

Politics and Society in Western Europe

4th edition



Jan-Erik Lane and Svante Ersson

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Foreword

To the Second Edition

This second edition of *Politics and Society in Western Europe* not only brings its coverage of events up-to-date but also includes a number of major changes. First, the presentation has been broadened to include the output side of the West European polity and the trends towards intergovernmental coordination in Western Europe. Secondly, much of the technicalities in the first edition have been deleted in an effort to present easily accessible data. Thus, the political party chapter now presents information about each single party instead of the aggregated information in the first edition. Thirdly, the focus of the volume has been substantially broadened from a political stability approach to an elucidation of how a political sociology approach compares with the new institutionalist approach when employed as a framework of analysis for the understanding of West European politics.

Oslo and Umeå, July 1992

To the Third Edition

This third edition of *Politics and Society in Western Europe* contains several changes from the second edition. A number of tables, particularly in the Introduction and Chapters 6, 7 and 10, have been updated in so far as that is possible. New material has been added in various places, and some errors including the headings to Table 8.1 have been corrected.

Oslo and Umeå, October 1993

To the Fourth Edition

The fourth edition of *Politics and Society in Western Europe* involves a complete rewrite of several parts of the text. The volume has been completely revised by using a single analytical framework, that of Alexis de Tocqueville's theory of democratic stability. If the earlier versions of our textbook had a somewhat eclectic theoretical foundation, then it is hoped that reinterpreting Tocqueville in relation to today's realities will give coherence to the various empirical chapters, where the analysis has been

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fully updated, using the most recently available data about civil society, the state and the outcomes that Tocqueville focused upon: stability and equality. In addition to new data on the countries included in the earlier version, Iceland and Luxembourg have been covered as well.

Geneva and Umeå, March 1998

Introduction: A Neo-Tocquevillean Approach

In order to make sense of recent developments in the 1990s in West European democracies we begin by taking a long-term perspective on how democracy has developed in Western Europe since the end of the Second World War. Although the trends described below may appear highly disparate ones, one may go back to the first major theory of modern democracy to find a few clues as to how to present everything in a clear and neat manner. We refer to the analysis of democracy, presented by Alexis de Tocqueville in his two volumes: *Democracy in America I-II*, the first volume published in 1835 and the second in 1840. We argue that the profoundness of Tocqueville's analysis of modern democracy is yet to be fully realized, as he is not only the first theoretician to fully grasp the nature of modern democratic society and its democratic politics, but his analysis is still unsurpassed in terms of depth and comprehensiveness. For the purposes of understanding real life democracy in a market economy Tocqueville is – to us – more central than any other of the founders of twentieth-century social thought, including Marx, Durkheim and Weber.

Western Europe is today a prototype of what Tocqueville called 'la société démocratique'. Our universe of discourse is the set of larger states in Western Europe, as identified in Table I.1, which presents some basic empirical information about the states on the Western European scene as it emerged out of the Second World War on the basis of the important Yalta and Potsdam agreements on how the empire of the Third Reich was to be divided as well as how Europe was to be structured into two distinct parts: Western Europe and Eastern Europe up until the system transition initiated in 1989.

Western Europe comprises small and large countries with regard to both population and land area. The political constitutions of these countries are of different ages, as the constitutions of some of the West European countries are much older than the constitutions of others.

This book focuses on the politics of the larger 18 states, listed in Table I.1. Although the five smaller states are not without interesting features, they fall outside our ambition in this volume, which is to examine the variations in the democratic state and in civil society in order to state how they are related by means of a comparative analysis.

The purpose of this introductory chapter is to examine some longitudinal trends in West European politics and to state a framework for the analysis of

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TABLE I.1 *Population, area and present constitution*

	1950	1990	1995		Year of present constitution
	(000)			Area (km ²)	
Austria	6,935	7,718	8,063	83,858	1920
Belgium	8,639	9,967	10,064	30,528	1993
Denmark	4,271	5,141	5,223	43,094	1953
Finland	4,009	4,986	5,101	338,145	1919
France	41,736	56,735	58,172	543,965	1958
Germany	68,373	79,433	81,912	356,974	1949
Germany West (BRD)	49,986	62,649	—	248,709	1949
Germany East (DDR)	18,387	16,433	—	108,333	1968
Greece	7,566	10,161	10,493	131,957	1975
Iceland	143	255	269	102,819	1944
Ireland	2,969	3,526	3,590	70,285	1937
Italy	47,104	56,749	57,386	301,309	1948
Luxembourg	296	382	409	2,586	1868
Netherlands	10,027	14,952	15,487	41,526	1983
Norway	3,265	4,241	4,355	323,878	1814
Portugal	8,405	9,896	9,906	92,135	1970
Spain	27,868	38,798	39,188	504,783	1978
Sweden	7,041	8,559	8,826	449,964	1975
Switzerland	4,715	6,712	7,039	41,284	1874
United Kingdom	50,290	57,561	58,586	244,110	—
Andorra	6	53	63	468	1993
Liechtenstein	14	29	31	160	1921
Malta	308	354	370	316	1974
Monaco	22	30	30	2	1962
San Marino	13	23	25	61	1600

Sources: EB (Encyclopaedia Britannica) 1991, 1996

these trends in the set of 18 countries (see also Gowland et al., 1995; Edye and Lintner, 1996; Rose, 1996; Budge, Newton et al., 1997; Ismayr, 1997; Mendras, 1997; Rhodes et al., 1997).

Longitudinal trends

Characteristic of European politics in the post-war period has been the swing back and forth between change and continuity in institutions and politics. Political events change so rapidly in Western Europe that it almost seems that each decade has had its own and somewhat unpredictable logic. During some intervals of time political systems may give the appearance of continuity and rest. However, hardly has the appearance of solidity and calm been interpreted in ideas about the apolitical nature of society, the coming of a technocratic society or the end of ideology, when signs of instability appear, indicating major change. Politics feeds on conflicts arising from social heterogeneity – cleavages – as well as on competition between the

variety of organized groups in civil society. Change in Western Europe has been greatly driven by the advancement of modernity, or the coming of a post-industrial society (Waters, 1995; Hirst and Thompson, 1996; Rifkin, 1996; Krugman, 1997), further accentuated in the last decade by a strong tendency towards globalization.

1950–65: End of ideology, and apathy

It was believed that the post-war political systems of Europe had stabilized after an unruly transition period at the end of the Second World War. France during the Fourth Republic was a divergent case, but once de Gaulle had created the Fifth Republic France appeared to fit the dominant mode among European democracies. No doubt the state of Italy was also deviant, but scholars interpreted the lack of strife and the overall stability of systems like the United Kingdom, or those in Scandinavia and the Federal Republic of Germany, as due to the disappearance or reduction in ideological conflict (Tingsten, 1955, 1965; Aron, 1957; Shils, 1958). Other scholars identified the development of a technocratic and administrative welfare society that would present its inhabitants with security and reduce the disruptive consequences of cleavages (Dahrendorf, 1959; Crozier, 1964; Bimbaum, 1975). The iron curtain was firmly established in the 1950s after considerable turmoil in some of the new people's republics and the East European countries began to embark on the road to economic recovery by means of a planned economy. The introduction of NATO in 1949 was paralleled by the creation of the Warsaw Pact in 1955, setting the parameters for the divided Europe that lasted until the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989.

It was argued that the politics of the post-industrial society would be different from political life in the industrial society (Bell, 1974; Kumar, 1995). West European nations were all thriving in terms of economic growth, leadership seemed remarkably stable and law and order prevailed to an extent that would make analysts of the late 1950s and the 1960s underline stability and continuity. The legitimacy of political institutions was not questioned as political authorities stayed in power for relatively long periods of time, and the regimes or the constitutions of these democracies were regarded as hallmarks of a long constitutional development. The political community or the political territory of the various democratic states was not questioned by minorities.

Major interpretations of the relationship between society and politics during the 1950s and the early 1960s talked about apathy (Berelson et al., 1954; Lane, 1965; Milbrath, 1965). However, during the 1960s the opposite of apathy – participation – became the focus of research (Di Palma, 1970; Dahl, 1971). Participation became a major goal of the political systems in Western Europe: it was seen not only as a way of challenging the centralist bias of the industrial state but also as a vehicle of latent cleavages that became manifest during the 1970s.

1965–80: Rejection of political authority

The politics of the late 1960s and early 1970s meant not only that participation replaced apathy; cleavages believed to be fading away emerged to an extent that had not been predicted. During the 1950s and the 1960s the prevailing theme of modernization implied that ethnic and religious cleavages would diminish as a source of conflict because societies that were modernizing would be dominated by economic or, as they called it, functional orientations (Deutsch, 1961). What actually happened created a need for an analysis of cleavages, in particular the challenges presented to political parties and political systems by the resurrection of traditional loyalties of an ethnic or religious nature. The theories of the end of ideology, the apathy of the electorate and the modernization of society when confronted with the turbulence and change of the late 1960s and 1970s suddenly appeared to be rather obsolete.

The late 1960s and the early 1970s showed convincingly how fragile political structures are and how easily the legitimacy of political institutions may be eroded. Signs of change conducive to political instability cropped up in most European democracies. Not only did leaders meet significant difficulties in staying in power for longer periods of time, but the very principles of how the political system of a nation was to be built up became a central political issue in several democracies. Compared with the 1960s there were strong voices demanding changes in government policy and leadership as well as in the structure or the principles of political decision-making. In several European democracies the legitimacy of traditional decision structures was called in question, especially by the strong leftist current in 1968, including student revolts. Demands for a change of regime were raised in several authoritarian regimes: Spain, Portugal and Greece in the early 1970s.

Criticism of the political decision-making systems resulted in demands for institutional autonomy in countries like the United Kingdom, Belgium and Spain. Systems such as those in Sweden, France and West Germany faced the demand for decentralization of political authority to local government and neighbourhood groups (Sharpe, 1979). In some systems the demand for participation implied decentralization of political authority to the local and regional levels; demands for increased local and regional autonomy appeared during this decade to an extent that surprised the adherents of an efficient centralized welfare state. The reaction to the progressive development of an industrial state brought out profound cleavages of various kinds: ethnic, religious as well as class-orientated. The modern capitalist state implies centralization of decision-making structures. Concentration of power and resources may bring about a higher level of affluence, but affluence is not a general remedy for contention. In fact, once economic and class cleavages have been attenuated, other kinds of cleavage such as post-materialism may become stronger (Inglehart, 1977, 1997).