THE ROLE OF PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEES IN COALITION GOVERNMENTS
Keeping Tabs on Coalition Partners in the German Bundestag

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The coexistence of strong parties and strong committees in the U.S. Congress has been interpreted in a principal-agent framework with committees regarded as agents of the congressional parties. In a parliamentary system having coalition governments, the coexistence of strong parties and strong committees has a comparable rationale. With data during a 40-year period, the authors show that the coalition parties in the German parliament distribute committee chair positions so that coalition parties can monitor each other's cabinet ministers. Such monitoring is an alternative at the legislative level to intracoalition monitoring through the use of junior ministers at the executive level and is a means of enforcing coalition treaties.

Keywords: *coalition government; parliamentary committees; German Bundestag*

The inverse relationship between committee and party power in legislatures was long regarded as axiomatic in legislative research, widely echoed in the literature (Olson, 1994). Interpreting the U.S. congressional committee system as an institutional arrangement to facilitate gains from exchange among members across time, Weingast and Marshall (1988) regarded "strong parties and strong committees" as "substitutes" and found that "when parties were more powerful (e.g., at the turn of the century), committees, though important, did not have such clear-cut rights as in modern times" (pp. 158-159). Casting an eye on the British parliament, they suggested that "parties potentially provide an alternative means for enforcing agreements" (Weingast & Marshall, 1988, pp. 158-159). With a broader

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comparative perspective, based on a review of the powers of parties and committees in eight national legislatures, Lees and Shaw (1979) concluded that "where the committees are strongest . . . one finds the lowest level of party control over committees" (p. 394). The importance of both legislative committees and party groups (*Fraktionen*) in the German Bundestag seemed to be a puzzling anomaly. Our research is an attempt to explain that puzzle.

We take our cue from the reconceptualization of the relationship between parties and committees in the U.S. Congress that occurred in the 1990s. To reconcile the growing evidence that parties as well as legislative committees influence the decisions of Congress, Kiewiet and McCubbins (1991) conceptualized their relationship in a principal-agent framework. Whether parties are more powerful than committees is the wrong question, they wrote. Focusing on the appropriations process in Congress, they showed that "congressional parties have successfully managed the delegation of policy-making authority to their members serving on committees" (Kiewiet & McCubbins, 1991, p. 233). Cox and McCubbins (1993) carried the analysis one step further, asserting that, in fact, congressional committees were the agents of the majority party.

Recent research on the role of committees and parties in parliamentary systems having coalition governments suggest that in some countries, there may be similar relationships. Michael F. Thies (2001) investigated how coalition parties "keep tabs" on each other's ministers at the executive level by the appointment of junior ministers from different parties than the corresponding ministers. But he found that although this held true in Italy, Japan, and the Netherlands, it did not hold true in Germany (Thies, 2001, p. 581). He speculated that the unusually strong committees in the German Bundestag might be substituting for the role of junior ministers in keeping tabs on coalition partners (Thies, 2001, p. 588). Taking a different approach to understanding the role of parliamentary committees, Martin and Vanberg (2004) have demonstrated that the legislative committees in the Dutch and German parliaments scrutinize government bills more extensively the greater the ideological divergence between coalition partners on the issues addressed by the bill.

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Both lines of research suggest that committees may be agents of the parties in some parliamentary systems as they are in the U.S. presidential system.

Our research focuses on the pattern of committee chair appointments in the Germany Bundestag to determine whether it suggests the use of committees to monitor the ministries held by coalition partners. Committee chairmanships in that parliament are distributed among parties in proportion to their strength in the chamber. But the assignment of particular chairmanships is the result of interparty negotiation governed by a set of informal norms. We investigated the pattern of these appointments during a period of nearly 40 years, from 1961 to 1998, to see whether they suggest the use of legislative chairmanships to police the coalition bargain among the governing parties. Our research, together with that of Thies (2001) and Martin and Vanberg (2004), is an effort to explain why legislative committees in parliamentary systems can be influential side-by-side with powerful parliamentary parties and to offer an explanation that is analogous to that offered by Cox and McCubbins (1993) to explain the relationship of strong parties and strong committees in the U.S. Congress.

THEORY AND HYPOTHESES

Since 1961, the governing majority in Germany has nearly always been composed of a coalition of two parties—one large but lacking a majority by itself and one much smaller but necessary to attain the majority, which the Basic Law requires for the election of the Chancellor by the Bundestag (article 63).[1] Each of the parliamentary parties that support this coalition faces the special problem of delegating governmental authority not only to ministries controlled by its own members, but also to ones headed by its coalition partner. The problem of agency loss resulting from delegation within governing coalitions has been analyzed from several different perspectives. Laver and Shepsle (1996) explain that the coalition formation process itself considerably resolves the problem. They suggest that each of the governing parties assert a property right to a particular ministerial portfolio and, in return, allow ministers the autonomy to carry out the preferences of their party without further control. Müller and Strøm (2000) find the solution to the problem of delegation and agency loss in the use of detailed coalition agreements that coalition parties enter to bind them in the exercise of policy making. Thies (2001), as we have noted, regards the assignment of junior ministers to the cabinet ministers of coalition partners as a checking mechanism designed to limit agency losses. But we wondered whether the control that coalition parties seek over each other's actions might not also rely on the party and committee

organization of parliament. Might not the disciplined, cohesive parliamentary parties that exist in Germany find it in their interest to maintain relatively powerful legislative committees to supplement other forms of intracoalition monitoring? Unless each of the governing parties has expost means to prevent opportunistic behavior by its coalition partner, how can it be sure that a coalition agreement will be upheld? It is our theory that parliamentary committees are indeed the instruments for the intracoalition monitoring that this situation requires. Aware that committee chairmanships are influential positions in Germany, as we will detail below, we have developed hypotheses about what the distribution of these chairmanships among the parties would look like if the parties regarded the committees as intracoalition monitoring agencies. In addition to the conventional view of the role of parliamentary committees in giving the opposition influence on policy (Powell, 2000), our theory offers new insights into the role of parliamentary committees in intracoalition politics (see also Martin & Vanberg, 2004).

We expect that each of the parties in parliament that compose the governing coalition has an incentive to chair the committees that oversee the ministries held by its coalition partner. Furthermore, in view of the relative weakness of the smaller coalition partner, which has relatively few committee chairs to assign under the German proportional distribution system, we expect that the chairs of its internal party committees, called "working groups" (*Arbeitskreise*), have a special incentive to monitor the parliamentary committees chaired by their coalition partner. These expectations led us to formulate three hypotheses: one, looking at the distribution of committee chairs among all the parties in the Bundestag; the second, looking at what confronts cabinet members as they face the chairs of Bundestag committees; and the third, looking at the assignment of the chairs of the working groups of the smaller coalition partner to the parliamentary committees of the Bundestag.

Although the chairs of Bundestag committees are distributed among all parties in the chamber, government and opposition alike, in proportion to their strength, we hypothesize the following:

> *Hypothesis 1:* The chairs of Bundestag committees are disproportionately held by members belonging to the coalition partner or the "sister party"[2] of the party holding the relevant ministry.

The number of Bundestag committees exceeds the number of cabinet ministries. Taking that into account but otherwise wanting to mirror the first hypothesis from the ministerial point of view, we hypothesize the following:

Hypothesis 2: Ministers are disproportionately confronted by chairs of Bundestag committees belonging to their coalition partner or their "sister party."

In recent years, the two large parties have organized internal party committees or working groups (Arbeitskreise) that are counterparts of each of the committees of the Bundestag, but the small parties have an insufficient number of members to accomplish such extensive committee oversight by their working groups. We conjecture that they rely on other means to monitor the work of their coalition partner in committees. We expect that they make sure that the chairs of their working groups belong to those committees of the Bundestag that are chaired by their coalition partner. We therefore hypothesize the following:

Hypothesis 3: Chairs of the working groups of the smaller coalition party belong disproportionately to those Bundestag committees that are chaired by a coalition partner.

As we have noted, the literature describes two other mechanisms by which coalition partners monitor each other: junior ministers and coalition agreements. We expect that parliamentary parties use committee chairs and junior ministers as alternative monitoring mechanisms.

Hypothesis 4: The frequency of appointing committee chairs to shadow ministries held by a party's coalition partner is inversely related to appointing junior ministers to ministries held by its coalition partner.

However, we expect that the existence of coalition agreements encourage the use of other monitoring mechanisms. Because 90% of the content of coalition agreements concerns matters of policy (Müller & Strøm, 2000, p. 577), parties to such agreements have an incentive to oversee their implementation. We therefore expect that when there are coalition agreements, parties use supplementary monitoring mechanisms. We therefore hypothesize the following:

Hypothesis 5: The frequency of appointing committee chairs to shadow ministries held by a party's coalition partner is directly related to the adoption of coalition agreements.

In the next section of our article, we describe the organization of parties and committees in the German parliament. In the fourth section, we describe our data and the measures we employed. In the fifth section, we present evidence to test the first three of our hypotheses by an analysis of the distribution

of the chairmanships of parliamentary committees among the parties. In the sixth section, we test our fourth and fifth hypotheses about the relationship between coalition monitoring through the use of committee chair positions and alternative forms of monitoring. The final section offers our conclusions.

PARTIES AND COMMITTEES IN THE BUNDESTAG

Parties and committees have both been strong in the German parliament since its early days. In the German Empire, party groups were, from the outset, the principal decision-making units in parliament. When a growing legislative workload led to a specialized committee system late in the 19th century, the party groups negotiated the composition of the committees and the appointment of their chairs by a proportional representation formula (Dechamps, 1954, pp. 55-61, 131-136). The parliament in which this strong party and committee system developed was separate from the executive branch and had no control over the appointment of the chancellor or the composition of the cabinet. It was a system of government closer to the separation-of-powers system of the United States than to the British parliamentary system. Parliament was more of a working, lawmaking body than a deliberative chamber, Westminster style (Schönberger, 2001). When a genuine parliamentary system developed in Germany after 1949, the strong committee system survived, although the legislative initiative was now strongly in the hands of a stable, governing coalition supported by its followers in the Bundestag. In this setting the strength of committees acquired a new justification, and we conjecture that party control over the appointment of committee chairs gained a new rationale.

In the period we investigated, from the year that the postwar party system became stable in 1961 until the election of 1998, which brought the Social Democratic-Green coalition to office, the German Bundestag had between 17 and 28 standing committees. The committee structure largely parallels the jurisdiction of the ministries in the cabinet. Most committees have counterpart ministries, although a few housekeeping committees, such as the committee in charge of the rules of procedure and that concerned with citizen petitions, have no executive counterparts. In effect, the committees of the Bundestag at any given moment mirror the structure of the cabinet, and this structure changes from time to time at the discretion of the Chancellor. Because the number of cabinet ministries and their jurisdictions are not determined until a particular cabinet has been formed, the parliamentary committees cannot be organized until a coalition agreement on the cabinet has been achieved (Zeh, 1989, p. 1091). Although every party, whether on the

governing or the opposition side, obtains committee chairmanships in direct proportion to its strength in the Bundestag, the particular assignment of chairs to particular committees is negotiated among the parliamentary parties through the agency of their whips (*Parlamentarische Geschäftsführer*). Failing agreement, the parties claim chairmanships in a rank order determined by their proportional strength. The parties endeavor to avoid that fallback procedure, because it precludes negotiation among them, but its existence sets the parameters for interparty negotiation. Resort to it has occurred only three times—in 1961, 1994, and 1998.

The sequence of forming a government after an election or after a vote of no confidence is therefore as follows: First, the coalition parties negotiate the composition of the cabinet, the jurisdiction of the ministries, and the identity of the ministers. Second, sporadically in the early years and consistently since 1980, the parties sign a coalition agreement, increasingly detailed, nowadays containing both the assignment of cabinet portfolios and a series of policy agreements, as well as procedures for settling future policy differences (Saalfeld, 2000). Third, the organization of the Bundestag takes place, shortly after the formation of the Government (Schindler, 1999, pp. 1141-42). The assignment of committee chairs—part of the organization of the Bundestag—therefore occurs only after the negotiations over the formation of the cabinet have been completed and in full knowledge of the identity of the cabinet ministers and their party affiliation. An attempt to include committee chair assignments in the agreement on the formation of the cabinet failed in 1961 when the leading opposition party announced that the agreement on the formation of the cabinet among the majority parties could not bind the Bundestag's procedures for allocating committee chairs.[3] Cabinets may be reshuffled between parliamentary elections, usually without a change in their party composition. Ordinarily, this does not produce a change in committee chairmanships, but in 1982, in the single instance in postwar German history when a vote of no confidence led to the replacement of one coalition by another without a general election, 6 out of 20 committee chair positions changed hands. This event clearly illustrates the relationship between the distribution of committee chair positions and the distribution of ministries among the parties that we will explore in detail below. Chair positions may change hands from one term of parliament to another, and it is from this pattern of change that we infer the existence of monitoring relationships between committees and ministries. A limited set of party property rights to particular chair positions exists, but it is not sacrosanct.[4]

The influence of committee chairs can best be described by the role of committees in the legislative process. That role has been shaped by two developments that began in the 1960s: (a) the adoption of party positions

prior to the committee stage by the parties' working groups and (b) the establishment of committee hearings as part of the legislative and oversight functions of parliament. That the parties have adopted their positions in advance of committee deliberations means that the committee chair is a moderator among the parties, responsible for the effective conduct of interparty negotiations, rather than a policy maker in his or her own right. The rapid expansion of the committee hearings procedure after the appointment of the "Great Coalition" in 1966 and still further after the entry of the Greens into the Bundestag in 1983 means that the committee chair is in a strategic position to use this procedure to control the executive.[5] Hearings are well organized, primarily by the staffs of committees that committee chairs control.

The committee phase of the legislative process nearly always results in the revision of the government's bills, and the hearings procedure gives committees effective oversight powers. Though committees cannot originate bills, they can take up subjects within their jurisdiction at their own discretion. This enables them to maintain continuous oversight over their corresponding ministry (Ismayr, 1992, p. 197). Thus they play a very substantial oversight and investigatory role (Loewenberg, 2002). Although committees cannot pigeonhole bills, they do substantially influence the course of legislative deliberations. How chairs conduct these deliberations may both advance and retard government legislation and ultimately cause some of it to fail especially near the end of parliamentary terms. As they preside over the sessions of the committee, the chairs steer their work hour by hour. Furthermore, they speak for the committee in the chamber (Ismayr, 2001, pp. 181-184). A committee chair position is sought after; it confers prestige within the chamber, and it can be a stepping stone to a ministerial position. The influence of a chair on legislation can exceed that of a cabinet minister, an authoritative commentary asserts (Dach, 1989, p. 1109), but this is probably rare. A recent study concludes that though the committee chair is not a policy maker but an arbiter, in the last analysis it is the committee chair who makes control of the executive branch possible (v. Oertzen, 2004, p. 20).

Between 1961 and 1998 the Bundestag had between three and five parliamentary parties. Each of the parties has considerable autonomy; even the governing parties in parliament have substantial independence from the cabinet ministers who have been selected from their ranks and whom, in general, they sustain in office. As we have noted, each parliamentary party has an ever more extensive set of internal committees or working groups as a product of ever-increasing intraparty specialization (Schüttemeyer, 1998). The Christian Democratic Union/Christian Social Union (CDU/CSU) is a single parliamentary party, but, as we will explain below, it is composed of two distinct parties outside parliament. The CSU has six specialized working groups of

its own. In our first two hypotheses and in the following analysis, we have referred to the CDU and the CSU as separate sister parties.

DATA AND MEASURES

To test our hypotheses, we identified the party affiliation for each of the ministers, junior ministers, and chairs of the Bundestag committees from 1961 to 1998.[6] We also identified the Bundestag committee assignment of chairs of the working groups of the Free Democratic Party (FDP), the small but indispensable coalition partner throughout this period with the exception of just 3 years.

From 1961 to 1998, the number of ministers in each cabinet ranged from 13 to 18, whereas the number of committees ranged from 17 to 28. The proportional share of committee chairs held by the smaller coalition partner left it with between four and six such positions. Although the larger party could assign committee chairs to shadow all of the ministers of their coalition partners, the smaller one could not. Likewise, although the relatively small number of ministries held by the smaller coalition partner could easily be checked by the available committee chairs held by members of the larger governing party, the larger party's ministers could not all be shadowed. To test the first two hypotheses, we created two indices, following Thies (2001, p. 589). The first measure, which indicates this monitoring relationship from the parliamentary point of view, we call *Watchdog Chairs*. It measures the percentage of each party's available committee chairs assigned to head committees that are parallel to ministries held by its coalition partner. The second, which indicates this monitoring relationship from the ministerial point of view, we call *Ministers Checked*. It measures the percentage of each governing party's ministers faced by a chair of the parallel Bundestag committee belonging to its coalition partner or sister party. Each index takes account of the limits of the ministries and committee chairs each party holds. It is based on either the number of ministries a party holds or the number of chair positions its partner holds and is calculated as the share of the lesser of these two bases.[7] We count each watchdog or checking relationship as one instance. We aggregate the total frequency of the occurrence for each cabinet and calculate it as a percentage of the available committee chairs and/or ministries for each party in each cabinet.[8] If, for example, the FDP has only two committee chair positions and uses them both to check its coalition partner, while its coalition partner occupies eight ministries, we count the FDP as using 100% of its monitoring possibilities.

To test the third hypothesis, we created a measure of the proportion of the FDP's working group chairs assigned to be members of Bundestag committees chaired by its coalition partner. We have called this measure *Fraktion Watchdog*.

EVIDENCE FOR INFERRING PARLIAMENTARY MONITORING

Figure 1 maps the distribution of Watchdog Chairs and Ministers Checked across all the governing coalitions in office in Germany between 1961 and 1998. The picture that emerges shows that the large CDU and the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD) used watchdog chairs only about half as often as they could have, whereas the smaller CSU and FDP used them nearly all of the possible time. In the mirror image, the CDU and the SPD ministers were checked as far as it was possible by committee chairs of their smaller coalition partners, whereas the ministries held by these partners were not checked nearly so extensively. These initial findings help to explain Thies' (2001) observation that the FDP made strikingly little use of junior ministers to check the ministries held by their coalition partners. Apparently, the FDP chose to do its monitoring by the use of committee chairs rather than by junior ministers, as Thies had conjectured (Thies, 2001, p. 590).

To determine whether the observed distribution of Watchdog Chairs and Ministers Checked supports the hypotheses we advanced, we needed to test whether the distribution of chairs and the confrontation of ministers appeared to be disproportionately influenced by monitoring considerations. We established as points of comparison two distributions that would appear to take no account of keeping tabs on coalition partners. The first is the distribution that would occur if each party allocated its chairs among ministries in proportion to the number of chairs and ministries it held without regard to whether a particular ministry was held by its own party or by the coalition partner. If, for example, the CDU held six ministries, the CSU held two, and the FDP held two, proportionate assignment would exist if each party assigned 60% of its share of committee chairs to monitor CDU ministries and 20% to monitor the ministries headed by the other two parties. We have called this "Baseline 1." The second is the distribution that would occur if each party allocated its chairs equally between the ministries it held and those held by its coalition partner. We have called this "Baseline 2." Having established these two distributions as points of comparison, we ran *t* tests to determine whether the observed distribution differed significantly from either the proportionate or

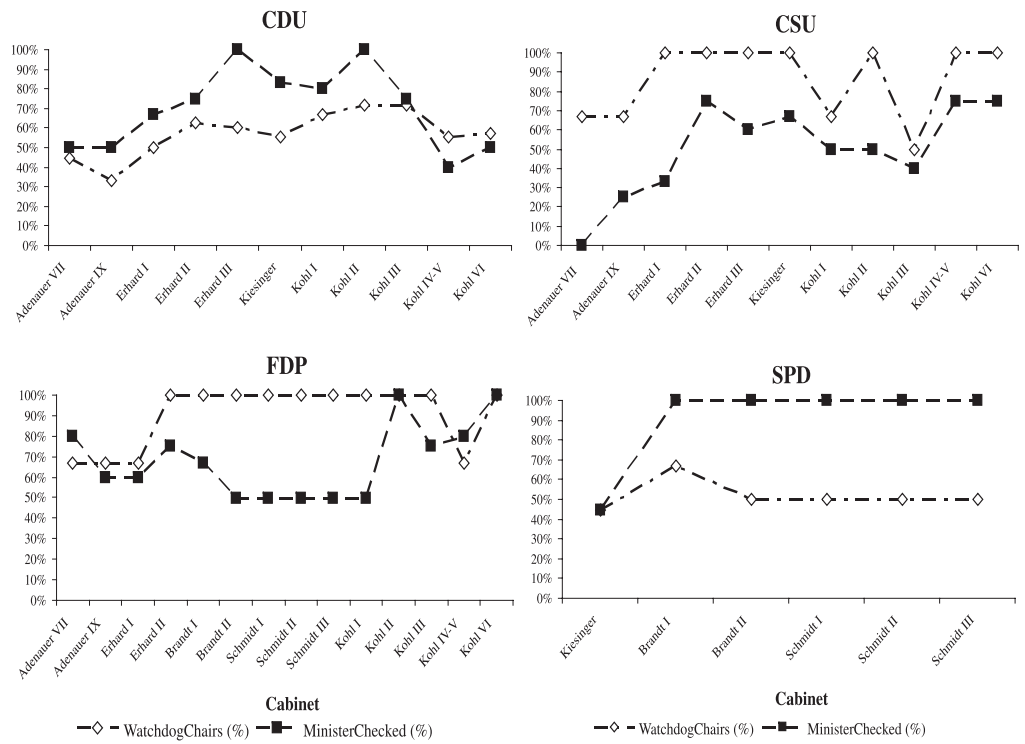

Figure 1. **Proportion of committee chairs shadowing coalition partner ministers.**
Note: CDU = Christian Democratic Union; CSU = Christian Social Union; FDP = Free Democratic Party; SPD = Social Democratic Party of Germany.

Table 1
*Significance of Observed Distribution of Committee Chair Assignments (*t *Tests)*

	Ha: mean(Observed = Baseline) > 0			
	CDU/CSU as one party		CDU/CSU as separate parties	
Variable	Baseline 1	Baseline 2	Baseline 1	Baseline 2
Watchdog Chairs	$t = 6.0$***	$t = 3.499$***	$t = 3.898$***	$t = 5.868$***
Minister Checked	$t = 2.809$**	$t = 4.966$***	$t = 1.954$*	$t = 3.177$**
N	30	30	42	42

*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$.
Note: CDU = Christian Democratic Union; CSU = Christian Social Union. Baseline 1 is proportional distribution. Baseline 2 is equal distribution.

the equal distribution of chair positions (see Table 1). The results support our first two hypotheses, regardless of whether we regarded the CDU/CSU as a single party or as separate parties.

When we examine the relationships among particular parties, we find that the CDU assigned its committee chairs disproportionately to shadow FDP ministers, as we expected. For instance, during the Kohl VI cabinet, the CDU assigned three of its committee chairs to head committees paralleling FDP ministers while assigning only one to committees parallel to ministries headed by CSU ministers. However, contrary to this pattern, the CSU rarely used its committee chairs to monitor FDP ministers, using its opportunities instead to shadow its sister party, the CDU. And FDP committee chairs rarely paralleled CSU-held ministries. This is consistent with Thies's (2001) finding that the CSU used its junior ministers to monitor CDU rather than FDP ministers and that CSU ministers were monitored by CDU rather than FDP junior ministers (p. 592). Thus although the CDU tended to use committee chairs to monitor the FDP rather than the CSU, it used its junior ministers to monitor the CSU rather than the FDP in the cabinet. Within the cabinet, the sister parties, CDU and CSU, were more intent on monitoring each other than on monitoring the other party in the coalition—the FDP.[9] In part, these patterns suggest the importance of regionalism and policy differences within the CDU/CSU parliamentary party. The CSU contests elections only in Bavaria where the CDU is not on the ballot and therefore represents Bavaria's distinctive interests in the CDU/CSU alliance. It appears that the conservative CSU pays more attention to monitoring the CDU, its dominant partner in the alliance—a partner standing at the policy median nationally—rather than the small, liberal FDP, which is less of a threat to its policy interests. The FDP, on the other hand, is more concerned to monitor its larger coalition partner, the

(text continues on p. 1119)

Table 2
Shadowing of Coalition Partner Ministers, by Cabinet and Party

		CDU					
		Committee Chairs			Ministers		
Cabinet	Coalition	Shadowing FDP Ministers	Shadowing CSU Ministers	Shadowing SPD Ministers	Shadowed by FDP Chairs	Shadowed by CSU Chairs	Shadowed by SPD Chairs
Adenauer VII	CDU/CSU-FDP	4	0		2	1	
Adenauer IX	CDU/CSU-FDP	3	0		2	1	
Erhard I	CDU/CSU-FDP	3	1		2	2	
Erhard II	CDU/CSU-FDP	3	2		1	2	
Erhard III	CDU/CSU		3		0	2	
Kiesinger	CDU/CSU-SPD		2	3	0	2	3
Kohl I	CDU/CSU-FDP	2	2		2	2	
Kohl II	CDU/CSU-FDP	3	2		1	3	
Kohl III	CDU/CSU-FDP	3	2		2	1	
Kohl IV to Kohl V	CDU/CSU-FDP	4	1		0	2	
Kohl VI	CDU/CSU-FDP	3	1		0	2	

		CSU					
		Committee Chairs			Ministers		
Cabinet	Coalition	Shadowing FDP Ministers	Shadowing CDU Ministers	Shadowing SPD Ministers	Shadowed by FDP Chairs	Shadowed by CDU Chairs	Shadowed by SPD Chairs
Adenauer VII	CDU/CSU-FDP	0	2		0	0	
Adenauer IX	CDU/CSU-FDP	0	2		0	1	
Erhard I	CDU/CSU-FDP	0	3		0	1	

Erhard II	CDU/CSU-FDP	0	2		1	2	
Erhard III	CDU/CSU		2			3	
Kiesinger	CDU/CSU-SPD		2	0		2	0
Kohl I	CDU/CSU-FDP	0	2		0	2	
Kohl II	CDU/CSU-FDP	0	3		0	2	
Kohl III	CDU/CSU-FDP	0	1		0	2	
Kohl IV to Kohl V	CDU/CSU-FDP	0	2		2	1	
Kohl VI	CDU/CSU-FDP	0	2		2	1	

		FDP					
		Committee Chairs			Ministers		
Cabinet	Coalition	Shadowing CDU Ministers	Shadowing CSU Ministers	Shadowing SPD Ministers	Shadowed by CDU Chairs	Shadowed by CSU Chairs	Shadowed by SPD Chairs
Adenauer VII	CDU/CSU-FDP	2	0		4	0	
Adenauer IX	CDU/CSU-FDP	2	0		3	0	
Erhard I	CDU/CSU-FDP	2	0		3	0	
Erhard II	CDU/CSU-FDP	1	1		3	0	
Brandt I	SPD-FDP			1			2
Brandt II	SDP-FDP			1			2
Schmidt I	SDP-FDP			1			2
Schmidt II	SPD-FDP			1			2
Schmidt III	SPD-FDP			2			2
Kohl I	CDU/CSU-FDP	2	0		2	0	
Kohl II	CDU/CSU-FDP	1	0		3	0	
Kohl III	CDU/CSU-FDP	2	0		3	0	
Kohl IV to Kohl V	CDU/CSU-FDP	0	2		4	0	
Kohl VI	CDU/CSU-FDP	0	2		3	0	

(conttinued)

Table 2: (continued)

		SPD					
		Committee Chairs			Ministers		
Cabinet	Coalition	Shadowing CDU Ministers	Shadowing CSU Ministers	Shadowing FDP Ministers	Shadowed by CDU Chairs	Shadowed by CSU Chairs	Shadowed by FDP Chairs
Kiesinger	CDU/CSU-SPD	4	0		4	0	
Brandt I	SPD-FDP			2			1
Brandt II	SDP-FDP			2			1
Schmidt I	SDP-FDP			2			1
Schmidt II	SPD-FDP			2			1
Schmidt III	SPD-FDP			2			2

Note: CDU = Christian Democratic Union; CSU = Christian Social Union; FDP = Federal Democratic Party; SPD = Social Democratic Party of Germany. Blank spaces indicate that the party was not part of the coalition.

CDU, with which it is nationally in electoral competition, than the CSU, with which it competes only in Bavaria, and weakly at that. The monitoring pattern that we have discovered therefore reflects the regional divisions within the CDU/CSU, the size asymmetry among the coalition partners, their patterns of electoral competition, and the ideological differences among them.[10] (See Table 2.)

Examining the distributional pattern of individual parties makes clear the constraints that each party's claim on chair positions places on the possible claims of other parties. In the example cited above, that the CSU used its committee chair positions to shadow CDU ministers precluded using them to parallel FDP-held ministries and precluded other parties from shadowing those CDU ministers. But it also left its own ministers open to being confronted by chairs of the other parties. In that sense, cross-party shadowing by one party increases cross-party shadowing by others. Without data on the negotiations among the parties that led to the reconciliation of conflicting claims, we must be cautious about the inferences we draw about the motives of the parties from our data on the assignment of chair positions. We do know, however, that the larger coalition partner has a dominant influence in the process of negotiating chair positions. We can therefore be relatively confident about the inferences we draw from its pattern of committee chair positions. If we recognize that its decisions substantially constrain the decisions of the smaller coalition partner, evidence that the smaller party assigned its members to chair committees parallel to ministries held by its coalition partner would also strengthen our confidence in the inferences we draw about its motives.

Thus far, we have presented evidence on how parties manage delegation between parliament and cabinet by using committee chairmanships. But there are other links in the chain of delegation in Germany between the parliamentary parties—seen as principals—and their agents, the members of the committees of the Bundestag, and the members of the cabinet (Müller, 2000; Saalfeld, 2000; Strøm, 2000). As we have noted earlier, each of the parties in the German Bundestag has developed an extended set of working groups that constitute specialized committees of the party group. Our third hypothesis tests whether the working group system is used to manage the delegation problem between coalition partners. Because the two large parties—the CDU/CSU and SPD—gradually developed working groups that completely parallel the committees of the Bundestag, their group structure enables them to monitor all the committees of the House. But the smaller parties have only four to six working groups and have to set monitoring priorities. We therefore examined how the FDP assigned the chairs of its working groups to membership on Bundestag committees. We found clear evidence that the party

Table 3
Committee Assignment of FDP Working Group Chairs, by Election Period

			Working Group Chairs				
Election Period	Coalition	Number of Working Groups	Shadowing Coalition Partner (Total)	Fraktion Watchdog (%)	Shadowing CDU Chairs	Shadowing CSU Chairs	Shadowing SPD Chairs
4 (1961 to 1965)	CDU/CSU-FDP	5	5	100.0	4	1	
5 (1965 to 1969)	CDU/CSU-FDP	5	5	100.0	5	0	
6 (1969 to 1972)	SPD-FDP	4	2	50.0			2
7 (1972 to 1976)	SPD-FDP	5	2	40.0			2
8 (1976 to 1980)	SPD-FDP	6	3	50.0			3
9 (1980 to 1983)	SPD-FDP	6	5	83.3			5
9 (1980 to 1983)	CDU/CSU-FDP	6	4	66.7	2	2	
10 (1983 to 1987)	CDU/CSU-FDP	5	5	100.0	5	0	
11 (1987 to 1990)	CDU/CSU-FDP	5	3	60.0	3	0	
12 (1990 to 1994)	CDU/CSU-FDP	5	5	100.0	5	0	
13 (1994 to 1998)	CDU/CSU-FDP	5	4	80.0	4	0	
Total		57	43	75.4	28	3	12

assigned its working group chairs to the Bundestag committees chaired by its coalition partners. In three quarters of all instances, FDP working group chairs were members of Bundestag committees that were chaired by a coalition partner. Rarely were these leaders of its working groups assigned to a committee of the House that it chaired itself or that was chaired by parties that did not belong to the coalition. In particular, the FDP assigned its working group chairs to sit on committees headed by CDU members far more frequently than to sit on committees chaired by the CSU or the SPD (see Table 3).

MONITORING ALTERNATIVES: PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEE CHAIRS, JUNIOR MINISTERS, AND COALITION TREATIES

In addition to the use of parliamentary committee chair positions that we have examined, there are two other mechanisms by which coalition parties can monitor each other: the use of junior ministers, as studied by Thies (2001) and the use of coalition treaties as analyzed by Müller and Strøm (2000). Thies had suggested that parliamentary committees and junior ministers might be alternative monitoring mechanisms. Is there evidence that this is true? Do coalition treaties constitute another substitute? We decided to investigate the extent to which these monitoring mechanisms exists side by side in Germany and the extent to which they constitute alternatives that substitute for each other. The position of junior minister appeared in Germany for the first time in the Kiesinger cabinet in 1966. We therefore limited our investigation to the time period 1966 to 1998. The literature suggests that the use of junior ministers for cross-party monitoring has varied across time (Ismayr, 2001, p. 210).

To test our fourth hypothesis, we employed a Poisson maximum likelihood event-count model to investigate the relationship among the use of the three alternative monitoring mechanisms.[11] This is an appropriate statistical model because it takes account of the fact that monitoring occurrences can only take nonnegative integer values (King, 1988, 1989a). A Poisson regression model assumes that the probability of an event occurring is constant within a particular period and independent of other events during the same period (King, 1989b). This is consistent with our assumption that the monitoring behavior of the parties at one time is not dependent on the behavior at some previous time. However, the monitoring behavior of the parties in the same government (cabinet) is not necessarily independent. One party's monitoring might influence its coalition partner to monitor also. If this is the case,

the estimates of the model will be inefficient and the standard errors biased (King, 1989a, 1989b). To check for the potential overdispersion or underdispersion problem, we used available tests of the appropriateness of the Poisson distribution and we used the Huber-White robust standard error with clustering.

Our dependent variable was each party's assignment of committee chairs to shadow ministers of the coalition partner for each government, a variable we called *Watchdog Chairs*. Because we wanted to consider the best possible efforts made by each party, it is the total number of each party's committee chairs assigned to the ministries headed by coalition partners' ministers for each government, divided by the maximum opportunity each party had to use committee chairs to monitor its coalition partners ministers. The model's functional form is the following:

$$\frac{E(Y_i)}{N_i} = \exp(x_i\beta), \tag{1}$$

or equivalently,

$$E(Y_i) = exp(x_i\beta + ln\ N_i\ ,$$

where $E(Y_i)$ equals the number of each party's committee chairs shadowing its coalition partners ministers for each government (cabinet), N_i is the maximum opportunity that each party had to shadow by its appointment of committee chairs, and $x_i\beta$ represents the set of independent variables.[12]

We entered three independent variables into the model: Watchdog Junior Ministers, Coalition Agreement, and Policy Distance. The variable *Watchdog Junior Ministers* measures the best possible efforts made by each party to match its partners ministers by appointing junior ministers to them. This is the number of junior ministers matching its coalition partner's ministers discounted by the maximum opportunity each party had for each government (cabinet).[13] We calculated that maximum opportunity as the lesser of the share of its coalition partners ministerships or its own junior ministers available to shadow its coalition partner's ministers for each government during this 32-year period. Coalition Agreement is a dichotomous variable indicating whether a coalition agreement exists among the governing parties for each government.[14] Policy Distance is a measure of the policy differences between the coalition partners, which we included to detect whether the distance among parties policy positions affected their use of monitoring mecha-

nisms.[15] For our measure of policy distance, we used the policy positions of the coalition parties' on a left-right scale from the data set compiled by the Manifesto Research Group (Budge, Klingemann, Volkens, Bara, & Tanenbaum, 2001).

In Table 4, we report our findings.[16] Our analysis provides evidence that the coalition parties are more likely to assign their committee chairs to shadow their cabinet partners when they are unable to monitor these partners at the cabinet level with junior ministers. The coefficient for *Watchdog Junior Ministers* is negative and significant. This confirms Thies speculation that the use of committee chairs as a monitoring mechanism is an alternative to the use of junior ministers. The finding provides additional support for our basic inference that the parties use their available committee chairmanships at the parliamentary level to keep tabs on their coalition partners. This is also consistent with Martin and Vanberg's (2004) conjecture that parliamentary scrutiny of government legislation at the committee stage is a way by which the coalition parties police the coalition agreement they have reached at the executive level. Our analysis also shows that the existence of a coalition agreement is positively related to the use of committee chairs as a monitoring mechanism. The variable *Coalition Agreement* has a positive sign and is significant. This suggests that the coalition parties put more effort into monitoring their partners, by using committee chairs in the Bundestag, when a coalition agreement exists that they need to enforce. Consistent with Müller and Strøm's (2000, p. 19) claim, this shows that coalition agreements impose constraints not only at the cabinet level but on the parliamentary level as well. The variable *policy distance* was also positively related to the use of committee chairs and the relationship is significant at $p = 0.05$, suggesting that parties are more likely to use committee chairs as a checking mechanism when they are on a different page on policies. Martin and Vanberg (2004) found that the delay that Government bills encounter in the legislative process is directly related to the ideological divergence between coalition partners on the subject of bills. It is plausible to regard the monitoring mechanisms we have examined as the instruments that facilitate legislative scrutiny and that delay the legislative process in the cases of bills that are contentious within the coalition.

CONCLUSION

In the literature on party and committee organization of legislative bodies, the German Bundestag was often regarded as an anomaly in comparative per-

Table 4
The Relationship of Monitoring by Junior Ministers, Existence of Coalition Agreements, Policy Distance Among Partners, and Shadowing by Bundestag Committee Chairs, 1966 to 1998: Poisson Event-Count Model

	Watchdog Chairs (Number of Chairs Shadowing Partners' Ministers)			
	Model 1		Model 2	
Independent Variable	β	IRR	β	IRR
Watchdog Junior Ministers	0.301** (0.102)	0.740** (0.076)	0.273** (0.113)	0.761** (0.086)
Coalition Agreement	0.338** (0.074)	1.401** (0.104)	0.331** (0.079)	1.393** (0.111)
Policy Distance	0.003* (0.001)	1.003* (0.002)		
Constant	0.527** (0.062)		0.477** (0.060)	
N	28		28	
χ^2 (Wald)	30.67**		17.23**	
Log likelihood	39.7479		39.8051	
Goodness-of-fit χ^2 against Poisson	4.192 ($p < .99$)		4.306 ($p < .99$)	

Note: IRR = Incident Rate Ratios. To control for the unequal opportunities each party faces, all specifications include $ln(N_i)$, which is the natural log of the maximum opportunity for each party to monitor partner ministers by using their committee chairs. Entries in parentheses are the Huber-White robust standard errors clustering on parties in the same cabinet.
*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$.

spective. It was well known to have both a strong party and a strong committee organization when most legislatures seemed to exhibit either a strong party organization or strong committees. The textbook Congress was used as an example of a legislature that had a relatively weak party organization but a strong set of committees, whereas the British House of Commons had strong parties but weak committees. The literature on Congress in the last decade developed explanations of the side-by-side existence of strong committees and increasingly strong parties, using the theory of delegation to show that these structures were not substitutes for each other but that strong committees were agents of the majority party. Although the U.S. Congress is a legislature in a presidential system and the German Bundestag exists in a parliamentary system, there are arguably the two most powerful legislatures in the world. Both exhibit strong committees as well as strong parties. The theory of delegation suggests a common explanation of the similarities of their structures.

We have presented evidence that in the German parliamentary system, committee chairs are distributed in a manner that makes it possible for parties to monitor their coalition partners in the executive branch. Our research contributes to the growing body of work offering new explanations of the role of legislative committees in parliamentary systems having coalition governments. We have suggested that parliamentary parties use the position of committee chair as part of the monitoring mechanism that enforces coalition agreements, alternative to such other mechanisms as junior ministers and as a means of enforcing coalition agreements. Together, these mechanisms are attempts to cope with agency loss that arises in the relationship between coalition parties as principals and members of the cabinet as their agents. The factors that determine the choices that are made among alternative means of monitoring are among the important questions that require further research in this growing area of interest in committee-party relations at the legislative level.

NOTES

1. The only exception was the 3-year period of the Great Coalition, 1966 to 1969, in which the two largest parties, the Christian Democratic Union/Christian Social Union (CDU/CSU) and the Social Democratic Party of Germany, governed together. In some respects CDU and CSU can be regarded as separate sister parties, in which case a CDU/CSU FDP coalition counts as a three-party coalition. The consequences for our analysis are discussed in Note 9 below.

2. The Christian Democratic Party and Christian Social Union (CSU) are sister parties in the sense that though they are separate parties outside of parliament, they do not compete with each other because the CSU only exists in Bavaria where the CDU has no organization. They form a

single *Fraktion* in the Bundestag, but the CSU maintains its own state group (*Landesgruppe*) within that Fraktion.

3. That attempt to assign committee chairs over the heads of the parties in parliament so impaired their ability to negotiate these positions with each other that they opted for the first time to use the fallback procedure described above (Schindler, 1999, p. 2095).

4. There is a tradition that a member of the largest opposition party always chairs the appropriations committee. A few other party preferences for chairing particular committees have remained intact during long periods of time: the Committee on Interior Affairs and the Committee on Labor and Social Policy has been consistently headed by a Social Democratic Party of Germany chair and the Economic Committee by a Christian Democratic Party and Christian Social Union (CDU/CSU) or a Free Democratic Party (FDP) chair.

5. Although there had been only 9 days of committee hearings in the Bundestag in the 15 years before 1965, their number averaged 65 in each of the next five terms and grew to an average of 212 in the next five. Two thirds of hearings deal with bills and about three quarters of all important bills are subject to hearings. The remaining third deals with investigations (Loewenberg, 2002).

6. We obtained data for the party affiliation of all the ministers, junior ministers, and chairs of corresponding Bundestag committees from Schindler (1999). Data on the working groups of the Free Democratic Party are from the *Amtliches Handbuch des Deutschen Bundestages* for each election period. We obtained the names of the chairs of committees who belong to the Christian Social Union from Bundestag (1998).

7. In other words, the two measures for each party are

$$Watchdog\ chairs = \frac{CM}{Min\left[CC, PM\right]},\ Ministers\ checked = \frac{CM}{Min\left[PC, OM\right]},$$

where *CM* is the number of party's committee chairs shadowing partner's ministers, *CC* is the number of party's committee chairs, *PM* the is number of partner's ministers, *MC* is the number of party's ministers shadowed by partner's committee chairs, *PC* is the number of partner's committee chairs, *OM* is the number of party's ministers.

8. In calculating the number of opportunities, we include all Bundestag committees. If we limit our analysis to those committees that have parallel ministries, the value of Watchdog Chairs and Ministers Checked increases. Also, if we include the deputy chairs of committee in the analysis, the values increase.

9. We thank an anonymous referee for helpful comments and suggestion on this matter.

10. Puzzles nevertheless remain in this monitoring pattern. Because Christian Democratic Union (CDU) and Christian Social Union (CSU) are allied in a single parliamentary party, the CDU may be able to dominate the CSU at the parliamentary level, leaving it free to use its precious committee chair positions to monitor the Free Democratic Party, although the CSU may feel the need to use both its parliamentary chair positions and junior minister positions to monitor its large partner. The pattern requires further research.

11. As we explained earlier, the assignment of committee chairs by the parliamentary parties take place after the negotiations over the formation of the cabinet have been completed. The appointment of junior ministers and committee chairs occurs sequentially, not simultaneously. We therefore use an event count model rather than the simultaneous-equation model to investigate the relationship by treating the assignment of junior ministers as an exogenous variable.

12. Because the number of opportunities to monitor varies across time periods, this model takes the same form as the event count model with unequal observation intervals (King, 1989a, p. 124). We take account of this by including N_i as a control variable in the form of the natural log in

the actual statistical operation (King, 1989b, p. 777). In other words, although $E(Y_i)/N_i$ is the same measure we used in Figure 1, $E(Y_i)$, which has a nonnegative integer value, is the actual dependent variable in the regression, and N_i enters into the right side of regression in the form of natural log.

13. Data were obtained from Schindler (1999).

14. Our data on the existence of coalition agreements are from Saalfeld (2000).

15. We were not able to distinguish between policy positions of Christian Democratic Union and Christian Social Union.

16. We report the goodness-of-fit χ^2 test against the Poisson model to justify the use of a Poisson distribution over others. χ^2 was not significant and confirms that the Poisson model is appropriate. To double check, we also ran a likelihood ratio test of a negative binomial model against the Poisson model of the same data. χ^2 was only significant at $p < .98$, which confirms that the data do not have overdispersion. Additionally, we checked the possibility of underdispersion by using King's Generalized Event Count model (GEC). The gamma in the GEC model, which indicates the degree of underdispersion existing in the data (King, 1989b, p. 771), was not significant.

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