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Cleavage structures and school politics: a Rokkanian comparative-historical analysis

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores comparatively and historically why Nordic and Continental welfare and education regimes differ in the degree of comprehensiveness of their primary and lower secondary school systems. It analyses how school reforms, reform attempts and coalitions in the post-war decades were shaped by different cleavage structures in Norway and the German federal state of North Rhine-Westphalia. While the class cleavage was most dominant in school politics in both cases, rural–urban, centre–periphery, state–church and communist–socialist cleavages shaped party systems, political alliances and outcomes decisively. In particular, the rural population was integrated into different cross-interest coalitions: in Norway, its political representatives consented to social democratic comprehensive school reforms, while in Germany, they opposed such reforms. This was related to cross-cutting conflicts concerning centralisation and language in the Norwegian case and regarding religion, centralisation and (anti-)communism in the German case.

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Introduction

The 1950s to 1970s were a period of unprecedented educational expansion and reform in Northern Europe. Among the most contested issues at the time was comprehensive schooling. The ‘comprehensiveness’ of a school system can be defined by the degree to which children of all backgrounds attend the same educational institutions and school classes without separation into parallel schools, tracks or ability groups. One important criterion for the degree of comprehensiveness is the age of first selection of students to parallel schools or tracks (see [Figure 1](#)). From sociological and educationalist research, we know that earlier separation increases the reproduction of inequality.¹ Highly comprehensive school systems, like those of the Nordic welfare states, are more equitable than the stratified school systems of Continental welfare states, such as Germany.² For

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¹OECD, *PISA 2009 Results: What Makes a School Successful? – Resources, Policies and Practices (Volume IV)* (Paris: OECD Publishing, 2010), 36.

²Anglo-Saxon and Mediterranean welfare states have comprehensive lower secondary schooling to a certain extent, but this is often undermined by higher degrees of private schooling or school choice. See Anne West and Rita Nikolai, ‘Welfare Regimes and Education Regimes: Equality of Opportunity and Expenditure in the EU (and US)’, *Journal of Social Policy* 42, no. 3 (2013): 469–93.

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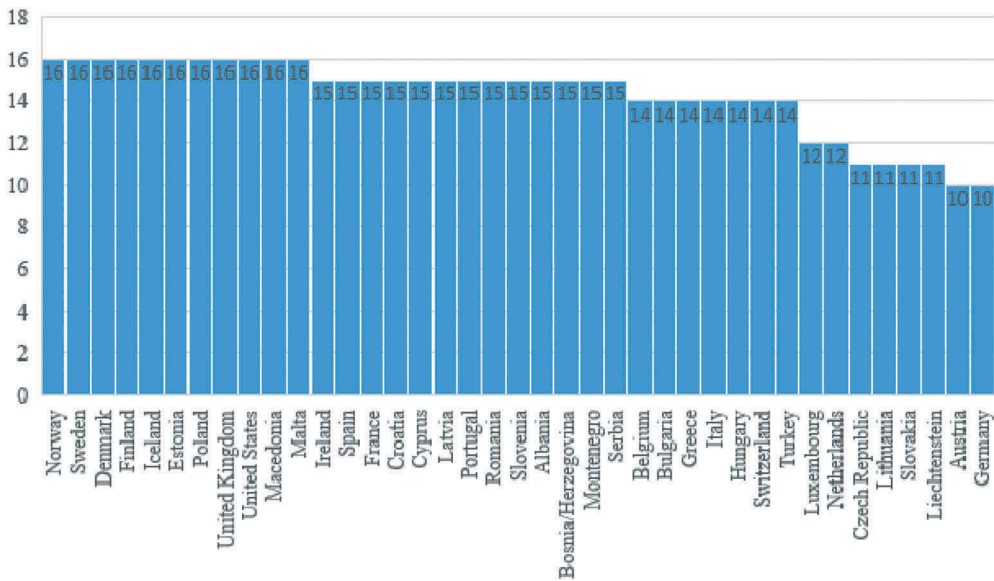


Figure 1. Age of first selection of students to parallel schools or tracks in selected countries. Source: European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice (2018).

example, around 75% of between-school performance variation in Germany can be explained by socio-economic factors. In Norway, this figure is 34%.³

This paper examines school politics in Norway and the German federal state of North Rhine-Westphalia (NRW) during the post-war reform period. Norway was the first country in Europe to introduce five years of comprehensive education in 1896. In 1920, social democrats and liberals instituted the seven-year comprehensive people's school. In the post-war reform period, comprehensive schooling was prolonged further from seven to nine years. Today, children of all backgrounds attend the mostly public primary and lower secondary schools together until the age of 16. In the Weimar Republic, social democrats and liberals also pushed through the four-year comprehensive primary school in 1920. Since then, separation of children into hierarchically ordered parallel schools has been exercised in almost all German federal states after four years, at age 10. Attempts at comprehensive school reform during the post-war period were largely unsuccessful.

The research question of this paper is thus why Nordic and Continental welfare and education regimes differ in the degree of comprehensiveness of their primary and lower secondary school systems. The paper explores how school reforms, reform attempts and political coalitions in the post-war decades were shaped by different cleavage structures in the two cases studied. It is shown that, while the class cleavage was most dominant in school politics, rural–urban, centre–periphery, state–church and communist–socialist cleavages shaped party systems, alliances and outcomes.

In particular, the rural population was integrated into different cross-interest coalitions: in Norway, its political representatives consented to social democratic comprehensive school reforms, while in Germany, they opposed such reforms. Materially, the

³OECD, *PISA 2015 Results (Volume 1): Excellence and Equity in Education*, PISA (Paris: OECD Publishing, 2016), 207, 229.

rural population could have profited from comprehensive school reforms in both cases. Comprehensive schools are cheaper to maintain in rural areas than parallel schools. They can thus provide high-quality education and cater to decentralisation interests of the rural population. However, the political alliances that developed were not exclusively based on material interests, but also on conflicts over religion, language and, in Germany, (anti-)communism. These conflicts are expressions of cross-cutting cleavages with old roots, which had decisive consequences for the coalitions that parties pursued.

The paper proceeds as follows. First, an overview of the most important theoretical arguments that have been brought forward to explain the variation in comprehensiveness is given. Rokkianian cleavage theory is then outlined in detail, with a focus on the two cases in this study. In the next steps, the research design and case selection are discussed and the cases are analysed in turn. This is followed by a comparison of the cases and by a conclusion discussing how the insights developed could inspire comparative-historical welfare and education regime research.

The literature on comprehensive school reforms

Much research has analysed the distributional effects of education systems, but the question as to how educational reforms have come about politically has not received equal attention. There has been a slight upsurge in comparative studies of the politics of education, but much of this research has focused on vocational and higher education or educational spending.⁴ Only a few studies have examined the politics of primary and secondary education from a comparative perspective.⁵ Even fewer studies have focused on comprehensive schooling.

Within this literature, one argument that has been brought forward to explain the German case is that the federalist structure is conducive to the institutional stickiness of the school system.⁶ However, a study by Erk indicates that German federalism tends to develop unitary characteristics in education.⁷ Moreover, the present article focuses on one federal state in particular, NRW. In theory, North Rhine-Westphalian school politicians could have introduced comprehensive lower secondary schooling despite the fact that other federal states did not. This would potentially have entailed conflicts in the bodies in which federal states' school politics are coordinated. This possibility of conflict with other federal states, however, played no significant role in the reform debates in NRW, as demonstrated below.

⁴Ben W. Ansell, *From the Ballot to the Blackboard: The Redistributive Political Economy of Education* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Marius Busemeyer, *Skills and Inequality: Partisan Politics and the Political Economy of Education Reforms in Western Welfare States* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014); Julian Garritzmann, *The Political Economy of Higher Education Finance: The Politics of Tuition Fees and Subsidies in OECD Countries, 1945–2015* (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2016).

⁵Andy Green, *Education and State Formation: Europe, East Asia and the USA* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013); Margaret S. Archer, *Social Origins of Educational Systems* (London: Sage Publications, 2013 [1979]); Terry M. Moe and Susanne Wiborg, eds., *The Comparative Politics of Education: Teachers Unions and Education Systems around the World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

⁶Gregory Baldi, 'Schools with a Difference: Policy Discourses and Education Reform in Britain and Germany', *West European Politics* 35, no. 5 (2012): 999–1023; Hubert Ertl and David Phillips, 'The Enduring Nature of the Tripartite System of Secondary Schooling in Germany: Some Explanations', *British Journal of Educational Studies* 48, no. 4 (2000): 391–412.

⁷Jan Erk, 'Federal Germany and Its Non-Federal Society: Emergence of an All-German Educational Policy in a System of Exclusive Provincial Jurisdiction', *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 36, no.2 (2003): 295–317.

Wiborg has provided the most sophisticated account of comprehensive school reforms in Scandinavia, Germany and England.⁸ She finds that (1) intensive processes of state-building were related to education reforms, but cannot explain why the level of vertical differentiation differs so strongly between Scandinavia and Germany.⁹ She demonstrates further that (2) ‘the relative homogeneity of Scandinavian societies was propitious for the development of a ladder system of education’ from the nineteenth century onwards, but that the difference in class structures cannot account entirely for the lack of a similar development in Prussia.¹⁰ She emphasises (3) the importance of liberal parties in the creation of comprehensive education in Scandinavia, in particular through the introduction of comprehensive primary schools and middle schools.¹¹ Wiborg’s final hypothesis is that (4) ‘it was ultimately the nature and strength of social democracy that explains the divergent development of comprehensive education in Scandinavia, on one hand, and Germany and England, on the other’.¹² Drawing on Esping-Andersen,¹³ she points out that social democratic parties forged alliances with the liberal peasantry and later with the white-collar middle class, which allowed them to prolong comprehensive education. German and English social democracy did not manage to build similarly strong alliances.

The finding that social democrats were the most important protagonists of comprehensive schooling is in line with assumptions of power resources theory and partisan theory.¹⁴ It is also supported by Österman’s quantitative analysis of the development in 31 countries, which shows that ‘social democrats are clearly more likely to carry through detracking reforms than any of the other major parties’, but also that a dominance of Christian democratic governments ‘is related to heavier tracking through early selection’.¹⁵ These findings are valid for many cases. However, one should be careful in concluding that Christian democrats *always* oppose comprehensive school reforms. In the present article, it is shown that the Norwegian Christian Democrats did not. In fact, the Norwegian Minister of Education who finalised the introduction of nine years of comprehensive schooling in 1969 was a Christian democrat. As Österman rightly points out, ‘detailed case studies’ are needed to understand ‘how political coalitions are formed around tracking reforms’.¹⁶

Furthermore, as pointed out by Manow, while power resources theorists have emphasised the importance of cross-interest coalitions, these approaches cannot actually *explain* why the middle classes sided with social democracy in some countries, but with Christian democratic or conservative parties in others.¹⁷ Wiborg’s explanation for

⁸Susanne Wiborg, *Education and Social Integration: Comprehensive Schooling in Europe* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009); Susanne Wiborg, ‘Why is There no Comprehensive Education in Germany? A Historical Explanation’, *History of Education* 39, no. 4 (2010): 539–56.

⁹Wiborg, *Education and Social Integration*, 47.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, 215.

¹¹*Ibid.*, 75–125.

¹²*Ibid.*, 231.

¹³Gösta Esping-Andersen, *Politics against Markets* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985).

¹⁴Walter Korpi, ‘Power Resources and Employer-centered Approaches in Explanations of Welfare States and Varieties of Capitalism: Protagonists, Consenters, and Antagonists’, *World Politics* 58, no.2 (2006): 167–206.

¹⁵Markus Österman, ‘Education, Stratification and Reform: Educational Institutions in Comparative Perspective’ (PhD diss., Uppsala University, 2017), 168, 171.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, 172.

¹⁷Philip Manow, ‘Electoral Rules, Class Coalitions and Welfare State Regimes, or How to Explain Esping-Andersen with Stein Rokkan’, *Socio-Economic Review* 7 (2009): 101–21.

the German case is that German social democrats were ideologically ‘rooted in the past’, that is, too radical to convince middle-class voters.¹⁸ However, Norwegian social democrats were more radical than German social democrats. This did not stand in the way of alliances with the rural population in Norway.¹⁹ The puzzle of what motivated the rural population and other sections of the middle classes to oppose comprehensive school reforms in Germany and to consent to them in Norway thus remains unsolved.

This paper argues that it is necessary to widen the view beyond the opposition between the left and the right and to consider the role of cross-cutting cleavages. As has been pointed out for other policy fields, centre–periphery and rural–urban cleavages played an important role in the Scandinavian countries, while the state–church cleavage laid the ground for Catholic and Christian democratic parties in the Continental welfare states.²⁰ This paper spells out how such cleavages influenced coalition-making in school politics. It demonstrates that the Norwegian cleavage structure weakened the political right and strengthened the political left, while the opposite was the case in Germany. The next section introduces the Rokkanian framework in more detail.

Rokkanian cleavage theory

Rokkan holds that political conflicts can result from many interactions in a social structure, but only a few will lead to polarisation and thereby to cleavages.²¹ A cleavage is a ‘fundamental opposition within a territorial population’ characterised by comparable importance and durability.²² Cleavages can mutually reinforce, superpose or cut across each other. They can vary in intensity, so that some become manifest and dominant, while others remain latent. They are composed of material, cultural and organisational elements,²³ and link action and structure by influencing politics over time. There are always several lines of cleavage. None of these should be analysed on their own since territorial areas are characterised by a set of interdependencies between cleavages.²⁴ Rokkan uses the term ‘cleavage structure’ to describe a combination of cleavages characterising an area’s social structure and political system.²⁵ He identifies several critical junctures, which have resulted in cleavages and shaped party systems.²⁶

Table 1 provides an overview of the cleavage structures in Norway and the Prussian provinces of Rhineland and Westphalia (later NRW) and of the consequences they had for party formation. The first juncture considered by Rokkan is the Reformation and

¹⁸Wiborg, ‘Why no Comprehensive Education in Germany’, 554.

¹⁹See Katharina Sass, ‘Understanding Comprehensive School Reforms: Insights from Comparative-historical Sociology and Power Resources Theory’, *European Educational Research Journal* 14, nos. 3–4 (2015): 240–56.

²⁰Philip Manow and Kees van Kersbergen, eds., *Religion, Class Coalitions, and Welfare States* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

²¹Stein Rokkan, *State Formation, Nation-Building and Mass Politics in Europe: The Theory of Stein Rokkan*, ed. Peter Flora with Stein Kuhnle and Derek Urwin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 276.

²²Peter Flora, ‘Einführung und Interpretation’, in *Staat, Nation und Demokratie in Europa. Die Theorie Stein Rokkans aus seinen gesammelten Werken rekonstruiert und eingeleitet von Peter Flora*, ed. Peter Flora (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2000), 14–119.

²³Stefano Bartolini, *The Political Mobilization of the European Left 1860–1960: The Class Cleavage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

²⁴Rokkan, *State Formation*, 309; Seymour Martin Lipset and Stein Rokkan, ‘Cleavage Structures, Party Systems, and Voter Alignments: An Introduction’, in *Party Systems and Voter Alignment*, ed. Seymour Martin Lipset and Stein Rokkan (New York: Free Press, 1967), 1–64.

²⁵Flora, ‘Einführung’, 20, 53–4.

²⁶Rokkan, *State Formation*, 303–19.

Table 1. Cleavage structures in Norway and Rhineland/Westphalia and implications for party formation up to the 1970s

Cleavage	Salience in Norway	Salience in Rhineland/ Westphalia	Implications for Norwegian party formation	Implications for West German party formation
State–church	Medium	High	Christian Democrats founded 1933	Catholic Centre Party founded 1870; CDU and FDP founded 1945 (on opposite sides)
Centre–periphery	High	Low	Liberal Party founded 1883 and Conservative Party founded 1884 (on opposite sides)	Catholic Centre Party founded 1870
Rural–urban	High	Low	Farmers’ Party (later Centre Party) founded 1920	Catholic Centre Party founded 1870
Worker–owner	High	High	Labour Party founded 1887 and Conservative Party founded 1884	SPD founded 1875; CDU and FDP founded 1945 (on the owner side)
Socialist–communist	Medium (high during 1920s)	High	Communist Party (NKP) founded in 1923, Socialist People’s Party (later Socialist Left Party) founded in 1961, Workers’ Communist Party (AKP, predecessor of today’s Red Party) founded in 1973	Communist Party (KPD) founded in 1918 (forbidden 1956, re-founded as DKP in 1968)

Thirty Years' War, which split Europe into a Protestant north, a belt of religiously mixed areas and the counter-reformation areas in the east and south.²⁷ This was followed by the national revolution after the French revolution and Napoleonic wars. The Protestant north was characterised by a centre–periphery cleavage between farmers, peripheral ethnic groups and urban outsiders on the one hand and the urban bureaucracy of the state administration and church on the other.²⁸ Rural and urban peripheral sections of the population were united in their opposition to the centre. In Norway, this cleavage led to the establishment of the Liberal Party, which was a broad movement of cultural opposition to urban elites, who organised in the Conservative Party.²⁹

The state–church cleavage was not that dominant because Protestant state churches were involved in nation-building processes. Dissenting groups of Protestant minorities were integrated into the peripheral movements. Neither these dissenting groups nor the Protestant state churches fought the state's attempts to control the education system.³⁰ When universal elementary schooling was introduced from around the seventeenth century onwards, the churches in the Lutheran areas became assistants of the state. They 'had no reason to oppose such measures'.³¹ However, in 1933 a small Christian democratic party (the Christian Democrats) was founded, representing Christian laymen in the periphery, and from this point on the state–church cleavage became more salient.

The religiously mixed areas on the Continent saw the rise of peripheral movements of Protestant dissidents and Catholic minorities, which often developed into political parties. This led to the development of a dominant state–church cleavage and bitter conflicts, especially concerning education.³² In Germany, the ultramontane Centre Party was founded to defend the Catholic religion and its influence on education. It developed into a mass party supported by many Catholic workers, which was strong in Rhineland and Westphalia. The conflict between Catholic elites and the Protestant Prussian state can also to some extent be considered an expression of the centre–periphery cleavage.

The industrial revolution added new cleavages to the existing ones. In the Protestant north, a rural–urban cleavage developed, dividing producers of primary goods in the countryside and businessmen and the burgeoning middle classes in the cities. In some cases, it led to the founding of agrarian parties, such as in Norway. Here, the agrarian Centre Party broke out of the periphery coalition within the Liberal Party in 1920.³³ In other countries with strong centre–periphery and rural–urban cleavages, agrarian parties also emerged but this was more likely in areas where industrial centres were weak and farmers were independent of large-scale landowners. In economies dominated by large-scale landed property, such as Prussia or the United Kingdom, agrarian interests were integrated into conservative alliances. The dominant position of landowners made it easier for them to control the rural population.³⁴ In religiously mixed areas, such as the Rhineland and Westphalia, Catholic mass parties organised Catholic farmers. Political

²⁷Ibid.

²⁸Ibid., 304; Stein Rokkan, 'Norway: Numerical Democracy and Corporate Pluralism', in *Political Oppositions in Western Democracies*, ed. Robert A. Dahl (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966), 70–115.

²⁹Rokkan, *State Formation*, 375.

³⁰Ibid., 286–88, 305.

³¹Lipset and Rokkan, 'Cleavage Structures', 15.

³²Rokkan, *State Formation*, 287.

³³Ibid., 375.

³⁴Ibid., 328–34; Flora, 'Einführung', 62–3.

Catholicism tended to superpose the centre–periphery and the rural–urban cleavage, so agrarian parties rarely developed in regions with strong Catholic parties.³⁵ The rural–urban cleavage within Rhineland and Westphalia was also not that salient, since these were densely populated, industrialised areas with only a few rural spots. As demonstrated below, rural interests were integrated by political Catholicism.

Furthermore, the industrial revolution created a class cleavage between workers and business owners. Conflicts between agrarian and urban interests on the commodity market did not produce parties everywhere – only in those cases where cultural oppositions reinforced economic ones.³⁶ Conflicts on the labour market resulted in the founding of labour parties almost everywhere and brought European party systems closer to each other. The class cleavage was highly salient in both Norway and Prussia/Rhineland–Westphalia. By around the First World War, strong labour movements had developed in both places.

Labour movements were often characterised by internal splits, related to conflicting values of nationhood and international solidarity. This internal cleavage of labour movements between socialists and communists was intensified by the final critical juncture, which Rokkan terms the ‘international revolution’, in the wake of the Russian Revolution.³⁷ Rokkan concludes that the chance for radicalisation and fragmentation of labour movements was greatest in countries where conflicts over national identity remained unsolved, such as in the German Reich or in Norway.³⁸ Both countries’ labour movements were deeply split, especially during the first decades of the twentieth century.

The resulting party system in the Norwegian case was an opposition of the Liberal Party and the Conservative Party in the early phase, based mostly on the centre–periphery cleavage, while in a later phase the Labour Party, the agrarian Centre Party, the Christian Democrats, and the Communist Party developed. With the growth of the Labour Party, the class cleavage became more dominant.³⁹ In 1961, the Socialist People’s Party was founded, so that internal splits in the labour movement remained relevant. In Germany, social liberal and national liberal parties, conservative parties, the Catholic Centre Party and the Social Democratic Party developed from the 1860s and 1870s on. After the Second World War, the party system changed and only the Liberal Party (FDP), the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) and the Social Democratic Party (SPD) remained relevant. The FDP and the CDU both represented owners’ interests but, in contrast to the CDU, the FDP stood on the side of the state in state–church conflicts. The disappearance of the Catholic Centre Party during the 1950s and the polarisation between SPD and CDU indicate that the cleavage structure was now dominated by the class cleavage to a higher degree than by the formerly dominant state–church cleavage. However, the CDU followed in the Centre Party’s footsteps, as Catholics, especially in NRW, dominated within the party. The communist–socialist cleavage also remained relevant due to Germany’s division. Even though communist groups in the West were small, the labour movement was split into anti-communist moderates and radical leftists, which was also a generational split.

³⁵Rokkan, *State Formation*, 309.

³⁶*Ibid.*, 290.

³⁷*Ibid.*, 307.

³⁸*Ibid.*, 334–9.

³⁹Rokkan, ‘Norway’.

Research design, data and case selection

The research design of the study on which this paper is based is historical-sociological, comparative and case-oriented.⁴⁰ This approach is particularly suited to investigating ‘combinations of conditions (that is, to investigate situations as wholes)’.⁴¹ It requires becoming deeply familiar with one’s cases in order to develop context-specific historical interpretations and contingent generalisations. In line with this approach, the study was not designed to ‘test’ Rokkanian theory. Rather, the usefulness of Rokkanian theory for the purpose of understanding school politics was discovered through the dialogue between theory and evidence.

The data sources of the study are primary sources such as party manifestos, parliamentary debates and publications of collective actors such as teachers’ organisations (see Tables A1, A2 online appendix for lists of party manifestos analysed). The study is also based on 23 in-depth expert interviews with people who were involved in the struggles over school reforms as representatives of parties and teachers’ organisations (see Table A3 online appendix for biographical introductions). The oldest experts were already involved in politics during the 1950s. Several of these time witnesses are now deceased. Others started their political or organisational careers somewhat later, in the 1960s or 1970s, implying a different generational perspective. Interviews and party manifestos were analysed qualitatively with the help of a coding frame, which was evaluated and adapted in the course of the analysis. Parliamentary debates consisted of too many pages to be analysed as systematically but were read several times. In addition, historical and sociological secondary sources, such as single case studies, were consulted. The combination of different types of sources served to crosscheck the sources’ validity.

The motivation for choosing Germany and Norway as cases was the author’s desire to understand why these countries had taken such different trajectories in school politics. In addition to being intrinsically relevant cases, they make for a good comparison, because the Norwegian and German education regimes share various similarities.⁴² There is institutionalised vocational education and tertiary education is free in both countries. Public education is comparatively dominant. Before the post-war reforms, historical similarities of and transfers between the two school systems were mirrored in the terms used for different school types (Norwegian: *folkeskole*; *realskole*; *gymnas*, German: *Volksschule*; *Realschule*; *Gymnasium*). Both countries had comprehensive primary schooling in people’s schools, lasting seven years in Norway and four in Germany, which was followed by parallel schooling. Social democrats spearheaded attempts to prolong comprehensive schooling both before and after the Second World War in both cases.

With regard to temporal development, the cases also exhibit similarities. During the 1960s and 1970s, a spirit for reform was making itself felt, which abated in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Obligatory schooling was prolonged to nine years (from a previous seven

⁴⁰Katharina Sass, ‘Cleavages and Coalitions: Comprehensive School Reforms in Norway and North Rhine-Westphalia/Germany (1954–1979)’ (PhD diss., University of Bergen, 2018).

⁴¹Charles Ragin, *The Comparative Method: Moving Beyond Qualitative and Quantitative Strategies* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 35.

⁴²In political science, this kind of case selection is often termed ‘Most Similar Systems Design’ (MSSD). The historical sociological approach employed here is more case-oriented and less oriented towards theory-testing than MSSD.

years in Norway and eight in Germany). Even though the character of the Norwegian and the German welfare states differ in many respects, the provision of free, high-quality education at least for a significant proportion of the population was in both cases associated with economic growth along a high-road path, based on specialised, well-educated workers able to cope with technological progress.

An important difference between the cases relates to the make-up of their political systems. Even though both have electoral systems based on proportional representation, school politics take place on different institutional levels. In Norway, the central government makes decisions on school structure, while in Germany the federal states have the authority to design their school systems. For this reason, the study compares the Norwegian national development with the development in a German federal state, NRW. Around a third of West German students went to school in NRW in the post-war decades. In school politics, NRW belongs to the more reform-oriented federal states, as opposed to the more conservative southern federal states, though it has not been as reform-oriented as some of the Northern federal states, including the city states of Hamburg and Berlin.⁴³ It has long been one of the most denominationally mixed areas within Germany, mirroring the denominationally mixed character of the German nation as a whole. The study takes into account German national politics as a contextual factor. In the following, the two cases are analysed in turn.

Norway: social democratic school reform and the centre parties' influential role

Among the Norwegian parties, the Labour Party was the main protagonist in the post-war comprehensive school reforms. Its membership numbers were impressive (see [Table A7](#) online appendix). Until 1961, it had an absolute majority in parliament. Also afterwards, most Ministers of Education were social democrats (see [Table A5](#) online appendix). The relevant exceptions were the coalition of the centre parties and the Conservative Party from 1965 to 1971 and the government of centre parties in 1972–1973. During the period in question, there was never a conservative Minister of Education or a conservative Prime Minister – except for a brief period in 1963. Only in 1981 did the Conservative Party form a minority government by itself for the first time. Most Norwegian governments after 1961 were minority governments, with the exception of the government of the Conservative Party and centre parties in 1965–1971.

In 1954, the Norwegian school system consisted of a comprehensive seven-year people's school (*folkeskole*), followed by two parallel lower secondary school types: the *realskole* (middle school) and the *framhaldsskole* (continuation school). The *realskole* was academically oriented and led to upper secondary schooling in the three-year *gymnas* and then potentially to university. It could also be followed by other upper secondary or vocational kinds of education. The *framhaldsskole* did not award formal qualifications but was seen as a useful prolongation of the education of working class-children, girls and children from rural backgrounds. From around 1953, the Labour Party started working towards reform. In 1954, a law on experiments with nine-year obligatory schooling was

⁴³Marcel Helbig and Rita Nikolai, *Die Unvergleichbaren. Der Wandel der Schulsysteme in den deutschen Bundesländern seit 1949* (Bad Heilbrunn: Klinkhardt, 2015).

passed unanimously in parliament.⁴⁴ The law introduced an Experimental Council, which would oversee experiments, but included no further specifications of the future school structure. In its manifesto for 1958–1961, the Labour Party made it clear that it aimed at a nine-year obligatory comprehensive school, which should replace *framhaldsskole* and *realskole*. This was justified through the necessity to ‘erase the class division which is rooted in unequal educational opportunities’.⁴⁵

This focus on equal educational opportunities and the support for educational expansion remained strong in all Labour Party manifestos. The abolition of parallel schooling was seen as a step towards breaking down educational privileges. Such privileges had not been very exclusive in Norway, but they were real.⁴⁶ The old school types were associated with different degrees of status and attended by students with different class backgrounds.⁴⁷

The Conservative Party was much smaller than the Labour Party, but the largest opposition party (see Figure 2; Table A6 online appendix). Many conservatives perceived

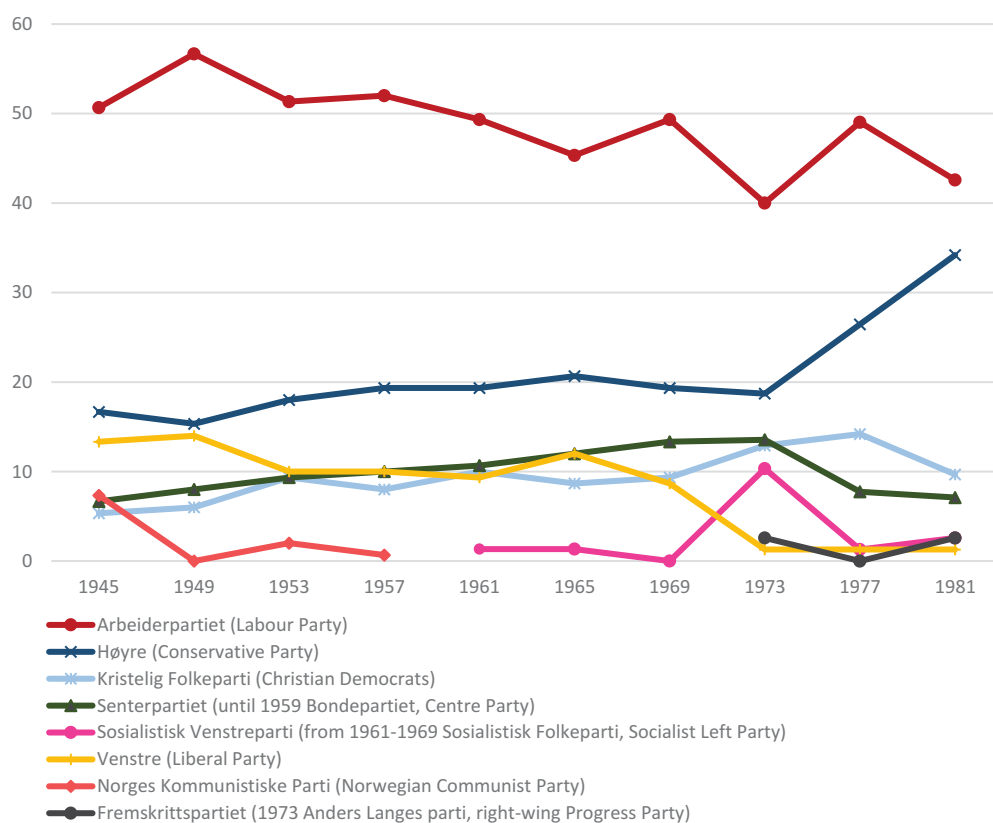


Figure 2. Parties' percentage of seats in the Norwegian parliament, 1945–1981.

⁴⁴Norwegian Parliament, 'Lov om forsøk i skolen', Forhandlinger i Odelstinget, June 17, 1954, 173–4; Norwegian Parliament, 'Lov om forsøk i skolen', Forhandlinger i Lagtinget, June 22, 1954, 75–7.

⁴⁵Norwegian Labour Party, 'DNAs arbeidsprogram for 1958–1961'.

⁴⁶Vilhelm Torgersen Aubert, Ulf Torgersen, Karl Tangen, Tore Lindbeck and Sonja Pollan, 'Akademikere i norsk samfunnsstruktur 1800–1950', *Tidsskrift for samfunnsforskning* 1, no. 4 (1960): 185–204.

⁴⁷Tore Lindbeck, 'Skolepolitiske reformer 1960–1980. Hensikter og virkninger', *Norsk Pedagogisk Tidsskrift* 92, no. 2 (2008): 88–99; Innstilling frå Folkeskolekomiteén av 1963, Om lov om folkeskolen og om mellombils lov om 7-årig folkeskole og overgang til 9-årig folkeskole, June 15, 1965, 129.

the Labour Party's emphasis on equality as foolish. Per Lønning, who represented the Conservative Party in parliament from 1959 to 1965 and was its main speaker on education politics at the time, stated:

This comprehensive school was to a great extent an ideology. And a philosophy of equality which lay behind it. I don't know how many times we heard that all children are actually good at school. ... All children are equally intelligent, if only we discover where they have their needs. So when the new people's school law was debated, there was no limit to the praise heard from the Labour Party but also partly from the so-called centre parties, and how there was now a new dawn for the Norwegian school, because now students should be allowed to become clever, all of them.⁴⁸

Lønning refers here to the parliamentary debate of 1959 of the law on the people's school. The most contested point regarding this law was whether the old school types, *realskole* and *framhaldsskole*, should be allowed to participate in experiments with nine-year obligatory schooling.⁴⁹ Against the scepticism of the centre parties, but especially the Conservative Party, the Labour Party majority insisted that experiments with nine-year obligatory schooling could only be organised comprehensively.⁵⁰ The law made it possible for municipalities to introduce nine years of obligatory schooling, if they were willing to replace the old school types with a comprehensive youth school. During the 1960s, it became clear that many municipalities were willing. The centre parties' scepticism in 1959 had mostly been due to their worry that rural municipalities would not manage the transition. The Labour government granted substantial financial support to municipalities taking part in experiments. Over time, most representatives of the centre parties became consenters to the reform.

During the 1960s and early 1970s, the centre parties also sided with the Labour Party in debates concerning differentiation within the youth school. The youth school had first consisted of two tracks similar to the old school types, which were replaced by a system of ability grouping and elective subjects in the 1960s. Ability grouping also came under criticism, because it was seen as reproducing inequality. The Labour Party now favoured teaching children in mixed-ability classes (*sammenholdte klasser*). The Socialist People's Party, which opposed the Labour Party in foreign politics but was its ally in school politics, supported this. The manifestos of the centre parties included hardly any information on the details of comprehensive schooling, but in parliamentary debates, their representatives indicated that they agreed that the ability group system was unfair.⁵¹

In 1965, the centre parties came to power in a coalition with the Conservative Party. Kjell Bondevik from the Christian Democrats became Minister of Education. His Ministry prepared the primary school law of 1969, which finalised the introduction of

⁴⁸Per Lønning (Conservative Party MP 1959–1965), in expert interview conducted by the author, June 25, 2014.

⁴⁹Alfred Oftedal Telhaug, *Den 9-årige skolen og differensieringsproblemet. En oversikt over den historiske utvikling og den aktuelle debatt* (Oslo: Lærerstudentenes forlag, 1969), 55–60.

⁵⁰Norwegian Parliament, Innst. O. II. (1959) Innstilling fra kirke- og undervisningskomiteen om lov om folkeskolen (Ot. prp. nr. 30 – 1958); Norwegian Parliament, 'Lov om folkeskolen', Forhandlinger i Odelstinget, March 5 and 6, 1959.

⁵¹Norwegian Parliament, 'Forsøksvirksomheten i skoleverket', Forhandlinger i Stortinget, June 8, 1961; Norwegian Parliament, 'Forsøksvirksomheten i skoleverket 1959–1960', Forhandlinger i Stortinget, May 21, 1963; Norwegian Parliament, '1) Interp. fra repr. Borten om karaktersystemet i 9-årige skole. 2) a) Forsøksvirks. i skoleverket, b) Læreraksj. for kristendomsfaget. 3) Aksj. vedr. fag- og timebytepl. i 9-årig skole.', Forhandlinger i Stortinget, June 8, 1965.

the youth school and the prolongation of comprehensive education to nine years. Because the Conservative Party favoured ability grouping, the law contained no rules for differentiation.⁵² When asked why the centre parties/conservative government had not attempted to reverse social democratic school reforms, Hans Olav Tungesvik, who was active in the Liberal Party during the 1960s and 1970s and represented the Christian Democrats in parliament from 1977 to 1985, replied:

My impression is that the thinking about expanded obligatory schooling ... this idea about equality ... it wasn't just ... the Labour Party that supported this. It was an idea, which had broad support, to contribute to greater equality and greater opportunities for all ... But we were somewhat divided with respect to the degree to which one should offer specialised choices. And the Conservative Party ... [has] always gone further than the others in individualisation... They have always been most concerned about giving choices ... to the most able. So there is somewhat more of an elitist line of thought there than in the other parties. On this issue I believe that all the centre parties ... have a line of thought which is more closely related to the line of thought of the Labour Party.⁵³

This consent of the centre parties to comprehensive school reforms was crucial.

The success of the social democratic school reforms must also be attributed to the fact that the Conservative Party was split during the 1950s and 1960s. Even though it contained the sharpest antagonists to comprehensive education, a leading conservative school politician, Erling Fredriksfryd, consented to comprehensive school reforms.⁵⁴ In the Conservative manifesto of 1957, passages on school politics were prepared by a commission chaired by Fredriksfryd and suggested the introduction of a tracked middle school and eight years of obligatory schooling. There was conflict over this within the party. Many others wanted to save the *realskole* from extinction and were worried about the quality of teaching in the youth school. Critical voices grew stronger over time.

In 1971, the Labour Party returned to government. With the curriculum of 1974, ability grouping was given up. From 1979, directives of the Ministry of Education stated that permanent ability grouping was unlawful until the ninth grade. The polarisation between Labour Party and Conservative Party had become more pronounced. With the exception of the Liberal Party, the centre parties now sided with the conservatives in the complaint that the regulations of 1979 on ability grouping were too inflexible. During the 1970s, a debate regarding the abolition of grading in the youth school ensued. Grades had been abolished in primary school. The Labour Party wanted to abolish them in the youth school as well, because, as argued by the social democrat Einar Førde, '[t]he grading system is the currency of the capitalist education system', socialising people 'into the status quo'.⁵⁵ A now united Conservative Party and almost all centre party representatives opposed the abolition of grading in the youth school. There was disagreement even within the reformers' own ranks. Therefore, the Labour Party had to relinquish this aim.

Overall, a clear opposition between the left and the right can be found in the struggles over the introduction of the youth school and differentiation and grading within this school type (see [Figure 3](#)). The Labour Party was most successful in implementing its

⁵²Norwegian Parliament, Innst. O. XIV (1968–69), Innstilling fra kirke- og undervisningskomitéen om lov om grunnskolen.

⁵³Hans Olav Tungesvik (representative of Liberal Party and later MP for Christian Democrats), in expert interview conducted by the author, 16 June 2014.

⁵⁴Erling Fredriksfryd, *Den nye skoleloven* (Reistad: Høires opplysningsorganisasjon, 1960).

⁵⁵Norwegian Parliament, 'Interpellasjon frå representant Røssum om departementets rundskriv om å gi karakterar i berre 3 fag i grunnskolen', *Forhandlinger i Stortinget*, May 8, 1974, 3133.

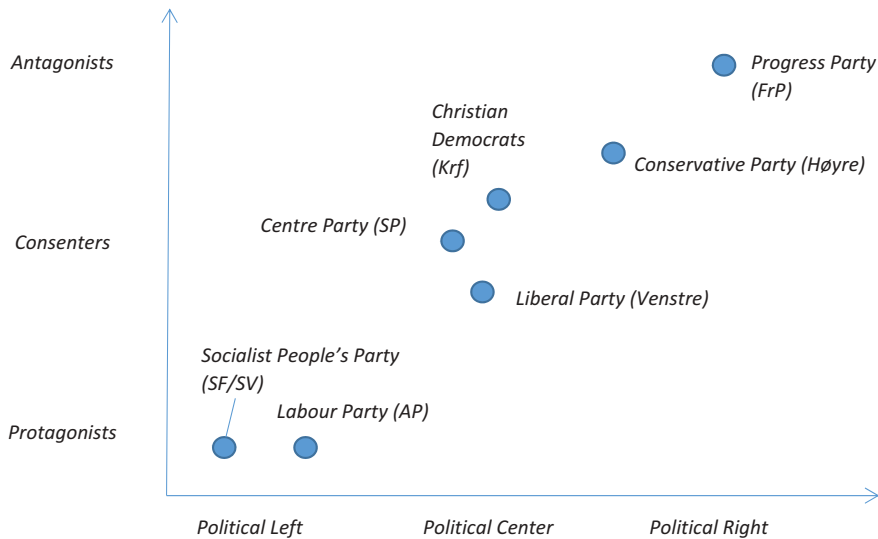


Figure 3. Protagonists, consenters and antagonists of post-war comprehensive school reforms among the political parties along the political left–right axis in Norway. The figure includes also the right-wing Progress Party founded in 1973. It opposed social democratic school politics, but played no role for the reforms begun in the 1950s. Source: Author's judgment based on qualitative analysis of party manifestos, parliamentary debates and expert interviews.

reform ideas. The centre parties did not push for structural reforms, but often consented to them. Towards the late 1970s, a political trend reversal put a stop to the reform period. Today, the structure of the Norwegian school system is still in line with the compromises developed during that time.⁵⁶

The centre parties' consent to the youth school reform is an important example for the coalition of the rural periphery and urban working class in Norwegian school politics. In order to understand the character of this alliance, it needs to be emphasised that many centre parties' representatives did not have strong views on comprehensive schooling. Rather, they prioritised other concerns, which touched the core of their identity: decentralisation, language issues and Christian influence on schooling. These issues took up much more space in the centre parties' manifestos.

The agrarian Centre Party in particular underlined in all of its manifestos from 1957 to 1977 the importance of a 'decentralised school system'. In sparsely populated Norway, keeping a school in the village was seen as economically and culturally strengthening. The two other centre parties also insisted that no rural municipality should be forced to close down its primary school. At the same time, they supported the improvement of schooling in the countryside so that conditions would be equalised across the country. There was potential for conflict, because social democrats aimed at centralisation, arguing that the quality of village schools was too low. Especially during the 1960s, there was an enthusiasm for large schools to ensure sufficient choices for the students. This conflict was more serious with regard to primary schools. On the youth school level, the interests of

⁵⁶In the 1990s, another Labour government lowered the school enrolment age by one year, prolonging comprehensive education further. The Norwegian school system today provides 10 years of comprehensive schooling in the seven-year children's school, followed by the three-year youth school.

social democratic and centre parties' reformers overlapped. Some rural municipalities had not had secondary schools at all, so that the youth school represented an educational boost. The trend towards less organisational differentiation within the youth school accommodated the centre parties' dislike of centralisation, because schools without ability grouping could be smaller and kept in the village more easily. Even though conservatives sometimes succeeded in building alliances with the centre parties based on the argument of centralisation, for example regarding the regulations of 1979 mentioned above, overall, the issue divided rather than united the non-Labour camp. The centre parties perceived the conservatives as an urban party, which did not prioritise rural interests. Social democrats' efforts to increase the quality of education in the countryside were considered more believable.

In the language struggle,⁵⁷ the centre parties also stood closer to social democracy. In school politics, the language struggle was about language forms used in schools and schoolbooks. The representatives of the periphery, especially those organised in the Liberal Party, but also in the other centre parties and the Socialist People's Party, supported the New Norwegian language form *nynorsk*, based on Norwegian dialects. On the other side of the conflict stood the Conservative Party, which considered traditional *bokmål* (literally 'book language') to be the most refined form of Norwegian. For the Labour Party, language was not a priority, but from the 1930s on, its strategy was to argue for an alliance of the rural population and the cities' working class. The Conservative Party therefore stood alone in language debates. Both in 1959 and in 1969, when the centre parties were in a coalition with the conservatives, the paragraphs of the school laws that regulated questions of language were passed with the support of the centre parties and the Labour Party, against the conservatives.⁵⁸ The language struggle was a centre-periphery conflict but partly also a class issue, since the Norwegian power elite was centred in the cities, especially in Oslo. Even though conflicts over language in schoolbooks were not directly linked to comprehensive school reforms, the issue hampered potential alliances between centre parties and conservatives.

Furthermore, conflicts concerning religion played a role. The number of hours taught in Christian education, the financing of Christian private schools and the Christian preamble of the school law were all topics of debate. The Christian Democrats in particular struggled for Christian influence on schooling. They represented laymen more than the upper ranks of the church, which were better integrated in the state and conservative urban elites. These conflicts were thus an expression of the state-church and to a certain degree the centre-periphery cleavage. The Christian Democrats sometimes received support from the Centre Party and the Conservative Party regarding these issues, while the Liberal Party was placed in the middle. The Labour Party and the Socialist People's Party represented the other side of the conflict. For them, these issues were risky. In 1965, a Christian signature campaign contributed to the mobilisation of many non-Labour Party voters before the elections, which the Labour Party lost.⁵⁹ With regard to comprehensive schooling these conflicts

⁵⁷The Norwegian language struggle has its roots in the country's domination by Danes and Swedes and arose in the middle of the nineteenth century; see Sass, 'Cleavages and Coalitions', 299–308.

⁵⁸Norwegian Parliament, Innst. O. II. (1959) Innstilling fra kirke- og undervisningskomiteen om lov om folkeskolen. (Ot. prp. nr. 30 – 1958), 17–18; Norwegian Parliament, Innst. O. XIV (1968–69) Innstilling fra kirke- og undervisningskomiteen om lov om grunnskolen, 50–2.

⁵⁹A total of 725,614 signatures were collected by a movement called People's Action for Christian Education (folkeaksjon for kristendomsfaget) initiated by the Christian lay organisations. Never before or since has any petition in Norway received a comparable number of signatures; see Sass, 'Cleavages and Coalitions', 254–69.

were, however, not such a great obstacle. In some cases, the Labour Party managed to split the non-socialist parties by cooperating with the Liberal Party or by making small concessions. The Christian Democrats' demands for Christian education were sometimes so far-reaching that even the Centre Party and Conservative Party could not agree. On other issues, the Conservative Party stood alone, for example with regard to deregulation of private schooling. The centre parties wanted Christian schools to have stable financing but did not support private elite schooling. The non-socialist parties were thus not united, and the Labour Party made the most of these divisions. Debates over Christian education and private schooling did not threaten the consensus of the centre parties and the Labour Party regarding comprehensive schooling.

Finally, it should be noted that even though the centre parties had different core identity topics in school politics, all three were representatives of the rural periphery and agreed on many of these issues. The Labour Party could not have held on to power in the political centre, Oslo, if the periphery had decided to rise up against it. It was therefore vital for the Labour Party to develop compromises. It manoeuvred smartly to uphold its alliance, in which it was the leading actor, but which depended on the centre parties' consent. The Conservative Party did not manage to build stable alliances with the centre parties based on rural–urban, centre–periphery and state–church cleavages.

NRW/Germany: political polarisation and the CDU's intra-party alliance

In post-war Western Germany, the SPD was the main protagonist of comprehensive schooling. Even though the SPD had more members than its competitor, the CDU, the CDU dominated the first post-war governments on both the national and the North Rhine-Westphalian level (see Tables A5, A7 in online appendix, Figure 4). The only

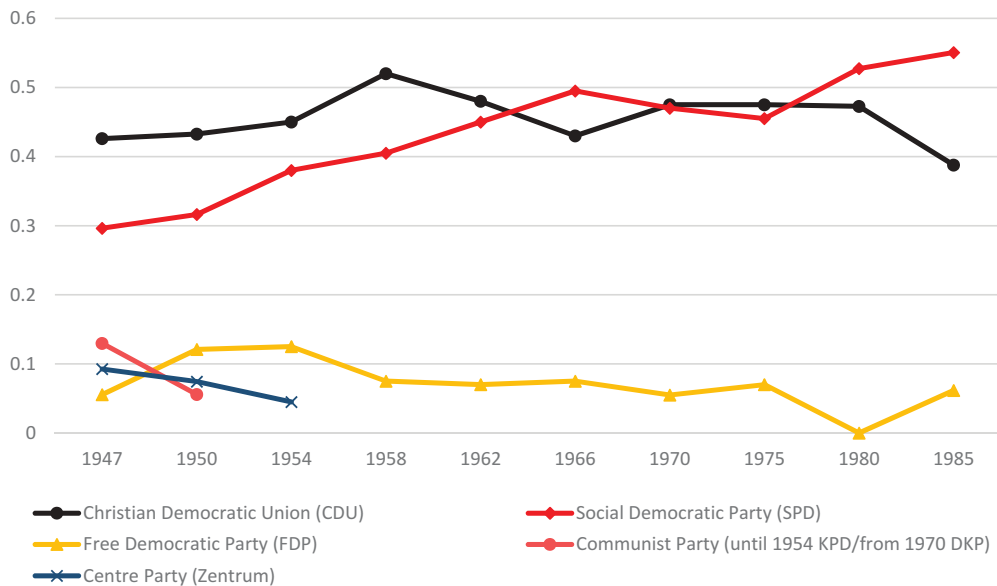


Figure 4. Parties' percentage of seats in the parliament of NRW, 1947–1985.

exception was a short interlude from 1956 to 1958, when the North Rhine-Westphalian SPD governed with the FDP. In 1966, the SPD joined a 'grand coalition' with the CDU on the national level and from 1969, the first SPD Chancellor, Willy Brandt, led a coalition with the FDP. In NRW, the SPD also came to power in 1966. From 1966 to 1980, it governed with the FDP. After 1980, the NRW SPD had a majority on its own, as the FDP had fallen below the barring clause. Majority governments were the rule on both the national and the federal state level.

The initial post-war years were a time of restoration, during which the pillared school system was consolidated. The four-year comprehensive primary school (*Grundschule*) made up the lower stage of the people's school (*Volksschule*). The majority of students continued to the upper stage of the people's school and then to vocational training or the labour market. A minority received secondary schooling in a middle school (*Realschule*) or in the academic secondary school, the *Gymnasium*. Today, the *Gymnasium* is still the most prestigious secondary school type.

In 1959, the German Committee for the Education and School System, a national advisory body that had been put in place in 1953, published the 'framework plan for the remodelling and standardisation of the general school system'. This document did not question parallel schooling, but suggested the introduction of a two-year transition stage in grades five and six and a prolongation of the people's school. During the early 1960s, the last CDU government of NRW increased the number of *Realschulen* and *Gymnasien*. The CDU Minister of Education, Paul Mikat, was a young, reform-oriented conservative, who supported educational expansion and even experiments with tracked comprehensive schools.⁶⁰ This was not the position of the majority of his party fellows. In 1966, Mikat's Ministry introduced nine years of obligatory schooling, independently of other school reforms and without conflict.

It took until the second half of the 1960s for comprehensive schooling to become a major topic. In 1964, the SPD published its Education-Political Guidelines (*Bildungspolitische Leitsätze*), which more boldly than before suggested replacing the vertical separation of school types with a horizontal system. The guidelines employed the term comprehensive school (*Gesamtschule*) for the first time. From this point on and until 1980, the SPD included the replacement of the traditional school types by an integrated comprehensive school (*Integrierte Gesamtschule*) as a long-term aim in its manifestos. The main argument of reformers was that comprehensive schooling would increase equality of opportunity.

Social liberals agreed. In its manifesto for the national elections of 1969, the FDP introduced its concept of the 'Open School' (*Offene Schule*). This liberal version of the integrated comprehensive school differed from the social democratic concept in its more pronounced focus on internal differentiation. In 1969, the SPD-FDP government introduced the first seven integrated comprehensive schools in NRW. By 1975, 23 such schools had been founded, within which ability grouping was the rule. Around 1970, reform protagonists were convinced that a general introduction of 10-year comprehensive schooling was possible. The atmosphere was optimistic. Between 1970 and 1972, even the CDU published a range of reform-oriented documents. In 1971, the North

⁶⁰Paul Mikat, *Grundlagen, Aufgaben und Schwerpunkte einer künftigen Kultur- und Schulpolitik im Landes Nordrhein-Westfalen. Eine Denkschrift vorgelegt von Kultusminister Prof. Dr. Paul Mikat* (Ratingen: A. Henn Verlag, 1966), 38.

Rhine-Westphalian CDU suggested experiments with cooperative comprehensive schools, a more strictly tracked alternative to integrated comprehensive schools.⁶¹ In 1973, the CDU representative Karl Nagel suggested a general introduction of such cooperative comprehensive schools from the next school year.⁶² The former CDU politician Wilhelm Lenz explained that this cautious willingness for reform was due to strategic reasons ('we must not eternally keep saying "no" in questions of schooling'), but also to the reform-orientation of some younger CDU representatives.⁶³ By 1975, the economy had worsened, and the CDU's reform willingness evaporated. The manifesto for the NRW elections in 1975 stated:

a school structured into school types and permeable across levels of schooling does best justice to inclinations and abilities; it corresponds with different structures of endowment. . . Thus, a CDU federal state government will develop the *Hauptschule*, *Realschule* and *Gymnasium* as equally valuable schools. . .⁶⁴

In its manifestos from 1976 onwards, the CDU increased its criticism of the integrated comprehensive schools and refused to turn them into a regular school type. In the manifesto for the NRW elections of 1980, they were termed 'mass schools' that had a 'levelling' effect while producing 'increasing social tensions'.⁶⁵

In response to growing antagonism, the SPD retreated from the aim to replace the parallel school system with a comprehensive system. This aim had never had the full support of all leading SPD politicians. For example, the Minister of Education from 1966 to 1970, Fritz Holthoff, belonged to the older generation and was sceptical towards the rhetoric of the party's younger, radical current. He accused the comprehensive schooling movement of advocating a comprehensive school 'which institutionalises class struggle and class hate'.⁶⁶ He supported a 'convergence of school types' into a 'general school' with the aim of achieving 'social integration' but thought that such a development should be conducted 'patiently and with convincing words'.⁶⁷ The federal state *Ministerpräsident* from 1966 to 1978, Heinz Kühn, wanted to avoid conflict and thought that it would be sufficient to open up the *Gymnasium* to working-class children. After the federal state elections of 1975, he stated that educational reforms would still be an important element of the government's policies, but should be continued in a 'sober-minded' way, meaning that the development of curricula and teacher training should take precedence over organisational reforms.⁶⁸ This lack of unity and lack of support from leading figures were crucial. In addition, around 1974/75, economic liberals became more influential within the FDP and opposed social liberals' educational reform ideas

⁶¹Parliament of NRW, Antrag der Fraktion der CDU, Schulversuch 'kooperative Gesamtschule', Drucksache 7/1215, November 15, 1971.

⁶²Parliament of NRW, Protokoll Kulturausschuss, 80. Sitzung (nicht öffentlich), Ausschussprotokoll 7/1155, September 13, 1973, 9. Nagel later admitted that his suggestion had been mainly strategic: 'When you . . . in practice wanted to introduce the integrated comprehensive school, we would *rather* [emphasis added] have been willing to introduce our model "cooperative school"' (Parliament of NRW, Plenarprotokoll 8/34, 8. Wahlperiode, 34. Sitzung, November 25, 1976, 1812). Nevertheless, if social democrats had chosen to support Nagel's suggestion, today's North Rhine-Westphalian school system would likely be different.

⁶³Wilhelm Lenz (CDU politician), in expert interview conducted by the author, May 20, 2015.

⁶⁴CDU, 'Ziele und Wege', 80; 'Programm für Nordrhein-Westfalen zur Landtagswahl 1975', Archiv für Christlich-Demokratische Politik (ACDP), Bestand CDU-Landtagsfraktion Nordrhein-Westfalen, 05-009-349.

⁶⁵CDU, 'Aussagen der CDU in Nordrhein-Westfalen zur Landtagswahl 1980. Landfassung', ACDP, 05-009-865.

⁶⁶Fritz Holthoff, *Anmerkungen zur pädagogischen Situation. Eröffnungsvortrag Bildungspolitisches Forum 75* (Düsseldorf: Verband Bildung und Erziehung, September 30, 1975), 16.

⁶⁷Ibid.

⁶⁸Parliament of NRW, Plenarprotokoll 8/2, 8. Wahlperiode, 2. Sitzung, June 4, 1975, 14–16.

more vehemently. Before the North Rhine-Westphalian elections of 1975, the FDP forced the SPD to postpone (in effect, to give up) the introduction of a comprehensive ‘orientation stage’ in grades five and six.⁶⁹

In the second half of the 1970s, SPD representatives developed another reform concept, the cooperative school. This was a combination of the *Hauptschule*, *Realschule* and *Gymnasium* school types, with comprehensive schooling in grades five and six followed by three tracks. It was not meant to replace the traditional school types, but was suggested as an alternative, especially for rural areas. It was a modest project, considered as the ‘last chance’ to take a step in the direction of comprehensive schooling.⁷⁰ However, even this modest reform led to massive conflicts. Many reformers within the SPD were unhappy. Anne Ratzki, principal of one of the first integrated comprehensive schools, explained how shocked she was to find that a new school reform was planned while ‘their’ school had not even left the experimental state:

It was an SPD damp squib... We were appalled. We had the integrated comprehensive school as a concept. And now a new concept turned up... We were absolutely against it. We really saw the integrated comprehensive school going down the drain, if it were instituted.⁷¹

Conservative antagonism to any kind of school reform was now massive. The law, which introduced the cooperative school as an additional school type, was passed in October 1977, but in February/March 1978 a movement of reform antagonists including the CDU and conservative teachers’ and parents’ associations collected over 3.6 million signatures for a referendum against it. The support of the traditional school structure was justified with theories of endowment, according to which ‘intelligence is up to 80% hereditary and only up to 20% related to the environment’.⁷² The Catholic Church also supported the movement. The reformers’ camp, which was split over the proposal, could not counter such attacks effectively. When the success of the signature campaign became known, the government under Kühn, who had not been convinced from the start, swiftly withdrew the law.

In its manifesto for the NRW elections of 1980, the SPD no longer suggested replacing the traditional school types with a comprehensive school. Instead, the strategy became to establish so-called comprehensive schools wherever parents asked for this. In 1981, the social democratic federal state government turned the integrated comprehensive school into a regular school type, meaning that it lost its experimental status. This led to the establishment of many comprehensive schools during the early 1980s, but implied that the aim of introducing truly comprehensive education had been relinquished.

⁶⁹Parliament of NRW, ‘Bericht des Kulturausschusses zur 2. Lesung des Entwurfs eines Gesetzes zur Änderung des Schulverwaltungsgesetzes und des Schulpflichtgesetzes (Gesetzentwurf der Landesregierung) und zu den Anträgen der Fraktion der CDU Schulversuch ‘kooperative Gesamtschule’ sowie Vorlegung eines Gesetzentwurfs über die Schulentwicklungsplanung im Lande Nordrhein-Westfalen’, Drucksache 7/4744, February 19, 1975; Parliament of NRW, Plenarprotokoll 7/124, 7. Wahlperiode, 124. Sitzung, February 27, 1975, 5211–82.

⁷⁰Werner Blumenthal, *Die bildungspolitische Auseinandersetzung und das Volksbegehren um die kooperative Schule in Nordrhein-Westfalen. Eine Analyse ihrer politischen Faktoren, Ursachen und Strategien sowie der Folgen für die Bildungspolitik in Nordrhein-Westfalen* (Doctoral diss., Rheinische Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität zu Bonn, 1988), 18.

⁷¹Anne Ratzki (teacher and social democratic teacher union activist), in expert interview conducted by the author, June 3, 2015.

⁷²Propaganda material by the movement, quoted in Ernst Rösner, *Schulpolitik durch Volksbegehren. Analyse eines gescheiterten Reformversuchs* (Weinheim: Beltz Verlag, 1981), 170.

Overall, there was a division between the left and the right with regard to comprehensive school reforms (see Figure 5). The SPD was the clearest protagonist, even though its currents disagreed concerning the right strategy. The FDP first consented to reforms, but as conservative antagonism grew so did antagonistic voices within the FDP. In the end, supporters of the traditional school system prevailed. To the present day, a truly comprehensive school reform has never again been attempted in NRW.

This outcome becomes more understandable when one considers that comprehensive schooling was not the only divisive issue in school politics. The rural and Catholic population had other concerns: Christian private schooling, denominational schooling, centralisation of village schools and fear of communist indoctrination. The CDU was the main representative of these concerns.

In 1961, the CDU pushed through a law securing generous financial support for the mostly Catholic private schools against the bitter opposition of social democrats and liberals. However, the regulations were phrased sufficiently strictly to prevent a steep increase in private schools. An even more contested topic during the 1950s and 1960s was denominational schooling. This state–church conflict dated back to the nineteenth century’s ‘cultural struggle’ and the Weimar era. The Nazis had abolished Catholic and Protestant people’s schools, but they were reintroduced in NRW after the Second World War and protected by the federal state constitution of 1950 against the opposition of the SPD and FDP. A change in the constitution required a two-thirds majority. In 1967/68, generational changes within the CDU allowed the SPD–FDP government to develop a compromise with reform-oriented conservatives. The primary school was separated from the upper stage of the people’s school, which was turned into an independent lower secondary school type, the *Hauptschule*. The *Hauptschule* became mostly independent of denomination. The Catholic Church and its most ardent supporters within the CDU were not happy. However, the CDU managed to push through exceptions, which

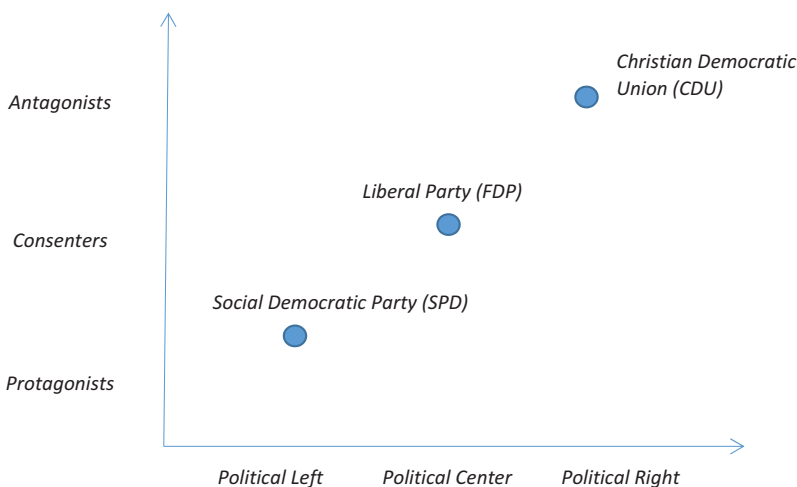


Figure 5. Protagonists, consenters and antagonists of post-war comprehensive school reforms among the political parties along the political left–right axis in Germany. Source: Author’s judgment based on qualitative analysis of party manifestos, parliamentary debates and expert interviews.

safeguarded Catholic influence in primary schools, many of which remain denominational into the present day.⁷³

The SPD and FDP not only disliked denominational schooling as such but also disliked the fact that it made it harder to get rid of small schools in rural areas, termed ‘dwarf schools’ by the SPD. Even though NRW was densely populated, centralisation of small people’s schools progressed more slowly than in much less populated Norway.⁷⁴ Social democrats and liberals considered centralisation to be in the interests of the rural population because, in their view, only schools of a certain size could guarantee sufficient quality of education. The rural population did not necessarily share these concerns. Within the CDU, some parliamentary representatives were especially known for their support for small rural schools. In debates, these representatives emphasised the small schools’ cultural and economic value.⁷⁵ Other CDU representatives, such as the Minister of Education in the early 1960s, Mikat, supported centralisation. But they also knew that they had to avoid unrest among the rural population and thus did so very carefully.

Overall, even though some ideological division existed within the CDU, the Catholic Church’s interests and the rural population’s dislike of centralisation were integrated into the CDU’s programme and its internal cross-interest coalition was maintained. This was also mirrored in the CDU’s membership: It was a cross-class party, organising white-collar employees and the self-employed, but also workers.⁷⁶ In 1971, 73% of the CDU membership was Catholic and 24% Protestant.⁷⁷ The CDU was strong in many of NRW’s rural areas, especially Catholic areas. It was thus based on the state–church and rural–urban cleavages as well as on the class cleavage.

Finally, school politics were also influenced by widespread anti-communist ideology. Both in debates regarding denominational schooling and in debates regarding comprehensive schooling, anti-communist accusations were abundant. The fact that the German Democratic Republic had instituted a secular and more comprehensive school system influenced debates, as did negative experiences with the communist regime. In this climate, even the modest school reforms of the social–liberal coalition could be portrayed as dangerous, anti-capitalistic policies. The cooperative school was portrayed by the CDU and its allies as a step towards the introduction of the ‘socialist comprehensive school’ – a term that was widely used as an anti-communist ‘warfare agent’, in the words of CDU politician Wilhelm Lenz. Such

⁷³Dieter Düding, *Parlamentarismus in Nordrhein-Westfalen. 1946–1980. Vom Fünfparteien- zum Zweiparteienlandtag* (Düsseldorf: Droste Verlag, 2008), 555–7.

⁷⁴In Norway, 1% of students were taught in one-class schools in 1963, compared with 1.8% in NRW (Norwegian Parliament, Innstilling frå Folkeskolekomiteen av 1963 [1965], Om lov om folkeskolen og om mellombils lov om 7-årig folkeskole og overgang til 9-årig folkeskole, June 15, 1965, 151; Parliament of NRW, Plenarprotokoll 5/16, 5. Wahlperiode, 16. Sitzung, May 14, 1963, 545). One explanation is lack of teachers in NRW. During the 1970s, centralisation in NRW progressed, as the shortage was overcome.

⁷⁵Parliament of NRW, Plenarprotokoll 05/10, 5. Wahlperiode, 10. Sitzung, February 12, 1963; Parliament of NRW, Plenarprotokoll 5/16, 5. Wahlperiode, 16. Sitzung, May 14, 1963; Parliament of NRW, June 26, 1968, Plenarprotokoll 06/36, ‘Antrag der Fraktion der CDU: Durchführung der neuen Schulgesetze’, 6. Wahlperiode, 31. Sitzung, Drucksache Nr. 775, June 26, 1968.

⁷⁶Klaus Von Beyme, *Political Parties in Western Democracies* (Aldershot: Gower, 1985), 214–15.

⁷⁷Peter Haungs, ‘Die Christlich Demokratische Union Deutschlands (CDU) und die Christlich Soziale Union in Bayern (CSU)’, in *Christlich-demokratische und konservative Parteien in Westeuropa*, Band 1, ed. Hans-Joachim Veen (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 1983), 23.

fearmongering scared large sections of the population including organisations that could otherwise have been potential reform allies.⁷⁸

Within the SPD, there was no agreement on how one should react to these accusations. Even though both party currents wanted working-class children to have access to better education, they disagreed over the right strategy. Moderate social democrats preferred a careful strategy, while younger radicals demanded a bolder approach. The SPD leadership in NRW mostly drew the conclusion that one should tone down socialist rhetoric and be content with modest reforms. On the national level, Chancellor Willy Brandt introduced an occupational ban on communists in 1972, with the support of the federal states' *Ministerpräsidenten*. As a result, DKP members could no longer be employed in public service, e.g. as teachers. SPD members who cooperated with communists were often excluded. This did not go down well with young radicals, who made up much of the SPD's grassroots in NRW.⁷⁹ They were no revolutionaries, but did see school reforms as a means to change society. In other words, the socialist–communist cleavage weakened the SPD internally and made it harder to build external alliances.

Comparison

In both cases in this study, the opposition regarding comprehensive school reforms ran primarily along a left/right axis. It can thus be considered an expression of the class cleavage. However, the political dynamics were different, which can only be understood against the backdrop of the cleavage structures of the two societies. The success of comprehensive school reforms in the Nordic welfare state of Norway and the failure of such reforms in the Continental welfare state of Germany should be attributed to how cleavage structures facilitated or hampered cross-interest coalitions.

The rural population especially was integrated into different kinds of coalitions in school politics: a social democratic/centre parties' coalition in the one case and a denominational/conservative coalition in the other. This was a result of struggles over centralisation, denominational schooling, Christian private schooling, language and (anti-)communism, which were expressions of rural–urban, centre–periphery, state–church and communist–socialist cleavages (see Table 2). In the Norwegian case, the state–church cleavage was partly superposed by the centre–periphery cleavage and did not significantly threaten the hegemony of social democracy. The socialist–communist cleavage came to expression in the party system, but not in school politics. The dominant centre–periphery and rural–urban cleavages coincided and hampered potential coalitions between conservatives and the rural population. This also led to internal splits within the Conservative Party. Social democrats managed to cooperate with the centre parties. From the 1950s to the 1970s, social democratic reform ideas shaped Norwegian school politics with regard to comprehensive school reforms, but also centralisation, language and religion. This applied even during the centre parties/

⁷⁸This applies for example to the Association of Education and Upbringing (VBE). This teachers' organisation had its roots in the organisations of Catholic and Protestant primary school teachers and could have been an ally for comprehensive school reformers if only its material interests are considered. However, many Christian teachers were integrated into the CDU alliance.

⁷⁹Düding, *Parlamentarismus*, 678.

Table 2. Expressions of cleavages during the post-war school reform period in Norway and NRW/Germany

Cleavage	Expressions in Norway	Expressions in NRW/Germany
State–church	Conflicts over the number of hours taught in Christian education, the Christian preamble of the school law and Christian private schooling	Conflicts over denominational schooling, the influence of the Catholic Church and Christian (especially Catholic) private schooling
Centre–periphery	Conflicts over the centralisation of rural schools, school language, the number of hours taught in Christian education, the Christian preamble of the school law and Christian private schooling	Conflicts over the centralisation of rural and denominational schools
Rural–urban	Conflicts over the centralisation of rural schools	Conflicts over the centralisation of rural schools
Worker–owner	Conflicts over introduction of the youth school, abolition of tracking, ability grouping and the abolition of grading in the youth school	Conflicts over the introduction of the integrated comprehensive school and the cooperative school
Socialist–communist	-	Conflicts over the ‘socialist’ comprehensive school, political standing of teachers and occupational bans

conservative government of 1965 to 1971, which continued the youth school reform.⁸⁰ Only from the 1970s onwards was social democratic dominance somewhat weakened.

In the German case, the state–church, rural–urban and centre–periphery cleavages largely coincided. The state–church cleavage was especially dominant. It crosscut the class cleavage and strengthened the internal cross-interest alliance of the CDU, rather than offering the SPD and FDP any means to weaken it. In addition, the socialist–communist cleavage produced splits on the left between anti-communist moderates and socialist radicals, who had trouble finding a common strategy in response to anti-communist attacks. This weakened their potential for coalition-making, while anti-communist ideology strengthened the unity of the CDU alliance further. The SPD and FDP managed to undermine the hegemony of the CDU in school politics for a short period from the late 1960s to the early 1970s, during which they pushed through centralisation reforms, reforms of denominational schooling and the introduction of the integrated comprehensive school. During the mid-1970s Christian democratic hegemony was re-stabilised.

Conclusion

Overall, additional lines of conflict besides the class cleavage have clearly played a role in school politics. By examining how religious, centre–periphery, rural–urban and socialist–communist cleavages have affected actors’ coalition-making, the present paper sheds light on a question that remains underexplored: namely how different kinds of cross-interest coalitions come about in specific policy fields. It spells out from a Rokkanian perspective how Norwegian social democrats and German Christian democrats accomplished building their broad alliances in the field of primary and lower secondary school

⁸⁰Telhaug, *Den 9-årige skolen*, 129.

politics. The paper thus provides case-specific interpretations of why the introduction of comprehensive schooling was successful in Norway but not in Germany, but also tries to develop our general understanding of cleavage structures and cross-interest coalition-making in school politics.

Some general conclusions for comparative-historical welfare and education regime research can be drawn. An important insight is that political parties can be founded on more than one cleavage and that several parties can give voice to the same cleavages. For example, the agrarian parties are not always the only parties of agrarian defence. In Norway, the Liberal Party and the Christian Democrats also represent the rural periphery and were often included in alliances with social democracy. Manow's conclusion that the Christian Democrats 'did not exert any substantial influence on post-war welfare state development' is therefore incorrect for the Norwegian case.⁸¹ He is right that agrarian parties need to be included in comparative welfare state analysis, but other centre parties should also be considered. For the understanding of the German case, it is equally useful to consider how the CDU mobilises different groups of the population along various cleavages. Even though the state–church cleavage has been the most dominant, religion is not the only issue keeping this alliance together. How the CDU has managed to maintain its internal cross-interest coalition is an issue worthy of more research.

Another insight is that crosscutting cleavages can also come to expression through splits within parties. In Germany, the communist–socialist cleavage was a major obstacle for social democrats' cooperation with rural, middle-class voters, but also for their internal unity. This made it difficult for social democrats to build up a cross-interest coalition for their school reform ideas. In Norway, the Conservative Party represented the urban centre rather than the rural periphery, in contrast to the German Catholic Centre Party and later the CDU. In the countryside, it was a weak party. This led to disagreements over the right response to rural reform demands. In school politics, this internal split was debilitating for the conservatives.

In future work, it would be interesting to explore to what extent school politics were characterised by similar dynamics in other countries. The historically grounded Rokkanian perspective is still valuable for the analysis of various policy fields.⁸² Compared with theories focusing exclusively on class oppositions or material interests, it allows for a more nuanced understanding of how cross-interest coalitions come about. It should not be considered a structuralist theory, but rather an invitation to dig deeper into one's cases and to take the historical complexity of political agency seriously.

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⁸¹Manow, 'Electoral Rules', 110.

⁸²Manow, 'Electoral Rules'; Lars Mjøset, 'Stein Rokkan's Thick Comparisons', *Acta Sociologica*, 43 (2000): 381–97.

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