1970	A. Karjalainen	KESK, SDP, SFP, LKP, SKDL
	1971	A. Karjalainen	KESK, SDP, SFP, LKP
	1971	T. Aura	Caretaker
10	1972	R. Paasio	SDP
	1972	K. Sorsa	SDP, KESK, SFP, LKP
	1975	K. Linanmaa	Caretaker
11	1975	M. Miettunen	KESK, SDP, SFP, LKP
	1976	M. Miettunen	KESK, SFP, LKP
	1977	K. Sorsa	SDP, KESK, SFP, LKP, SKDL
	1978	K. Sorsa	SDP, KESK, LKP, SKDL
12	1979	M. Koivisto	SDP, KESK, SFP, SKDL
	1982	K. Sorsa	SDP, KESK, SFP, SKDL
	1982	K. Sorsa	SDP, KESK, SFP
13	1983	K. Sorsa	SDP, KESK, SFP, SMP
14	1987	H. Holkeri	KOK, SDP, SFP, SMP
15	1991	E. Aho	KESK, KOK, SFP, SKL
16	1995	P. Lippman	SDP, KOK, SFP, Greens, VL

Note See Table 8.2 for the full party names.

One institution of major importance for the frequent use of minority governments in Nordic politics is the regime of negative parliamentarism. Its basic rule is that governments may be formed without the explicit and positive support of a political majority in parliament. A government survives as long as it is at least tacitly tolerated, because it has to step down only when there is an intentional vote of no confidence. Actually the Schuster government in Denmark survived several parliamentary defeats during the 1980s but remained in power (Bergman 1993).

The overall pattern of government formation differs between the various countries, reflecting the variation in voter support for the largest party, the Social Democrats. In Norway and Sweden the Social Democratic Party had such a strong hold on government that people spoke of a 'statist' political party. The Norwegian Social Democrats enjoyed majority support in the Stortinget in the period 1945–61, whereas the Swedish Social Democratic Party could rule as a majority government from 1945 to 1976 first on the basis of government co-operation with the Agrarian Party up to 1957 and then in a minority government with the tacit support of the Communist

Table 8.11 Governments of Norway, 1945–93

<i>Legislature No.</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Prime Minister</i>	<i>Party composition</i>
1	1945	E. Gerhardsen	DNA
2	1949	E. Gerhardsen	DNA
3	1951	O. Torp	DNA
	1953	O. Torp	DNA
4	1955	E. Gerhardsen	DNA
	1957	E. Gerhardsen	DNA
5	1961	E. Gerhardsen	DNA
	1963	J. Lyng	H, SP, KRF, V
	1963	E. Gerhardsen	DNA
6	1965	P. Borten	SP, KRF, H, V
7	1969	P. Borten	SP, KRF, H, V
	1971	T. Bratteli	DNA
	1972	L. Korvald	KRF, SP, V
	1973	T. Bratteli	DNA
8	1976	O. Nordli	DNA
	1977	O. Nordli	DNA
9	1981	G. Harlem Brundtland	DNA
	1981	K. Willoch	H
10	1983	K. Willoch	H, SP, KRF
	1985	K. Willoch	H, SP, KRF
	1986	G. Harlem Brundtland	DNA
11	1989	J. P. Syse	H, SP, KRF
	1990	G. Harlem Brundtland	DNA
12	1993	G. Harlem Brundtland	DNA

Note See Table 8.3 for the full party names.

Party. In Denmark, Finland and Iceland the labour movement never achieved such an hegemonic position.

Government stability has been lower in Denmark and Finland, where the number of governments between 1945 and 1989 has been twenty-six and thirty-eight respectively, with an average duration of 20.2 months and 13.6 months. Finland had very unstable governments in the 1950s before turning to oversized Cabinets. The number of governments is lower in Sweden (twenty-two), Norway (twenty-two) and Iceland (twenty), and the average duration longer, i.e. some twenty-five months. The degree of parliamentary support and the number of parties partaking in government is consistently higher in Finland than in Scandinavia, owing to the occurrence of oversized coalitions. The average support is as high as 57.5 per cent in Finland and the number of parties included is three, whereas in the Scandinavian countries parliamentary support hovers between 41 per cent (Denmark) and 47 per cent (Sweden, Norway). The chief developmental trend, however, is that government life spans have decreased in the Scandinavian countries but increased in Finland. Minority governments are frequent in Scandinavia (Strom 1990).

The pattern of ideological composition varies between the nations. Sweden and Norway have had a long tradition of single-party social democratic governments,

Table 8.12 Governments of Sweden, 1946–94

<i>Legislature No.</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Prime Minister</i>	<i>Party composition</i>
1	1946	T. Erlander	SAP
2	1948	T. Erlander	SAP
	1951	T. Erlander	SAP, BF/CP
3	1952	T. Erlander	SAP, BF/CP
4	1956	T. Erlander	SAP, BF/CP
	1957	T. Erlander	SAP
5	1958	T. Erlander	SAP
6	1960	T. Erlander	SAP
7	1964	T. Erlander	SAP
8	1968	T. Erlander	SAP
	1969	O. Palme	SAP
9	1970	O. Palme	SAP
10	1973	O. Palme	SAP
11	1976	T. Fällidin	CP, FP, MSP
	1978	O. Ullsten	FP
12	1979	T. Fällidin	CP, FP, MSP
	1981	T. Fällidin	CF, FP
13	1982	O. Palme	SAP
14	1985	O. Palme	SAP
	1986	I. Carlsson	SAP
15	1988	I. Carlsson	SAP
16	1991	C. Bildt	MSP, CP, FP, KdS
17	1994	I. Carlsson	SAP

Note See Table 8.4 for the full party names.

covering 69 per cent and 70.5 per cent of the time between 1945 and 1990. The Danish pattern includes both social democratic single-party governments (41.5 per cent) and right-wing-led governments (39 per cent), while in Finland governments tend to be formed that balance the right and the left in the same administration (63.5 per cent). In Iceland coalition governments are formed by parties of the centre, often taking the form of a coalition between the dominant conservative Independent Party and the Social Democrats or the Agrarians (Woldendorp *et al.* 1993).

It is impossible to talk about Nordic party government without bringing up the question of corporatism. On the one hand, inherent in the compromise culture is the fact that strong interest organizations are afforded a number of opportunities to exercise influence over policy initiation and legislative decision-making. On the other hand, since the Nordic countries are characterized by the hierarchical and encompassing nature of the interest organization among both employees and employers, there is also strong pressure for interest consultation and interest intermediation.

Trade union density rose between 1950 and 1985, from 53 per cent to 83 per cent in Denmark, from 33 per cent to 81 per cent in Finland, from 46 per cent to 64 per cent in Norway and from 68 per cent to 91 per cent in Sweden (Western

1993:264). The Scandinavian countries, and Finland, are the most typically corporatist countries in Western Europe apart from Austria. Although it is true that the relevance of corporatist interest intermediation and interest concertation tends to swing back and forth (Ruin 1974), corporatist patterns of policy-making and policy implementation constitute important elements of political institutions in Norden.

Corporatism in Nordic politics emerged from the Great Depression, when crucial system choices were made combining a capitalist economy with extensive State regulation and trade union involvement (Karvonen and Sundberg 1991). The existence of strong trade unions was accepted by the employers' associations, where industrial relations were to be managed by means of broad agreements between the interest organizations. A tripartite system of policy interaction was introduced covering the trade unions, the employers' associations and the State.

Corporatism acquired its most characteristic features after the Second World War, when it became a cornerstone of the Scandinavian model. It involved the notion of an industrial pact between employers and employees in order to enhance economic growth by means of low wage increases and low inflation. As Mancur Olson (1990) has emphasized, the Scandinavian model achieved considerable growth rates at first in Sweden and Finland and later in Norway and Denmark in the 1980s.

Each Nordic country has its own version of corporatism. Perhaps the Swedish model took social corporatism to its limits. The Swedish interest organizations were to some extent integrated with the State. Not only were they given a prominent role in the policy-making process, having the right to state their view on any reform proposal, but they were integrated in policy implementation by virtue of the capacity to nominate members of State agencies as well as to execute public functions (Micheletti 1985:1991).

In Norway the interest organization played a large role in the promotion of an 'organized democracy', to use the words of Olsen (1983). In Finland 'structural corporatism' grew strong in the 1960s (Helander and Anckar 1983), which resulted in a strong political role for the interest organizations. In Denmark the interest organizations play a heavy role in various administrative regimes, including straight-forward implementation of policies (Grønnegaard Christensen 1993).

Nordic corporatism has been institutionalized in five policy and implementation procedures:

- 1 Involvement of the interest organizations in the hearings process concerning major policy reforms ('remiss').
- 2 The organizations' participation in major policy investigations.
- 3 Board representation of the organizations in central government agencies.
- 4 Schemes for employee representation on various boards as well as for co-determination.
- 5 The delegation of administrative tasks to the interest organization.

A conspicuous case of the last mentioned institution is the construction of the unemployment insurance funds, where Denmark, Finland and Sweden provide the union-run employment schemes with public funds (Rothstein 1992).

Yet the late 1980s and the early 1990s have witnessed a reassessment of corporatism. Patterns of corporatist interaction are no longer sacrosanct, as they have been attacked for harbouring special interests promoted at the expense of the public interest. In the wake of the economic depression of the 1990s the Nordic countries have attempted to remove some of their institutional sclerosis, unpacking certain corporatist schemes (Lewin 1994).

BUREAUCRACIES AND INTERGOVERNMENTAL RELATIONS

Being unitary States, the Scandinavian countries adopted a three-tier system, whereas Finland has a two-tier framework. The principle of local government autonomy traditionally has a strong standing in the Nordic countries, although there is much State regulation and State funding (Table 8.13).

Table 8.13 Decentralization In the Nordic countries

Country	State regions	Municipalities	County councils	Local government taxes/GDP (1985)	Local government final con./GDP (1985)
Denmark	14	275	14	13.8	17.2
Finland	12	461		9.0	13.4
Iceland	8	216	21	6.6	4.0
Norway	19	454	19	8.6	11.4
Sweden	24	284	23	14.3	19.9

Source J.E.Lane, D.McKay and K.Newton, *Political Data Handbook: OECD Countries*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1991.

The central government is made up of Ministries and a large number of agencies and boards which enjoy a degree of autonomy not found in Continental Europe. The Swedish model of autonomous *ämbetsverk* (agency) is the typical model to which Finland and Norway come closest, whereas the Danish model involves ministerial rule. Administrative matters are delegated to these independent agencies and boards to a considerable extent. Such central government authorities are run either by a chief director or a board that often includes corporatist representation. It may be interpreted as an institutional mechanism that moderates the amount of centralization in the Nordic unitary State. The same applies to the extensive autonomy granted the municipalities and county councils.

During the post-war period local government functions have increased tremendously, as the local authorities are entrusted with the administration of many

welfare services. Whereas the municipalities take care of education, social services and the infrastructure, the county councils are responsible for health care. In Finland health services are provided by special associations set up between the municipalities. As the budgets of the local authorities have multiplied, the local government sector increasing more rapidly than GDP, the organizations of the local authorities have been transformed, underlining their formal structure and their function as major employers (Strömberg and Westerståhl 1984; Fevolden and Sørensen 1987; Bogason 1987; Magnusson and Lane 1987).

Welfare programmes date back to the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as the national government took steps to protect workers against the consequences of the rapid process of industrialization and urbanization that swept over the Nordic countries during the second half of the nineteenth century. The economic crisis of the 1930s led to sustained expansion of various aspects of the public sector, involving both the provision of welfare services and transfer payments. The real expansion of the public sector began, however, after the Second World War.

The overall growth of the public sector has been dramatic in Norden. Measured as a percentage of GDP, the Danish figures climb from 18 per cent in 1950 to 56.5 per cent in 1990, in Norway from 22 per cent to 51.5 per cent, in Sweden from 23.5 per cent to 59 per cent, whereas in Finland the expansion of the tax State has been more moderate, manifested in a rise from 19.5 per cent to 37.5 per cent. Considering that overall resources as measured by GDP have more than doubled during the post-war period, the increase in the capacity of the Nordic States to embark on extensive public-sector programmes involves a major change in the relations between State and society in those countries from a historical point of view.

The Nordic Welfare State comprises a set of three broad policies: extensive public resource allocation in education and health, universal transfer payments for social security and a heavy commitment to full employment, including job retraining. The State and the local government in particular are responsible for the production of many goods and services, final government consumption standing in 1990 at 25 per cent in Denmark, 26 per cent in Finland, 21 per cent in Norway and 27 per cent in Sweden. However, the increase in transfer payments between 1950 and 1990 has been even more spectacular, from 6 per cent to 18.5 per cent in Denmark, from 4.5 per cent to 11 per cent in Finland, from 5 per cent to 19.5 per cent in Norway and from 6.5 per cent to 21 per cent in Sweden.

At first it was possible to combine high average growth in the overall economy with steadily expanding public spending, but from the 1970s on there is a clear reduction in economic growth at the same time as the expansion of the public sector at all levels of government, but particularly the local government level, was far in excess of private-sector expansion. The Scandinavian model implies both substantial public resource allocation, providing a number of services almost free of charge, and huge social security programmes, redistributing income between various social groups. Such heavy reliance on public provision has led to a large

increase in the number of public employees. Sweden especially suffers from a long period of reliance upon the public budget for resource allocation and income redistribution, with huge central government deficits and a large national debt as the most urgent problem in the 1990s.

The Nordic Welfare State has cherished equality as its first and foremost goal. Thus services were to be provided equally to all citizens, and regional disparities were to be equalized. When the Nordic Welfare State was constructed and expanded, centralization was the major tool, the national government laying down standards and using local government to provide the goods and services. This has the effect that the traditional commitment to local government autonomy was weakened by the weight of State legislation and considerable allocation of central government grants to local government. However, since the beginning of the 1980s the trend has been reversed, and decentralization is in favour. Local governments have passed through comprehensive organizational growth processes, transforming them into huge formal organizations with large budgets and many employees.

Whereas intergovernmental interaction was characterized by planning and the use of various control schemes such as detailed rule regulation in combination with earmarked grants, the strong decentralization drive involves a profound movement from a top-down perspective to a bottom-up approach. Framework legislation has been employed, together with block grants, augmenting discretion at the regional and local level of government, also within the State (deconcentration). The central government now only outlines the major objectives in the various policy sectors, refraining from the employment of policy instruments used earlier but underlining the relevance of the evaluation of outputs (productivity) and outcomes (effectiveness). The overall trend in intergovernmental relations is the replacement of *ex ante* steering mechanisms with *ex post* instruments such as performance evaluation in particular.

INSTITUTIONAL REFORM

Considering the size of the Scandinavian Welfare State, it is scarcely surprising that most reform activity has focused upon the public sector. Two chief objectives may be identified: (1) enhancement of productivity and effectiveness within State agencies and local governments, and (2) initiation of cut-back management in relation to several programmes in the social security systems. Two major types of strategy have been attempted: (1) decentralization, and (2) privatization.

The temporal sequence between these objectives and measures is that the *political* reforms, particularly decentralization, came before the resort to cut-back management and privatization strategies. The decentralization reform involved on the one hand deconcentration within the State, moving functions and resources from the central level to the regional and local levels of government. On the other hand, there was a

strong emphasis on the values of the local government system, meaning that both the municipalities and the county councils were allowed to expand far more rapidly than the growth rate of the economy as a whole. The local governments are now the major employers of people in the Nordic countries.

The basic tenor of the debate about the pros and cons of the Scandinavian Welfare State has shifted. The increasing relevance of market values in these countries, with their earlier strong socialist ambitions, was at first reflected in various institutional attempts to reform the public sector, but as the financial pressure grew along with the depression of the early 1990s it became necessary to initiate various policies of retrenchment. This applies in particular to the Swedish context, where there have been substantial cut-backs both at the central government level in the transfer programmes and at the local government level, where people have been laid off. The public sector in Denmark and Norway is in a better shape than in Sweden and Finland, where the economic depression has hit hard, resulting in high unemployment figures.

The innovations in the economic reform of the public sector contained a number of different steps:

- 1 New budgetary and evaluation techniques.
- 2 Contracting-out and tendering.
- 3 Hiving off bureau functions to public joint-stock companies.
- 4 User fees instead of taxation.
- 5 The introduction of market-type mechanisms such as internal markets or individual salary schemes into public agencies, especially at the local government level.
- 6 Privatization proper, meaning the selling off of public property.

In the local government sector major amalgamations have been undertaken in every country except Norway, where the number of municipalities remains very high, which means that many local governments are responsible for only a few thousand inhabitants, reflecting the strong support for peripheral communities and local participation in that country.

The Scandinavian model outlined a distinct set of political institutions that made Nordic politics different from either Anglo-Saxon practices or Continental European realities. It combined adversarial politics with compromise institutions, from patterns of consultation and negotiation in parliament to corporatist policy concertation. And compromise between the socialists and non-socialists resulted in a commitment to the Welfare State without parallel elsewhere.

Yet Scandinavian political institutions are not working as they used to when the reputation of this institutional model was at its peak, in the 1970s. There is less consensus between the labour market organizations. The public sector, it is widely agreed, needs structural reform, underlining market incentives, at a time when the major development of public-sector growth has been halted. Besides the drive for more efficiency in public services, cut-back strategies are being implemented,

particularly in Sweden and Finland. The Scandinavian model has been transformed in various ways: less corporatism, more choice and competition, as well as less collectivism and more personal freedom.

It has become more and more difficult to combine the two basic values of the Scandinavian Welfare State—efficiency and equality. Data indicate profound productivity problems and the comprehensive and generous transfer programmes are hardly an incentive compatible with the presuppositions of an advanced open economy. There is a search for efficiency-enhancing reforms and retrenchment policies that trim the social security systems. The question of membership of the European Union raised the same type of confrontation in Finland, Norway and Sweden, where adherents underlined the economic benefits whereas opponents feared the negative regional consequences.

Moreover, the most conspicuous change in Nordic politics follows from the sharp increase in voter volatility. The processes of dealignment and realignment have resulted in party system transformation, including the phenomenon of new politics, as well as in governmental instability, making policy-making more complicated. The typical compromise institutions now involve more unpredictability and strategic behaviour. Scandinavian exceptionalism is waning at the same time as Norden is becoming increasingly integrated into Western Europe, Denmark, Sweden and Finland being members of the EU, with Norway having signed the European Economic Area treaty.

Table 8.14 Referendums on entry into the European Union, 1994 (%)

Country	Date	Turnout	Yes	No	Blank
Finland	16 October	74.0	56.9	43.1	
Sweden	13 November	83.3	52.3	46.8	0.9
Norway	27–8 November	88.8	47.7	52.3	

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