

Article Abstracts

“The Tipping Point: The 2005 Election and the De-consolidation of the German Party System?”

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This article develops the thesis that the past quarter-century of electoral volatility in Germany reached a critical tipping point at the 2005 election. The two major parties of the Bonn Republic are now at their lowest combined share of the popular vote since the Federal Republic's founding in 1949. Electoral necessity and not, as in 1966, elite choice forced them into a grand coalition with little programmatic consensus. Their respective demographic cores—church-going Catholics for the CDU and unionized industrial workers for the SPD—have eroded as has the proportion of the electorate identifying with them. Institutional factors such as the electoral system have neither helped nor hindered these changes. The current grand coalition also faces a larger and more focused opposition than in 1966. The article concludes with some comparisons between the current German party system and its Italian counterpart of the late 1980s.

Keywords: Germany, elections, Bundestag, volatility, grand coalition, SPD, CDU

“The Extraordinary Bundestag Election of 2005: The Interplay of Long-term Trends and Short-term Factors”

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When Chancellor Gerhard Schröder went public and announced his plan for early elections on the evening of 22 May 2005, the SPD and the Green Party had just lost the state election in North-Rhine Westphalia. It was the last German state ruled by a Red-Green government, which left the federal government without any stable support in the Bundesrat. The chancellor's radical move resulted in early elections that neither the left (SPD and Greens) nor the conservative

political camp (CDU/CSU and FDP) was able to win. While the citizens considered the CDU/CSU to be more competent to solve the country's most important problems, unemployment and the economy, the SPD once again presented the preferred chancellor. The new government, build on a grand coalition of CDU/CSU and SPD, might be able to solve some of the structural problems of the country. While this will be beneficial for Germany as a whole, it will at the same time weaken the major German parties, which are running the risk of becoming politically indistinguishable.

Keywords: Germany, elections, electoral behavior, Bundestag, volatility, grand coalition, SPD, CDU, Angela Merkl, Gerhard Schröder

“The Grand Coalition: Precedents and Prospects”

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While the Federal Republic has been famously characterized as a “grand coalition state,” the Merkel government, formed in the aftermath of the 2005 federal election, is only the second CDU/CSU-SPD coalition at the federal level since 1949. A comparison of the present administration with the first grand coalition government (1966-1969) reveals a wealth of differences that include some of the basic parameters of governing and governance in Germany, such as the structure of the party system and the overall public climate. Also, the personnel features and patterns of informal coalition governance under Chancellors Angela Merkel and Kurt-Georg Kiesinger display major differences. Arguably the single most important difference between the two administrations, however, relates to the level of public policy, with the Merkel government seeking to reverse some of the key decisions of its historical predecessor. Such u-turn dynamics have been particularly tangible in the field of federal system reform.

Keywords: Germany, coalition government, grand coalition, governance, leadership, public policy-making, political reform

From High Hopes To On-Going Defeat: The New Extreme Right's Political Mobilization and its National Electoral Failure in Germany

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German extreme Right parties have increased their political and electoral significance in recent years, in particular through some considerable regional successes in the East. However, in spite of noticeable nation-wide gains by the NPD in the Bundestag election, the extreme Right suffered from another defeat. Looking at the interplay of supply side and demand side factors, the article examines the transformations and continuities of extreme Right parties within the German party system, their performance in the 2005 general election, and the reasons for their ongoing national electoral failure. While extreme Right parties benefit from more favorable conditions related to increased voter volatility, new public issues and new cleavage structures, these parties also continuously face crucial difficulties, especially on the supply side: the *cordon sanitaire* is still intact, and new cleavages in relation to globalization are more convincingly and effectively utilized by left-wing competitors. The main obstacle, though, are the extreme Right agents themselves. Incorporating *Zeitgeist* issues, they nevertheless remain unable to actually modernize their agenda. The present and future challenge to liberal democracy may be a new level of cooperation between extreme Right parties and consolidated “informal” right-wing extremist subcultures in Eastern regional strongholds.

Keywords: extreme Right parties, German party system, political mobilizations, electoral campaigns, new cleavage structures, regional politics

“Angela Merkel: What does it mean to run as a woman?”

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Considering Angela Merkel as a female candidate raises questions of the extent to which political leadership has become degendered in recent decades. Three issues of gender and politics are considered

here: the changes in expectations for women in public life, the shift in defining what is a “woman’s interest” and how women may represent such interests, and the degree to which women challenge the “old boys’ networks” with alternative connections to women and provide a critical mass rather than just an individual in office. The implications of each of these dimensions for assessing the impact of Merkel on German politics are considered. I suggest that her role can be seen as a feminist one, even if her own politics are not.

Keywords: gender, candidates, Angela Merkel, women, feminism

“Merkel’s EU Policy: “Kohl’s Mädchen” or Interest-driven Politics?”

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This article tries to assess the likely trajectory of Angela Merkel’s policies toward the EU in contrast to her predecessor’s. With Germany taking the European Council Presidency in the first half of 2007, Merkel will have had a year to put her stamp on the Presidency. By contrast, Gerhard Schröder, who took office in October 1998 had only two months before the German Council Presidency of 1999 began. I argue that Schröder’s years will be remembered at the EU for a new emphasis on Germany’s interests, and the decline of Germany’s interest in and willingness to fund “European Grand Projects.” Schröder had no great ambitions to follow Helmut Kohl’s footsteps in being “reflexively European.” Merkel, by contrast, shows signs early in her tenure to follow more closely her mentor’s approach to the EU. I examine Germany’s EU budget policies, as well as statements and policies toward the Stability and Growth Pact as the main support for the claim Merkel is different in policy not simply rhetoric.

Keywords: European Union, Germany, EU budget, Stability and Growth Pact, European integration, Angela Merkel, Gerhard Schröder.

“The Change in Government and Transatlantic Relations”

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Almost seventeen years after the Berlin Wall fell, German-American relations represent a mixture of partnership, competition, and a vast network of political, economic and cultural ties which make up one of the most intensive bilateral relations on the globe. A cornerstone of the Euro-Atlantic framework, German-American relations remain of critical importance to both sides of the Atlantic. However, the reasons why that is the case have been in continuous transformation, as the interests and the needs of the United States and the Federal Republic of Germany have responded to the demands of a changing environment during the past five decades, especially since the end of the Cold War. Angela Merkel has stated clearly that she sees a stronger Europe and a stronger transatlantic relationship as two sides of the same coin. While that has been the mantra of many chancellors before her, she has an opportunity to help define what it means today. In setting the priorities and the course of German foreign policy while engaging in an honest and candid dialogue with Washington, Angela Merkel will be building on a mixture of continuity and change within the German debate about its European and global roles and responsibilities.

Keywords: Germany, United States, foreign policy, transatlantic relations, chancellors, presidents, Angela Merkel, George W. Bush, Cold War, unification

“Honecker’s Revenge: The Enduring Legacy of German Unification in the 2005 Election”

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A core lesson of Germany’s federal election of September 2005 is the enduring legacy of the communist past in East Germany, a legacy that substantially shapes politics in unified Germany. Fifteen years after unification, the crucial difference in German politics still lies in the East. The 2005 election demonstrated the enduring east-west divide in German party politics. The result is that Germany today has two coherent party systems, one in the East and one in

the West. Combined, however, they produce incoherent outcomes. Any party that hopes to win at the federal level must perform well in the very different circumstances in the East.

Keywords: Germany, Bundestag, elections, East Germany, political parties, unification