

Beyond the Class Question New Cleavages Emerge in Europe, Turkey, and America

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The twentieth century was a century of class conflict between capital and labor. These two irreconcilable camps faced one another, radicalizing political contention, almost tearing political systems apart, and furthering the rise of fascism. After the Second World War, contention became institutionalized and civilized, at least in the democratic countries of Western Europe and North America. At the same time, confrontation emerged on an international political level, this time in the form of nuclear competition between the socialist and democratic camps. With the fall of the Berlin Wall, however, the East-West divide dissolved. In parallel, the differences between social-democratic and conservative parties within countries crumbled. People started talking about post-democracy, characterized by a lack of political alternatives (Colin Crouch). The agonistic element in politics—struggle and polarization—was missed (Chantal Mouffe).

From a historical perspective, there is thus nothing new about societal cleavages in national societies caused by social changes such as the industrial revolution or globalization, which often become dominant for a century, only to lose their importance at a later date. The history of political systems in Europe can, as the political scientist Stein Rokkan suggests, be understood as a sequence of such cleavages between: Catholicism and Protestantism, periphery and centre, and agriculture and industry. Even as these cleavages lose their formative power, the old divides have not completely disappeared; their persistence is to some degree reflected—for instance in Western Europe—in the party system.

Especially in recent years, events and developments pointing to the emergence of a new societal cleavage have multiplied. In France, the right-wing populist Marine Le Pen with her Front National (FN), which regards the European Union and migration as the root of all evil, had high hopes of triumphing in regional elections. Only last-minute cooperation between conservatives and socialists prevented the FN from six possible wins. In Germany, in response to an aggravating crisis, the Christian Democrat chancellor opened the German borders for refugees from the Middle East. While she was supported above all by parties generally more to the left of the Christian Democratic Union of Germany (CDU), she was strongly opposed within the ranks of her own party, as well as, by the sister party of the CDU, the Christian Social Union in Bavaria (CSU), and especially by a burgeoning new party, the Alternative for Germany (AfD). Furthermore, in the United Kingdom, a coalition of conservative elites and frustrated lower and middle classes pushed Britain into leaving the unloved EU; this decision came against the wishes of a grand coalition, including the prime minister, parts of the governing Conservative Party, and—at least on a rhetorical level—the Labour Party leadership and the London financial world. Only a few years ago, such a coalition would have been considered unbeatable.

Alongside these developments, in the United States, a candidate who would have been very much at home in a right-wing populist party in Western Europe was elected as president. It is not always easy to discern what Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton were at loggerheads about—it was certainly not about the classical issues of economic and social policy, which characterized the old cleavage between left and right.

The most radical shifts in the political landscape, however, have manifested in Austria. In the first round of the presidential election, the candidates of the two

Summary: While class conflict was the dominant (though not the only) societal divide in the 19th and 20th century, a new cleavage is currently developing between winners and losers of globalization, between cosmopolitans, who promote the idea of open borders and universal values, and communitarians, who stress the importance of the nation state and are sceptical of supranational institutions. In the context of this new cleavage, political debates tend to become more polarized. Agonistic politics are back.

The bridging project “The Political Sociology of Cosmopolitanism and Communitarianism” was headed by WZB directors Ruud Koopmans, Wolfgang Merkel, and Michael Zürn. Research fellows and staff included Sarah Carol, Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser, Mattias Kumm, Onawa Promise Lacewell, Oliver Strijbis, Céline Teney, Bernhard Weßels, and Pieter de Wilde.

so-called people's parties, the Social Democratic Party of Austria (SPÖ) and Austria's People Party (ÖVP), which had predominated in the country for decades, together (!) won only 22.4 percent of the vote, while the two candidates of the new parties, the Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ) and the Greens, together obtained 56.4 percent. In 2002, the two large catch-all parties won just under 80 percent of the vote in the election to the lower house, the National Council. In this context, one can question whether the old cleavages in Western democracies are giving way to a new one—to a complete reshaping of the political landscape? Is the old cleavage between left and right, between socialism and liberalism, really disappearing? And what is the new cleavage? Who is confronting whom and on what issues? Can similar radical changes further be observed outside Europe?

In recent years, the WZB research units Democracy and Democratization, Global Governance and Migration, Integration, and Transnationalization have cooperated closely in this field through a bridging project entitled "The Political Sociology of Cosmopolitanism and Communitarianism." We have examined the emerging conflict constellations in five countries (Germany, Mexico, Poland, Turkey, United States) and two international forums (European Parliament, General Assembly of the United Nations). In this context, we have looked at conflicts relating to trade, climate change, migration, and human rights. To this end, we put together a comprehensive new data set: a content-analytical assessment of the leading daily newspapers in the five countries and an international elite survey. These new data were considered in relation to the Manifesto data on party programmes collected over decades by the WZB, and with respect to general international survey data, whose questions we have to some extent integrated into the elite survey. Some of the findings and their implications can be summed up as follows:

What are the new conflicts about? In short, there are two major issues addressed. The first relates to the openness of national borders. In particular, how open should national borders be with respect to trade, people, ideas, and emissions? What distributive effects do open borders produce? Should national communities have the right to close their borders to the movement of capital and people? Are we free to weigh up the environment against the economy even as pollution causes harm elsewhere? And is there a universally valid idea of human rights with enduring relevance across borders?

A second set of key questions includes the following: At what political level should relevant political decisions be made? At the national level, in the framework of national political systems, or beyond the nation state, that is to say, through regional cooperation or even global organizations?

With respect to these two core dimensions of the new political discourse, it is evident that the emerging cleavage differs fundamentally from all preceding ones: it is no longer about how national societies should be, but rather about the boundaries of the nation state itself. It is against this backdrop that the title of our project, The Political Sociology of Cosmopolitanism and Communitarianism, is to be interpreted. The emerging cleavage addressed in our project, is also relevant to political and philosophical theory. It considers, for example, towards whom do we have moral obligations and what, therefore, is the logical space of democracy? Are political communities and individual identities demarcated by the boundaries of dense institutionalization in conjunction with a monopoly of authority by the nation state (communitarianism), or are there moral and political obligations towards all people who are affected by our actions (cosmopolitanism)?

Has the cleavage between communitarianism and cosmopolitanism displaced that between socialism and liberalism? The new cleavage can be found in all the countries and forums under consideration. In public debates in Mexico, Poland, and Turkey, such divides are also apparent. The new cleavage meanwhile plays a formative role, with the focus on two main issues: migration and the transfer of political power to institutions beyond the nation state.

Depending on how these issues are addressed, four basic political orientations may arise: cosmopolitanism (open borders; shift of power to the supranational level); intergovernmentalism (open borders; no supranationality); regional communitarianism (closed borders; supranationality within the framework of regional integration), and communitarianism (closed borders; no supranationality). There is much to suggest that the predominant political parties have already positioned themselves within such a matrix: cosmopolitanism is generally represented by the Greens; intergovernmentalism accommodates the neoliberal parties; the Christian Democrats stand for the regional integration project; and the communitarian position is propagated by right-wing populist parties, conservatives, and—under quite different auspices—the old left. Only the social democrats have difficulty positioning themselves.

The four basic orientations show that the old cleavage is not at an end. What had in socio-economic terms been called the right or left wing of politics continues to influence the structure of the political landscape. The proponents of open borders, in particular, are divided between a right-wing position (intergovernmentalism: global market integration, without market intervention at the international level) and a left-wing position (cosmopolitanism). Wherever a broadly speaking cosmopolitan coalition breaks up, right-wing populist parties gain ground. While the position of societal actors on the trade issue is sometimes related to positions on other issues, such as migration and the environment, the correlation between these positions is rather small. In a certain sense, trade is at odds with the other fields; the old cleavage lives on.

It could be argued that this two-dimensional political space has been there for a long time already; Ronald Inglehart, for example, had identified a second cleavage running parallel to the old capital-labor cleavage. What is decisive, however, is that the second cleavage has been substantively transformed: open borders and the transfer of competencies have become the key contentious issues, which appear to lie at the heart of current debates.

Another important question concerns the relationship between various political positions and differing social characteristics. Cosmopolitans generally have higher incomes, a high degree of “lived internationality,” and are better educated. It is almost impossible, however, to establish the relative importance of these three social characteristics in detail, especially as they usually occur together. That being said, “lived internationality” and education seem to be decisive, whereas income is more relevant with regards to the old cleavage.

In short, the new cleavage divides people who are “privileged to inhabit the frequent-traveller lounges” (Craig Calhoun) from people who praise the homeland. While it is a cultural conflict, it is also one with a material dimension. The defenders of the homeland can often not afford a flight and evening meal in Singapore, even if they live door to door in some neighborhood with frequent travellers and often display less social distance than once prevailed between factory owner and worker. The new divide therefore expresses itself less in “left versus right” and more in “those at the top” versus “those at the bottom.” The socio-cultural differentiation between bourgeoisie and worker culture has been replaced by a division between top and bottom. The contradictions between cosmopolitanism and communitarianism are particularly conspicuous in the different attitudes of the elite and the population at large.

Where is the new cleavage most visible? It is interesting to note that pro-cosmopolitan views and attitudes appear to be especially dominant in Turkey and Mexico. At first glance this is very surprising, especially in Germany, since the Germans—not only since Merkel’s refugee policy—have always liked to see themselves at the forefront of cosmopolitanism—not always for good reason. This finding essentially points, not so much to the absolute strength of cosmopolitanism in these two countries, but rather to the fact that both are countries of emigration rather than immigration, and that neither is a member of a supranational integration project. In other words, in countries that receive immigrants and which are part of a far developed regional integration project the controversy is especially visible. Another finding is less surprising, but all the



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more significant: it is above all representatives of European and international organizations, as well as national representatives in these organizations, that are particularly cosmopolitan-minded—much more so than, for instance, members of national parliaments and, in particular, the average citizen (see the contribution by Pieter de Wilde, p. 22–24). This finding is significant because it implies that only one side of the cleavage feeds into the decision-making process on the international level. Since these decisions bounce back to the national level, it reinforces the process of alienating those at the bottom.

The political implications of our findings on processes of radical political change are far-reaching. Three in particular should be stressed here. First, our findings confirm what has become apparent in 2016: the agonistic element is back in politics. The proclamation of post-democracy seems to have been somewhat overhasty. Second, if the new cleavage is really concerned with the boundaries of the nation state and the national community, the tradition elective affinity between liberalism, which protects individual rights, and republicanism, which emphasizes majorities within given political communities, will increasingly diverge from each other. Third, and even more fundamental, the question of legitimacy has now taken on a different form than that of the past. As long as a national political community was more or less congruent with the community affected by national measures, democracy could always impose itself as the dominant legitimatizing principle. But if the normative integrity of national borders itself becomes a bone of contention, national communities can no longer be the sole source of legitimate decisions—even in particularly elaborate democratic procedures. As a consequence, legitimation becomes reflexive: Who is actually permitted to make decisions? What decisions? And through what mechanisms? Should not national decisions take precedence over international decisions, and vice versa? When do we obey majority decisions, and when not?