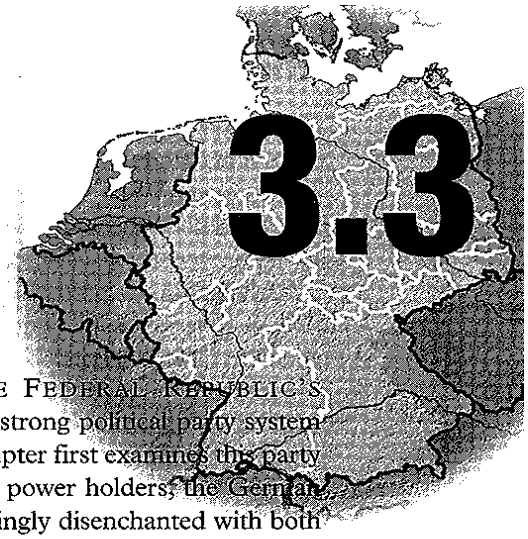
Who Has the Power?



3.3

SINCE ITS FOUNDING, THE STABILITY OF THE FEDERAL REPUBLIC'S major political institutions has been based largely on a strong political party system and an effective structure of interest representation. This chapter first examines this party and interest group structure before turning to the ultimate power holders, the German voters. As described in this chapter, these voters are increasingly disenchanted with both the parties and the interest groups that have functioned so well since 1949, but are now associated with the major economic and social problems facing the country.

Political Parties

One of the most striking changes in postwar Germany has been the emergence of a system of political parties that has effectively organized and controlled the political process. Traditionally, parties were marginal factors in political life. Their home was the legislature, and the executive and the bureaucracy dominated politics; the parties had little influence in these institutions. This pattern was also dominant during most of the Weimar Republic (1919–1933), when the party system was fragmented and stable parliamentary majorities became impossible to form. By the end of the Weimar Republic, the democratic political parties were unable to defend the new democracy against the Nazi onslaught.

This system of weak, unstable, fragmented parties did not reemerge after 1949. Indeed, democratic political parties began to assert themselves early in the occupation period (1945–1949), and they assumed major leadership roles in the parliamentary council that drafted the Basic Law establishing the West German state. Never before in German history have democratic political parties been as important and powerful as they are in the Federal Republic today.

Related to the expanding power of political parties was the decline from 1949 to 1980 in the number of parties seriously contending for power. During the Weimar Republic, up to 100 parties contested elections, and as many as 25 gained parliamentary representation, with no single party able to secure a majority of seats. Coalition governments consisting of several parties were the rule. Because these governments were, for the most part, unstable, they had to expend their resources on surviving instead of planning and implementing policy programs. During the fourteen-year Weimar Republic, there were twenty different governments.

By contrast, the postwar party system has been characterized by a concentration of electoral support in two large parties—the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) and the Social Democratic Party (SPD)—together with the smaller Free Democratic Party (FDP).

Another political party, the Greens, entered parliament in 1983 and then joined the Social Democrats in a national coalition government in 1998. Unification in 1990 also brought the Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS), East Germany's Communist Party, into the parliament.

In 1949 seventeen different parties contested the first national election, and nine succeeded in entering the first parliament. Since 1961, no parliament has had more than five parties, and only four—the Christian Democrats, the Social Democrats, the Free Democrats, and the Greens—have been in government. These parties, especially the two largest, have dominated the selection and control of government personnel and have had a major influence on setting the country's policy agenda.

The postwar democratic parties had several advantages over their Weimar predecessors. First, the parties' competitors in previous regimes—the state bureaucracy, the army, the landed nobility, and even big business—were discredited through their association with the Third Reich. Second, from the outset the parties enjoyed the support of the occupation powers, and they accrued numerous material and political benefits that put them in a strong starting position when the decision was made by the Allies in 1948 to launch a West German state. Third, the parties largely organized and controlled the proceedings of the parliamentary council. Under the constitution, the parties were quasi-state institutions with fundamental responsibility for "shaping the political will of the people." This provision has also been used to justify the extensive public financing of the parties both for their normal day-to-day activities and during election campaigns. Fourth, these same parties, exploiting their strong constitutional and political positions, made certain that their supporters staffed the local, state, and national postwar bureaucracies, at least at the upper levels. In contrast to the Weimar bureaucracy, the civil service in the Federal Republic has not been a center of antirepublican sentiment, but has been firmly integrated into the republican consensus.

This system of strong political parties has, however, had a downside: All too frequently parties have manipulated the laws governing their financing. They have voted themselves generous subsidies for election campaigns and have not been fully accountable for the funds they have received. In recent years, several major investigations have surrounded the payment of large kickbacks to party officials in exchange for favorable political decisions. Meanwhile, such scandals and the poor policy performance of recent governments have taken their toll on public support for the parties. In a 2012 survey, about 80 percent of Germans said they "tended not to trust" the political parties.[1] Membership in political parties has also declined. Since 1990 the SPD has lost 40 percent of its members, and the CDU/Christian Social Union (CSU) 25 percent.

In the 2009 national election, the two largest parties, the Christian Democrats and the Social Democrats, saw their combined share of the vote drop to its lowest level in the history of the Federal Republic. Among younger voters the decline in support for the major parties is even more dramatic. Between 1998 and 2009 the proportion of voters under 35 voting for the CDU and SPD dropped from 69 percent to 45 percent.[2] Opposition parties secured the highest totals in their histories. This party system, so successful in the first six decades of the Federal Republic's history, may be on the verge of a major transformation that will see the further decline of the once-large parties and the emergence of a more fragmented multiparty system.

The Christian Democrats

The CDU, together with its Bavarian partner, the CSU, is a postwar political movement. Like the Gaullists in France, the CDU/CSU developed largely as a vehicle to facilitate the

election and reelection of a single political personality, Konrad Adenauer. From its beginnings in 1945, the CDU was a decentralized broad-based movement that sought to unite Protestants and Catholics in a political organization that would apply the general principles and values of Christianity to politics. (The religious division between Protestants and Catholics was regarded as one factor in the rise of Nazism.) The CDU also stressed that it was open to all social classes and regions. The CDU/CSU became a prototype for the new "catchall" parties that emerged in postwar Europe—that is, parties that sought through a pragmatic, nonideological image to attract as broad an electoral base as possible. The CDU wanted voters, not necessarily believers, and it refused to place itself in one of the traditional liberal, conservative, socialist, or communist ideological categories. To more traditionally minded politicians and some intellectuals, such an approach was nothing more than opportunism. How could a party not have a clearly articulated ideology and program? The CDU/CSU represented a new development in politics.

In the 1950s the CDU, benefiting from the remarkable success of Chancellor Adenauer in foreign policy and the free market policies of his economics minister, Ludwig Erhard, became Germany's dominant party. In the 1957 election, it became the first and thus far only democratic party in German history to secure an absolute majority of the popular vote. The CDU/CSU's program was very general: free market economic policies at home, alliance with the United States and other countries of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), and staunch anticommunism abroad; otherwise, "no experiments" (the party's main slogan in the 1957 election).

This approach worked well throughout the 1950s, but the construction of the Berlin Wall in 1961 and the 1966–1967 economic recession revealed the weaknesses in the CDU/CSU's policies. Anticommunism and a refusal to recognize the legitimacy of postwar boundaries in eastern Europe had not brought Germany any closer to unification. Moreover, the weak US response to the Berlin Wall was for many a sign that the Federal Republic could not rely entirely on the United States to run its foreign policy. On the economic front, the recession, although mild in comparison with past economic declines and with those experienced by other industrial societies, indicated that the postwar boom was over and that the economy was in need of more management and planning. Within the party, it had become obvious that almost two decades of governing had taken their toll on the party leadership. Erhard, who succeeded Adenauer as chancellor, lacked the political skill of the "old man." Also, the Social Democrats had, since the late 1950s, begun to revamp their program, organization, and leadership. The collapse of the Erhard government in 1966 was followed by a "grand coalition" between the CDU and the SPD. By sharing power with its chief adversary, the CDU enabled the SPD to show middle-class voters that it could indeed be entrusted with national political responsibility.

After the 1969 election, the SPD and FDP formed a coalition that ended twenty years of CDU/CSU government. Lacking a programmatic focus, the party went through four different chancellor candidates in search of a winner who could bring it back to power. In opposition, it expended much of its time in internal conflicts revolving around this leadership question.

The Christian Democrats returned to power in 1982, after thirteen years in opposition. Although the party did not receive any direct electoral mandate that year, the state elections and national public opinion polls revealed that the CDU/CSU enjoyed a sizable

advantage over the Social Democrats. This advantage was confirmed in the March 1983 election when the CDU scored a solid victory over the SPD.

But the late 1980s, just prior to the opening of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the collapse of the East German regime in 1990, found the fortunes of the Christian Democrats at low ebb. In public opinion polls throughout the first ten months of 1989, the party's level of support ranged from 33 percent to 38 percent. In June, Chancellor Helmut Kohl's leadership of the party was challenged by several intraparty dissidents. The prospects for the CDU in the upcoming national election were not good.[3] The unity issue, however, gave the party new political life. Led by Chancellor Kohl, the CDU received 43.8 percent of the vote in the December 1990 all-German election and, together with the Free Democrats, enjoyed a commanding majority of 134 seats in the parliament.

After the 1990 election, however, taxpayers began to get the bills for unification. In spite of its campaign pledge of "no new taxes," the CDU-led government announced in 1991 that Germany's contribution to the Gulf War and the unexpectedly high costs of unification necessitated a temporary tax increase. The voters were not amused, and the CDU's performance in state elections declined sharply. Only an improving economy, the popularity of Chancellor Kohl, and the mistakes of the rival Social Democrats enabled the party to stay in power after the 1994 election, albeit with a majority of only ten seats.

In 1998, after sixteen years in power, the party suffered one of the worst defeats in its history. "Kohl fatigue" and a poor economy, especially in the eastern regions, were the major factors in the electoral debacle. The CDU now had to prepare for life after Helmut Kohl. In 1999 the Kohl legacy took a new and ominous turn for the CDU. The party was hit by a major scandal when the former chancellor admitted that he had kept secret bank accounts outside of regular party channels. In 2000 the scandal spread to Kohl's successor as party leader, Wolfgang Schäuble, who admitted that he also had received illegal campaign contributions. Under heavy pressure from the CDU members of parliament, Schäuble gave up his leadership post.

Hoping to turn the party's fortunes around, the CDU selected Angela Merkel as its new leader. She became the first female to lead any major political party. But in her two-year tenure as party leader, Merkel was unable to unite the party or develop any convincing electoral strategy to defeat Chancellor Gerhard Schröder, who was running for reelection under the SPD banner. In seeking a chancellor candidate for the 2002 election, the party turned for the second time in its history to Bavaria. Many Christian Democrats believed that the economy would be the main issue in the election, and Edmund Stoiber, Bavaria's minister–president, was presiding over a strong economy. Stoiber, however, lost in a very close election.

Despite the close outcome, Stoiber was not given a second chance in the 2005 election. Instead, the CDU selected Merkel, the first female candidate for chancellor in German history. Entering the campaign, the Christian Democrats held a large lead in public opinion polls and appeared to be a sure winner. But a poor campaign strategy featuring a promise to increase taxes and reduce subsidies for homebuyers and commuters enabled the Social Democrats to portray Merkel and the CDU/CSU as indifferent to the plight of the average voter. As a result, the party received only 35 percent of the vote and was unable to form a coalition with the Free Democrats, its preferred partner. Yet it did receive about 440,000 more votes and four more parliamentary seats than the Social Democrats. After

three weeks of negotiations, the Christian Democrats formed a grand coalition with the Social Democrats, and Merkel became the first woman chancellor in German history.

During the 2005–2009 grand coalition the CDU/CSU veered away from many of the pro-business policies it had advocated during the campaign. The near-loss in 2005 with this neoliberal program had a sobering effect on the party and especially on Chancellor Merkel. The demands of its nearly equal coalition partner, the Social Democrats also played a role. But as the 2009 election approached, the party was determined to end the grand coalition and form a coalition with the Free Democrats, as it had intended to do in 2005.

In spite of Merkel's high popularity, the CDU/CSU's vote in 2009 actually dropped from 35.2 percent to 33.8 percent. But its major competitor, the Social Democrats, did much worse with a record low of only 23 percent. The CDU was able to form a coalition with the Free Democrats, who received a record high of almost 15 percent of the party vote. Nonetheless it was a muted victory for the CDU; its Bavarian cousin, the CSU, dropped to its poorest performance since 1949.

After 2009 the CDU/CSU was Merkel's party. Her unprecedented popularity (her approval rating from 2009 to 2013 has averaged almost 70 percent), her leadership in the euro crisis and her international status made her position in the party unassailable. But she has not lacked for critics. Seeking to attract younger voters in urban areas, she has abandoned many of the Union's sacred cows such as the draft, opposition to same-sex marriages, supporting the right of same-sex couples to adopt children, and the ending of nuclear power. She has also been critical of how the Catholic church has dealt with the sexual misconduct of some of its priests.

With Merkel providing the power, the Christian Democrats in 2013 achieved one of the best results in their history. With 41.5 percent of the vote the CDU easily topped its main rival, the Social Democrats (27.5 percent). The party made major gains among young people, women, and voters in large metropolitan areas.

The Social Democrats

The SPD is Germany's oldest political party and the only one to emerge virtually intact after the collapse of the Third Reich. The heir to Germany's rich Marxist tradition, the SPD was outlawed and persecuted by Chancellor Otto von Bismarck and the kaiser during the nineteenth century and by the Nazis in the twentieth century. In 1945 it appeared that the SPD's hour had finally come. Unlike other Weimar parties, its record of opposition to Nazism was uncompromising—in 1933 it was the only political party to vote against Adolf Hitler's Enabling Act. Its commitment to socialism had long been tempered by its even greater support for the principles and values of political democracy. Even during the Weimar Republic, the party's interest in the class struggle and the realization of the revolutionary vision had given way to a policy of reformist gradualism designed to change the society and economy by peaceful political means.

During the Third Reich, the SPD retained a skeletal organization in exile and a small underground movement in Germany. Although many Social Democrats did not survive the war and the concentration camps, the party was still able to regroup in a relatively short time after 1945—its loyal members emerged literally from the ruins of Germany's cities to begin the task of reconstruction. Yet the outcome of the first parliamentary election in 1949

did not elevate the SPD to the position of largest party, and so it found itself in opposition. After the landslide CDU/CSU victories of 1953 and 1957, the SPD could claim the support of only about 30 percent of the electorate.

The SPD's first postwar leader, Kurt Schumacher, was unable to convert the party's opposition to Nazism and its resultant moral authority into electoral success. Although he made a substantial contribution to postwar democracy by preventing a merger of the SPD and the German communists and by shaping the SPD into a viable opposition party, he was unable to make the SPD the dominant postwar party. Specifically, Schumacher failed to recognize that the post-1948 success of free market (capitalist) economic policies left the bulk of the electorate with little interest in socialism, with its connotation of government ownership of means of production, of centralized economic planning, and of class struggle. He also overestimated the interest of the average German in an independent "nationalist" foreign policy designed to secure reunification of the country. Most West Germans, at least by the early 1950s, were willing to accept the division of the old Reich in exchange for the economic prosperity, individual freedom, and security they received from German integration into the US-led Atlantic Alliance. Finally, Schumacher's political style, with its emphasis on conflict, polarization, and ideology, simply reminded too many voters of the Weimar Republic. Postwar Germany and western Europe had tired of this approach to politics—this was the heyday of the "end of ideology," and most voters were supporting consensual, middle-of-the-road parties and leaders.[4]

During the 1950s an increasing number of SPD leaders in Länder such as Hamburg, Frankfurt, and West Berlin responded to the party's woes by advocating major changes in the SPD's program, organization, and leadership. The reformers wanted the party to accept the pro-Western foreign policy course of Adenauer and abandon its opposition to the free market economic policies of the CDU/CSU.

This reform movement culminated in the party's 1959 program, which was adopted at its convention in Bad Godesberg. In the program, the SPD dropped its advocacy of nationalization of means of production and compulsory economic planning, and it stressed its opposition to communism and its support of NATO and the Western alliance. Shortly thereafter, the party sought to broaden its membership base to include more white-collar employees and even independent business owners. It also asked the young, politically attractive mayor of Berlin, Willy Brandt, to serve as its national chair and as its 1961 candidate for chancellor. But the national political responsibility that accompanied the party's eventual electoral success in 1969 brought with it new problems, especially from the SPD's old left—the trade unions and traditional Marxists—and the new left—students, counterculture groups, and environmentalists. They both argued that the party had sold out its ideological and revolutionary heritage and its commitment to social and economic change for political power.

Conflicts within the party peaked during the latter years of Helmut Schmidt's chancellorship (1974–1982) and were a major factor in the party's return to the opposition after the 1983 election. In opposition, the SPD was unable to make significant progress toward resolving its internal divisions until 1985, when it won decisive victories in two state elections. In the 1987 national election, however, the question of how to deal with the Greens again divided the party, and its vote dropped to 37 percent, its lowest level since 1961.

The 1989–1990 unification both surprised and divided the SPD. For years, the party had sought to improve the living conditions of East Germans by negotiating with the communist regime. This contact with the East German leadership, however, also gave the communists a certain legitimacy and status in the view of many Germans. Therefore when the revolution began, the SPD was ill prepared. Although the party had good contacts with the now-beleaguered East German "elite," it had few if any with the "street"—that is, the fledgling democratic opposition, including the churches. The "rush to unity" that followed the opening of the Berlin Wall also divided the party. Many members under the age of forty-five had no living memories of a united Germany. They had accepted at least tacitly the permanence of Germany's division, or believed that it could be overcome only within a united eastern and western Europe.

In the 1990 election, these SPD activists, including the party's 1990 chancellor candidate, Oskar Lafontaine, were unable to comprehend the broad appeal that unity had in the west and its fundamental importance for the new voters in the east. Older Social Democrats, such as former chancellors Willy Brandt and Helmut Schmidt, enthusiastically supported unification and had few problems with the euphoria this issue generated. Lafontaine's lukewarm approach to this issue hurt the SPD in the 1990 election, especially in the east, where the SPD received only 24.5 percent of the vote. Overall, its total of 33.5 percent represented the party's worst performance since 1957.

In 1994 the party had high hopes of finally returning to power. It had gained control of the Bundesrat in 1991 through its numerous victories in state elections, and its internal divisions appeared to be resolved A weak economy throughout 1993 further enhanced the SPD's electoral fortunes. But in early 1994, the economy began to improve, and the Kohl government was able to eke out a narrow victory in October. Although the SPD's proportion of the vote increased to its highest level since 1987, it still lost its fourth straight election.

Not long after the vote, internal conflicts flared up again among the SPD's leadership. The aggressive minister–president of Lower Saxony, Gerhard Schröder, who narrowly lost out to Rudolf Scharping in the vote for party leader in 1993, attacked Scharping and the national leadership for their continued advocacy of classic Social Democratic nostrums such as increased spending for public works, welfare programs, and a reduced workweek. In November 1995 at the SPD convention, Lafontaine successfully challenged Scharping for the leadership. Although Lafontaine had unified the party, the SPD still needed a candidate to challenge Kohl in 1998. Lafontaine yearned for another chance at Kohl, but Schröder was convinced that he was the only Social Democrat who could defeat the chancellor. Indeed, Schröder's victory in a state election in early 1998 and his standing in public opinion polls compelled even his opponents in the party to concede that he had the best chance of dethroning Kohl. In the end, then, even though the SPD's heart wanted Lafontaine, its brain said Schröder could win.

In 1998, after sixteen years in the political wilderness, the Social Democrats finally regained national political power. The party presented a united front in 1998 and positioned itself at the center of the electorate. Like the Democratic Party in the United States under Bill Clinton and the British Labour Party of Tony Blair, it advocated a "third way" between unfettered capitalism and traditional social democracy with its emphasis on big government and high taxation. But it took one more intraparty struggle between the

traditionalists, led by Lafontaine, and the modernizers, led by Schröder, before this new course was set. After a stormy cabinet meeting in early 1999, Lafontaine left the new government but not before he denounced Schröder's probusiness policies. He would return to the political stage a few years later as the founder of a new political movement.

The new SPD-led government got off to a bad start in 1998. It was slow to react to the country's pressing economic problems and the need to reform the welfare state and the labor market. Throughout most of the government's first term, the SPD languished in the polls and continued to hemorrhage voters at state elections. Although it did pass a new liberalized citizenship law in 1999, it was not until 2000 that major tax reform legislation was finally approved. The party's narrow victory in the 2002 election was largely a tribute to Schröder's popularity and his strong opposition to the Iraq war, but not to any policy achievements of his government.

After the 2002 election, the party had little time to enjoy its come-from-behind victory. The harsh realities of a poor economy and increasing public debt did not disappear during the campaign. Schröder's Agenda 2010 reform package, designed to create jobs and economic growth through cuts in social spending, deeply divided the SPD and led to the defection of thousands of members and the formation of a new Left Party led by Lafontaine.

With few prospects for the rest of his legislative program, Schröder called for new elections in September 2005. Because neither large party was able to form a government with the smaller parties after the election, the SPD entered into a grand coalition with the Christian Democrats. In the grand coalition (2005–2009) the party's contingent, especially the ministers of finance and foreign affairs, performed well. The larger party, however, remained divided. The party chairmanship merry-go-round continued as four different chairmen led the party over the four-year grand coalition: in 2006 the architect of the grand coalition resigned over disputes with the Left, his replacement quit after a few months, allegedly for health reasons; his successor lasted until September 2008 when he resigned after a mini-putsch by party pragmatists who doubted his ability to lead the SPD during the 2009 campaign. Frank-Walter Steinmeier, the foreign minister under Merkel, became the party's standard-bearer for the 2009 election.

At this election the SPD suffered its worst defeat since the founding of the Federal Republic. In fact, its total of only 23 percent was the lowest for the party since 1893. The impact of the deep divisions within the party over the Agenda 2010 reform program had taken their toll. It was small comfort for the SPD that voter support for Merkel and the CDU also declined, albeit slightly; neither partner seems to have been rewarded for the achievements of their grand coalition.

After this 2009 debacle, the Social Democrats attempted to regroup. At the leadership level the party was led by a troika consisting of the 2009 chancellor candidate, Frank-Walter Steinmeier who became the leader of the party in the Bundestag; Sigmar Gabriel, former environmental minister, as party chairman; and Andrea Nahles, the nominal leader of the party's left wing, as general secretary. Missing from this group was the former Finance Minister under Merkel, Peer Steinbrück, the party's leading finance expert and titular leader of the SPD's conservative wing. In the aftermath of the 2009 defeat, Steinbrück, who as finance minister had worked closely with Merkel in dealing with the 2007–2008 financial crisis, showed little interest in assuming any major party role. Indeed,

he made it very clear that he was displeased with the direction the party was taking in opposition and especially its revision to some of the key components of Agenda 2010, such as the labor market reforms and a higher retirement age. But as the financial crisis mutated into a eurozone sovereign debt crisis by 2010, Steinbrück's status began to improve.

In September 2012 the SPD selected Steinbrück to challenge Merkel in 2013. A pragmatist in the tradition of Helmut Schmidt, he appeared able to attract voters in the center of the electorate and thus compete with Merkel. But his campaign has stumbled badly. His upscale lifestyle and his penchant for accepting large speaking fees from business groups before his nomination did not go over well with the party's working-class core. Steinbrück had little chance to defeat Merkel at the 2013 election, and he was unable to bring the party back from its dismal 2009 performance. With 25.7 percent of the vote the SPD remained far behind the CDU. To the dismay of many rank and file party members, the SPD's leaders—above all Gabriel and Steinmeier—decided to enter into a grand coalition with Merkel's Christian Democrats as it did in 2005. Whether this coalition will end as badly for the SPD as the 2005–2009 alignment remains to be seen.

The Free Democrats

The FDP is the only smaller party to survive the postwar emergence of a concentrated and simplified party system. Ideologically and programmatically, it is somewhere between the two large parties. On economic issues, it is closer to the CDU/CSU than to the SPD, but on matters such as education, civil liberties, and foreign and defense policies, the FDP has had more in common with the Social Democrats and the Greens.

The FDP, like the two newer smaller parties, the Greens and the Left, owed its continued existence and relative success to the electoral system, which gives the party a proportionate share of the parliamentary mandates as long as it secures at least 5 percent of the vote. From 1961 to 1994 the FDP held the balance of power in national elections. Both major parties tended to prefer coming to terms with the Free Democrats in a small coalition to forming a grand coalition with the other major party. Between 1949 and 1957, and again from 1961 to 1965, the Free Democrats were the junior coalition partner in CDU/CSU governments. From 1969 to 1982 it was in coalition with the Social Democrats. In 1982 the FDP changed partners once again and returned to the Christian Democrats. This last move sharply divided the party, but it was still able to surmount the 5 percent barrier in the 1983 and 1987 elections.

With 11 percent of the vote in the 1990 all-German election, the FDP achieved the third-best result in its history. This success was largely a tribute to the role that the party's titular leader, longtime foreign minister and vice chancellor Hans-Dietrich Genscher, played in the unification process. As FDP campaign speakers never tired of reminding the voters, "Bismarck unified Germany with blood and iron. Helmut Kohl did it with Hans-Dietrich Genscher!"

In 1998 the party went down with Helmut Kohl. For the first time in almost thirty years, the Free Democrats were not in the national government. But many saw the defeat as an opportunity to rejuvenate the party. Freed from its ties to Kohl and the Christian Democrats, the FDP could now move in new directions. In 2002 the FDP did not campaign on any promise of forming a government with the Christian Democrats; instead, it claimed to be open to both major parties as a partner. The same year, the FDP also attempted to

project itself as an up-and-coming major party with the goal of securing 18 percent of the vote. This strategy failed, however, and it remained in the opposition. In the 2005 election, the FDP returned to its role as a potential partner of the CDU and secured almost 10 percent of the vote. But much of its support came from Christian Democratic voters splitting their ballots, and so the FDP's gains meant losses for its potential partner. When the combined CDU/CSU–FDP total fell well short of the majority needed to form a government, the Free Democrats once again found themselves in the opposition.

As the 2009 election approached, the FDP felt the wind at its back. Merkel's move to the center enabled the party to gain votes from the free market wing of the Christian Democrats. The cornerstone of the FDP program was tax reform. In fact, that issue was just about all the party talked about; much of its program, in the words of one observer, "reads like a tax consultant's handbook."[5] After taxes, liberals emphasized their traditional commitment to civil liberties and the rule of law. It has also strongly opposed any efforts to increase electronic surveillance of Internet communications.

The FDP's 2009 election strategy earned the party 14.6 percent of the vote, the best result in its history. The FDP also achieved its goal of forming a coalition government with the Christian Democrats under Chancellor Merkel. Guido Westerwelle, the party's leader and architect of the 2009 victory, became vice chancellor and foreign minister.

In government (2009–2013) the FDP got off to a very bad start and never really recovered. Its record 15 percent of the vote soon disappeared as it dropped to single digits in public opinion polls and did even worse at several post-2009 state elections. After it was revealed that the party received a huge campaign contribution from hotel interests while it supported a large tax cut for hotel owners, its credibility plummeted. It was derided as a narrow "clientele party."

The leadership change did not improve the party's standing in public opinion polls or its record at state elections. To the shock of the party's loyalists the FDP in 2013 failed to surmount the 5 percent mark and for the first time in its history did not secure parliamentary representation. It thus became the first member of the Federal Republic's classic party system to disappear. Thus while Merkel won the election, she lost her coalition partner. Whether the FDP can come back at the next federal election will depend on its ability to develop new leadership and an improved program.

The Greens

In the late 1970s, a variety of environmentalist groups opposed to the government's plans to expand nuclear energy plants banded together to create the Federal League of Citizen Groups for the Protection of the Environment, or more simply the "Environmentalists" or "Greens." The Greens were a new face on the political scene. Their antiestablishment, grassroots, idealistic image had an appeal that was especially strong among younger voters. In October 1979 the Green Party gained entrance into the parliament of the city-state of Bremen, and in March 1980 it surmounted the 5 percent hurdle in the relatively large state of Baden-Württemberg.

In the early 1980s the Greens were, above all, a protest movement with a single issue—the environment. Their opposition to placing US medium-range missiles in West Germany gave them the additional issue they needed to gain representation in the Bundestag in 1983. In doing so, they were the first new party to enter the parliament since the 1950s.

In spite of its successes, the party at this time was divided on what to do next. Should it seek power through a coalition with the SPD, or should it remain a protest movement unsullied by any association with the established parties? Most Green voters preferred an alignment with the SPD. The party's activists and leaders, however, were divided. One group, the fundamentalists, rejected any cooperation with the SPD, whereas a second wing, the realists, was willing to form coalitions with the Social Democrats at the state and national levels to achieve Green goals, if only in piecemeal fashion. At the 1987 election the party was able to increase its share of the vote from 5.6 percent to 8.3 percent, and the party was also now represented in most state parliaments. The Greens had clearly become accepted by most voters as a legitimate political force.

In 1990 the Greens were ill prepared for the unification issue. Their predominantly young electorate had little interest in a unified Germany, having known only the reality of two German states. Most Greens wanted the indigenous East German revolutionary groups to have more time to find a "third way" between the Stalinism of the old East German regime and what they considered the antienvironmentalist capitalism of the West. But with only 3.9 percent of the vote, down from 8.3 percent in 1987, the party failed to return to parliament. The Greens in the former East Germany, however, did surmount the 5 percent barrier in their region and entered the parliament.

After the 1990 election, the Greens rebounded in public opinion polls and in state elections. With the euphoria over unification past and the realists firmly in control of the party, the Greens in 1994 became the first party ever to return to the Bundestag after a failure to clear the 5 percent hurdle in a prior election.

By 1998 the realist faction, led by Joschka Fischer, had control of the party. The Greens were determined to finally assume national political power as a junior coalition partner of the Social Democrats, and with the 1998 election they succeeded. Fischer became foreign minister, and other Greens took over the environment and health ministries. The party had become part of the establishment it once so strongly condemned.

During the first term (1998–2002) of their coalition with the Social Democrats, several important Green policies such as the gradual closing of all nuclear power plants, an energy tax, liberalized citizenship laws, and same-sex unions were passed. But Fischer's honeymoon with the voters ended abruptly in early 2005 with a controversy over the granting of visas at the embassy in Kiev (Ukraine). Under Green pressure, it was charged, Fischer's Foreign Ministry developed a very liberal and careless visa policy that allowed Ukrainians to have practically uncontrolled entry into Germany.

Schröder did not consult the Greens before his 2005 decision to seek new elections. The once close relationship then deteriorated rapidly, and the Greens had to campaign on their own. Although they were able to hold their vote share at about 8 percent, they refused to enter into any coalition with the CDU and the FDP—the so-called "Jamaica" coalition, named for the colors of the Jamaican flag: black (CDU), yellow (FDP), and green. Such a government would have had a numerical majority, but there was little or no agreement on policy among the three such divergent parties.

After the election, the party lost Fischer, who retired from political life. In opposition, the Greens found themselves forced to compete with both the Free Democrats and the new Left Party for media and voter attention. Public interest in environmental questions was waning. Among many younger voters, once the core of Green support, the environment

is an "uncool" topic. With their environmental concerns now the common property of all the parties, the Greens had to redefine themselves if they were to remain a viable component of the party system.

For the 2009 campaign the Greens made major revisions of their program and electoral themes. The party attempted to link its established ecological identity to economic growth, jobs, international competitiveness, and technological innovation. The Greens promised a "Green New Deal" that included a promise of 1 million new "green" jobs within four years; and the strategy was successful. With 10.7 percent of the party vote, the Greens achieved the best result in their history, but it was not enough to return them to national political responsibility, as the collapse of the Social Democrats made any coalition impossible.

The Greens entered new territory in 2011 when the party secured almost 25 percent of the vote in Baden-Württemberg and for the first time in its history assumed the leadership of a coalition government. The Green–SPD coalition, which replaced the Christian Democrats in this strongly conservative state, is headed by the first-ever Green minister-president, Winfried Kretschmann. The CDU had been the dominant governing party for almost 60 years.

A key to the Greens' electoral success since 2009 is their ability to link environmental protection, their signature issue, to economic growth and jobs. The "Green Jobs" theme was very important in their break-through performance in Baden-Württemberg and in subsequent state elections in big important Länder like North Rhine–Westphalia (May 2012) and Lower Saxony (January 2013). This job growth, or as some have put it, "the Greens are good for business" theme is the key to further Green inroads into traditionally center-right sectors of the electorate. In short the Greens at the state level have learned that the environment and other post-materialist issues will get them into the parliament and into junior partner positions in state and national governments, but they will not suffice to compete for the top jobs. For this they need the "bread and butter" economic issues.

As the 2013 national election approached, the Greens, based on midterm state elections and national polls, were confident that they would received at least 12 percent to 15 percent of the national vote. Like the FDP the Greens were shocked at the results. With only 8.3 percent of the vote the party dropped to its lowest level since 2005. What happened? The party at the national level essentially veered off the course that had been so successful in many state elections between 2009 and 2013. Instead of building on the gains it had made among middle-class voters, it ran a campaign that alienated many of these supporters. Its chief national candidate, former environment minister Jürgen Tritten, emphasized tax reform, which included tax increases for upper-income groups. The national Greens also advocated that Germans forego meat at least one day a week. The "veggie day" issue was turned into a punch line by Merkel and the CDU, who solemnly proclaimed that they would not tell voters what to eat! Finally, the national campaign returned to an issue that was guaranteed to upset many voters: a speed limit on the autobahns. The right to drive at any speed on the autobahns is cherished by car-loving Germans. And any party that touches this issue will lose more voters than it gains.

Following this debacle the party's top leadership resigned. The Greens did conduct pro forma negotiation with Merkel over a possible coalition, but these talks went nowhere. Back in opposition the party has much work to do if it is to return to those heady days in 2011 and 2012 when it was riding high in state elections and public opinion polls.

The Left Party

The newest addition to the party system is the Left Party. PDS, which at its first election in 2005, secured almost 9 percent of the vote and increased its vote in 2009 to a record 11.9 percent. The party is a curious union of the eastern PDS, the successor to the ruling Communist Party in the former East Germany; western Social Democrats; and other assorted far-left groups dissatisfied with the course the Schröder government took after 2002. This western component was founded in early 2005 and called Labor and Social Justice—The Electoral Alternative (WASG). The Electoral Alternative was led by Oskar Lafontaine, the former SPD leader and 1990 chancellor candidate, who left the Schröder government in 1999. Lafontaine then went into self-imposed exile and was content to attack Schröder from the sidelines by means of books and media appearances. Agenda 2010 was the last straw for Lafontaine; he left the SPD and launched the Electoral Alternative.

Meanwhile, the PDS looked lost in unified Germany. It had no foothold in the western states and was struggling on its eastern home turf. It failed to clear the 5 percent hurdle in 2002 and was left with only two members in the parliament, representing the only two districts in which it won a plurality of votes. The PDS also suffered in 2002 when its most popular figure, Gregor Gysi, resigned from the party leadership and, like Lafontaine, retreated to the sidelines. Both men, however, saw Schröder's troubles as an opportunity for their own political comeback.

It was a perfect campaign marriage. The PDS badly needed western support, and the Electoral Alternative had few voters in the eastern states. The PDS also had more funds and a much stronger organization than the newly founded Electoral Alternative. In early 2005 Lafontaine and Gysi decided to merge and run a common campaign.

So far the Left Party, PDS, is a protest party. Its program in 2013, which it frankly admitted had no chance of being implemented, contained the usual left-wing panaceas: "soak the rich" tax plans, a massive and very expensive public works campaign for the unemployed, and a repeal of all the "antilabor" policies of Agenda 2010. The left also wanted the immediate withdrawal of all foreign troops from Afghanistan. Germany's NATO membership is another target of the party; it wants Germany to leave NATO.

The party did not follow up on its strong performance in 2009. Its position in the western states has weakened as Lafontaine has become less active due to health concerns. The party has also been plagued by numerous leadership and policy conflicts. In 2013 its percentage of the vote did indeed drop to 8.4—down from its record total of 10.7 percent in 2009. It now joins the Greens in opposition to the Merkel-led grand coalition. But both is membership and voters are aging, and it has thus far shown little interest in any cooperation with the Social Democrats or the Greens at the national level.[6] Surviving because of its eastern base, the party once again appears lost in a unified Germany.

Other Parties

The Pirates

A potential new member of the increasingly complex party system appeared in 2009. Although the Pirate Party received only 2 percent of the vote, among new voters they were in double digits. In 2011, to the surprise of many observers, they received enough votes to enter the Berlin parliament. That was followed in 2011 at state elections in the Saar, North

Rhine–Westphalia, and Schleswig-Holstein. Thus in about a year they secured representation in four state parliaments. Obviously they became the focus of major media attention.

But when this media attention waned, so did the Pirates fortunes. It needed more surprise victories at state elections, but there was almost an eight-month period from mid-2012 to early 2013 when there were no state elections and whatever media coverage the party received centered on its leadership conflicts and lack of organization and a clear program. By election day 2013 the Pirates had largely faded from the national scene and received only 2.2 percent of the vote.

The Pirates are largely a single-issue party: full, free, uncensored access to the Internet is the only clear position the party offered the voters. The rest of their program is still "under construction." Whether they can recover from their 2013 defeat remains to be seen.

Interest Groups

In the Federal Republic, like in other western European societies, a wide variety of groups, associations, and movements play significant political roles. The major interest groups—business, labor, agriculture, religious, and professional—are well organized at the local, state, and national levels and work closely with the political parties and state bureaucracy. They have been joined in the past two decades by less structured but widely based "new social movements"—environmentalists, peace and disarmament activists, women's rights groups, as well as movements for various social minorities. Less established than the traditional interest alignments, the new social movements, nevertheless, have had a growing influence on the political process.

The hierarchical structure of the established interest associations allows their top officials to speak authoritatively for the membership and ensures them access to state and party elites. Indeed, it is standard operating procedure in German ministries to consult with the leading representatives of interest groups when drafting legislation that relates to a group's area of concern. Unlike in the United States, where the terms interest groups, pressure groups, and lobbyists have negative connotations, Germany treats such groups as legitimate and necessary participants in the policy process. Each major interest group alignment also maintains contact with all the major parties, although not uniformly. For example, the labor unions have closer ties to the SPD than to the Christian Democrats. Yet there is also a labor wing within the CDU. Business and industrial interests enjoy a warmer relationship with the center-right CDU/CSU than the SPD, but again, there are supporters of the SPD among the ranks of Germany's business–industrial elite.

This pattern of strong government–interest group–political party integration has at times became somewhat institutionalized. In 1998 newly elected chancellor Gerhard Schröder made his "Alliance for Jobs" the cornerstone of his plan to reduce unemployment. The alliance consisted of representatives from business, labor, and government, who met periodically to propose job programs. Alas, it eventually disbanded as business and labor representatives were unable to reach any viable agreement on job creation.

The Alliance for Jobs and the other less formal interest group/government contacts have prompted some analysts to call Germany a "neocorporatist" state.[7] *Corporatism,* an old term in social and political thought, refers to the organization of interests into a limited number of compulsory, hierarchically structured associations recognized by the state and

given a monopoly of representation within their respective areas. These associations become in effect quasi-governmental groups with state approval, training, and licensing, and they may even exercise discipline over members. The power of these associations is not determined by a group's numerical size alone, but also by the importance of its function for the state and community.

Business and Industrial Interests

Three organizations speak for business and industry in the Federal Republic: the League of German Industry, which represents large industrial and business interests; the National Association of German Employers, which essentially represents small- and medium-size firms; and the German Industrial and Trade Chamber, composed of smaller, independent businesses (shopkeepers, artisans).

The impressive accomplishments of the economy and the importance of economic conditions to the political health of any government assure these associations easy access to the political elite. Business interests in Germany, as elsewhere in Europe, advocate cuts in government spending and business contributions to social programs, usually citing their negative effect on the country's competitive position in the world market. Reducing nonwage labor costs—that is, payments for health insurance, pensions, unemployment compensation, and sick leave—is a current top priority.

The ability of business interests to influence government policy even under the Red–Green coalition that governed from 1998 to 2005 (see Chapter 3.2) was on view in the 2000 tax package, which substantially cut business taxes, as well as in the Agenda 2010 program, which reduced union influence at the plant level. The program also encouraged the development of a low-wage job sector—something long advocated by business interests.

Labor Groups

The labor movement, like the political parties, has changed extensively in the postwar period. During the Weimar Republic, labor was divided along politico-ideological lines into socialist, communist, Catholic, and even liberal trade unions. These unions, especially the socialist and communist groups, were concerned with more than wages, hours, and working conditions. They sought to mobilize their members to support and implement a comprehensive ideology of social, economic, cultural, and political change. Indeed, many of their resources were spent on developing and refining this ideology and the accompanying tactics, which included confronting fellow workers in competing unions. The labor movement was therefore fragmented and relatively ineffectual in securing solid economic gains for its members and in preventing the Nazis' seizure of power in 1933.

The postwar Western occupation authorities and many prewar German trade union leaders sought to restructure and reform the unions. The result of their work is the German Trade Union Federation (Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund—DGB), an organization composed of eight different unions with a total membership of more than 7 million in western Germany and about 1 million in the former East Germany.[8]

The DGB has become labor's chief political spokesperson and has essentially pursued a policy of "business unionism," concentrating on wages and working conditions. Labor leaders as well as economic policy makers within the SPD advocate a pragmatic position on the market economy best summed up by the adage "Do not kill the cow we want to milk."

The trade unions have been successful in securing steady and solid economic gains for workers. The unions have also shared in this prosperity. One factor behind the low strike rate is the economic strength of organized labor, which induces business to take union proposals seriously and seek compromises. Business knows that labor has the financial resources to sustain and extensive strike action. The unions' ties to all parties, especially to the Social Democrats, give them direct access to the government. This political power is an additional factor in close worker-management cooperation.

That said, trade unions throughout the country have experienced a steady decline in membership. By 2008 total membership had dropped to about 8 million from 13.7 million in 1991.[9] The proportion of wage earners organized into unions declined from 41 percent in 1991 to 22 percent in 2006. Many of the losses have come from the east, where trade union membership was artificially high in the first years of unification. But in the west, membership has also declined, mainly because of the loss of blue-collar jobs.[10] Only among white-collar, service, and government workers have unions been able to grow.

After the 2002 election, the Schröder government's cuts in social programs such as unemployment compensation and sick leave as well as proposals to loosen the job protection many employees enjoy drew the intense opposition of the trade union movement. Many trade union leaders who had strongly supported the Schröder government felt betrayed by its postelection policies. In 2005 some of them supported Lafontaine and his Left Party. During the grand coalition labor continued to oppose any further cuts in social programs, especially the decision to increase the retirement age to sixty-seven from sixty-five. At the 2009 election most unions were officially neutral, but generally supported the Social Democrats, albeit with little enthusiasm. Among union members the SPD vote dropped from 47 percent in 2005 to 36 percent in 2013—a decline that exceeded the national average.

The trade unions greeted the current grand coalition of CDU and SPD with some skepticism. They fear that the Social Democrats may agree to further cuts in social programs under the influence of the Merkel-led Christian Democrats. The SPD leadership, however, contends that a long-time union demand for a national minimum wage and further expansion of child care and preschool programs will be a top priority and a condition of their further participation in the new government.

Agricultural Groups

Few interest groups in the Federal Republic have been as successful in securing government policies beneficial to their members as the various organizations representing farmers. Farmers constitute less than 5 percent of the workforce, and agriculture's contribution to the gross national product (GNP) is less than 3 percent. Yet no occupational group is as protected and as well subsidized by the government as farmers. They receive guaranteed prices for most of their products, and they are given subsidies and tax benefits for new equipment, construction, and the modernization of their holdings. The increase in the value of farmland has led some observers to call farmers Germany's "secret rich."[11]

Even though a succession of "green plans" has consolidated many small farms into larger, more efficient units, German agriculture would not be able to compete with other Western societies were it not for the strong EU protective tariff system for farm products and additional subsidies from Berlin. These benefits to farmers add an estimated

10 percent to 15 percent to the food bill of consumers, but all governments since 1949, regardless of their party configuration, have essentially continued these policies.

Agriculture in the former East Germany has been transformed. Under the communists, almost all farmers were forced to join collective farms. Since unification, some have reclaimed their land and become independent, and others have reorganized the former collectives into cooperatives. Many of these new cooperatives are run by the managers of the former collective farms. These "Red Barons" acquired a controlling interest in the cooperatives by buying out former members at cut-rate prices. They then modernized the operations through investments in new equipment and personnel cuts. The result is that many farms in eastern Germany are twenty to thirty times larger than their counterparts in western Germany. The large size of agricultural holdings makes them more efficient. Indeed, agriculture is one of the most productive sectors of the eastern economy.[12]

Citizens and Elections

Elections in the Federal Republic offer citizens their chief opportunity to influence the political process. Convinced that Adolf Hitler and the Nazi regime were supported by the German rank and file during most of the Third Reich, the founders of the Federal Republic essentially limited popular involvement at the national level to participation in periodic elections.[13] Therefore, Germany's Basic Law does not provide for the direct election of the president or the chancellor, referendums, the recall of public officials, or direct primaries to ensure more popular involvement at the national level.[14]

As in other western European parliamentary systems, national elections do not directly determine who holds the top-level positions in government. The chancellor and cabinet are elected by the parliament after the parliament has been elected by the voters. Elections must be held at least once every four years but can take place more frequently if a government loses its majority and parliament is dissolved. The Federal Republic has automatic registration and universal suffrage for all citizens over eighteen years of age.

Electoral System

Generally, Western democracies use one of two basic procedures for converting votes into legislative seats: a proportional system, in which a party's share of legislative mandates is proportional to its popular vote, and a plurality, or winner-take-all system, under which "losing" parties and candidates (and their voters) receive no representation. Proportional systems are usually favored by smaller parties, because under "pure" proportionality a party with even a fraction of a percentage of the vote would receive parliamentary representation.

Conversely, plurality systems are usually favored by the large parties, which have both the resources and candidates to secure pluralities in electoral districts. Some political scientists have hypothesized that a causal relationship exists between the electoral law and the number of political parties, with a proportional law producing a multiparty pattern and a plurality system producing a concentration of electoral support in two parties.

German electoral law has elements of both plurality and proportionality, but it is essentially a proportional representation system. Half of the delegates to parliament are elected on a plurality basis from 299 districts; the other half are chosen under the proportional representation principle from state (Land) lists. The voter receives two ballots—one listing

district candidates, the other listing parties. The second ballot is by far the more important. The proportion of the vote a party receives on the second ballot ultimately determines how many seats it will have in parliament, because the number of district contests won by the party's candidates is deducted from the total due it on the basis of the second-ballot vote.

This electoral system was intended to combine the best features of the plurality and proportional representation systems. The district contests were meant to introduce a "personalized" component into elections and give voters a means of identifying with "their" parliamentary deputy. The party-list allocations were meant to ensure the presence of a programmatic or policy dimension to elections.

There are three exceptions to the proportional character of this system. First, to participate in the proportional distribution of seats, a party must receive a minimum of 5 percent of the second-ballot vote. If it does not, these now "wasted" votes go proportionally to the parties that did clear the 5 percent barrier. This 5 percent clause was designed to prevent small, antisystem splinter parties from gaining representation and making coalition building in parliament difficult.

Second, if a party receives more district victories than it is entitled to under proportional representation, it can keep these extra or "excess" seats, and the total number of deputies in the parliament is increased.[15] In 2009 there was a record number (twenty-four) of such excess mandates, and the size of the parliament grew from 598 to 622.

In 2012 this excess mandate provision was altered in a major revision to the electoral system. The law, which went into effect at the 2013 election, compensated parties that did not receive any excess mandates. These "compensatory mandates" (Ausgleichmandate) are also designed to reassert the proportional character of the law. Thus depending on the number of excess mandates every party could receive at least one additional seat.

Also the new electoral law requires that the vote/seat ratio be roughly the same throughout the country. Each parliamentary seat should be based on the same number of votes. If there is a deviation at the state level, the other states will also receive compensatory mandates even though there were no excess mandates involved. In 2013 both forms of compensatory mandates were in play. There were five excess mandates that generated an additional five compensatory mandates. In addition because of a low vote/seat ratio in Bavaria, the other states were awarded an additional twenty-three compensatory seats. Thus the parliament was expanded by thirty-three seats—five because of excess mandates and twenty-eight through the new compensatory mandate provisions.

Third, if a party wins in at least three districts, the 5 percent clause is waived and it participates in the proportional distribution based on the second-ballot vote. This provision of the system, rarely affected elections. In 1994, however, the PDS (the old Communist Party) failed to clear the 5 percent mark, but it did win four district seats and therefore participated in the proportional payout.

Not surprisingly, many citizens do not fully understand this complicated system.[16] An example from the 2013 election may then make the system clearer (see Table 3-6). In 2013 the CDU/CSU received 41.5 percent of the second-ballot vote (proportional list) and was entitled to 248 seats in the Bundestag. But because it won 236 district victories on the first ballot, it received an additional 12 seats from the proportional list (second ballot) vote. Its final total of 311 seats included the original 248 seats plus 47 seats from the "wasted" votes of the small parties, three excess mandates and 13 additional seats from the compensatory

Table 3-6 Seat Distribution, 2013 German Election

Party	Percentage on first ballot	Percentage on second ballot	No. of seats earned[a]	No. of district seats won[b]	No. of list candidates elected[c]	Total
CDU/CSU	45.3	41.5	248	236	75	311
SPD	29.4	25.7	154	58	135	193
FDP	2.4	4.8	29	0	0	0
Left/PDS	8.2	8.6	51	4	60	63
Green	7.3	8.4	50	1	62	60
Minor parties	7.4	11.0	66	0	0	0
Total	100	100	598	299	332	627

Source: Federal Statistical Office.

Note: CDU/CSU = Christian Democratic Union/Christian Social Union; SPD = Social Democratic Party; FDP = Free Democratic Party; PDS = Party of Democratic Socialism.

[a]Under proportional representation.

[b]In first ballot.

[c]Includes seats from parties that did not clear 5 percent mark, excess mandates, and compensatory mandates.

provisions of the electoral law. The Social Democrats' total of 193 seats came from fifty-eight district victories, ninety-three list mandates, 31 seats from the "wasted vote" pool and 11 from the compensatory mandate provisions. The Left Party, with 8.6 percent of the second ballot vote, was entitled to fifty-one seats. Since it won in four districts, it received forty-seven proportional list seats. Its final total of sixty-four included ten from the wasted vote pool and three from the compensatory mandate provision. The Green total of sixty-three seats was comprised of one district victory, forty-nine from the proportional list (second ballot), ten from the wasted vote pool, and three compensatory mandates.

The wasted votes at the 2013 election amounted to a record 15.8 percent of the party vote. Almost 7 million voters cast ballots for parties that did not clear the 5 percent hurdle. The seats that these votes generated, as we show previously, were awarded to the parties that did clear the 5 percent mark. One could argue that the voters of these small parties had their votes "misappropriated"—that is, they benefited parties that they did not intend to support. Certainly it is highly doubtful that the 4.8 percent of the electorate that supported the FDP intended for their votes to benefit the Left Party, but some of them did. This large wasted vote in 2013 has prompted calls for further changes in the electoral law, including lowering the 5 percent threshold and allowing voters to indicate a second preference on their ballot in the event that their preferred party does not make the minimum percentage. Alas such changes would make a complicated law even more complicated!

In spite of the basically proportional electoral system, between 1949 and 1976 the party system became very concentrated—that is, the two-party (CDU/CSU–SPD) share of the vote grew from 60 percent in 1949 to 91 percent in 1976. During the past thirty years, however, the system has become more diffuse. The two largest parties in 2009 received only 56.8 percent of the vote. The two smaller parties now in the parliament—Green and Left Party—still owe their existence largely to this

system. Naturally, these parties are opposed to any shift toward an Anglo-American plurality electoral system.

Candidate Selection

Candidates for the party lists are selected at state-level party conventions held several months before the general election. Composing a list involves considerable bargaining both within the party and between the party and its major interest clientele. Generally, the very top positions on the list are reserved for the party's notables in the state, followed by representatives of factions and interest groups. Most of the candidates in safe districts are also given a "seat on the life boat"—a good list position—as a backup. In some instances, a candidate assigned a relatively weak district will be compensated by a promising list position. All participants in this procedure have a rough idea of how many list positions will be allotted to the party—that is, how many candidates will actually be elected. As the assumed cutoff point is approached, the intensity of the bargaining increases.

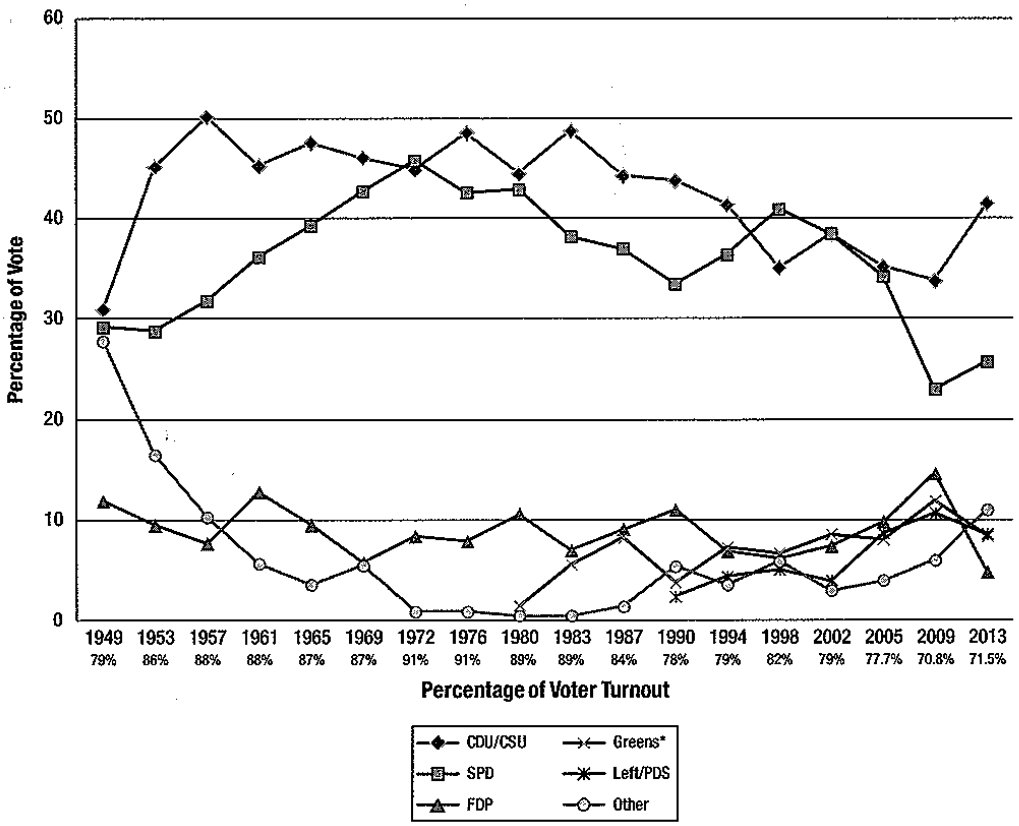
District candidates are nominated at local meetings of party organizations. These meetings are intended to give all party members an opportunity to screen prospective candidates. But in fact, the district leadership of the party dominates the proceedings, and state and national party leaders have relatively little influence on the district-level nominating process. Because most candidates are incumbents, the most obvious qualification for nomination to the parliament is previous job experience. A successful local- or state-level legislative background, long service in a local party organization, and close association with an interest group important to the party are other major qualifications. For a list nomination, expertise in a particular policy area also can be an important factor.

The German Voter, 1949–2013

The results of the eighteen national elections held between 1949 and 2013 (see Figure 3–1) reveal several major electoral trends:

- A generally high rate of turnout, which by the 1970s exceeded 90 percent, the highest figure of any major Western democracy without legal penalties for nonvoting. This high turnout not only reflects the strong emphasis that the political culture places on voting as a duty but also indicates a tendency to perceive elections as a way in which citizens can influence the policymaking process.
- The increasing concentration of support in two large parties from 1949 to 1976, as well as two small but strategically important third parties from 1983 to 1990, all of which support the basic democratic structure of the system.
- The hegemonic position of the CDU/CSU between 1953 and 1969 and from 1983 to 1998. During these periods, the CDU was the largest political party and the major partner in all coalition governments.
- The steady rise of the SPD between 1953 and 1972 from the "30 percent ghetto" to relative parity with the Christian Democrats.
- The decline in support for the two major parties since 1976.

Figure 3.1 Federal Elections, 1949–2013



Source: Federal Statistical Office.

In 1949 nine political parties entered the parliament, but by 1957 most of them were absorbed into the Christian Democrats led by Konrad Adenauer. Extremist parties such as the Communist Party and several radical right-wing groups also disappeared by 1957, rejected by the electorate. Campaigns of the 1950s focused on the performance of Adenauer's governments. CDU gains during this period were largely at the expense of the smaller parties. Most SPD advances between 1957 and 1972 were in the form of CDU/CSU voters and new voters, not those from the minor parties. The Free Democrats, depending on their coalition partner, attempted to appeal to CDU/CSU or SPD voters dissatisfied with their "regular" party. The FDP projected itself as a "liberal" corrective to the major parties: less conservative and less clerical than the CDU/CSU but not as "radical" or "socialist" as the SPD. In election campaigns, the FDP, to some extent, had to campaign against its coalition partner.

In the 1983 election, voters solidly endorsed the CDU/CSU–FDP government of Helmut Kohl, which had governed since October 1982, when the SPD government fell. The Christian Democrats, with 48.8 percent of the vote, achieved their best result since 1957. The CDU/CSU gains came largely at the expense of the Social Democrats; almost

2 million 1980 SPD voters switched to the CDU. The major campaign issues were unemployment, security of the pension system, reduction in deficit spending, and price stability. In all these areas, the CDU/CSU was regarded as better qualified to deal with the problems than the SPD. In their campaign, the Social Democrats focused on the missile question, which was not nearly as important to the majority of voters as the bread-and-butter economic problems. The Free Democrats, with 7 percent of the vote, were able to gain the support of voters dissatisfied with the Christian Democrats, but who also wanted the coalition to remain in power. Nonetheless, the CDU's performance was its worst since 1969.

In 1987 voters returned the ruling CDU/CSU–FDP coalition to power but with a reduced majority. For the first time in postwar electoral history, both major parties lost support in the same election. The beneficiaries were the Free Democrats, whose vote increased to 9.1 percent, and the Greens', who received over 8 percent of the party vote. Voting turnout dropped to 84.4 percent, the lowest since the first federal election in 1949.

Unified Germany at the Polls, 1990–2013

In the 1990 election, the first democratic election in all of Germany since the 1930s, the Kohl-led coalition was returned to power for the third straight time. Within the governing coalition, the big winner was the FDP, which achieved the third-best result (11 percent) in its history.

The parties on the left of the political spectrum were the major losers in 1990. The Social Democrats, with only 33.5 percent of the vote, dropped to their lowest level since 1957. In the new eastern states, the party received less than one-fourth of the vote. This poor result was, in part, a reaction to Oskar Lafontaine's lukewarm attitude toward unification. The big surprise of the election was the failure of the western Greens to return to parliament.

The ruling CDU/CSU–FDP government led by Helmut Kohl won its fourth straight election in 1994 but by a very narrow margin. Only about 48 percent of the electorate voted for the government. The complexities of the electoral process, however, turned this minority vote into a thin majority, 50.7 percent, of the seats.

In 1998 voters went to the polls for the fourteenth time since 1949, and for the first time they removed an entire incumbent government. In office since 1982, Chancellor Kohl's coalition government of Christian Democrats and Free Democrats was defeated soundly and replaced by a coalition of Social Democrats and Greens, nicknamed "Red–Green." The new government was headed by Gerhard Schröder, the chief executive of the state of Lower Saxony.

The narrow government win in 2002 victory came largely as a result of a last-minute swing that can be traced to three discrete, unprecedented events: an August flood along the Elbe and Mulde rivers in the east; the emergence of American plans for a preemptive war against Iraq; and the televised one-on-one debates between Schröder and his challenger, Edmund Stoiber.

Elections in Germany are usually not decided by last-minute developments, but in recent years, voters have been less attached to "their" parties and more likely to change their vote based on short-run factors such as candidate personality, media presentations, and events such as a flood or the Iraq War.

The 2005 election continued these trends. The major parties lost so many voters that neither of them could form a government with just one small partner as they had done since 1961. Unable to persuade two small parties to join in a government, they had no choice but to form a grand coalition, the first since 1966.[17] In 2005 the number of undecided and

late-deciding voters reached record levels, as did the number of Germans splitting their ballots. Until hours before voting began, almost all of the usually accurate polling organizations predicted a victory for Angela Merkel's Christian Democrats and her preferred partner, the Free Democrats. At a minimum, the CDU/CSU was to receive about 41 percent of the vote. Apparently, however, between bedtime on election eve and the trip to the polls on Sunday, almost 2 million voters changed their minds.

In September 2009 at the seventeenth national election since the republic's founding and the fifth since unification, voters gave a majority of the parliamentary seats to the Christian Democrats and their old coalition partner, the Free Democrats, and replaced the grand coalition that had governed for four years. Chancellor Merkel remained in office, and the Social Democrats returned to the opposition for the first time since 1998. The Christian Democrats' new partner, the Free Democrats, returned to government after eleven years out of power. Many voters, however, stayed home, dropping the turnout rate to 70.8 percent, the lowest level in the history of the Federal Republic.[18]

The SPD ran a campaign in which it largely ignored the Agenda 2010 program of former chancellor Schröder that had so divided and weakened the party. Instead, it returned to the tried-and-true themes of social justice and unwavering support for the welfare state. The CDU, its partner since 2005, was portrayed as the party of rich capitalists and managers, which would dismantle the welfare system that had given Germany social peace and prosperity for sixty years. Voters, however, did not buy this argument, and SPD support dropped from 34.2 percent to 23.0 percent, its worst performance in the history of the Federal Republic. Although Merkel's Christian Democrats won the election, they also saw their vote total decline—albeit far less than the Social Democrats. Nevertheless, the CDU's 33.8 percent was its worst performance since the Federal Republic's first election in 1949. The 2013 election was a personal triumph for Chancellor Merkel. The Christian Democrats' campaign began and ended with "the most powerful woman in the world" (*Forbes*). The strong economy and her calm, deliberate approach to the euro crisis struck a positive chord with voters. Her personal approval rating was a phenomenal 80 percent—even two-thirds of opposition party supporters thought she was doing a good job. But her triumph was muted by the inability of her coalition partner, the Free Democrats, to clear the 5 percent mark. Thus for the third time in the Republic's history the two largest parties formed a grand coalition.

Voting Behavior

The votes of most Germans can be explained by (1) the demographic characteristics of voters, especially social class and religion; (2) voters' attitudes toward major candidates; (3) the programs and policies of the political parties; (4) voters' attitudes toward the important policy issues facing the country; and (5) campaign events, especially those that attract widespread media attention.

Demographics

Unionized manual workers still form the eore of the Social Democratic electorate, whereas the middle-class and nonmanual occupations favor the Christian Democrats and the FDP. In 2013 unionized manual workers preferred the SPD over the other parties by about a eight-point margin.[19] Among middle-class voters, support for the Christian Democrats and the Greens runs high. The religious factor also structures the party vote. The party

preference of Catholics varies significantly according to their attachment to the church, as measured by church attendance. Most Catholics who regularly attend church are staunch supporters of the Christian Democrats, but Catholic voters who seldom or never go to church are far less likely to support that party. For nominal Catholics, social class, rather than religion, is a more important determinant of voting behavior. The SPD and the Greens receive disproportionate support from Protestants, especially those with a weak attachment to their church. The Greens also do well among voters who report no religious affiliation.

Although social class and religion remain important factors in voting behavior, their relative impact has declined since the early 1970s. The proportion of Germans in manual occupations dropped from 51 percent in 1950 to 26 percent in 2011, which leaves less of a "proletariat" on which the Social Democrats can draw. Similarly, the "old" middle-class component of the electorate—the small shopkeepers, farmers, and self-employed doctors and lawyers—declined from 28 percent in 1950 to only 12 percent by 2011. This reservoir of Christian Democratic–Free Democratic strength has become smaller as well.

The erosion of the social class cleavage is also evident in the religious division. A generation ago, conservative politicians characterized elections as a competition between Christian good and atheist evil, and such rhetoric succeeded in polarizing many voters along religious lines. But social change in the Federal Republic includes a strong secular trend. In the 1950s more than 40 percent of voters reported going to church on a weekly basis; by the 2009 election barely 20 percent attended church this regularly. Among Catholics, regular church attendance declined from 54 percent in 1953 to 16 percent in 2008.[20] Although churchgoing Catholics were about as likely to vote for the CDU/CSU in the twenty-first century as they were in the 1950s, their numbers and therefore the aggregate impact of religion on the vote have declined.[21]

These social changes have especially strong effects on young voters. They are the least likely to be tied to the old class and religious networks and the most likely to seek out new alternatives. In short, age is one demographic factor whose importance has increased, especially in explaining support for the Greens. In 2013 voters under forty-five years of age accounted for 47 percent of the Green vote. As Green voters age, this polarization should decline, but in the near future the generation gap will remain an important factor in voting behavior.[22]

Voters' Attitudes toward Candidates

Voters' perceptions of the major candidates, especially party leaders and those slated for the chancellorship or cabinet positions, are important influences on voting behavior. The incumbent chancellor generally has an advantage, or "bonus," over the challenger. As in other Western societies, the chief executive can to an extent make headlines by announcing tax cuts, spending hikes for social programs, and subsidies for various groups, all timed for the election.

A major factor in the landslide CDU/CSU victories in 1953 and 1957 was the personal popularity of Chancellor Konrad Adenauer. Indeed, more voters liked Adenauer than liked his party, and the SPD's chancellor candidates were less popular than their party. Likewise, the low popularity of the Christian Democratic candidate in 1980, Franz Josef Strauss, was an important factor in the victory of the SPD–FDP coalition. In 1990, after unification, Chancellor Helmut Kohl became more popular than his party. The narrow victory of Chancellor Gerhard Schröder in 2002 was greatly aided by his personal popularity advantage over his challenger. His performance in the TV debates yielded another increase in the polls for his party and government. In 2005 his near comeback from a fifteen percentage point

deficit to a one percentage point loss was also attributable in part to his popularity advantage (53 percent to 39 percent) over Angela Merkel.[23]

In 2009 and 2013 the Christian Democrats ran campaigns focused almost exclusively on Chancellor Merkel. From the beginning of her term in 2005, her personal popularity had been extraordinarily high, averaging about 75 percent over a four-year period. The great majority of Germans simply liked her even though they were far from enthusiastic about her party and some of her policies. In 2013 voters gave her credit for guiding the country through the euro crisis and the relatively strong economy. Given this reality, the CDU campaign planners simply focused on her personality and said as little as possible about policy.

Party Programs and Policies

Through their policies and strategies, the parties also have played an independent role in shaping electoral outcomes. For example, by bringing down the Schmidt government in 1982, the Free Democrats lost many voters and were able to return to the parliament in 1983 only with the support of many CDU/CSU supporters who split their ballots. Indeed, the party narrowly escaped political extinction. The SPD paid a heavy price for its Agenda 2010 program, which many members and voters considered a betrayal of the party's core principles. Kohl's 1998 decision to try for a fifth straight win was probably a major mistake. Four years later, the Free Democrats' attempt in 2002 to run as if they were a major party was not taken seriously by many voters. In 2005 the CDU/CSU's strategic decision to run a "campaign of honesty" that promised tax increases and further cuts in social programs hurt the party's fortunes.

The SPD had a difficult task in 2009. It had to run against many of the policies it had enacted both in the 1998–2005 Schröder government and in the grand coalition. The cuts in social programs, the fusion of unemployment and welfare programs, and the increase in the retirement age to sixty-seven from sixty-five were all done at the initiative of the Social Democrats. But in 2009 the party was railing against these programs and blaming everything on its "evil twin," the SPD in government.

Issues

In most elections, the issues of prime concern to voters revolve around the economy and social stability. Some specific examples are inflation, unemployment, law and order (terrorism), and the viability of the social welfare system. Yet the bulk of the electorate does not want any major political or socioeconomic changes. In the 1994 election, the economy was the major issue, and the economic upturn that began in late 1993 was just in time and just enough to bring the Kohl government a narrow victory. In fact, Kohl became the first chancellor to escape unscathed from a recession. In 1998, however, record high unemployment worked against the incumbent government. In 2005 unemployment was again the voters' top concern. But many Germans were also worried about the security of their pensions and health care insurance system.

In the early 1980s, noneconomic or "new politics" issues began to increase in importance. Chief among them was protection of the environment, specifically the problem of nuclear power plants. By 1990 almost 75 percent of voters considered the environment to be a "very important" issue, second only to unemployment. The 1986 nuclear disaster at Chernobyl in the Soviet Union struck Germany with special force, because citizens were

told not to eat certain foods and to keep their children indoors. This crisis was soon followed by a series of chemical spills into the Rhine River. The ecological cries of the Greens were now being taken seriously by supporters of all political colors, and support for the Greens in public opinion polls soared. More than 40 percent of all voters considered the Greens to be the "most competent" party to deal with nuclear power issue—a percentage almost five times greater than the party's vote in the 1983 election. Other noneconomic issues whose importance increased in the 1980s and 1990s were women's rights, peace and disarmament, and the treatment of foreign minorities. In 2002 another noneconomic issue, the Iraq War and Germany's relationship with the United States, was an important factor in the Schröder government's come-from-behind win. But at the 2009 election, a major factor in the Free Democrats' success was their emphasis on tax cuts.

Campaign Events

In recent elections, as the traditional ties of class and religion have weakened, campaign events, as communicated by the media, have had an increasing influence on voting. In 2002 the first-ever American-style television debate between chancellor candidates Stoiber and Schröder apparently had a significant impact on the choice of many voters.[24] Schröder, the perceived winner, believed the debate helped his candidacy. In 2005 the televised debate between Merkel and Schröder again turned into an advantage for the

Thousands of Opel workers rally in Ruesselsheim, Germany, November 5, 2009, to protest GM's decision to abandon the unit's sale to new owners whom the workers hoped would preserve jobs.

Source: AP Images/Michael Probst.

incumbent, although it was not enough to keep him in office. Also during the 2005 campaign, Merkel's decision to name a professor of tax law as her potential finance minister proved to be a distinct negative for her cause. The professor had a mind of his own and did not stay on message. In his freewheeling speeches, he suggested that the country needed a flat tax (Merkel disagreed) and that women should probably stay at home and raise children. Needless to say, after the election the professor's brief political career came to an end. In 2009 events related to the economic crisis played a major role. The SPD, behind in the polls and searching for another target in the Merkel camp, focused on her economics minister and his alleged refusal to help the Opel automobile company, a subsidiary of General Motors (GM), and its 55,000 workers in the wake of the GM bankruptcy. His alleged indifference to the plight of the common worker, the Social Democrats argued, was symptomatic of the entire party and its ally, the probusiness Free Democrats.

NOTES

1. European Commission, Eurobarometer, no. 77.3, Brussels, May–July 2012, Question QA 13.
2. Federal Election Statisitics.
3. David P. Conradt, "The Christian Democrats in 1990: Saved by Unification?" in *The New Germany Votes,* ed. Russell J. Dalton (Providence, RI: Berg Publishers, 1993), 59–75.
4. For a discussion of this point, see Gordon Smith, *Democracy in Western Germany* (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1979), 96ff.
5. Viola Neu, "FDP Bundesparteitag, Hannover, 15–17. Mai 2009," *Parteienmonitoraktuell,* Berlin: Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, 2009, 11.
6. The average age for Left Party members in 2011 was 65; since unification its membership has dropped from 125,000 in 1990 to 71,000 in 2011. *Der Spiegel,* no. 30, July 25, 2011, 15.
7. Gerhard Lehmbruch, "Liberal Corporatism and Party Government," in *Trends toward Corporatist Intermediation,* ed. Philippe Schmitter and Gerhard Lehmbruch (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage, 1979), 147–188.
8. Since 1999 white-collar workers have been organized in a United Service Sector Union, which is also part of the DGB. Indeed, it has replaced the metal workers as the largest component of the federation.
9. Nico Fickinger, "Deutsche Gewerkschaften suchen nach Antworten," *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung,* April 30, 2005, 16; *Datenreport 2009,* Bonn: Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, 2009, 234; DGB website: www.dgb.de/mitgliederzahlen.
10. *Das Parlament,* nos. 7–8, February 10–17, 1995, 7; Federal Statistical Office, *Datenreport 2002* (Bonn: Federal Center for Political Education, 2003), 602.
11. Michael Jungblut, "Die heimlichen Reichen," *Die Zeit,* November 10, 1978, 25.
12. Adalbert Zehnder, "Wo die 'Roten Barone' das Sagen haben," *Süddeutsche Zeitung,* September 26, 2000.
13. Kurt Sontheimer, "Die Bundesrepublik und ihre Bürger," in *Nach dreißig Jahren,* ed. Walter Scheel (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1979), 175–186.
14. Referendums are constitutionally possible in most states, and a little-known provision of the Basic Law allows local communities to be governed by citizen assemblies. Thus far, no locality has employed this form of governance.
15. In a July 2008 decision the Federal Constitutional Court ruled that parts of the current law are unconstitutional because in some cases all votes are not equally weighted and, indeed, a vote for a particular party can have a negative impact on its total number of seats; in other

words, voting for a party can reduce its total number of seats. Although it was not specifically mentioned in the opinion, many observers consider the excess mandate provision to be a major factor contributing to the law's defects. The court did not invalidate the 2005 election result; rather, it gave the parliament until June 30, 2011, to correct the current law or pass a new electoral law. In short, in 2009 Germans went to the polls according to an electoral law that in 2008 its highest court had declared, in part, unconstitutional. In 2011 the parliament passed a new law, but without the support of the SPD, the Greens or the Left Party—that is, only the CDU/CSU and the FDP voted for the law. A few months later the Constitutional Court declared this law also unconstitutional and sharply criticized the Merkel government for not involving the opposition parties in the process. Finally, in February 2013 yet another version was passed, this time with the votes of the SPD and the Greens. It deals with the excess mandate provision by allowing for compensatory seats for parties that do not receive any excess mandates so that the excess mandates will have no net effect on the overall proportional distribution of seats. Most critics of the old law supported this new version. For an account of the events leading up to the new law see David P. Conradt, "Electoral Law Blues," American Institute for Contemporary German Studies, The Johns Hopkins University, Washington, DC, August 9, 2012 (www.aicgs.org/issue/electoral-law-blues/).

16. Two additional changes in the law were in effect only for the 1990 election, the first free all-German vote since 1932. First, largely as a concession to the East German parties, a party in 1990 was required to secure the 5 percent minimum in either the former West Germany or former East Germany. The PDS, the old Communist Party, and the East German Greens, which was allied with the East German citizen democracy movement, Bündnis 90, both won representation in the parliament, even though they only received 2.4 percent and 1.2 percent, respectively, of the national vote, but in the former East Germany they met the 5 percent minimum. Second, parties were allowed to combine their electoral lists—that is, form alliances in the various states. This measure also was designed to help the new East German parties. Ironically, had the West German Greens formed such an alliance with their East German counterparts, they would have returned to parliament with about twenty-six seats.
17. The 1966 alignment was largely elite-driven. Both the CDU/CSU and the SPD could have formed a government with the Free Democrats, but important leaders in the major parties had other plans. The 2005 coalition was clearly driven by electoral realities.
18. Forschungsgruppe Wahlen, "Bundestagswahl. Eine Analyse der Wahl vom 27. September 2009," *Berichte* Nr. 138. Mannheim, 18–21. For an analysis of the 2009 election, see David P. Conradt, "The Shrinking Elephants," *German Politics and Society* 28, no. 3 (Fall 2010): 25–46.
19. ALLBUS, 2008, Variables 524–526.
20. Forschungsgruppe Wahlen, Bundestagswahl. Eine Analyse der Wahl vom 22 September 2013, Mannheim, 2013, p. 98.
21. Among Catholics who regularly attended services, support for the CDU/CSU in the 1950s averaged about 80 percent; at the 2005 election it was 72 percent; in 2009 it dropped to 67 percent. See David P. Conradt, "The Tipping Point: The 2005 Election and the De-Consolidation of the Party System?" *German Politics and Society* 24, no. 1 (Spring 2006): 11–26; for 2009, see Forschungsgruppe Wahlen, "Bundestagswahl," 62.
22. Forschungsgruppe Wahlen, 2013, p. 97.
23. Forschungsgruppe Wahlen, "Bundestagswahl. Eine Analyse der Wahl vom 18. September 2005," *Mannheim*, 2005, 45. In 2002 Schröder had a twenty three percentage point lead over his challenger, but support for the two major parties was about dead even at 39 percent.
24. Thorsten Faas and Jürgen Maier, "Chancellor-Candidates in the 2002 Televised Debates," *German Politics* 13, no. 2 (June 2004): 300–316.