Cleavage Politics and the Populist Right

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Cleavage Politics and the Populist Right

The New Cultural Conflict in Western Europe

Simon Bornschier

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Preface

This book grew out of my fascination with the long-term stability of West European party systems and the partial disruption of these historical patterns caused by the forceful manifestation of identity politics in the 1990s. While some scholars took the latter to mark the end of cleavage-based politics, the common changes a number of party systems were experiencing can also be read as a sign that the societal changes of previous decades were quite predictably transforming older antagonisms. In fact, the very commonality of right-wing populist appeals made interpretations of a fundamental detachment between party systems and societies seem implausible. This is both good and bad news. Parties solidly anchored in society instill mechanisms of accountability, and despite citizens' growing skepticism toward politicians and parties, party systems have remained fairly responsive to voters' preferences throughout the countries studied. But the bad news is that we may find no comfort in the seemingly durable presence of parties that mobilize anti-universalistic preferences and values.

A first key to understanding the extreme-right-wing populist phenomenon is the novel ideology that has allowed the successful exponents of this new party family to mobilize tensions rooted in social structure. The first two chapters of this book study the ideological foundations of right-wing populist parties' appeal and its relationship to the political changes brought about by the New Left. In the third chapter, I introduce a cleavage perspective into the study of the extreme populist right. In doing so, I relate political change and entrepreneurship to the forces of inertia and path dependence that continue to characterize Western European party systems. I argue that

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