

## Conclusion

The previous chapters have shed light on the politics of comprehensive schooling in two ways. On the one hand, the comparative-historical case studies develop historically specific arguments for why Norwegian and German education politics evolved the way they did. On the other hand, they demonstrate that the Rokkanian approach is a fruitful starting point for comparative research on education politics. In the following, the results of the case studies are summed up one more time, followed by a discussion of the general conclusions that can be drawn from them for comparative welfare and education regime research. The next section discusses some open questions that would merit further research. Finally, the current education-political situation in Norway and North Rhine–Westphalia/Germany is analyzed briefly with a focus on how cleavages are manifested today and what this means for political coalition-making.

### CLEAVAGE STRUCTURES AND EDUCATION POLITICS IN NORWAY AND GERMANY

The comparative-historical case studies in this book are divided into four parts, corresponding to Chapters 2–5. Chapter 2 provides a historical sociological analysis of the development of schooling in the two countries up to the 1950s, demonstrating how cleavages were manifested over time and shaped the school as an institution. It concludes that conditions were somewhat more favorable for comprehensive school reformers in the postwar period in Norway because of feedback effects of previous reform cycles. The Norwegian school system was already somewhat more

comprehensive than the school system of NRW. On the other hand, in the 1950s both school systems consisted of comprehensive primary schools, followed by segmented secondary schooling, and, despite different cleavage structures, there were also significant similarities in their historical development. Even though previous events and processes shaped the conditions for postwar reformers, different types of compromises between historical actors remained possible and could have brought the two cases closer to each other. The reform period of the 1950s to the 1970s was a critical juncture with an open ending.

A detailed analysis of this period is provided in Chapters 3, 4, and 5. Chapter 3 introduces the most important collective actors involved in the politics of schooling during these postwar decades and compares their power resources and social base. The analysis shows that cleavage structures shaped the political playing fields in both cases, leading to differences in party systems and among teachers' organizations. Social democrats and primary schoolteachers were somewhat more powerful in Norway than in NRW. However, the differences in power resources were not so great as to preclude alternative political outcomes. They should also at least partly be considered a result of successful coalition- and policymaking.

Chapters 4 and 5 analyze these processes of coalition-making in detail. Chapter 4 focuses on the struggles over comprehensive school reforms. It demonstrates that the left and the right were ideologically opposed to each other and that the struggles over comprehensive education were an expression of the class cleavage in both cases. However, the hegemonic consensus differed. In Norway, the idea that it was unjust and detrimental for learning outcomes to divide students into school types, tracks, or ability groups became hegemonic over time. Norwegian social democrats and their allies, such as primary schoolteachers, were mostly united in their support for the comprehensive school. The center parties did not push for comprehensive education but for the most part consented to the structural development of the school system. The politicians of the Conservative Party were divided over the question, especially in the 1950s and 1960s, so the party did not manage to develop a clear profile. Many secondary schoolteachers were skeptical toward the reforms, but hardly dared raise their voices. Only during the 1970s did Norwegian conservatives become a clearly antagonistic and more united voice in school debates.

In Germany, the situation was the reverse. The idea that children should be divided into (seemingly) homogeneous ability groups remained

hegemonic. Many viewed the *Gymnasium* as an “untouchable” school type that should be the school of future elites and high achievers. German social democrats were highly divided. Many moderate or right-wing social democrats in leading positions did not consider comprehensive schooling very important and did not care for the anticapitalistic rhetoric of the leftist current of the party. The liberal FDP was also divided over the issue. Christian democrats, and their allies such as the *Gymnasium* teachers, were for the most part ideologically united in their skepticism toward comprehensive education. Around 1970, some Christian democrats consented to experiments with cooperative schooling, but during the second half of the 1970s, conservative hegemony was reestablished.

Chapter 4 draws out how different coalitions and lines of division emerged in the struggles over comprehensive school reforms between and within political parties and teachers’ organizations. However, class interests and ideologies alone cannot explain why some rural, religious, lower-class, and middle-class groups actively supported or at least consented to social democratic comprehensive education politics in Norway, while similar groups in NRW opposed the reforms. To really understand the nature of the different cross-interest coalitions that materialized in the two cases, we need to extend our focus beyond the class cleavage and comprehensive school reforms.

Chapter 5 therefore takes a closer look at these cross-interest coalitions and focuses on other major school-political debates of the time that were expressions of crosscutting cleavages. In Norway, these crosscutting cleavages mostly had the effect of weakening potential coalitions between the political center and the conservatives. This holds especially for the rural-urban and center-periphery cleavages. The Conservative Party did not manage to build stable alliances with the political center in the struggles over language, centralization, gender, or religion. The Labor Party succeeded in handling crosscutting cleavages in a way that did not sabotage and sometimes even strengthened its school reforms, thus building a powerful hegemonic coalition. The Labor Party was in such a strong position that it could in some cases push through important decisions on its own. In other cases, it cooperated with the parties of the political center. It also had an alliance with primary schoolteachers and with the women’s movement. Norway’s cleavage structure gave Norwegian social democrats opportunities that they used skillfully.

In NRW, the state-church cleavage and the communist-socialist cleavage had the greatest influence on the political outcome. Both cleavages were a major obstacle for social democratic and social liberal

comprehensive-school reformers. They led to intra-party splits and made it difficult to build extra-party coalitions, especially with the Catholic population. For the CDU, these cleavages had a unifying effect by integrating the Catholic rural population and many Catholic primary school-teachers. Social democratic and liberal reformers managed to destabilize the hegemony of conservative ideas about schooling during the 1960s and 1970s, but their lack of internal unity stood in the way of more far-reaching success. Finally, because of the dominance of the struggle over denominational schooling until 1967–8, the time window for reforms was shorter than in Norway.

If reframed from the point of view of the lower- and middle-class groups who opposed comprehensive schools in NRW but consented to them in Norway, the argument of this book can also be summed up in the following way. In NRW, the decision of rural Catholics, religious Protestants, Christian primary schoolteachers, and Catholic female teachers to cooperate with conservative representatives of the upper class in their opposition to comprehensive schooling was not simply a result of “false consciousness” in terms of their material class interests. It was the result of their evaluation of who would be most likely to support their demands for denominational and Christian private schooling, anti-communist education, decentralization of schools, and the preservation of Catholic girls’ education. Equality of educational opportunities was important to some of them; however, they concluded that the modest structural reforms supported by the CDU would suffice to ameliorate the educational chances of their offspring. They did not want to cooperate with supporters of comprehensive schooling, who were for the most part opposed to their concerns listed above. The CDU managed to maintain this cross-interest and cross-class alliance by supporting educational expansion within the parallel school system through the expansion of the *Realschule* and *Gymnasium*, and through its support for the introduction of the *Hauptschule* and nine years of obligatory schooling.

In the Norwegian case, the consent of the rural and religious population to comprehensive school reforms was a result of these reforms being connected to a social democratic reform package, which included educational expansion in rural areas, an upgrading of the social status of the rural populations’ language and culture, and compromises regarding centralization. Not least, the center parties embraced the youth school because it was connected to the introduction of nine years of obligatory schooling. There was some disagreement with the social democrats regarding Christian education and gender roles, but these issues were

not as decisive as decentralization or language politics. And, importantly, the Norwegian urban upper-class conservatives did not appear as a more attractive coalition partner because they did not care much about the issues that mattered most to the representatives of the rural periphery and, for a long time, they were themselves internally split on education politics.

Finally, it should be underlined that the historical outcomes represent a compromise in both cases. Even though the Norwegian compromise was more in favor of reform protagonists and the North Rhine–Westphalian compromise was more in favor of reform antagonists, neither of them got exactly what they wanted. In Norway, reform protagonists had to relinquish the abolition of grading in the youth school. In NRW, reform antagonists had to accept that the integrated comprehensive school would become a regular school type besides the other parallel school types, that additional such schools were founded in the 1980s, and that they have remained a growing part of the North Rhine–Westphalian school system up to the present day.

This implies that the strategies chosen by the actors in the period of investigation were meaningful and had consequences for the kinds of compromises that came about. This may seem like a trivial statement. However, in Germany, the belief that comprehensive schooling was and continues to be “impossible” to introduce in a German context is quite influential today. In Norway, it might be difficult to imagine a development of the Norwegian school system that would not have included comprehensivization to the same extent. The present analysis certainly supports the view that the structural, organizational, and cultural conditions actors faced contributed to developments along different paths. However, this should not be taken to mean that there was no room for action. For example, it should be noted that it is uncertain whether Norwegian social democrats would have managed to introduce the youth school as smoothly if they had not decided in 1959 that the old school types should be excluded from experiments, thereby overriding all opposition. With regard to ability grouping within the youth school, different kinds of compromises could also have come about. In theory, social democrats in NRW could have insisted on introducing the comprehensive school as a regular school type with blanket coverage but without experiments, or on focusing experiments exclusively on organizational differentiation within the comprehensive school, as Norwegian reformers did. Maybe more realistically, they could have accepted the CDU’s offer to introduce cooperative schools on a general level in 1971–3. True enough, this would have roused

opposition in the population. However, it is probable that this opposition would not have been equally strong in the late 1960s or early 1970s as it was during the late 1970s. Moreover, if the CDU had been involved in the reform, it would have had to defend it. Of course, these are hypothetical remarks. Nobody knows what would have happened if actors had made different choices. It is nevertheless important to emphasize that there were opportunities for making different choices.

#### IMPLICATIONS FOR COMPARATIVE WELFARE STATE AND EDUCATION REGIME RESEARCH

Within the field of comparative welfare state and education regime research, Rokkanian cleavage theory is not often discussed as a separate theoretical approach worthy of consideration. A few scholars have argued for a “Rokkanian amendment” (Manow, 2009, 2015; Manow/van Kersbergen, 2009) and have applied and developed Rokkanian theory, for example in studies of European political development and party systems (Bartolini, 2000, 2005; Berntzen/Selle, 1992; Caramani, 2004; Ferrera, 2005; Hooghe/Marks, 2018; Kriesi, 2010; Magone, 2010; Mair, 1997). In the historical-institutionalist literature, the interest in macro-historical analyses of critical junctures and political processes survived, and Rokkan is acknowledged as a classic contributor to the field (Mahoney, 2000; Thelen, 1999). Still, overall, his work has not received the attention it deserves.

The most important general contribution of the present book is thus to demonstrate the continued empirical fruitfulness of the Rokkanian approach for the study of education politics – and presumably, many other policy fields. It should not be considered a structuralist approach but rather an invitation to dig deeper into one’s cases and to respect the historical complexity of political agency and coalition-making in varying political and institutional environments and contexts (Mjøset, 2000). The approach stands not in opposition to the other major perspective employed here, power resources theory, but rather represents an extension of focus. In the field of education politics, it is not difficult to see that additional lines of conflict besides the class cleavage, which have roots back into the nineteenth century, have played an important role. By examining how religious, center-periphery, rural-urban, communist-socialist, and gender conflicts have been expressed in education politics and how they have influenced coalition-making, the book sheds light on a question that remains underexplored, namely *how* different kinds of

cross-interest coalitions come about in specific policy fields. It is the first contribution to spell out from a Rokkanian perspective how Norwegian social democrats and German Christian democrats accomplished building their hegemonic alliances in the field of primary and lower-secondary schooling.

The book supports Manow's (2009) suggestion that agrarian parties should be included in comparative welfare state analysis. As has been emphasized by Esping-Andersen (1990) and later by Manow and van Kersbergen (2009), the center-periphery and rural-urban cleavages have been particularly influential for the development of Scandinavian welfare states, while the state-church cleavage has been the second most salient cleavage after the class cleavage in some of the continental welfare states, such as Germany (see also Baldwin, 1990; Huber et al., 1993; van Kersbergen, 1995). However, Manow's (2009, 110) conclusion that the Christian Democrats in Scandinavia "did not exert any substantial influence on post-war welfare state development" is incorrect for the Norwegian case. Especially during the conservative-center party government of 1965–71, the Christian Democrats did have an influence, not least on the development of the school system. During Labor Party governments, social democrats were also forced to consider Christian interests to a certain degree.

This might become more understandable when one considers that the agrarian Center Party is not the only party of agrarian defense in Norway, contrary to Manow's (2009) discussion. The Christian Democrats and the Liberal Party also represented sections of the rural periphery and consented to social democratic reforms many times. In other words, it should be recognized that parties can be founded on more than one cleavage and that several parties can give voice to the same cleavages. All three Norwegian center parties share a similar, mostly rural voter base, for whom decentralization, language politics, and, to a certain extent, religious convictions have been important cornerstones of political orientation. The parties have long emphasized different elements of this program. The early Liberal Party was founded around a range of issues but gave voice to center-periphery conflicts most of all. The Christian Democrats were founded based mostly on the state-church cleavage, while the Center Party emphasized economic rural interests and thus the rural-urban cleavage. In terms of the left-right dimension of politics, the three parties together constitute the Norwegian political center and should be taken into account in an analysis of coalition-making. In Germany, the Catholic Center Party and its successor, the CDU, gave expression to the state-church cleavage. However, they

also integrated economic and cultural rural interests such as support for decentralization and, in the early phase, opposition to the Prussian center. In other words, rural-urban and center-periphery divisions coincided with state-church divisions, which strengthened the internal unity of the Catholic Center Party and later the CDU. While the Catholic Center Party was also to some extent a workers' party, the CDU became more of a representative of sections of the upper class. Rokkan's (1999, 309) insistence that one should always consider the interrelationships of different cleavages is therefore important.

In this book, the gender cleavage is incorporated into the Rokkanian framework (see also Sass/Kuhnle, 2022). The provision of welfare and education has been a prime issue for women in politics, even long before they had the right to vote. Compared to other actors and movements, women's organizations have not been sufficiently considered in comparative welfare and education regime research. There is a rich comparative literature on welfare and gender regimes (e.g. Esping-Andersen, 2009, 2016; Korpi, 2000; Laperrière and Orloff, 2019; Lewis, 1992; O'Connor, 1996; Orloff, 1993, 2009; Sainsbury, 1994, 1999; Sümer, 2009), but for the most part this literature has focused more on how regime types produce different consequences in terms of gender equality than on how women as political activists have contributed historically to the development of these regimes (but see Berven/Selle, 2001; Bock/Thane, 1991; Hobson/Lindholm, 1997; Koven/Michel, 1993; Sainsbury, 2001; Skocpol, 1992, for important exceptions). There is also an interesting literature on gender, voting, and party politics, which has demonstrated among other things that issues like childcare, health care, or education are more salient for women than for men, independent of socioeconomic factors or position on a left/right axis, and that women, including conservative women, support higher social spending than men (Campbell 2017; Campbell/Childs 2015; Finseraas et al., 2012). Clearly, gender conflicts should not be reduced entirely to other cleavages, and women's political mobilization should receive increased attention (see Sass/Kuhnle, 2022, for an extended discussion of this argument). There remains much to be explored here.

Regarding the cases in this book, the analysis shows that organizations of the first-wave women's movement, such as organizations of female teachers, were important players in education politics (see also Sass, 2021). Furthermore, in the Norwegian case, the radical second-wave women's movement was in an alliance with the Labor Party, which supported coeducation of boys and girls in line with its general support

for comprehensive education. In the German case, the Catholic women's movement was in an alliance with the CDU, and the women's movement as a whole was weaker and more split than in Norway. Catholic women's organizations supported separate schooling for girls as an alternative route to emancipation and opposed comprehensive schooling. Even though other cleavages were more salient, the gender cleavage is thus a relevant piece of the puzzle.

Another cleavage that has not received much attention is the communist-socialist cleavage (but see Bartolini, 2000, 97ff; Manow, 2015).<sup>1</sup> That might in part be because Rokkan was not consistent in his treatment of this cleavage, which was not included in all of his models and papers (Rokkan, 1999). As shown in Chapter 5, this cleavage was highly significant for the education-political development in Germany. Pervasive anti-communism put social democrats and reformers in a difficult position. The "socialist comprehensive school" was presented as a serious threat, which frightened the rural, religious, and middle-class population. The fact that the GDR had instituted a secular and more comprehensive school system influenced debates, as did negative experiences of the population with the communist regime. In Norwegian education politics, anti-communist arguments were nonexistent. Even though the Norwegian left has long been split into different currents and parties, this did not impede cooperation in education politics. In other words, it should be an empirical question to what extent legacies of (anti)communism and communist-socialist divisions affect coalition-making in different cases and policy fields.

A related insight is that crosscutting cleavages can be expressed through splits within parties, movements, or organizations. In Germany, social democracy, the unions, teachers' organizations, and the women's movement were all split internally into different wings. The SPD and the unions, including the social democratic teachers' union – the Education and Science Workers' Union (GEW), were split into radical and moderate currents that disagreed, among other things, on the issue of cooperation with communists and the right response to anti-communist attacks. This implied conflicts about the right strategy for comprehensive school

<sup>1</sup> Watson (2015) has demonstrated the importance of splits between and within parties of the left, with an emphasis on the effects of such splits rather than their roots. Possibly for this reason, she does not refer to Rokkan's (1999) historical analysis of the communist-socialist cleavage. If she had done so, she might have realized that splits on the left are not something historically new in her shadow cases Norway and Germany but have old roots (Watson, 2015, 258ff). In Norway, this has not stood in the way of coalition-making to the same extent as in Germany.

reforms. Moderate social democrats preferred a careful, harmonious, and defensive strategy, while younger radicals demanded a bolder, more anticapitalistic approach. The communist-socialist cleavage was thus an obstacle not only 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.

Teachers' organizations and the women's movement were split along class divisions, but more importantly along religious divisions. The dominant state-church cleavage led to the development of separate organizations for Catholic and Protestant teachers and Catholic female teachers. Because primary schoolteachers were not united, philologists could dominate through their alliance with the CDU. Christian primary and lower-secondary schoolteachers were also to a certain extent integrated into this alliance but were less successful in influencing the CDU's politics. Up to the present day, primary and lower-secondary schoolteachers in Germany are separated into organizations with social democratic and religious roots, which is a major reason why they have not been more influential.

In Norway, the Conservative Party originated on the side of the center in the center-periphery conflict of the nineteenth century, not on the side of the periphery like the German Catholic Center Party and later the CDU. In the countryside, it was a weak party. As a result, the Norwegian Conservative Party had difficulties with responding to the reform demands of the rural population. This led to disagreements within the party about the right strategy. A more reform-oriented current and a conservative current opposed each other, especially during the 1950s and 1960s. The reform-oriented current included, for example, the primary schoolteacher Erling Fredrikfryd. His opponents in the party were representatives of the urban elites. This split was debilitating for the conservatives. In other words, the Norwegian cleavage structure weakened the unity of the political right and strengthened the unity of the political left, while the opposite was the case in Germany.

On the methodological level, this book underlines the importance of the historical, comparative, and case-oriented approach. "Large processes" and "big structures," such as the education reforms and systems studied here, have multiple and configurational causes (Tilly, 1984). For research questions pertaining to *how* such reforms come about, historical comparison is the most adequate approach because it is the only way to study how different factors *combine* with each other *over time* in creating a historical outcome (Ragin, 1987). Historical case studies shed light on

the dynamics of politics and allow historical situations to be analyzed as wholes and in context.

In addition, historical comparison encourages researchers to think outside of the box of national explanations and are the best way to take temporal dynamics in politics into account (Haupt/Kocka, 2009; Streeck, 2015). Education politics today are still partly shaped by social conflicts that originated centuries ago. An ahistorical analysis would be incapable of uncovering the relevance of such factors. Examining the historical roots of education systems increases our understanding of the role of institutionalized schooling in the development of modern welfare and nation states and sharpens our perspective on how cleavage structures continue to shape education politics today. This is not merely a historical exercise but is necessary to understand the potential for future changes. For all these reasons, we are going to need comparative-historical case studies of education politics also in the future.

Finally, it should be emphasized that the method of historical comparison involves going back and forth between theory and data, as well as between cases, with an open mind and an explorative attitude (Ragin, 1987; Ragin/Amoroso, 2011). This method is not inferior to hypothesis testing. It means taking one's cases seriously and making the most of the benefits of comparison, while balancing generalization and contextual relevance (Mjøset, 2000, 393). In the case of this book, this process led to the realization that a class perspective on education politics is not sufficient to understand the development of the school system. The comparison produced the insight that school reforms are shaped by cross-cutting cleavages that have not been sufficiently considered in previous work. The theoretical approach that resonated most with this finding was the Rokkanian approach.

#### OPEN QUESTIONS

The politics of education continue to be under-researched, especially from a comparative perspective. There are numerous possibilities for further research that would be valuable for the development of the field. For example, it would be interesting to apply the Rokkanian perspective to other cases. The most obvious potential theoretical generalization of this study relates to the other Nordic countries (Sweden, Denmark, Finland, and Iceland). As Rokkan (1999, 306ff) has shown, cleavage structures and party systems in these cases were similar to the Norwegian case. In Sweden and Denmark, rural-urban, center-periphery, and communist-socialist

cleavages were not quite as salient as in Norway but were still much more salient than the state-church cleavage. As we know from the work of Wiborg (2009), comprehensive education politics in Scandinavia had much in common, and the presence of comparatively strong liberal and agrarian parties was important in all these cases. In addition, there was no Catholic political movement in any of these cases. In other words, the political coalitions that emerged in the other Nordic countries were most likely a result of similar processes as in the Norwegian case, but it would still be valuable to analyze the relevance of specific crosscutting conflicts in more detail.

One could also compare the cases in this study with reforms of secondary schooling in the countries of the United Kingdom, and other countries historically connected to the British Empire. This would be of interest, because postwar comprehensive school reforms in the United Kingdom went further than in many continental countries. On the other hand, private schooling and school choice have played a much more prominent role in England and Wales than in Norway and Germany – while Scotland is an interesting case of its own and apparently more similar to the Nordic countries. How crosscutting cleavages emerge in conflicts over private schooling or school choice in English-speaking, continental, or Mediterranean countries could generally be examined in more detail.

It would also be interesting to consider the relevance of the communist-socialist and gender cleavages for other cases. Not least, the role of women's organizations in welfare state and education regime development should be studied further. For example, a comparative-historical study of the role played by female teachers' organizations would be an interesting research project on its own. To what extent splits on the left have impeded comprehensive school reforms in other places is also an issue worthy of further consideration. Most likely, the Rokkanian framework would prove fruitful in approaching other cases and generate new insights.

Some scholars have attempted to develop Rokkanian theory further to make sense of current political conflicts about globalization, European integration, ethnicity, migration, and nationality. They have, for example, conceptualized a "transnational cleavage" (Hooghe/Marks, 2018), a "libertarian/authoritarian cleavage" (Kriesi, 2010) and a "universalism-particularism cleavage" (Bornschieer et al., 2021) to describe these conflicts of today, which are apparent in the rise of far-right parties in many places (see also Bornschieer, 2010; Ferrera, 2019; Kriesi, 2010; Kriesi et al., 2012; Seiler, 2015). It would be interesting to examine to what extent such

a cleavage can be detected in debates about the treatment of migrants, refugees, and ethnic minorities in national education systems. There is certainly a structural foundation for conflicts, considering that ethnicity is today one of the most significant determinants for educational outcomes (OECD, 2010b, 2016, 2018).

Another issue that would merit more analysis is the relationship between comprehensive school reforms at the lower-secondary and at the upper-secondary level. In Norway and Germany, protagonists of comprehensive school reforms envisaged comprehensive schooling also on the upper-secondary level, while antagonists opposed it. In Norway, upper-secondary schooling did not become fully comprehensive, but reforms diminished the differences between academic and vocational upper-secondary schooling (Olsen, 2012). In Germany, academic and vocational upper-secondary forms of education remain more distinct. While the history of vocational education has been analyzed, for example by Thelen (2004), commonalities and interlinkages between debates about lower- and upper-secondary education could be examined in more detail. Whether crosscutting cleavages influenced the outcomes of upper-secondary reform attempts in similar ways as in the field of lower-secondary education could also be analyzed. Busemeyer's study (2014) illustrates that there are potentially similar dynamics.

Another potential extension of the present study relates to post-secondary education in colleges and universities. In Norway and Germany, the 1960s and 1970s saw the establishment of new types of colleges, not least in rural areas. This involved debates about the status of these new institutions in relation to the universities. In NRW, the term "comprehensive college" (*Gesamthochschule*) became a political buzzword employed by social democrats and liberals and at times even by the CDU. In both cases, the development of the postsecondary educational sector was an important part of the educational expansion. This part of educational history could be examined more closely and related to the debates about comprehensive schooling at the lower levels of the education system.

There have also been recurrent debates and reforms of special schooling. In Germany, the slowly increasing inclusion of disabled children in the general school system has led to renewed discussions of parallel schooling (Hartong/Nikolai, 2016). In Norway, special schools were largely abolished in the 1970s and 1980s (Dalen, 2006). Much of the data collected for this book indicates that the ideological arguments for the abolition of special schools were similar to the arguments for comprehensive schooling. However, this field of politics involves important

additional actors besides the ones studied here, such as special-school teachers and parents of disabled children, who would have to be included in future research on this issue.

Another open question is why a political trend reversal occurred in both cases in the mid-1970s. All the experts interviewed agreed that such a trend reversal took place. Some of the reform protagonists who were interviewed had realized with the benefit of hindsight that the window of opportunity had been closed from the mid-1970s onward. Other experts noticed at the time that the tide had turned and that eagerness for reform was waning. Most likely, economic development played a role in this trend reversal, but it is unclear how exactly it may have done so. Future research should analyze the relationship between economic development and cycles of educational expansion and reform in more detail, from a long-term, comparative perspective (see e.g. Dartenne, 2016; Nath, 2001; Titze, 2004, for a starting point). This could be connected to an analysis of the long-term relationship between demographic development and educational expansion. The increasing student numbers of the 1960s and 1970s and the economic need for more qualified labor certainly put pressure on political actors to reform the school system. Economic development was often referred to by reform protagonists. Demography also played a role in the debates. Reform protagonists pointed out that comprehensive schooling would secure schools in rural areas, once student numbers started to decline again. However, this argument was not very effective during the 1970s because demographic pressure on rural schools first made itself felt in the 1980s. A more detailed analysis of these questions would be valuable but should not be based on functionalist assumptions linking the economy, demography, and the education system in a clear-cut way. As Green (2013, 35ff) and Ringer (1979, 1ff) convincingly argue, there is no simple functionalist relationship between economic development and the institutional development of the school system. Among other things, the variation between national education systems is too big to warrant a purely functionalist explanation.

#### THE POLITICS OF SCHOOLING TODAY: IS THE ROKKANIAN PERSPECTIVE STILL RELEVANT?

Finally, the timeframe of this study could and should be expanded with the aim of analyzing how cleavage structures have continued to influence the development of schooling since the 1980s. In this final section, a short analytical sketch serves to demonstrate that coalition-making is still

constrained by the cleavage structure in the two cases of this study. Numerous collective actors, such as parties, teachers' and parents' organizations, and unions, continue to be involved in the struggle over the school system. Changes have taken place with regard to the political playing fields and the salience of political issues. However, the hegemonic alliances that developed during the postwar reform period for the most part bore up.

In NRW, prolonging comprehensive schooling has not been attempted since the 1970s. It is common for politicians and activists to point to the conflicts of the 1970s as an explanation for why governments have not dared suggesting comprehensive school reforms ever again. This does not imply that there was a complete standstill. Today, integrated comprehensive schools (*Gesamtschulen*) continue to play an important role in the North Rhine–Westphalian school system. The proportion of integrated comprehensive schools has grown significantly in the past years. In 2008–9, this school type had 232 814 students, with 593 080 students attending *Gymnasien*. In the school year 2020–1, 335 805 students in NRW attended an integrated comprehensive school, with 501 395 students attending *Gymnasien*, 203 010 attending *Realschulen* and only 52 410 attending *Hauptschulen*. The *Hauptschule* is in the process of disappearing, as student numbers at this school type are declining quickly. A new school type was introduced in 2011 that combines at least two school types from grades five to ten. This school type is called *Sekundarschule* (secondary school) and had 58 620 students in 2020–1 (IT.NRW, 2018, 2021). In the same school year, around 38 percent of *Hauptschule* students, 14 percent of comprehensive schools' students, and 6 percent of *Gymnasium* students were not of German nationality, indicating that the background of students at different school types differs massively (IT.NRW, 2021, own calculation).

The slow death of the *Hauptschule* might eventually force politicians in NRW to reform the system more decisively, for example by reducing the high number of parallel school types – as has been done many times before in the region's school history. In other federal states, the *Hauptschule* has already been abolished and a two-tier school system seems to be taking shape (for an overview see Helbig/Nikolai, 2015, 99ff). This is not so much a result of strategic decision-making than of parents' choices. Some leftist school reformers of today see the development toward a two-tier system as a potential step toward comprehensive education.

The class cleavage remains relevant, and activists and social scientists continue to emphasize that class inequality is reproduced in the German

school system. The educational certificates of the lowest secondary schools (the *Hauptschule* as well as the special schools) have become largely worthless on the labor market. As a result, these school types have become schools for the most deprived children of society; those of poor, often immigrant, workers or unemployed people, who lack the educational and financial resources necessary to ensure the educational success of their children (Solga, 2004; Solga/Wagner, 2007). Even though the postwar educational expansion affected all social classes, working-class children's relative disadvantage was not significantly reduced with regard to the *Gymnasium* (Geißler, 2011, 282ff; Schimpl-Neimanns, 2000). The integrated comprehensive schools function as a possible path to the *Abitur* exam for children from more disadvantaged backgrounds, as these schools are less socially selective than the *Gymnasium* (Köller, 2008, 459f). The introduction of bachelor's and master's degrees in teacher training, which took place in NRW in 2009, has entailed new debates about the unequal pay of teachers from different school types. Now that all teachers have the same length of education, this might lead to a reduction in their status and pay differences, which would increase the chances of comprehensive school reforms.

Comprehensive school reforms might also be subject to more favorable conditions today because conflicts over gender, denominational schooling, and anti-communism have lost importance, thus taking up less political space. The consensus in the social scientific literature is that educational inequalities based on gender and denomination have decreased significantly or even disappeared. Gender is still a relevant political issue, and the Catholic Church especially continues to administrate a number of private girls' schools in NRW. The Association of German Catholic Female Teachers still exists. However, coeducation of boys and girls is not seriously questioned. Denominational primary schooling also still exists and continues to be debated in NRW, but these debates are much less emotional than in earlier times. The state-church cleavage thus seems to be less salient. Nevertheless, the Catholic Church is still a relevant actor, if not as powerful as before. One must assume that it continues to shape the political orientation of the Catholic population, in rural areas especially. To what extent this is reflected in opinions about comprehensive schooling would merit more research.

With the GDR, the Soviet Union, and the iron curtain having become history, anti-communism and the communist-socialist cleavage also seem less salient today. After reunification, a hierarchical, multi-tier school system including the *Gymnasium* was reintroduced in East

Germany, so that reformers today can no longer be thwarted with the suggestion to “go over there.” Nevertheless, one must assume that this cleavage continues to exert an influence on German (education) politics. It suffices to look at the relations between the parties to come to this conclusion. The German Left Party (*Die Linke*), founded in 2007, is subject to surveillance by the German secret service. Its relations with the social democrats are characterized by mutual mistrust, making coalitions difficult.

The opposition to comprehensive school reforms voiced by the CDU, the Association of Philologists, and others is still considerable. Many social democrats in NRW – and in Germany as a whole – consider truly comprehensive school reforms “impossible” and have basically accepted parallel schooling. This is illustrated by a compromise made by the minority government of the SPD and the Green Party with the CDU in 2011 to change the school articles of the NRW Constitution so that the *Hauptschule* no longer has to be an obligatory school type in the federal state. A sentence was included in Paragraph 10 of the Constitution according to which the federal state “guarantees a sufficient, varied public school system, which allows for a multi-tiered school system, integrated school types as well as other school types.” The inclusion of the multi-tiered school system in the Constitution will complicate future reform attempts. There seem to be even fewer clear-cut reform supporters in the SPD today than in the postwar reform period. Truly comprehensive schooling – which would include the abolition of the *Gymnasium* – has not been an issue for the party for a long time. The Green Party has been similarly quiet on the issue. Only the Left Party has included a ten-year comprehensive school as an aim in its manifestos but does not advocate this particularly boldly.

Another obstacle for any future reform is that teachers’ organizations in Germany remain highly fragmented. A minimum requirement for primary and lower-secondary schoolteachers to increase their influence would be an alliance between the teachers in the Education and Science Workers’ Union (GEW) and in the Association of Education and Upbringing (VBE). Both organizations support comprehensive school reforms. However, even though the two organizations cooperate in some ways, a more formal alliance or a complete integration seem unrealistic for the time being. Apparently, the state-church cleavage continues to complicate cooperation between these groups of teachers.

In Norway, the comprehensive school structure is taken for granted by most people. Hardly anybody – including conservatives – wishes to

reintroduce parallel schooling on the youth school level.<sup>2</sup> Even though the Norwegian school system is more open socially than the German one, the reproduction of educational inequality continues to be seen as a problem by the Norwegian left. The distributional effects of school reforms of the 1950s to 1970s have long been and continue to be a subject of debate (Hernes, 1973; Hjellbrekke/Korsnes, 2006, 119f; Lindbekk, 2008). In absolute terms, children from lower-class backgrounds significantly increased their participation in upper-secondary schooling. The percentage of Norwegian youths who finished upper-secondary education rose from 35 to 53 percent for the age cohorts born in 1954–5 and 1964–5. For youths with working-class backgrounds, the percentage rose from 26 to 39.7 percent. Lindbekk (2008, 97) concludes that class background continued to have a rather stable relative effect but that the effect of parents' education on their children's educational attainment was reduced by one-fifth as a result of the youth school reform (see, however, Hjellbrekke/Korsnes, 2006, 119f). The effect of class background was reduced slightly by the abolition of ability grouping in the youth school. In the most rural municipalities, the youth school reform increased the average level of education significantly. Women's earlier disadvantages at the upper-secondary level of schooling disappeared (Lindbekk, 2008, 91ff).

Comprehensive schooling was prolonged by another year by the social democratic school reforms of the 1990s, when the school enrolment age was lowered from seven to six. In addition, all youths received the right to three years of upper-secondary education. The ideological justifications of these reforms were similar to those of previous social democratic reforms in the sense that equality remained a major goal (Volckmar, 2008, 2016, 87ff). The center parties have also continued to emphasize the value of comprehensive education for equality.

Since the 2000s, Norwegian educational rhetoric and politics have changed more in the direction of the ideas and practices of New Public Management. There is an ongoing debate whether reforms of curricula oriented toward competencies more than the content of schooling and the related introduction of national tests have weakened the socially integrative function of the comprehensive school (Volckmar, 2016, 111ff). The growth in special schooling arrangements within the comprehensive

<sup>2</sup> The only exception I have come across is the suggestion of the leftist Kjell Horn (2015, 432ff) to divide the youth school up into two school types, one theoretical and the other practical. Horn (2015, 434) emphasizes that such a change is in his opinion conditional on a higher status of blue-collar work in the economic sphere.

schools can also be seen as a threat to comprehensive education. The term *enhetsskole*, which until the 1990s was the usual Norwegian term for the comprehensive school, has been replaced by the term *felleskole* – according to Volckmar (2016, 114), this is an indication that the previous conception of the Norwegian comprehensive school is seen by many as not leaving enough room for students' individuality. Schools in Oslo have been experimenting with permanent ability grouping, which has been supported by the Conservative Party (Wilden/Juven, 2013).<sup>3</sup> The political right has thus made some progress in Norwegian education politics. On the other hand, on the question of grading, the former conservative government, which was in place until 2021, decided after some debate not to reintroduce grades in the last years of the children's school because they concluded that this would be too demotivating for students. Abolishing grades in the youth school has not been attempted since the 1970s. With respect to grading, it seems that the hegemonic balance that came about in the postwar reform period has borne up.

Among the Norwegian teachers' organizations, the merger process continued over time so that all groups of teachers are now united in the Union of Education (*Utdanningsforbundet*), Norway's second largest union with over 180 000 members. Dissatisfied university-educated secondary schoolteachers founded a new organization in 1997, which is somewhat boldly called *Norsk Lektorlag*. It is not to be confused with the earlier Association of Norwegian Secondary Schoolteachers, which was named *Norsk Lektorlag* until 1983 and which became a part of today's Union of Education through mergers. With around 8200 members, the new *Norsk Lektorlag* is relatively small in comparison with the Union of Education, but it is growing. Originally, it could be considered a conservative and antagonistic actor to comprehensive schooling; for example, it demanded the option to make use of organizational differentiation and grades also in the children's and youth school (*Norsk Lektorlag*, 2015). The most recent manifesto from the organization is not as clear in this respect but still emphasizes the importance of grading, testing, and exams. The new *Norsk Lektorlag* also demands to only allow students with average grades above a certain level to choose academically oriented upper-secondary education (*Norsk Lektorlag*, 2019).

<sup>3</sup> The author has collected anecdotal evidence from students indicating that more or less informal ability grouping is practiced in some subjects in Norwegian youth schools outside of Oslo as well. This is not in line with national regulations and would merit further research (see also OECD, 2010a, 212, which, however, gives no information about how permanent Norwegian ability grouping is).

Other moot points are whether the growth in private schooling and grade-based upper-secondary school choice undermine comprehensive schooling in the public school. The law on private schools has been reformed several times in the past fifteen years (Volckmar, 2016, 114ff). A reform took place in 2015, with the support of the Conservative Party, the Progress Party, the Liberal Party, and the Christian Democrats. The law remained for the most part as restrictive as previous compromises but made it easier to found new “profile schools” with alternative curricula and a focus on specific subject areas (Volckmar, 2016, 123). In April 2022, the new Labor Party and Center Party government presented a new private school law proposal with the aim of undoing the reform of 2015. The law proposal is currently under debate. The current minister of education from the Labor Party, Tonje Brenna, has stated that “we want to stop privatization and build a stronger public comprehensive school” (Norwegian Ministry of Education, 2022).

With regard to school choice, there is an ongoing debate about whether intake of students to lower- and especially to upper-secondary schools should be based on geographical catchment areas or competition based on grades (NRK, 2018). Upper-secondary schooling is regulated by the Norwegian regions, *fylker*, approximately half of which have introduced school choice based on grade competition. The Conservative Party, the Liberal Party, and the Progress Party support grade-based school choice. The former conservative government attempted to force all regions to introduce grade-based school choice from autumn 2022, but this was reversed in November 2021 by the government of the Labor Party and the Center Party. The left parties and the Christian Democrats are also skeptical of grade-based school choice, as they fear increasing social, ethnic, and geographical inequality.

Overall, the class cleavage continues to become apparent in conflicts over the regulation of the Norwegian school system. To date, it seems that the Labor Party will continue to apply the strategy of cooperating with allies on the left as well as in the center to take steps against the growth in private schooling and liberalization of school choice. On the left, the Red Party (*Rødt*) has established itself as an additional competitor for the Socialist Left Party. While the Red Party is less likely to join coalitions with social democracy, both left parties continue to support comprehensive schooling and anti-privatization measures. Because Norwegian left parties enjoy more legitimacy than the German Left Party, their relations to social democracy continue to be less complicated.

Crosscutting cleavages continue to become apparent and to shape coalition-making in Norwegian politics. In education politics, this is still reflected in debates about decentralization, language issues, Christian education, and, recently, boys' fate in the school system. In these debates, it seems that the left and the center still have more in common with regard to decentralization and language than with regard to Christian education and gender.

In terms of coalition-making, the three Norwegian center parties have chosen different routes. The Center Party is today a firm coalition partner of social democracy. The Christian Democrats decided in 2019 to join the governing coalition of the Conservative Party, the Progress Party, and the Liberal Party. Both the Christian Democrats and the Liberal Party suffer from massive internal conflicts about their coalition strategies, especially regarding cooperation with the Progress Party. It remains to be seen what will become of Norway's political center. My guess is that it will remain a force to be reckoned with. In the German case, the integrative power of the CDU as a cross-interest party based on several cleavages will also have to be taken seriously in the future.

Overall, education politics in both cases continue to be shaped by the entire cleavage structure. The class cleavage continues to be the most salient, leading to debates about educational class inequality. However, cooperation between social groups and political parties is still often hampered by disagreements over other issues. Whoever wants to understand cross-interest coalitions and political outcomes in education politics should thus study how cleavage structures come to be expressed in political coalition-making.