

# Candidate Selection in Germany: Local and Regional Party Elites Still in Control?

American Behavioral Scientist  
2016, Vol. 60(7) 837–852  
© 2016 SAGE Publications  
Reprints and permissions:  
sagepub.com/journalsPermissions.nav  
DOI: 10.1177/0002764216632822  
abs.sagepub.com



**Klaus Detterbeck<sup>1</sup>**

## Abstract

In comparative terms, the strong legal regulation of internal party processes is a specific feature of the German party democracy. Local and regional party conventions are the formal sites of decision making in selecting parliamentary candidates. The national party level is relatively excluded from the procedures. The article argues that the decentralization of intraparty competences has facilitated a gatekeeping role for local and regional party elites. At the constituency level, most often a single candidate is presented to the party convention after he or she has been appointed in the informal preselection activities of local party elites. Gaining a local nomination is the crucial step for obtaining a federal parliamentary mandate, either by winning a direct constituency mandate or being awarded a safe list position. At the regional level, *Land* party elites are in control of producing balanced party lists. The article also looks at newer developments, such as the introduction of party primaries and gender quotas. It shows that these developments have somehow weakened, but not fundamentally altered, the predominance of subnational party elites in candidate selection.

## Keywords

candidate selection, informality, party organization, Germany, elite politics

In comparative terms, the strong legal regulation of internal party processes is a specific feature of the German party democracy. The German Basic Law (1949) has constitutionally recognized the importance of parties in the political process but requires them to be organized democratically in order to enjoy the privileges of this constitutional status, including public funding. With the adoption of the party law in 1967, the

---

<sup>1</sup>University of Education Schwäbisch Gmünd, Schwäbisch Gmünd, Germany

## Corresponding Author:

Klaus Detterbeck, University of Education Schwäbisch Gmünd, Oberbettringer Straße 200, Schwäbisch Gmünd 73525, Germany.

Email: klaus.detterbeck@gse-w.uni-magdeburg.de

state has set binding rules for the democratic election of party leadership bodies, the adoption of party programs and the nomination of parliamentary candidates. Over the decades, there have been no major changes on state regulation of internal party democracy (Poguntke, 1994).

With respect to candidate selection, electoral laws are prescribing at which territorial levels and in which ways parliamentary candidates are to be selected. Party statutes do not say much on the issue as the rules are laid down in detail by law. As a result, the formal process is relatively similar across the different German parties. It is also quite stable, with regional and local party conventions having remained the formal site of decision making. The national party level is relatively excluded from the procedures. Overall, there is a strong degree of decentralization in candidate selection in Germany. However, for many years, observers have pointed to the crucial role of local and regional party elites as decisive power brokers (Kaack, 1969; Roberts, 1988; Schüttemeyer & Sturm, 2005; Zeuner, 1973).

This is the puzzle in the German case. While formal rules have been set to promote intraparty democracy at large, the real winners are subnational party leaders. In the comparative literature, candidate selection is seen as a decisive step in the recruitment of political elites, making and breaking political careers. The locus of selection, the place where decisions are effectively taken, is often at lower party levels. Indeed, in many countries candidate selection is among the most important privileges of local and regional party units (see Gallagher, 1988; Hazan & Rahat, 2010). The German case throws an interesting light on this theoretical literature. It shows that the level of openness of candidate selection, the actual degree of participation of party members, is not determined by the formal degree of decentralization alone. It is also influenced by the efforts of subnational party elites to keep control of the process.

This article addresses the puzzle in two ways. First, it wants to show how the interplay of formal and informal processes has facilitated the predominant role of subnational party elites in the nomination procedures for federal elections. For doing so, we will emphasize the importance of local preselection activities at the constituency level. Second, the article seeks to evaluate the impact of more recent developments, in particular, the introduction of gender quotas and party primaries, on the gatekeeping role of local and regional elites. Are they still in control of the process of candidate selection?

## The Formal Rules of the Game

The most important institutional variable that shape candidate selection is the electoral system. At the federal level, as well as in most of the regional elections, a mixed-member proportional (MMP) voting system is used.<sup>1</sup> Each voter has two separate choices: a constituency vote for individual (party) candidates (*Erststimme*) and a secondary vote for party lists (*Zweitstimme*). Half of the MPs are elected directly by relative majority in single-seat constituencies (currently 299) via the constituency votes, the other half are elected via closed party lists. The party lists are compiled at *Land* level. The secondary vote is more decisive, as the overall composition of the Bundestag

is determined by the national party results. Parties will be represented in parliament according to their national share of the vote; therefore, list seats will be distributed to compensate for any disproportionality produced by the constituency seat results.<sup>2</sup> A party has to win at least 5% of the secondary votes in the whole of Germany or three constituency mandates in order to be entitled to gain list seats and proportional representation in the *Bundestag* (see Farrell, 2001).

The MMP electoral system has led to a dual process of candidate selection: Constituency candidates are nominated by local party conventions, while list candidates are chosen by regional party conferences. As a result, there are two different sets of selectors and two different logics of nomination in the German system: While local parties have to pick a single candidate for representing the constituency at the elections, *Land* party delegates decide on a closed list of candidates which has to integrate different segments and interests within the party.

In the case of the constituency candidates, the local party members choose some of their fellow members to attend the nomination conference at constituency level. For the *Land* party lists, nomination conferences at regional level are bringing together representatives of the local parties with party actors from the party districts and the *Land* party level (i.e., regional party executives).

Both the party law and the electoral law stipulate secret voting for both types of nominations. It is up to the parties, however, to organize conventions which are open to all party members (party primaries) or restricted to party delegates (*Bundeswahlgesetz*, §21 and §27). The formal rules of the game thus suggest that the process is, in the categories of comparative research on candidate selection, highly decentralized and fairly inclusive (Bille, 2001; Hazan & Rahat, 2010).

This is also reinforced by the weakness of central party intervention. In the German case, regional and federal party executives have formal veto powers on constituency candidates and can demand that the local procedure has to be repeated. However, this has hardly ever been used. In the few cases that have been documented, there is no single instance in which this has led local selectors to change their mind (Schüttemeyer, 1999). Federal parliamentary parties will have to live with their “rebels” as long as they can rely on a well-entrenched local power base. There is no central veto power with respect to the regional party lists.

Parachuting has become somehow more important over time. Both SPD and some of the CDU *Land* parties have introduced statutory reforms in the 1990s to allow *Land* party executives to place experts who do not necessarily have to be party members on prominent list positions. Yet, even in these rather rare cases, the *Land* party nomination convention will have the final decision (Detterbeck, 2012).

Central intervention has also included the introduction of party-wide gender quotas. The Green Party has followed a gender parity policy from the mid-1980s, the SPD federal party conference introduced a 40% quota for women on party lists in 1988 and the CDU adopted a nonbinding quorum of 33% of female candidates in 1996. In 2007, the Left Party (*Die Linke*) has taken over gender parity rules from its predecessor party, the PDS. There are no gender quotas for candidate selection with the CSU and the Free Democratic Party (FDP; see Bukow & Poguntke, 2013).

## Becoming a Candidate: The Predominance of Local and Regional Party Elites

The institutional rules of the game suggest a high degree of decentralization in candidate selection in Germany. Informally, however, the dual process of local and regional nominations has led to a predominance of subnational party elites. As the analysis will show, constituency nominations are the crucial first step in the nomination process. And it is here that we find a relatively low level of competitiveness. This is indicated by the high number of “coronations,” that is, the selection of the one single candidate who is standing, at the constituency level. This lack of choice for the delegates can be attributed to the gatekeeping role of local party elites in their preselection activities. At the regional level, *Land* party elites are in control of balancing party lists. While delegates decide, they often follow the suggested order of rankings.

### *The Sequence of Nomination: The Primacy of Constituency Selection*

Looking at the sequence of nomination in the dual process of candidate selection in Germany, there is an interesting pattern to be noticed. The decisions over the party list rankings are regularly taken only after the constituency candidates have been selected. There are quite some interesting linkages and interdependencies between the two rounds of nomination.

The German electoral system allows candidates to simultaneously stand for election in both tiers. As in other MMP electoral systems, double listing is quite common (see Hennl, 2014). For the individual candidates, taking the “two-lane route” increases their chances of winning a seat and reduces career uncertainty (Roberts, 1988, p. 44). For the political parties, nominating candidates in both races multiplies their potential to strategically use their recruitment power.

Some 30% of all candidates run for a constituency mandate and are nominated on a party list at the same time (Table 1). As we will see, however, almost all successful candidates, that is, incoming MPs, are double listed.

As we can see, dual candidacies have become slightly more common over time. This is, however, mainly driven by the Green Party and the Left Party that have given up earlier reservations about the practice of securing established politicians. There are also some differences between the parties with respect to the strength of linkages between the two tiers. There are many dual candidacies within the liberal FDP and the Social Democrats, while they are less common in the Bavarian CSU.

Next to party traditions, electoral rationalities seem to play a role for dual candidacies. For the CSU, which is very successful in winning constituency mandates in Bavaria, only the top list positions are attractive in terms of seat safety. For many constituency candidates, there is not much to be earned in fighting for a list nomination. Thus, we do find relatively few dual candidacies in the CSU with only 21% on average. For the FDP and Greens, on the other hand, the chances of entering the *Bundestag* via the party lists are much higher than winning a direct mandate. Running in a constituency increases intraparty status and thus the likelihood of gaining a good position on the party list (for a debate, see Hühne, 2010).

**Table 1.** Dual Candidacies in German Federal Elections, 1990-2103 (%).

	1990	1994	1998	2002	2005	2009	2013	Average (1990-2013)	Changes (1990-2013)
CDU	30.4	31.6	30.0	30.1	28.9	31.8	31.7	30.6	+1.3
CSU	23.9	24.2	17.7	18.6	16.3	20.3	25.2	20.9	+1.3
FDP	39.9	40.8	37.8	37.0	39.5	41.4	41.6	39.7	+1.7
Greens	24.6	28.5	30.6	28.9	31.6	31.4	36.9	30.4	+12.3
Left	21.4	25.9	22.4	24.3	17.6	28.8	29.3	24.2	+7.9
SPD	36.4	37.6	36.5	35.6	37.0	38.0	40.2	37.3	+0.9
Average	29.4	31.4	29.2	29.1	28.5	32.0	34.2	30.5	+1.1
N	895	1,003	991	948	968	1,086	1,084	—	

Note. CDU = Christian Democratic Union; CSU = Christian Social Union in Bavaria; FDP = Free Democratic Party; SPD = Social Democratic Party of Germany. *N* refers to the number of candidates who stood in both tiers (constituency seats and regional party lists) in each of the elections between 1990 and 2013.

Source. Own calculations, based on Statistisches Bundesamt (2013).

This also holds true more generally across parties. Candidates who are selected at constituency level stand better chances in the competition for list positions. For most aspiring MPs, a strong local power base and a long record of party offices and public mandates at local and regional levels (which is referred to in Germany as the *Ochsentour*)<sup>3</sup> is necessary to secure local nomination in a constituency (see Borchert & Stolz, 2011).

For the 1998 and 2002 federal elections, a remarkable 94% of all MPs who made it to parliament via the party lists were also running, albeit unsuccessfully, for a constituency seat (Schüttemeyer & Sturm, 2005). In 2009, 86% of all elected parliamentarians have been double listed, 12% were running only at the constituency level, and 2% have been “pure” list candidates (Reiser, 2013). Hence, winning nomination in a constituency is the crucial step for winning a federal parliamentary seat.

### “Coronations” at the Constituency Level

If selection at the constituency level is decisive, one would expect strong competitive races for these positions. Empirical studies have shown, however, that competitive contests for local nominations are actually quite rare. For the 1960s, it has been found that only 16% of all CDU/CSU and SPD constituency candidates had been facing internal competition (Zeuner, 1973). Looking at more recent elections, competitiveness in local selection has increased but remains limited. For the 2002 federal elections, 34% of all SPD constituency candidates and 43% of their CDU colleagues were selected among several contenders (Schüttemeyer & Sturm, 2005). In 2009, less than a quarter (23%) of all CDU, CSU, SPD, and Left Party local party conventions were contested; in 77% of all cases, the selectors were given no choice (Reiser, 2011).

While the legal regulation of candidate selection which prescribes local and regional party conventions is aiming at promoting intraparty democracy, the actual process is

**Table 2.** Constituency Coronations, in 2009 (%).

	Incumbent MP is seeking reselection	"Vacant" constituency
SPD	90.1	57.5
CDU	90.5	51.9
CSU	94.8	0
Left Party	100	76.7
Total	91.3 (N = 378)	56.9 (N = 283)

*Note.* SPD = Social Democratic Party of Germany; CDU = Christian Democratic Union; CSU = Christian Social Union in Bavaria.

*Source.* Reiser (2013).

elite driven. Most often, local party leaders have agreed on a single candidate prior to the formal selection; he or she is then been presented to the delegates who usually "coronate" the candidate by very large margins.<sup>4</sup> The level of competitiveness in local candidate selection is strongly connected to the role of incumbents (see Roberts, 1988; Zeuner, 1973). In Germany, sitting MPs hardly ever face competition.

Table 2 documents constituency coronations for the 2009 federal elections, that is, selections in which only one candidate stood for winning the party ticket. There are different patterns depending on whether an incumbent seeks reselection (around 60% of all cases), or whether the constituency is "vacant" (some 40% of all cases).<sup>5</sup>

If incumbents were running, coronations took place in more than 90% of all cases. There seems to be a strong informal rule in all German parties that challenging the incumbent is an act of disloyalty which can be considered only under specific circumstances, for example, when there is massive discomfort with his or her parliamentary behavior. Even if challenged, however, incumbents stand good chances of winning the internal competition. In three out of four contested races, the sitting MP gained the upper hand (Reiser, 2013).

"Vacant" constituencies are more likely to be contested as there is no incumbent claiming his or her territory. In 43% of these cases, two or more aspirants came forward and sought selection by the nominating convention in 2009. However, there was still a majority of constituencies (57%) where coronation of one single candidate took place. This was particularly pronounced in the Left Party (77%), while vacant constituencies were heavily competitive within the Bavarian CSU, not allowing for coronations.<sup>6</sup>

Interestingly, there was no statistically significant effect between the level of competition (number of contenders) and the modus of selection (delegates vs. members) for the 2009 federal elections (Reiser, 2013). While Hazan and Rahat (2010) have found in their comparative research that more inclusive selectorates in party primaries lead to less competition, the German case study points to some other conclusions. Participation in party primaries is higher in cases where there is a real choice between several contenders. Arguably, open competition leads to higher

intraparty mobilization. The more competitive the races are, the more party members become interested in the decision-making process. Competition breeds inclusion (see also Detterbeck, 2013). In a similar vein, competition in the selection process will be more intense if there are good chances for the party candidate to win the constituency in the general elections, irrespective of the modus of selection (Schüttemeyer & Sturm, 2005).

### *Informal Preselection Activities of Local Elites*

Nevertheless, the strong tendency within German parties to present just one candidate to the formal organ of selection indicates that there are important informal processes going on before the delegates or members meet. Older studies have suggested that this is the place for the classical smoke-filled room in which local notables take a decision (Kaack, 1969; Zeuner, 1973). More recent research has updated and modified this finding without putting in question the importance of the preselection activities of local party elites (Höhne, 2010; Reiser, 2011). What are the relevant informal mechanisms? What is their effect?

In many constituencies, in particular, if there is no incumbent seeking reselection, a rather long discussion process is preceding formal nomination. This involves the presentation of aspiring candidates at local party meetings and more informal ways of winning support among party selectors (e.g., via leaflets, personal contacts and visits, mailing lists, and personal websites). During this process, the candidates will learn to evaluate better their chances of being selected which will clear the field. Some will give up, others will go on (see Schüttemeyer & Sturm, 2005).

At the same time, members of local party executives (sometimes also important higher level party or public office holders from that area) may exert more or less subtle pressure on individual candidates to withdraw from competition. Factional linkages may be used to unite delegates and members behind “their” nominee. Reiser (2011) shows that in some cases, the party selectors were relatively free in making up their mind, while in other cases, local and regional/national elites strongly pushed their favorite candidate. Whether as a result of elite pressure, member preferences, or personal reasons, the number of aspiring candidates shrinks during the preselection process, often resulting in the “one (wo)man” show at the formal site of nomination (Höhne, 2010). Overall, there is a strong steering role for local party elites during this phase. The key effect of their informal preselection activities is the reduction of the level of competitiveness in nomination races.

Most of the time, the national party level will keep aloof from the process, knowing that any open attempts to dictating local party decision making would be perceived as an attack on local autonomy. However, there are extensive linkages of party elites between territorial levels in the vertically integrated German parties. Most important, many regional party leaders are members of national party executives (see Detterbeck, 2012). We may thus expect mutual considerations and cooperation when it comes to selecting federal parliamentary candidates or to balancing regional party lists. In that

sense, major party figures will be able to informally influence local decision making if they choose to have an impact.

### *The Next Step: The Regional Balancing of Party Lists*

When the constituencies have chosen their candidates, delegate conferences meet at regional party level for selecting candidates for the *Land* party lists. According to the German federal structure of 16 *Länder*, the parties are holding 16 regional delegate conferences in the wake of a federal election.<sup>7</sup> Before the delegates convene, *Land* party executives are seeking to compile the ordering of the list accommodating all the different interests within the party. The top positions on the party list, which are visible for the voters as they appear on the ballot paper, usually are reserved for prominent politicians who are standing as constituency candidates in that *Land*. Angela Merkel, for example, has been selected as a candidate for a direct mandate in a constituency in Mecklenburg-West Pomerania the last round of elections and headed the CDU *Land* list there.

As we have seen above, there is a general tendency to place constituency candidates, in particular, in the case of sitting MPs, on attractive list positions. Next to securing incumbents, many other considerations do play a role. For some of the parties, gender quotas have to be met. Subregional party districts (*Bezirke*) will seek to find adequate representation on *Land* list giving rise to an informal territorial quota for the different regional subunits. The different political wings and factions will be active to push their own candidates. Groups within the party that represent women, youth, trade unions, employers, or other interests will advocate the inclusion of their representatives (see Turner & Wigbers, 2014).

Hence, regional party lists as compiled by the *Land* party executives are an attempt to find the right balance between all these different demands and obligations. They can be seen as resulting from a political compromise that has to be struck well before the delegate convention takes place. However, the final word is with the delegates. They have to vote on each position on the list in descending order. Additional candidates can come forward and challenge the executive proposal. In these cases, a runoff is held between two or more contenders for a specific position on the list (see Schüttemeyer, 1999).

There is no systematic data on the level of competitiveness in *Land* delegate conferences. Some studies have suggested that the CDU follows a more institutionalized system of representation with relatively fixed shares for the different intraparty groups while there is more factional infighting between the left and the right inside the SPD (see Padgett, 1994). Green party delegates have the reputation of being particularly skeptical toward their party leaders and attempts of elite manipulation. In general, however, it seems fair to say that candidate selection for party lists runs quite smoothly most of the time. Party delegates are quite aware of the delicate balance that lies behind the executive proposals. If the compromise breaks down, it will become quite difficult to find a new accommodation of interests. As a result, organized challenges by specific groups are the exception rather than the rule (Bukow & Poguntke, 2013; Roberts, 1988; Turner & Wigbers, 2014).



## Recent Changes in Candidate Selection: Subnational Party Elites Losing Control?

As we have seen, the predominance of subnational party elites in candidate selection can be explained by the interplay of the formal decentralization of the process and the informal mechanisms of preselecting local constituency candidates and balancing regional party lists. Over the past decades, however, party organizations in Germany, as elsewhere, have responded to declining membership levels and ailing partisan alignments by introducing new instruments of intraparty participation, notably party primaries and gender quotas (see Detterbeck, 2013). In this section, we want to study whether these innovations have weakened the control of local and regional elites over candidate selection.

### *The Impact of Party Primaries*

The selectors in German parties are party members. Traditionally, parliamentary candidates have been selected at party delegate conferences (Zeuner, 1973). There have been some attempts by the SPD leadership in recent years to introduce open primaries in which nonparty members can participate. This met with staunch opposition from midlevel elites, that is, incumbent MPs, regional and local party executives, and party headquarters. While there can be some debate on the arguments they brought forward, there is little doubt that the midlevel elites who are currently benefiting from the established system of candidate nomination feared the loss of their privileges. In any case, attempts toward open primaries in the SPD have not been successful (Bukow, 2014; Höhne, 2013). Regional delegate conferences are still the undisputed locus of selection with respect to party lists. However, there have been some more recent changes in selecting constituency candidates. Since the 1990s, most German parties have called on their regional and local party units to more actively seek the involvement of all party members in party affairs. Thus, the legal option to hold nomination conventions open to all party members has been promoted (Detterbeck, 2013).

Empirical data show that this has had some effect, although delegate conferences still remain the norm. For the 2009 *Bundestag* elections, around 70% of all constituency candidates were selected by delegates with the remaining 30% decided by membership conventions (Reiser, 2011). However, there are strong differences between the parties to be noticed (see Table 3).<sup>8</sup>

The CDU seems to be particularly open for holding membership conventions). More than half of their constituency candidates have been chosen by local party primaries. The trend is especially strong in the East of Germany, where party membership is low. Yet there are also strong CDU *Land* parties in the West which have favored a more inclusive process, for example Baden-Württemberg and Lower Saxony. By contrast, the party statute of their Bavarian sister party CSU does still prescribe delegate conferences. The SPD has shown a clear preference for the delegate system. It is only in the East, where SPD membership conventions are somehow more common, again in conjunction with small membership figures (Reiser, 2011).

**Table 3.** The Modus of Selection for Constituency Candidates in the 2009 Bundestag Elections, for Some Selected Parties (%).

Party	Membership convention (party primary)	Delegate conference	Total (N)
CDU	52.5	47.5	100 (254)
CSU	0	100	100 (45)
Left Party	38.3	61.7	100 (297)
SPD	14.4	85.6	100 (299)
Total (N)	30.3 (272)	69.7 (623)	100 (895)

Note. CDU = Christian Democratic Union; CSU = Christian Social Union in Bavaria; SPD = Social Democratic Party of Germany.

Source. Reiser (2011).

Following the cartel party arguments (Katz & Mair, 1995), the empowerment of ordinary members in candidate selection has been seen as a manipulative method by which party leaders circumvent the organized and more critical segment of party activists (Hazan & Rahat, 2010; Mair, 1997). In this view, the members are seen as isolated individuals lacking information on intraparty dynamics but also being less characterized by ideological preferences and factional commitments. Giving members more of a say, is to provide party leaders with advantages in having their will (see Detterbeck, 2013).

Whether this has been true or not, the German case suggests that the type of selectorate does matter. Interviews show that most delegates arrive at nomination conferences with a clear voting intention, while members are often not aware of the profile of the candidates (Reiser, 2011). In membership conventions, the performance of candidates in presenting themselves is therefore much more important. In the case of delegate conferences, candidates can rely strongly on local networks, their political record, and the support of local party elites. In sum, there is much less of a foregone conclusion who will win in party primaries.

A more inclusive modus of selection also changes the ways in which preselection activities work. In their intraparty campaigns, prospective candidates will have to reach out to the wider membership rather than to the smaller circles of party activists. Local party elites will face more difficulties in finding the right people to talk to in their attempts to find a consensual candidate. Arguably, the less integrated members will be more immune against the wishes of party notables than the party faithful (Bukow & Poguntke, 2013). More party actors, including ordinary party members, will have a say in the nomination process.

### *The Impact of Gender Quotas*

Federal party conferences have introduced gender quotas for party candidate lists in most German parties. While serving the aim of more equality between the sexes,

**Table 4.** Female Candidates and MPs in 2013 (%).

Party	Female candidates	Female MPs
CDU	32.3	25.1
CSU	24.4	25.0
FDP	19.8	—
Greens	43.7	55.6
Left Party	35.3	56.2
SPD	39.8	42.0
Others	19.0	—
Average (N)	25.8 (688)	36.1 (227)

*Note.* CDU = Christian Democratic Union; CSU = Christian Social Union in Bavaria; FDP = Free Democratic Party; SPD = Social Democratic Party of Germany.

*Source.* Own calculations, based on Deutscher Bundestag (2014) and Statistisches Bundesamt (2013).

gender quotas are also an instrument of central party intervention. They restrict the autonomy of local and regional party elites in committing them to the promotion of female political careers. Empirically, there are strong differences between the parties.

The parties of the left—The Greens, the SPD, and the Left Party—have more female candidates than parties of the political right (see Table 4). As German left-wing parties have established robust gender quotas, there is an inbuilt mechanism to foster female participation. Moreover, the share of female MPs in left-wing parties is higher than their share of female candidates. This indicates that women in these parties stand good chance of being awarded safe or hopeful nominations to fulfill quota regulations. By contrast, the CDU/CSU and the FDP (which failed to pass the 5% threshold in the 2013 federal elections and thus currently has no MPs) have a more strongly male-dominated pool of candidates and deputies.

For the purposes of our argument, it thus seems fair to conclude that the recognition of gender equality has curtailed local autonomy more strongly in the parties of the left.

## Conclusion

Candidate selection in Germany can be classified as a mixed system (Rahat & Hazan, 2001). Prospective candidates face two different sets of selectors and two different logics of nomination at local and regional party levels. As determined by part law, local and regional party conventions are the formal sites of decision making in selecting parliamentary candidates. The national party level is relatively excluded from the procedures. We have argued that the decentralized method of selection has facilitated a gatekeeping role for local and regional party elites.

At the constituency level, most often a single candidate is presented to the party convention. Hence, the level of competitiveness is relatively low. This is especially the case if an incumbent MP runs again. Vacant constituencies are more open to contestation but

even in this category “coronations” are more frequent than competition between two or more contenders. The German case suggests that competitiveness is related to the likelihood of gaining the electoral mandate rather than to the modus of selection (party primaries vs. delegate conferences).

The finding that there is often only one candidate at the formal site of selection indicates that the preselection process is an important feature of candidate selection. In local party meetings and intraparty campaigns, the aspiring candidates present themselves and test their chances of being selected, while at the same time local and regional party elites seek to influence the process. As a result, some contenders withdraw, others stay on. The balance between an open discussion among members and delegates on the one hand, and a strong steering role of local party executives varies among constituencies and parties (see Reiser, 2013).

Gaining the local nomination is the crucial step for obtaining a federal parliamentary mandate. Dual candidacies are quite common, in particular, nearly all successful candidates have been running on both levels simultaneously. There are very few federal deputies who have not either won a direct mandate at constituency level or earned a good list position that allowed them to enter parliament in conjunction with local nomination.

At the regional level, *Land* party elites are in control of producing balanced party lists according to factors like gender, ideology, social groups, and the representation of subregional districts. We do, however, lack systematic data on the level of competitiveness in *Land* delegate conferences. Informally, individual heavyweights in the party can seek some impact but there is no evidence that this happens more than occasionally.

Looking at changes in the modus of candidate selection, we have seen some trend toward membership conventions at local levels but the delegate principle is still dominant. Party primaries for selecting constituency candidates have mainly been used by the CDU, the FDP, and the Green Party. The SPD and the Left have remained reluctant, the CSU does not allow for local primaries. In all German parties, the final decision on party list positions has remained in the hand of *Land* party delegate conferences. Gender quotas which have been adopted by federal party conferences in the three left-wing parties (Greens, SPD, Left Party) have resulted in higher percentages of female candidates and MPs.

Future research will have to show whether this trend toward a more open process of candidate selection will continue. There is also need for a more systematic evaluation of the preselection activities of local party elites and the balancing of party lists at regional level. Furthermore, as most analyses are based on federal elections, there is a lack of information on the process of candidate selection for regional elections.<sup>9</sup>

To conclude, local and regional party elites have remained vital gatekeepers in the process of candidate selection in Germany. However, there has arguably been a stronger involvement of ordinary party members in recent years. Both the trend toward party primaries and the stronger openness of preselection activities indicate that subnational party elites have less control over the selection process today than they once had. The nomination of parliamentary candidates in Germany has become (somehow) more inclusive.

## Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

## Funding

The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

## Notes

1. At the regional level, 14 of the 16 *Länder* elect their state parliaments via the MMP system, with some regional variations on the balance of constituency and list seats, the method of transferring votes into seats, and other elements of the electoral system. By contrast, the small *Länder* of Bremen and the Saarland operate on a pure proportional representation system (see Leunig, 2012).
2. In practice, almost all of the 299 constituency seats are won by the major parties, the Christian Democratic Union/Christian Social Union in Bavaria (CDU/CSU) and the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD; with some exceptions in the strongholds of the Left Party in East Germany and a single direct mandate for the Greens). In case a party wins more seats in the constituencies than it has gained secondary votes on a national level, the other parties in parliament are awarded extra seats to compensate for the disproportional effects of surplus seats. Accordingly, there can be some more list seats than constituency seats in the *Bundestag*. After the 2013 federal elections, 631 MPs entered parliament (Deutscher Bundestag, 2014).
3. The term which makes reference to the hard work of a beast of burden indicates that there is a long way to the top, where politicians first have to serve their party at lower political levels, build their networks, and learn their political profession before being selected as candidate for a national mandate.
4. Detterbeck and Rohlfing (2014) show that this also true with respect to the election of federal party leaders in Germany. Between 1965 and 2012, 88% of all leadership elections were uncontested; only the Green Party in its formative period in the 1980s diverged from the general pattern. German parties are seemingly very reluctant to risk the image of intra-party unity by having open runoffs between two or more candidates. Thus, party leadership selection is very much a party elite affair behind closed doors.
5. In her study, Reiser (2013) defines constituency as vacant if the incumbent does not seek reselection or if the local party candidate in the past federal election did not become an MP.
6. Given the fact that nearly all Bavarian constituencies are safe or hopeful CSU seats, there certainly was a high price to be won in the internal nomination race. On average, more than three CSU contenders run in the seven vacant constituencies in 2009 (Reiser, 2013).
7. This is slightly different in the case of the Christian Democratic sister parties, with the CDU organizing 15 *Land* party conferences and the CSU one *Land* party conference in Bavaria (Höhne, 2010).
8. The data do not include the Green Party and the FDP. Both parties tend to prefer membership conventions at the local level. Given their rather small membership base, an open process of candidate selection seems more appropriate (Höhne, 2010). However, in contrast to the four other established parties their chances of winning constituency seats are very limited. Looking at the period after reunification, the FDP won just one single direct mandate

in Halle in 1990, the Greens have won one single constituency in Berlin repeatedly since 2002.

9. As the nomination process for both types of elections takes place at local and regional party levels, we may expect that the dynamics are quite similar. After all, we are talking about basically the same set of selectors. Studies on *Land* party primaries on leadership selection confirm this assumption (see Detterbeck, 2013). However, there is need for more systematic research on candidate selection for regional elections.

## References

- Bille, L. (2001). Democratizing a democratic procedure: Myth or reality? Candidate selection in Western European parties, 1960-1990. *Party Politics*, 7, 363-380.
- Borchert, J., & Stolz, K. (2011). German political careers: The state level as an arena in its own right? *Regional and Federal Studies*, 21, 205-222.
- Bukow, S. (2014). Die SPD-Parteiorganisationsreform 2009-2011: Mit Primaries und verstärkter Basisbeteiligung auf dem Weg zur modernsten Partei Europas? [The SPD party organisational reform 2009-2011: do primaries and more inclusion of the party on the ground pave the way towards the most modern party in Europe?]. In U. Münch, U. Kranenpohl, & H. Gast (Eds.), *Parteien und Demokratie: Innerparteiliche Demokratie im Wandel* [Parties and democracy: changes in intra-party democracy] (pp. 133-150). Baden-Baden, Germany: Nomos.
- Bukow, S., & Poguntke, T. (2013). Innerparteiliche Organisation und Willensbildung [Intra-party organisation and decision-making]. In O. Niedermayer (Ed.), *Handbuch Parteienforschung* [Handbook on party research] (pp. 179-209). Wiesbaden, Germany: Springer VS.
- Detterbeck, K. (2012). *Multi-level party politics in Western Europe*. Basingstoke, England: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Detterbeck, K. (2013). The rare event of choice: Party primaries in German *Land* parties. *German Politics*, 22, 270-287.
- Detterbeck, K., & Rohlfing, I. (2014). Party leader selection in Germany. In J.-B. Pilet & W. Cross (Eds.), *The selection of political party leaders in contemporary parliamentary democracies* (pp. 77-92). Abingdon, England: Routledge.
- Deutscher Bundestag. (2014). *Datenhandbuch zum Deutschen Bundestag* [Data handbook on the German Bundestag/Federal parliament]. Berlin, Germany: Author.
- Farrell, D. (2001). *Electoral systems: A comparative introduction*. Basingstoke, England: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Gallagher, M. (1988). Introduction. In M. Gallagher & M. Marsh (Eds.), *Candidate selection in comparative perspective: The secret garden of politics* (pp. 1-9). London, England: Sage.
- Hazan, R., & Rahat, G. (2010). *Democracy within parties: Candidate selection methods and their political consequences*. Oxford, England: Oxford University Press.
- Hennl, A. (2014). Intra-party dynamics in mixed-member electoral systems: How strategies of candidate selection impact parliamentary behavior. *Journal of Theoretical Politics*, 26, 93-116.
- Höhne, B. (2010). Strukturmuster, Selektionsprämissen und Resultate von Kandidatenaufstellungen zu Bundestags- und Europawahlen in Deutschland [Structures, selection patterns of candidate selection in Bundestag and European elections in Germany]. In U. Jun & B. Höhne (Eds.), *Parteien als fragmentierte Organisationen* [Parties as fragmented organisations] (pp. 85-122). Leverkusen, Germany: Barbara Budrich.
- Höhne, B. (2013). Reform von Kandidatenaufstellungen: Fehlende Realisierungspotenziale in Parteien [Reform of candidate nomination: failing to materialize]. In O. Niedermayer, B.

- Höhne, & U. Jun (Eds.), *Abkehr von den Parteien? Parteiendemokratie und Bürgerprotest* [Deserting parties? Party democracy and citizen's protest] (pp. 177-203). Wiesbaden, Germany: Springer VS.
- Kaack, H. (1969). *Wer kommt in den Bundestag? Abgeordnete und Kandidaten 1969* [Who gets into the Bundestag? Deputies and candidates 1969]. Leverkusen, Germany: Leske.
- Katz, R., & Mair, P. (1995). Changing models of party organization and party democracy: The emergence of the cartel party. *Party Politics*, 1, 5-28.
- Leunig, S. (2012). *Die Regierungssysteme der deutschen Länder* [The systems of government in the German Länder/states]. Wiesbaden, Germany: Springer VS.
- Mair, P. (1997). *Party system change: Approaches and interpretations*. Oxford, England: Clarendon Press.
- Padgett, S. (1994). The German Social Democratic Party: Between old and new left. In D. Bell & E. Shaw (Eds.), *Conflict and cohesion in Western European Social Democratic Parties* (pp. 10-30). London, England: Sage.
- Poguntke, T. (1994). Parties in a legalistic culture: The case of Germany. In R. Katz & P. Mair (Eds.), *How parties organize: Change and adaptation in party organizations in Western democracies* (pp. 185-215). London, England: Sage.
- Rahat, G., & Hazan, R. (2001). Candidate selection methods: An analytical framework. *Party Politics*, 7, 297-322.
- Reiser, M. (2011). Wer entscheidet unter welchen Bedingungen über die Nominierung von Kandidaten? Die innerparteilichen Selektionsprozesse zur Aufstellung in den Wahlkreisen [Who decides according to which criteria on candidate selection? The intra-party selection mechanisms on constituency level]. In O. Niedermayer (Ed.), *Die Parteien nach der Bundestagswahl 2009* [The parties after the Bundestag elections of 2009] (pp. 237-259). Wiesbaden, Germany: Springer VS.
- Reiser, M. (2013). Ausmaß und Formen des innerparteilichen Wettbewerbs auf der Wahlkreisebene: Nominierung der Direktkandidaten für die Bundestagswahl 2009 [Forms and degree of intra-party competition at constituency level: nominating the constituency candidates for the Bundestag elections of 2009]. In T. Faas, K. Arzheimer, S. Roßteuscher, & B. Weißels (Eds.), *Koalitionen, Kandidaten, Kommunikation* [Coalitions, candidates, communication] (pp. 129-147). Wiesbaden, Germany: Springer VS.
- Roberts, G. (1988). The German Federal Republic: The two-lane route to Bonn. In M. Gallagher & M. Marsh (Eds.), *Candidate selection in comparative perspective: The secret garden of politics* (pp. 94-118). London, England: Sage.
- Schüttemeyer, S. (1999). Fraktionen und ihre Parteien in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland: Veränderte Beziehungen im Zeichen professioneller Politik [Parliamentary groups and their parties in the Federal Republic of Germany: changing relations in the sign of professional politics]. In L. Helms (Ed.), *Parteien und Fraktionen* [Parties and parliamentary groups] (pp. 39-65). Leverkusen, Germany: Leske + Budrich.
- Schüttemeyer, S., & Sturm, R. (2005). Der Kandidat—das (fast) unbekannte Wesen [The candidate - the (nearly) unknown beast]. *Zeitschrift für Parlamentsfragen*, 36, 539-553.
- Statistisches Bundesamt. (2013). *Die Wahlbewerber für die Wahl zum 18. Deutschen Bundestag 2013: Informationen des Bundeswahlleiters* [The nominated candidates for the elections of the 18th German Bundestag 2013: Informations of the Bundeswahlleiter/the Federal Elections Officer]. Wiesbaden, Germany: Author.
- Turner, E., & Wigbers, D. (2014). Ambitionierte Zielsetzung, unzureichende Realisierung? Reform der Kandidatenauswahl in Großbritannien und Deutschland [Ambitious goals,

unsatisfying results? Reforming candidate selection in Great Britain and Germany]. In U. Münch, U. Kranenpohl, & H. Gast (Eds.), *Parteien und Demokratie: Innerparteiliche Demokratie im Wandel* [Parties and democracy: changes in intra-party democracy] (pp. 57-74). Baden-Baden, Germany: Nomos.

Zeuner, B. (1973). Wahlen ohne Auswahl: Die Kandidatenaufstellung zum Bundestag [Elections without choice: Bundestag candidate selection]. In W. Steffani (Ed.), *Parlamentarismus ohne Transparenz* [Parliamentarism without transparency] (pp. 165-190). Opladen, Germany: Westdeutscher Verlag.

### Author Biography

**Klaus Detterbeck** is professor at the University of Education Schwäbisch Gmünd, Germany. His areas of expertise are party politics, federalism, and European integration. He has been coconvenor of the ECPR Standing Group on Federalism and Regionalism. Among his most recent publications are *Parties and Civil Society in Federal Systems* with Wolfgang Renzsch (2015, Oxford University Press), *Multi-Level Party Politics in Western Europe* (2012, Palgrave Macmillan), *Parteien und Parteiensystem* (2011, UVK Verlag), and *Föderalismus in Deutschland* with Wolfgang Renzsch and Stefan Schieren (2010, OldenbourgVerlag).