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Political Consequences of Germany's Mixed-Member System: Personalization at the Grass-Roots?

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Zusammenfassung

Dem deutschen Wahlsystem werden international einige Vorteile gegenüber anderen Wahlsystemen bescheinigt, die z. B. Neuseeland sogar zur Nachahmung angeregt haben. Als gemischtes Wahlsystem kombiniert es das Prinzip proportionaler Repräsentation mit einer Mehrheitskomponente. Wegen dieser Kombination wird ihm zum einen nachgesagt, Garant für ein stabiles Parteiensystem zu sein, und zum anderen, demokratietheoretisch proportionale Repräsentation und Mehrheitsentscheidung ideal zu kombinieren. Dieser Beitrag untersucht die Effekte des Wahlsystems auf die Größe des Parteiensystems und die Frage, inwieweit Wähler von den Möglichkeiten der beiden Komponenten des Wahlsystems, der Listen- und Direktwahl, also substantiell von der Partei- und Persönlichkeitswahl tatsächlich Gebrauch machen. Letzteres wird häufiger bestritten und behauptet, auch die Direktwahl der Abgeordneten im Wahlkreis folge lediglich parteienbezogenen Überlegungen. Die empirischen Ergebnisse zeigen anhand der Wahlrechtsänderungen in der Bundesrepublik, daß das Wahlsystem tatsächlich einen beträchtlichen Anteil an der Größe des Parteiensystems und damit der Stabilität des Parteiensystems hat. Sie zeigen zum anderen, daß die Möglichkeit der Listen- und Personenwahl zum einen mittels Stimmensplitting strategisch zum Koalitionswählen genutzt wird, zum anderen der Wahlerfolg der Kandidaten im Wahlkreis aber durchaus davon abhängt, wie stark sie sich in der Sicht der Bürger für den Wahlkreis einsetzen und wie gut ihre politische Arbeit beurteilt wird. Es existiert also die Persönlichkeitswahl „at the Grass-Roots".

Abstract

It is widely believed that the German type mixed member election system has advantages over other types of electoral arrangements. New Zealand, for example, has exchanged her time honored British type plurality system for the German model. German electoral law combines the principles of proportional representation and majority rule. This is why it is believed that it guarantees both, representation of interests in parliament and stable government. The analyses which are presented in this paper address the following two questions. First, is there an effect of the electoral system on the size of the party system? Second, how do voters make use of the two ballots? Is there a difference between candidate voting (first ballot) and party voting (second ballot)? The first aspect is often neglected. It is taken for granted that citizens split their votes on strategic grounds to support a specific coalition government. Results of the empirical analysis reveal that there are (1) a close relationship between electoral arrangements and size of the party system and (2) that success of candidates in SMDs cannot be explained by strategic voting alone. Rather, candidate performance has to be taken into account, too. Thus, in addition to strategic voting there is a sizeable effect of a personal vote at the grass-roots.

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The Political Consequences of Germany's Mixed-Member System: Personalization at the Grass-Roots?

Stability has been a central feature of the German political system and of the party system in particular. However, in recent years this impression is shaken by increased volatility due to issue voting and personalization of politics. The notion of "personalization of politics" has been used to describe a growing phenomenon of the electoral process, especially in the era of television. In Germany this perspective mainly focuses on the impact of prominent politicians. Above all candidates for the chancellor's office are perceived to be decisive for the parties' success or failure in elections. The 1998 federal election, for example, has been interpreted by many in terms of a battle between Helmut Kohl, the old incumbent, and Gerhard Schroeder, the young and dynamic challenger. This perspective is equally shared by political scientists and journalists (Pappi 1999).

In this context it is interesting to note that the notion of the personalization of politics is rarely used to consider the impact of rank-and-file candidates for political office on the voting decision of citizens. In Germany this comes as a surprise because the German electoral system was specifically designed to strengthen personal ties between representatives and constituents. The system combines the principle of proportional representation with the plurality principle in a particular way (Nohlen 1986). The total number of seats for each party passing the threshold is allocated proportional to its share of list votes on what is known in Germany as the second ballot (*Zweitstimme*). However, the law offers citizens the opportunity to select in single-seat districts (SSDs) half of the members of the national parliament (*Bundestag*) by a plurality of nominal votes on the so-called first ballot (*Erststimme*). It was the firm belief of the founding fathers that the plurality element would introduce incentives to a more personalized politics at the grass roots level (see Scarrow, this volume). Empirical evidence about the effects of this electoral institution is in scarce supply. Based on findings by Farah (1981: 191-92), Kaase (1984: 163-64) concludes that "… the initial expectations in designing the personalized proportional representation system (PR) with respect to citizen-deputy ties have certainly not materialized, despite obvious efforts by the deputies to establish firm roots in their constituencies." For Nohlen, an eminent expert of the German election law, this does not come as a surprise. He argues that

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it does not make much sense to distinguish between members of parliament (MPs) who are elected in a SSD and those elected on a party list because the number of double candidacies has reached a very high level in Germany (Nohlen 1978: 305-6). Considering these results one would not expect to find much of a *personalization effect* on the vote in the nominal tier. The same is not necessarily true for candidate vote in general. Ticket-splitting in terms of *strategic voting* is of relevance for election outcomes and the shape of the party system.

This chapter addresses the question of the relevance the German mixed-member electoral system has for the party system and for candidate vote. The analysis proceeds in four steps and discusses the impact of the electoral system on the inter- and intra-party dimensions. The first two sections deal with the impact of the electoral system a) on the party system, and b) on voting behavior with special attention to ticket-splitting. The third and fourth sections deal with a) the opportunity structure for candidates as shaped by the electoral system and the parties, and b) the likelihood of a performance-based personal vote. We conclude with a confrontation of the normative expectations of the founding fathers and empirical reality and speculate about the future of the German party system.

The Electoral System and the Party System

After the second World War all parties in the parliamentary council (*Parlamentarischer Rat*) were of the opinion that the stability and proper functioning of a parliamentary system could be strongly influenced by the proper choice of an electoral system. All parties agreed that the re-introduction of the pure proportional system of the Weimar Republic was not an option. Whereas the CDU/CSU favored a plurality system, the majority of the parliamentary council was against this proposal. The compromise consisted of an electoral system which combined a majority decision rule with a proportional principle of representation. This formula was thought to serve as a bulwark against party system fragmentation. Some changes of the electoral law in 1953 and again in 1957 led to the system that has been is in place ever since, except for the 1990 federal election—the first election of reunified Germany. In this system, citizens have the right to cast two votes in elections to the national parliament. The nominal ("first") ballot selects a candidate by plurality in SSDs (*Wahlkreise*). The list ("second") ballot is based on closed party lists (*Landeslisten*) one in each of the 16 federal states (*Länder*; 10 before Saarland joined Germany in 1957; 11 before unification until 1990). A nation-wide five-percent or three-SSDs threshold applies for participation in list-tier allocation. The proportion of list votes a party receives determines its number of seats in parliament. Each party then gets its plurality-won seats plus the

number of seats won by the proportional rule less the number of plurality-won seats. Thus, half of the seats are filled by the winners of the race in the SSDs. The remaining seats are filled from closed state party lists starting with the candidate ranked highest. The German electoral system knows no by-elections. Seats, both SSD and list, that become vacant during a term go to the next highest ranked non-elected candidate of the party list. Empirically the number of seats vacated between elections has ranged from 30 to 59; the average is 42.

As the founding fathers had hoped stability is the dominant feature of the German party system. This is true for turnover in governments, number of parties in parliament, and even aggregate vote volatility. Turnover in government as a direct consequence of an election has happened only recently in German post war history (1998). Change in governments until then came about as change of government coalitions. This was the case in 1965 when government shifted from a CDU/CSU-FDP coalition to a "grand coalition" combining forces of CDU/CSU and SPD. The grand coalition was followed in 1969 by a Social-Liberal (SPD and FDP) coalition. In 1982 the CDU/CSU-FDP government was re-instituted. It was voted out of office in 1998 and replaced by a Red-Green coalition government (SPD and Alliance 90/The Greens). Disregarding the early period between 1949 and 1957, the average change of votes from 1961 to 1994 is 2.6 percent for the CDU/CSU and 2.5 percent for the SPD. Regional stability of election results is rather high, too. Contemporary election results can be predicted by those of twenty years ago with a success rate of 80 percent (R^2; Wessels 1998: 262-65). The number of parties in parliament did not change over a twenty-year period (1961-80). In 1983 the Greens were able to overcome the five-percent hurdle and in 1990, the Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS) followed suit. In that election the PDS as well as Alliance 90 profited from a ruling of the constitutional court valid only for the 1990 federal election which allowed entry to parliament for parties able to win five percent or more of second ballots in the territory of the former GDR. At the same time, the number of parties presenting lists in federal elections has increased tremendously (Klingemann 1999: 117; Figure 1). These developments demonstrate two features of the German party system. There is stability but there is also room for incremental change. The thresholds do not exclude all new parties from parliament. It may be difficult to overcome the five-percent hurdle or the three seats rule, but it is possible. Thus thresholds contribute to the stability of the parliamentary party system but they do not determine the number of parties in parliament nor do they limit interest in the formation of new parties. A changing political agenda and changing interests of voters can overcome the rules designed to keep small new parties out. The concern for the environment has given strength to the Greens. Regional interests of citizens in the new *Länder* can be linked to the electoral fortune of the Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS), the successor of the former

communist Socialist Unity Party (SED), which is since 1990 on the rise. In both cases these concerns were strong enough to secure parliamentary representation.

Participation in elections is an additional indicator of electoral stability. In Germany turnout figures hover around 85 percent in most elections. This situation changed in 1987. The proportion of non-voters increased to 23 percent in 1990. However, turnout has risen again since then and non-voting dropped to 18 percent in 1998 (Figure 1). This indicates that the German party system continues to attract voters to participate in the electoral process.

Figure 1: Basic Characteristics of the German Party System:
Number of Parties Running State Lists, Parties in Parliament, Voter Volatility,
Index of Disproportionality, and Percent Abstentions
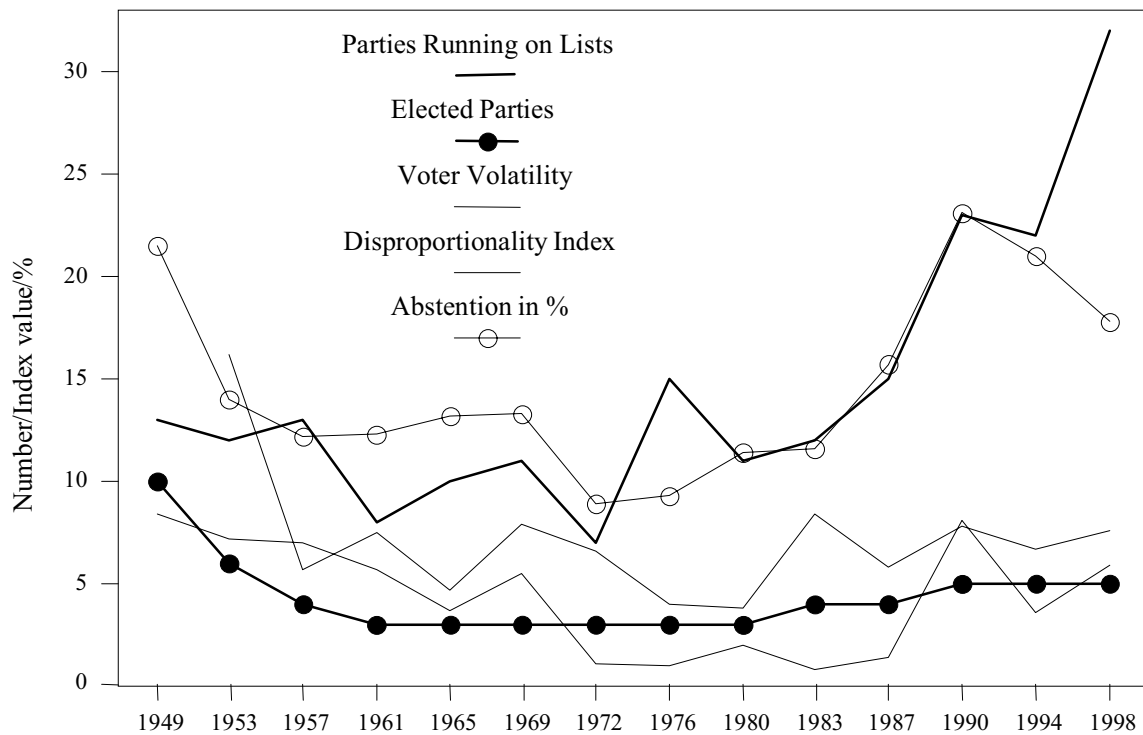
Sources: Klingemann 1999, Schindler 1983, 1986, 1994.

There is some evidence that the electoral system contributed to the stability of the German party and parliamentary system. This can be shown by the effect of the changes of the electoral law on the party system. The election law was changed four times: in the 1949 elections voters could cast only one vote, the threshold to overcome was five percent in either of the *Länder* or one SSD-seat. In 1953, the five-percent-threshold was applied nation-wide, the one-SSD-seat threshold remained. In 1957, the SSD-requirement was changed to three SSD-seats. Nationwide five percent or three SSD-seats have been the

threshold criteria ever since, with the exception of the 1990 election, when the five percent threshold was applied to the territory of the new and the territory of the old *Länder* separately.

Each of the four variants of the German election law have set a different effective threshold. Thresholds can be defined in both legal and theoretical terms. "The latter arise from the interplay between district magnitude and allocation formulas" (Taagepera and Shugart 1989: 133). In contrast to legal thresholds, theoretical thresholds can account for many other parameters which influence the exclusion or inclusion of parties. District magnitude is one of the most important features which determine the outcome of electoral systems (Cox 1997: 228). It is also a central element of thresholds. District magnitude, like thresholds, can also be defined in both legal and theoretical terms. Taagepera and Shugart (1989: 135f) refer to the result of the theoretical definition as the *effective* magnitude.

In complex electoral systems only a successive application of different theoretical and practical considerations can account for an estimate of the effective district magnitude. In Germany, three elements are constitutive for the effective district magnitude: (1) the number of elected representatives divided by the number of districts, (2) the effective threshold, which is the mean of the upper and lower thresholds as an expression of the legal five percent hurdle. Thirdly, one must take into account the rule permitting parties with less than five percent to participate in list allocation based on SSDs won. Since one of the measures may overstate the magnitude estimate and another one may understate the magnitude estimate, the measure we apply takes into account the considerations of Taagepera and Shugart and calculates effective district magnitude as the geometric mean of all three measures. Of course, this figure is just an approximation to the theoretical threshold and can most certainly be improved upon (for a specification of our formula compare Figure 2).

Empirical results demonstrate that there is a close relationship between changes of the electoral system and *effective* number of parties. In 1949 the theoretical threshold was low and the number of effective parties high. In 1953 the electoral system defined an intermediate position with a nation-wide five percent/one SSD-seat threshold. Under these conditions the effective number of parties was lower than in 1949 but higher than in 1957, the current electoral system. The 1990 electoral law was a special case. For reasons of fairness the Constitutional Court (*Bundesverfassungsgericht*) had ruled to apply the five percent threshold separately in the new and in the old states of the federation. This ruling resulted in a lowering of the effective threshold and it found its consequence in a higher effective number of parties as compared to 1957 or 1987, the last election before unification. In 1994, however, the effective number of parties did not decrease as one would expect because of the return to the rule established in 1957. But as Taagepera and

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Figure 2: Electoral System Change and the Number of Parties in Germany
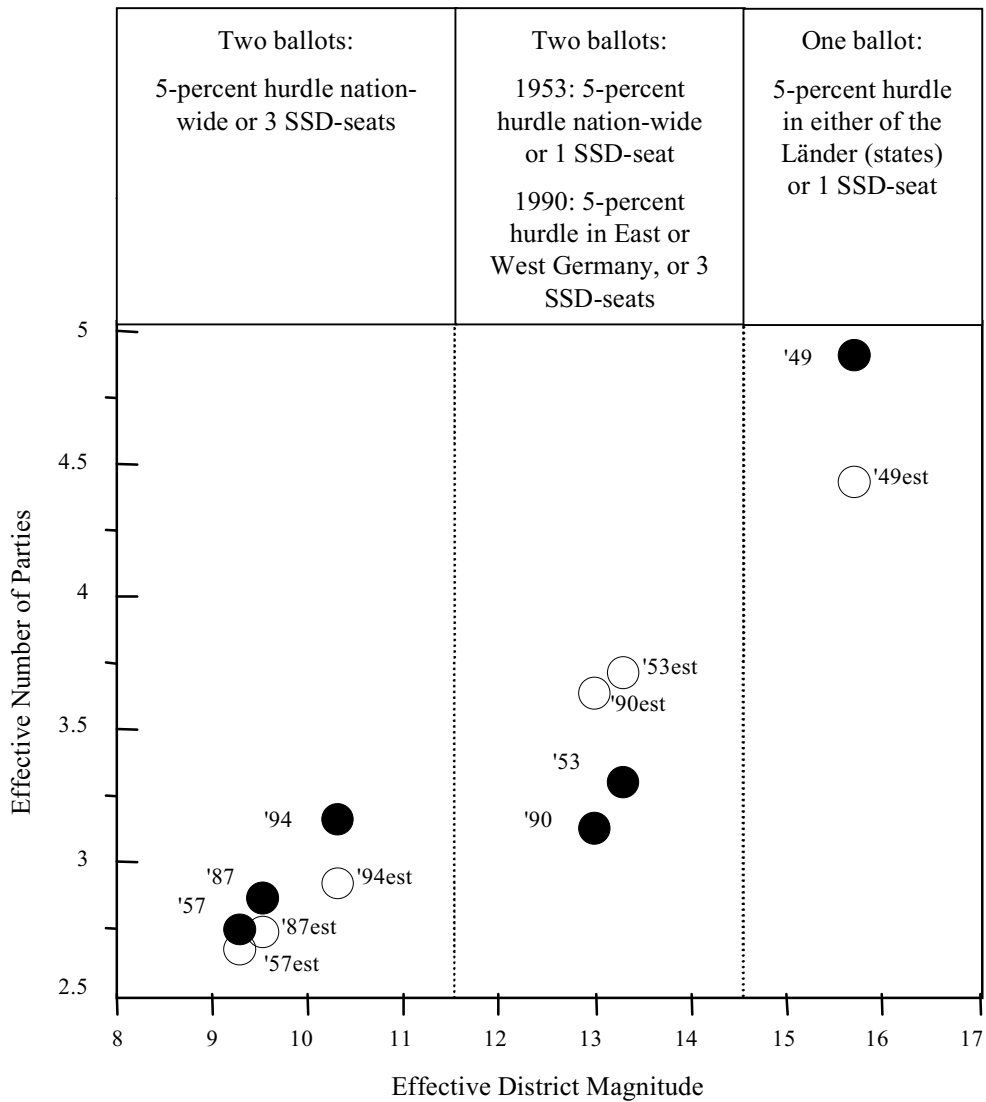
● Empirical Value
○ Estimated Value

Effective District Magnitude (M_{Eff}):
1) Seats/Districts (Taagepera and Shugart 1989: 135); where districts is calculated as the sum of SSD and the number of *Länder*-based multi-seat districts.
2) Effective threshold = 50% / legal threshold (5%) (Taagepera and Shugart 1989: 135)
3) Seat threshold = 50% /(SSD-seats/seat threshold*100).
4) M_{Eff} = geometric mean of the three measures, i.e. $(1*2*3)exp\ 1/3$.

Effective Number of Parties (N_{Eff}):
   $N_{Eff} = 1/HH = 1/sum(p_i^2)$; where p the fractional share of parties.

Regression Equation
   $N_{Eff} = .24 + .27(M_{Eff}) + e$
   $R^2 = .74$; SE B .08.

Shugart (1989) have pointed out, the size of the party system is not just a matter of the electoral law but also of cleavages and history, and is contingent on how many parties existed before a change of rules. Figure 2 shows the empirical number of the effective number of political parties as well as the results of our theoretical estimates. The statistical relationship between the two sets of figures is rather strong and statistically significant. 75 percent of the variance are accounted for. The equation for the effective number of parties is: $N_{Eff} = .24 + .27*M_{Eff}$; where N_{Eff} is the effective number of parties and M_{Eff} is defined as the effective district magnitude; the standard error for B is .08.

For most of the time, the German party system has been a two-and-a-half party system of a bipolar structure with the Free Democrats (Liberals) being the key actor to make or break governments (as happened in 1969 and 1982). Since 1983, Germany is a "two and two halves" party system due to the electoral success of the Greens. This has probably stabilized the bipolar structure of two political camps (*Lager;* Christian Democrats/Christian Socials and Free Democrats vs. Social Democrats and Greens). However, the two and a half pattern in which the smallest party is decisive for majority formation was probably more conducive for effective government formation than the "two and two halves" situation encountered since 1983. With the PDS entering the *Bundestag* in 1990, the situation has become even more complicated. Although the structure is still bipolar, the possibility of an overall left coalition including the PDS is rather unlikely. However, the 1998 elections demonstrated that some election results may make government formation easier than could be deduced from theoretical considerations alone. The future of the German party system at the federal level is probably for a long time fixed as a "two and three halves" party system with a bipolar structure. Only once—during the period of the Grand Coalition (1966 to 1969)—this bipolar structure seemed to vanish and a similar situation was anticipated by many well-informed observers before the 1998 elections. However, there is a clear understanding of most of party elites that a Grand Coalition should only be a last resort of government formation in times of serious crises. The election result in 1998 seems to indicate that citizens share a similar view. Strategic voting behavior to avoid grand coalitions is much eased by the fact that Germans have to votes in federal elections. Thus, voters have an instrument to express their respective coalition preferences as well as a candidate based performance evaluation.

Electoral System and Voting Strategies of Citizens

The possibility for voters to split their votes may be motivated differently. The original idea of this ballot structure is to give voters a chance for a *personal vote*. Citizens vote for

a candidate because the candidate is thought to be competent. However, ticket-splitting can also be used strategically to support formation of a particular government coalition. If a nominal vote is based on competence, the voter may split his or her ticket, but not necessarily. If an outstanding candidate is of the same party as the voter would vote for anyway, then no ticket-splitting results. However, if the candidate happens to be identified to a different party, ticket-splitting is highly probable. Casting a personal vote in this manner is mainly performance-motivated. Little is known about performance-driven personal voting in Germany.

Another motivation for ticket-splitting is strategic voting. Strategic voting means to split the ticket between two parties which the voter prefers to form a government. Neither performance voting nor strategic voting results in wasted votes. According to our definition, strategic voting implies giving the nominal vote to the larger coalition partner regardless of the performance of the candidate. The likelihood of wasted vote is reduced due to the relatively higher probability for the larger coalition partner, in contrast to the smaller one, to win the SSD. Splitting between parties has had an impact in recent elections and it has improved the chances of effective government formation. It is also thought to have contributed to high electoral involvement of citizens (Duverger 1954; Fischer 1973). However, the idea that voters are really able to make strategic use of the two ballots is a perspective not shared by all experts. One prominent counter-argument stresses the fact that the distribution of seats is governed by the list ballot anyway, because the nominal vote does not affect the distribution of seats. Therefore, according to this view, strategic voting by differential use of the nominal and the list ballot is an illusion (Jesse 1988). However, this argument is not convincing on two grounds.

First, the election law allows for so-called overhang seats (*Überhangmandate*). If the number of SSDs won by a party is higher than the number of seats allocated by the party's proportion of list votes the party may keep the additional seats. Thus, the possibility to change the total number of seats in the federal parliament (*Bundestag)* by strategic voting behavior exists in reality. Until unification the number of surplus seats has been rather small. In the four elections from 1965 to 1976 there were no surplus seats at all. Otherwise numbers ranged from one (1980, 1987) to five (1961). The greatest beneficiary up to 1987 was the CDU/CSU which gained twelve of the total of seventeen seats in this period of time (SPD: 4; DP German Party: 1). This situation changed drastically after unification. The number of surplus seats amounted to six in 1990 (all CDU/CSU), sixteen in 1994 (CDU/CSU: 12; SPD: 4), and thirteen in 1998 (all SPD). Although surplus seats were certainly helpful to form governments (especially in 1994) they never tipped the scale. There are two reasons, both linked to unification, which may explain the increase in surplus seats: On average SSDs are smaller in the new than in the old Länder; and the

structure of party competition in the SSDs differs between the new and the old Länder. Due to the relative strength of the Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS) a three-way race is much more typical in East than in West Germany. In the 1998 election, for example, a SSD was won by less than 40 percent of the votes in East Germany in 34 of the total of 72 SSDs. In West Germany the same figure was 4 out of 256 SSDs. Here the third party was Alliance 90/The Greens (Infratest dimap 1998: 25).
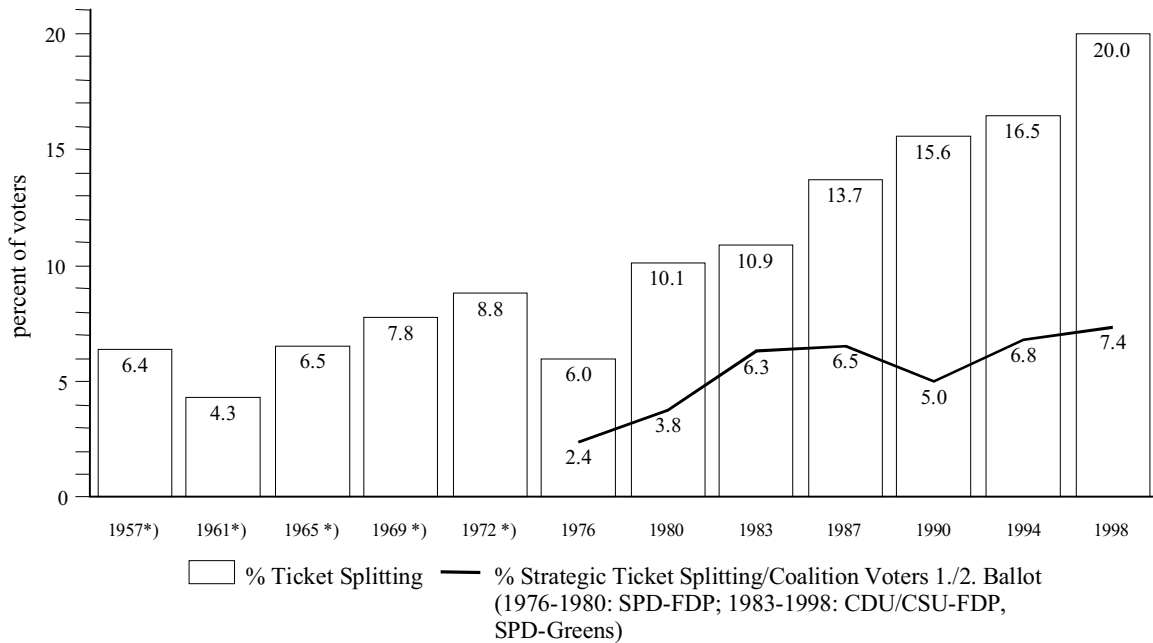
The second reason why strategic voting is consequential in Germany is that casting a list vote for a minor party de facto almost always amounts to voting for a coalition regardless of the nominal vote. Bawn (1999) has demonstrated for the period of 1969 to 1987, that voters make different use of the SSD and the list ballot: 1) there is always a positive difference of some percent points between list votes and district votes for the major parties (this is true for up to 96 percent of the major parties' candidates), 2) the ratio of strategic voting patterns (when voters cast their district vote for a major party and their list vote for a minor party) increased between 1969 and 1987 from 2.4 to 6.5 in favor of such "strategic" voting patterns.

Bawn's findings support a notion of strategic voting. This notion is also confirmed by our own results. First, ticket-splitting has tripled between 1957 and 1998. In 1957 6.4 percent of the voters were ticket-splitters; today the proportion of ticket-splitters has risen to 20 percent (Figure 3). Roughly one fifth of all voters make use of this possibility today and it seems that the electorate has become more and more accustomed to its action potential (although for a larger part of the electorate the difference and impact of nominal and list vote still seems not to be totally clear in an abstract interview situation (Schmitt-Beck 1993).

However, not all ticket-splitting can be called strategic. In our understanding, two conditions must be met in order to characterize ticket-splitting as strategic: First, voters must know the coalition preferences of political parties. This can be safely assumed since most parties announce their coalition preferences prior to elections and this is publicized widely. Second, voters must take these coalition preferences into account and cast their two ballots accordingly. That is, the nominal vote must be given to a major party, since small parties almost never win SSDs, and the list vote must be given to the smaller potential coalition partner. A less restrictive criteria for strategic voting would be to regard any ticket-splitting as strategic which allocates the nominal vote to a smaller party and the list vote to a major party. The latter definition was used by Bawn (1999). Obviously this definition does not exclude unlikely coalitions and thus disregards the wasted vote argument. Empirically, however, the difference between our more restrictive criteria and the less restrictive criteria used by Bawn is small, indeed. Between 1976 and 1998 the difference never exceeded 1.7 percent (on average: one percent). Defined in the restrictive sense, strategic coalition vot-

ing increased from 2.4 percent in 1976 to 7.4 percent in 1998. This increase co-varies with the general increase in ticket splitting. Thus, on average, the proportion of strategic voters so defined remains at the level of about 40 percent of all ticket-splitters (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Ticket Splitting and Strategic Coalition Voting

☐ % Ticket Splitting —— % Strategic Ticket Splitting/Coalition Voters 1./2. Ballot
(1976-1980: SPD-FDP; 1983-1998: CDU/CSU-FDP, SPD-Greens)

*) Data for strategic coalition voting not available

Source: Own calculations and Hilmer und Schleyer (1999).

The impact on election outcome was probably strongest in the 1998 elections. 3.9 percent of the electorate has split between CDU/CSU and FDP, 3.5 percent between SPD and Greens (calculations based on data from Hilmer/Schleyer 1999: 17). If voters would not have decided to split either the smaller party would have lost the same amount list votes (which would have meant that the two small parties would not have overcome the five percent threshold), or the two large parties would have lost district votes of roughly 13 respectively 11 seats. Both scenarios may not be realistic. Real voting behavior would probably be something in between. But still, some percentage points less for the smaller parties could have altered election outcomes seriously (the Free Democrats gained 6.2, the Greens 6.7 percent of list votes). We can safely conclude from these findings that one can identify a sizable group of citizens whose voting patterns indicate that the nominal and list votes are used to express different party or candidate preferences. The reason may be strategic but there is also much room for a performance based interpretation of the personal vote. If there is such a performance based personal vote, performance should make an

independent contribution to a candidate's probability to be (re-)elected. If parties also think that there is something like a performance-oriented personal vote this should be reflected in candidate selection. We are turning to the latter question first and to the question of the impact of performance in a later section.

Candidate Selection and Opportunity Structures

The party law demands democratic procedures for decision-making processes within political parties, including candidate selection. Thus, more than in many other democratic countries candidate recruitment follows rigorously defined legal rules (Roberts 1988: 97).

Reflecting the dual voting procedure, candidates must be selected at the district level and at the state level. Candidate selection at the SSD level is controlled by the local party organization. The state party organization, on the other hand, controls the formation of the respective state party list. In SSDs votes are cast either by all members of the local party branch (*Kreisverband, Unterbezirk*) or by a committee of delegates chosen by the local members. Empirically numbers of delegates of election committees range from twenty-five to one hundred (Zeuner 1971; Porter 1995).

At the state level candidates are selected by about 250 to 300 delegates representing local party branches in proportion to membership size. Usually the state party executive proposes a list of candidates, and delegates vote on each of the candidates, starting with the highest ranked position on the list. In order to win a position a candidate must obtain the absolute majority of votes.

Perceived importance of candidate characteristics for nomination differs somewhat between SSD and party list candidates. "Competence in political matters" is regarded very important by both groups of candidates. However, SSD candidates rank "performance in constituency service" higher than party list candidates while the reverse is true for "political position within the party" (Table 1).

Conflicts about candidate nomination occur more often at the state than at the district level. This may be due to the fact that a good position on the party list is a safer way to win a seat than just running in a SSD. Only 17 percent of all districts return MPs safely (Schindler 1994: 553). On the SSD level conflicts seem to be rare. However, if one compares the relative importance of different types of conflict, patterns are similar. In both cases conflicts between "old" and "new" candidates seem to be the most severe ones. Newcomers have a hard time both ways (Table 2).

There are reasons to believe that competition for promising list positions has increased over time. From 1949 to 1976 the number of candidates in federal elections rose from

2,324 to 3,244. This figure dropped somewhat until 1983, to strongly rise again thereafter. In 1998 the total number of candidates was 5,062. Thus, disregarding fluctuations over time we can observe a net increase of 2,738 candidates between 1949 and 1998. The total number of seats in parliament has changed on two occasions. One hundred seats were added in 1953 as an initial adjustment and 143 seats were added in 1990 as a consequence of German unification. Until 1990, there has been an average of 5.4 candidates per seat, or, to put it differently: on average 19 percent of all candidates got elected. The large increase in number of candidates during 1990-98 has decreased the proportion of candidates elected to 13 percent—despite the increase of the total number of seats. However, one has to keep in mind that this ratio is much better for candidates of parties which have already entered parliament (here the ratio is 1:4, Table 3).

Table 1: Average Importance of Perceived Candidate Characteristics by Type of Nominantion (Candidates of SPD and CDU/CSU only)

	SSD Nomination	Party-list Nomination
	(1 = very important; 5 = not important at all)	
My ability to win votes	1.89	2.92
My political position within the party	3.84	2.32
My performance in party work	2.44	2.52
My performance in constituency service	1.91	3.06
My competence in political matters	1.69	2.21

Number of candidates: 315.
Source: Porter 1995: 84-86.

Table 2: Types of Conflict in Candidate Selection Meetings at the SSD Level and at the State Level as Perceived by Local Party Chairs (SPD and CDU/CSU only)

	SSD level	State level
Conflicts between:	(1 = applies fully; 5 = does not apply)	
Old and new candidates	4.06	2.80
Party factions	4.20	3.63
Party leadership and regulars	4.53	3.71

Number of party chairs (*Kreisvorsitzende*): 350.
Source: Own calculations based on Porter 1995: 29, 32.

Table 3 shows some important similarities and differences between types of candidacy. First, about half of the candidates of parliamentary parties run both on a state list and in a SSD. This begs the question of the relative importance of the local district and the party. Do politicians with a double candidacy have any incentive to work for a local constitu-

ency? Table 3 shows that politicians who manage to get double candidacy have a much higher chance to get elected (with CSU candidates being the exception). There is, however, another finding which is more important to our question. The probability for double-candidacy politicians to win a seat via the district or the list mode is almost equal. This should be an incentive for double-candidacy candidates to seriously consider interests and demands of the local constituency. This should, of course, be particularly true for candidates with insecure list positions. If this is indeed the case, even double-candidates should form some kind of district orientation which impacts on their district performance in order to reduce uncertainty about re-election chances.

Table 3: Type of Candidacy and Probability of Election by Parliamentary Parties in 1994 and 1998

Candidates	SSD only		Party list only		SSD and party list		
	%	% elected	%	% elected	%	% elected in SSD	% elected from list
1994 General Election							
SPD (n = 532)	1.1	0.4	38.5	0.8	60.3	19.0	29.1
CDU (n = 511)	9.4	8.6	44.6	0.6	46.0	26.0	12.5
CSU (n = 69)	33.3	33.3	34.8	7.2	31.9	30.4	1.4
FDP (n = 378)	19.0	0.0	14.3	0.5	66.7	0.0	11.9
Greens (n = 367)	44.7	0.0	15.8	0.5	39.5	0.0	12.8
PDS (n = 269)	39.4	0.4	25.7	0.1	34.9	1.1	8.9
Total[a] (n = 2126)	19.7	3.3	30.0	0.8	50.3	12.1	15.3
1998 General Election							
SPD (n = 553)	1.8	1.3	40.7	1.4	57.5	37.1	14.1
CDU (n =523)	11.1	7.5	46.1	1.1	42.8	6.7	22.6
CSU (n = 79)	35.4	32.9	43.0	5.1	21.5	15.2	6.3
FDP (n = 411)	18.7	0.0	20.4	0.0	60.8	0.0	10.5
Greens (n = 409)	35.5	0.0	20.5	0.0	44.0	0.0	11.5
PDS (n = 333)	45.6	0.0	25.5	1.8	28.8	1.2	7.8
Total[a] (n = 2308)	20.4	3.1	32.6	1.0	47.0	11.1	13.7

a Parliamentary parties only. Total number of candidates of all parties 199 4: 3931; 1998: 5062.
Source: German Candidate Data 1994.

District Performance of MPs and the Vote

As demonstrated, the German mixed-member system does not necessarily imply that list candidates would lack a local orientation. One reason is to reduce uncertainty about re-election prospects. Second, all parliamentary parties--in particular the two large ones--see to it that deputies are assigned to constituency service regardless of which tier they are elected from. Candidates who have lost in the district even have an office there if they are of the two larger parties. Candidates of smaller parties often have to take care of a larger territory than just the district. Considering this general situation one would not expect to find many differences between MPs who get their seat in a SSD and those who enter the Bundestag via a state list. On the other hand, one could plausibly argue that the probability for (re-)election for SSD legislators should be higher, if they care more for their constituency and that those party list candidates should do better who are more oriented towards their party. The assumption is that a SSD MP (in contrast to a list MP) will be less willing to respond to party concerns. Rather, even their parties expect SSD MPs to be competent and perform well in the constituency rather than to follow the party (Table 1). This expectation relates to a distinction made in the German basic law (*Grundgesetz*). On the one hand the MP is described as independent and responsible only to his own judgment or conscience (§38). Thus, his competence counts. On the other hand political parties are characterized as organizations which are obliged to participate in the formation of the political will (§21). Thus, the political party counts. This is also reminiscent of the classical distinction between the two major models of representation: the trustee- and the delegate-model. In this sense, the SSD MP may be more concerned with his own judgement as a yardstick for his behavior whereas a list MP may put more emphasis on the party line. Nevertheless, it is an empirical question whether SSD MPs place more emphasis on representing constituency interests and party list MPs are more responsive to the political needs of the party.

Survey results show statistically significant differences between the two types of representatives. Although most MPs prefer the "trustee" *style of representation*, SSD MPs are even more attracted to the trustee-model (Table 4). Even more striking is the difference with respect to the *focus of representation*. More than 80 percent of SSD MPs want to represent *all* citizens of the constituency whereas the respective figure for list MPs is 55 percent. Even with respect to candidate behavior, such as contacting citizens in the district, a difference remains visible. Almost all SSD MPs (99%) have contact with citizens of the local district at least once a week whereas the same figure for list MPs is 15 percent points lower (84%; Table 4). This reflects a clear difference between winners and losers in SSDs, even though both may have district offices and care about the constituency. The reason

probably is that it is not easy to be a successful challenger of a sitting SSD MP and that candidates who have lost that battle see greater chances for re-election on the list instead of in the SSD.

Table 4: Representational Role Orientations of SSD MPs and Party List MPs

	MPs elected in SSDs %	MPs elected via Party List %
Decisions should be based on own judgement alone [a]	78.8**	67.0**
MP wants to represent all citizens in local constituency	83.2***	55.6***
At least weekly contact with ordinary citizens	98.5***	84.4***
n (appr.)	132	176

a)   % first choice as criteria for guiding political decisions.
*   between group difference sign. > .05
**   between group difference sign. > .01
*** between group difference sign. > .001
Source: German Members of Parliament Study 1996.

These results indicate that type of mandate makes a difference for role orientation. However, the findings do not say whether these differences have an impact on the citizens' vote. In order for candidates to have an effect on the vote they must be known and evaluated by citizens. In PR systems it is not very likely that rank-and-file candidates are easily recognized. However, the dual system in Germany may have been more successful than other PR systems to create closer ties between representatives and the represented. Results from comparative post-election surveys of the *Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES)* project show that Germany finds itself in a middle position between pure PR systems and plurality or majority systems. About 40 percent of the electorate can correctly name at least one candidate who ran in the district in the last election (Table 5). This is a much higher proportion as, for example, the one observed in Spain, a pure closed-list PR system and is indeed greater than in two systems in which nominal votes alone determine the order in which candidates are elected in multiseat districts (Taiwan and Poland).

For strategic voting it is not necessary to know or recall names of candidates. They are given on the ballot anyway together with the parties they represent. This fact certainly eases coalition as well as candidate voting. In this analysis we can get a step closer to answer the question whether perceived candidate performance matters for the vote in the mixed German electoral system. From surveys among voters in all constituencies before the 1998 elections (roughly 300 respondents in each SSD, a total of more than 90,000 interviews), we can estimate the perception of the performance of candidates by citizens district by district. Information about knowledge of candidates, perceived general political performance and perceived constituency performance is available from this rather unique

survey. We hypothesize that differences between candidates are mainly performance based. However, voting decisions are not just inspired by perceived candidate performance. Other factors contribute to the voting decision as well.

Table 5: Correct Knowledge of Candidates[a]

Country (rankorder)	At least one candidate named correctly %	Type of Electoral System[b]	N of Cases
Great Britain	60.5	SSD, plurality	2931
Czech Republic	57.6	PR, flexible list	1229
Australia	57.5	SSD, alternative vote	1798
USA	52.0	SSD, plurality	1534
Germany	41.6	MMP	2019
Ukraine	39.1	SSD, majority	1148
Taiwan	36.9	SNTV	1200
Poland	38.0	PR, open list	2003
Romania	29.5	PR, closed list	1175
Spain	26.4	PR, closed list	1212

a   Respondents were asked to name candidates who ran in the last election and classified according to correct names mentioned.
b   Electoral systems: Maj = majoritarian; Plu = plurality; PR = proportional.
    District Type: MMD = multi-member district; SSD = single seat district.
    Vote: AV = alternative; PREF = preferential.
Source: CSES (The Comparative Study of Electoral Systems), module 1, post-election surveys. Most recent national election, i.e. 1997-1999. Survey data can be downloaded from http://www.umich.edu/~nes/cses/cses.htm. Electoral system characteristics are taken from Blais and Massicotte 1997 and Shvetsova 1999.

In addition to perceived candidate performance we consider and control for two other variables. First, citizens often ask themselves whether or not a vote for a smaller party is "wasted." In this respect candidates of the two large parties should have an advantage over candidates of the smaller parties (*wasted vote hypothesis*). Second, the incumbent should have an advantage over the challenger (*incumbency advantage hypothesis*). This is because the incumbent is more visible in the district and has had a greater chance to build his following. With respect to candidate performance, the hypothesis is straightforward: perceived constituency performance should have a stronger impact on the voting decision than perceived general political performance (*constituency performance hypothesis*). The dependent variable is the proportion of nominal votes cast for a SSD candidate.

   Results from regression analyses confirm all three hypotheses. The crucial question is, however, how strong is the candidate performance factor? Table 6 provides the estimates. Confirmation of the wasted vote hypothesis is reflected in the advantage for candidates of

large parties. The difference between candidates of large and small parties amounts to 27 percent points. The incumbency advantage hypothesis is also confirmed. It is even valid if one restricts the analysis to candidates of the two large parties only. In the overall model incumbents have a 7.5 percent point advantage over challengers. However, of crucial importance to the initial question is the contribution of perceived performance of candidates. All three performance measures show a statistically significant effect. As expected the largest effect can be attributed to constituency performance. In the overall model the difference between a candidate performing poorly and a candidate performing well amounts to 17.5 percent points. This is a sizable difference.

These results point to the fact that there is indeed a personal element to the district vote. Strategic considerations, for example wasted vote or coalition considerations, do play a more important role. However, even if these variables are controlled for in the model, the effect of candidates' perceived district performance is surprisingly high.

Table 6: Type of Mandate, Perceived Constituency Performance of MPs and the Vote (% district votes 1998)

	All		SPD		CDU/CSU	
	B	Max. effect[a]	B	Max. effect[a]	B	Max. effect[a]
Mandate 1994 (direct = 1; list = 0)	7.57***	7.57	11.28***	11.28	7.44***	7.44
Known by citizens[b]	0.11*	4.31	0.09	2.89	0.27***	10.49
Perceived general political performance[c]	3.26**	8.15	0.89	1.96	0.10	0.23
Perceived constituency performance[d]	5.47***	17.50	4.63**	11.11	6.39***	14.70
Big parties[e]	26.95***	26.95				
Constant	-17.20***		22.71***		11.82***	
R square (adj.)	0.79		0.49		0.46	
N = MPs who run 1998 in constituencies	655		247		285	

a   Empirical range of variable times B.
b   Known by citizens: percentage of voters in constituency who remember deputy name without help; empirical range: all 0-39%; SPD 0.68-32.78%; CDU/CSU 0.34-39.19%.
c   Perceived general political performance: Evaluation of deputy by citizens of the local constituency. Mean values calculated from a scale ranging from 0 (very bad) to 5 (very good); empirical range: all 1.5-4.0; SPD 1.8-4.0; CDU/CSU 1.7-4.0.
d   Perceived constituency performance: Evaluation of deputy by citizens of the local constituency how strongly the deputy fights for the interest of his constituency. Mean values calculated from a scale ranging from 0 (very weak) to 5 (very strong); empirical range: all 0.7-3.9; SPD 1.5-3.9; CDU/CSU 1.6-3.9.
e   SPD, CDU/CSU vs. others.
*   sign. > .05
**   sign. > .01
*** sign. > .001
Source: Research project "The Performance of German MPs" conducted by Bernhard Wessels in cooperation with FORSA.

These results point to the fact that there is indeed a personal element to the district vote. Strategic considerations, for example wasted vote or coalition considerations, do play a

more important role. However, even if these variables are controlled for in the model, the effect of candidates' perceived district performance is surprisingly high.

Conclusions

This analysis is an attempt to study the effects of Germany's mixed-member proportional electoral system. Special attention was given to two questions: what impact has the electoral system on political stability and the party system and does a PR system with a plurality component support candidate voting. Results are relatively clearcut. First, the impact of the electoral system on the dominant features of the German political system is high. It is conducive to both a relatively stable bipolar party system, and to coalition governments. However, one has to bear in mind that institutions can only be effective if they correspond to the existing social and political cleavage structures. In this regard, the founding fathers have found, it seems, a matching solution. Second, German citizens vote for candidates for two different reasons. The first one is strategic. Voters split their ticket to support a preferred coalition. Strategic voting has become more and more frequent in Germany. Its impact on election outcomes of the smaller parties is sizable. The second reason for candidate voting is a performance-based. Previous research has underestimated the impact of the personal vote. The strong role of parties in the German system and strategic considerations for ticket-splitting have been cited as main reasons. In our analysis we were able to demonstrate for the first time that performance of district candidates indeed matters. However, this effect has not much to do with the media driven logic of personalization of politics mentioned at the beginning. Rather, Germany's mixed electoral system contributes to a *personal vote at the grass roots*. This was exactly what the authors of the German electoral law had tried to engineer.

Future developments are hard to predict. The German party system has changed since 1983 and in particular after unification. Germany has developed a "two and three halves" party system. It is still bipolar but the coalition potential between the left parties (SPD and PDS) is low. There are few prospects for change. The regional base of the PDS in the new *Länder* guarantees three SSD seats and thus the party's presence in the Bundestag. The differences between the left parties will prevent them to form governments even if they together would command a majority of seats. Minority governments of Christian Democrats and Free Democrats or Social Democrats and Greens, are likely under these circumstances. More than ever, strategic coalition voting by citizens is required to avoid such situations. The German electoral system supports coalition voting and provides the techni-

cal instruments for differentiated decision-making. There is reason to believe that German citizens are able to make good use of them.

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