PARTIES AND POLITICS IN MODERN GERMANY

GERARD BRAUNTHAL
Parties and Politics
in Modern Germany

Published 2019 by Routledge
52 Vanderbilt Avenue, New York, NY 10017
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an Informa business

Copyright © 1996 Taylor & Francis

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reprinted or reproduced or utilised in any form or by any electronic, mechanical, or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publishers.

Notice:
Product or corporate names may be trademarks or registered trademarks, and are used only for identification and explanation without intent to infringe.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Braunthal, Gerard, 1923–
  p. cm.
  Includes bibliographical references and index.
  1. Political parties—Germany—History.  2. Germany—Politics and
government—20th century.  I. Title.
JN3972.A979B73  1996
324.243'009—dc20  95-46210
CIP

Contents

List of Illustrations ix
Acknowledgments x
List of Acronyms xi

Introduction 1
Notes, 3

PART ONE
An International and National Overview

1 Political Parties: A Comparative Perspective 7
   Historical Origins, 7
   Discord on Definitions, 9
   Classifying Parties by Competition, 9
   Other Classifications and Analyses, 14
   Conclusion, 15
   Notes, 15

2 German Parties: A Historical Perspective 18
   The Second Reich, 18
   The Weimar Era, 24
   The Third Reich, 30
   The Postwar Years, 32
   Conclusion, 32
   Notes, 33

PART TWO
West German Parties Since World War II

3 The Party State: Political Legitimacy 37
   Rebirth of a Pluralist Party System, 37
   Constitutional Foundation, 39
Contents

Party Finance, 41
Electoral System, 46
Conclusion, 48
Notes, 49

4 The Christian Democrats: Right of Center 51
The Occupation Years: 1945–1949, 52
The CDU: 1949–1990, 55
The CSU: 1949–1990, 62
Conclusion, 63
Notes, 63

5 The Social Democrats: Left of Center 65
The Occupation Years: 1945–1949, 65
The SPD in Power: 1966–1982, 72
The SPD in Opposition: 1982–1990, 75
Conclusion, 76
Notes, 77

6 The Free Democrats: Keeping the Balance 78
Historical and Ideological Development, 79
Organization, 80
Membership and Voter Profile, 81
Schisms and Coalition Switches, 82
Conclusion, 86
Notes, 87

7 The Greens: Challenging the Establishment 89
The Antecedents of the Greens, 89
The Launching of the Party, 91
The Electoral Balance Sheet, 92
Organization, 94
Membership and Voter Profile, 95
Factional Disputes, 96
Conclusion, 97
Notes, 98
8 Left and Right Radical Parties: Protesting the System 100

Left Radical Parties, 101
Right Radical Parties, 103
Conclusion, 108
Notes, 109

PART THREE
East German Parties Since World War II

9 The Socialist Unity Party and the Bloc Parties 113

The Soviet Occupation, 113
The German Democratic Republic, 118
SED Structure, 121
Conclusion, 123
Notes, 124

10 The Turbulent Transition, 1989–1990 126

The SED, 127
The New (and Old) Party Landscape, 129
The Democratization of the Government, 137
Conclusion, 138
Notes, 139

PART FOUR
Parties in the Unified Germany

11 The First Three Years 143

The 1990 Election Campaign, 143
Government and Opposition, 1990–1993, 149
Conclusion, 159
Notes, 159

12 “Super” Election Year 1994 161

The Christian Democrats: From Defense to Offense, 161
The Free Democrats: On the Brink of Disaster, 165
The Social Democrats: From Offense to Defense, 166
The Greens: Hoping for a Comeback, 169
The PDS: Optimism Prevails, 170
New Minor Parties, 171
The Coalition Debates, 172
The National Election, 174
Conclusion, 178
Notes, 178

Conclusion

The Central Role of Parties, 181
Political Stability, 182
A Crisis of Parties? 184
Confronting the Future, 189
Notes, 191

Appendix: Self-Portraits of the Bundestag Parties, 1994 195
Selected Bibliography 200
About the Book and Author 204
Index 205
Illustrations

Tables

4.1 Bundestag election results, 1949–1994 55
4.2 Distribution of seats in the Bundestag, 1949–1994 57
10.1 East German People's Chamber election results, 1990 130
11.1 Eastern German perceptions of unification consequences, 1994 157
12.1 Bundestag election results, 1994 175

Figures

4.1 Bundestag election results, 1949–1994 56
12.1 Ideological self-estimate of the electorate, 1994 163
12.2 Chancellor preferences of the electorate, 1994 163
12.3 Distribution of seats in the Bundestag, 1994 175

Cartoons

The trajectory of a politician 43
5% hurdle 47
It's got to be wonderful 59
The new wall between east and west 154
Plea for a small vote 162
Scharping into storage 176
The citizen, the parties 185
His majesty, the voter 188
Acknowledgments

I am deeply indebted to the German Academic Exchange Service and to the Friedrich Ebert Foundation (Bonn) for giving me study grants in 1990 and 1992, respectively, to interview leaders and staff of all major parties and several minor parties, journalists, and scholars in both parts of Germany and to collect party documents. I am also thankful to Inter Nationes (Bonn) for inviting me in 1990 and 1994 to participate on a team of scholars and journalists in observing the German national elections.

I offer further thanks to the ever-helpful staffs of the Federal Office for Political Education (Bonn), the Bundestag archive, Inter Nationes, the Ministry of the Interior, the Social Democratic Party press and documentation archive, Forschungsgruppe Wahlen and Allensbach public opinion institutes, the German Information Center (New York), and the University of Massachusetts–Amherst library for their kind assistance. In addition, Klaus Dammann, Dieter Dettke, Hans-Eberhard Dingels, Jürgen Faulenbach, Hannelore Koehler, Peter Munkelt, Dieter Roth, Hans-Joachim Veen, and numerous other specialists provided me with valuable information and insights. Walther Keim of the Bundestag Press and Documentation Center generously made available cartoons from his extensive collection, and several cartoonists kindly gave permission to reprint their irresistible and humorous contributions to politics. Thanks also to George C. Lane Jr. for the computer preparation of the tables and figures.

Susan McEachern, senior editor of Westview Press, suggested that the time had come for an introductory book on German political parties. Her able assistance and that of her staff in the final preparation of the book deserve special mention. In this list of acknowledgments, the unflagging support of my family should not be omitted. Of course, none of these persons bears responsibility for any errors that may still be lodged between the book's covers.

Gerard Braunthal
Acronyms

AfA  Arbeitsgemeinschaft für Arbeitnehmerfragen (Association of Workers)
A90  Alliance 90
ASF  Arbeitsgemeinschaft Sozialdemokratischer Frauen (Association of Social Democratic Women)
BBU  Bundesverband Bürgerinitiativen Umweltschutz (Federal Association of Citizens' Initiatives for Environmental Protection)
CDU/CSU  Christlich-Demokratische Union/Christlich-Soziale Union (Christian Democratic Union-Christian Social Union)
DA  Demokratischer Aufbruch (Democratic Awakening)
DBD  Demokratische Bauernpartei Deutschlands (Democratic Farmers Party of Germany)
DKP  Deutsche Kommunistische Partei (German Communist Party)
DM  deutsche mark
DRP  Deutsche Reichspartei (German Reich Party)
DSU  Deutsche Sozial Union (German Social Union)
DVU  Deutsche Volksunion (German People's Union)
FDP  Freie Demokratische Partei (Free Democratic Party)
FIS  Front Islamique du Salut (Algerian Islamic Salvation Front)
FLN  Front de Libération Nationale (National Liberation Front)
FRG  Federal Republic of Germany
GDR  German Democratic Republic
GIC  German Information Center
Jusos  Jungsozialisten in der SPD (Young Socialists in the SPD)
KPD  Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands (Communist Party of Germany)
LDP  Liberal Demokratische Partei (Liberal Democratic Party)
LDPD  Liberal-Demokratische Partei Deutschlands (Liberal Democratic Party of Germany)
.NATO  North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NDPD  National-Demokratische Partei Deutschlands (National Democratic Party of Germany [GDR])
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NPD</td>
<td>Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands (National Democratic Party of Germany [FRG])</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NSDAP</td>
<td>Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei (National Socialist German Workers Party)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PDS</td>
<td>Partei des Demokratischen Sozialismus (Party of Democratic Socialism)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRD</td>
<td>Partido de la Revolución Democrática (Democratic Revolutionary Party)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRI</td>
<td>Partido Revolucionario Institucional (Institutional Revolutionary Party)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REP</td>
<td>Republikaner (Republicans)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SDP</td>
<td>Sozialdemokratische Partei in der DDR (Social Democratic Party of the GDR)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SED</td>
<td>Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands (Socialist Unity Party of Germany)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SPD</td>
<td>Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands (Social Democratic Party of Germany)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SRP</td>
<td>Sozialistische Reichspartei (Socialist Reich Party)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SS</td>
<td>Schutzstaffel (Elite Guard)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stasi</td>
<td>Ministerium für Staatssicherheit (Ministry for State Security)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UFV</td>
<td>Unabhängiger Frauenverband (Independent Women's Association)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USPD</td>
<td>Unabhängige Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands (Independent Social Democratic Party of Germany)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Introduction

Germany is a powerful state in the international arena, especially since the 1990 accession of the eastern German Democratic Republic (GDR) to the western Federal Republic of Germany (FRG). The country's political and economic strength has given it a visibility and influence in European and world affairs few would have predicted in 1945. Then, Adolf Hitler's Germany lay in smoldering ruins, and the victorious Allied powers dictated its uncertain future. To understand the successful revival of the prostrate country (1945–1949), the divergent developments in the two rival capitalist and communist states (1949–1990), and developments in the unified Germany (1990–present), we focus on one key segment of the political system—the political parties.

The parties, according to the first major theme of this book, were at the center of the post–1945 political systems and are at the center of the current unified system. Although in the FRG there have been strong competing interest groups and a plethora of social movements, party leaders, on assuming cabinet office, become national decisionmakers shaping the state's domestic and foreign policies.

In the GDR, the chiefs of the powerful Socialist Unity Party (SED) were the undisputed rulers of the dictatorial state. Unlike in West Germany, they could not allow countervailing forces to challenge their decisions. Opponents were jailed or forced into exile. To give the appearance of having a democratic and pluralist political system, SED leaders allowed the founding of minor parties, which, however, had no significant influence.

The parties, according to the second major theme of this book, provided the political stability underpinning the democratic FRG after 1949 and the communist GDR from 1949 to 1989. Such stability did not signify that the party systems were frozen in time and not subject to the political, economic, and social forces impinging on the development of both countries for four decades. Changes, of course, took place, but often they were glacial and came too late to appease popular dissatisfaction with the status quo. This was true especially in the GDR in 1989 when the communist regime collapsed. Since 1990, the party leaders in the unified Germany have had to confront the
continuing dissatisfaction with government policies among many eastern Germans and the psychological gap between the formerly divided people.

In recent years, critics of parties have referred repeatedly to the citizens' \textit{Partei­enverdrossenheit} (disaffection with parties), a term chosen by a committee of specialists as the most favorite expression of the year 1992. Parallel with a twin term \textit{Politikverdrossenheit} (disaffection with politics), \textit{Parteienverdrossenheit} has become a part of the German political vocabulary. In 1992, German president Richard von Weizsäcker, supporting the critics, doubted the major parties' ability to resolve urgent political, economic, and social issues. He also claimed that parties were obsessed with holding onto power, exceeded their constitutional rights, and lacked "conceptual" leadership.\textsuperscript{1} Other critics accused parties of lacking openness and honesty and of being prone to graft and corruption. Party leaders admitted to some of the charges but defended their organizations as the crucial variable in politics.

This introductory study of modern German parties focuses in part on the question of whether the current German party system faces the same malaise or crisis of politics many advanced industrial and developing states are experiencing. In such states, incumbent politicians have to confront the anger of voters who blame them for the grave societal problems of mass unemployment, crime, environmental pollution, cuts in the welfare system, national identity and minorities, immigration and integration, and a decline in the quality of living. Frustrated citizens, especially the young, vent their anger at the system by supporting new parties or opting out of politics. In the 1994 U.S. congressional election, only 39 percent of the electorate turned out to vote. In many parts of the world, right-wing extremist parties are gaining strength as a result of individual alienation and system breakdown.

Can we speak of a crisis of politics in Germany if its voters are identifying less with their traditional parties and in consequence switching to other parties or failing to vote? Can the party system provide political stability if a realignment of parties characterizes developments since unification in 1990? How much of a threat to the democratic system are right-wing parties and groups? What are the governing coalition combinations possible in Bonn when two equally strong party blocs, made up of center-conservative and center-left parties, might not produce a viable majority in coming national elections?

Before such questions can be answered, we must first study foreign and German parties from comparative and historical perspectives. Part 1 surveys the history of parties and party systems in various regions of the world and assesses the ways in which party systems have been categorized and analyzed. Then it examines the historical development of German parties, which oper-
ated in the authoritarian Empire, democratic Weimar, and totalitarian Nazi eras.

Part 2 deals with the array of old and new parties in western Germany from 1945 to 1949 and in the semisovereign FRG from 1949 to 1990. The parties were (and still are) the centerpiece of a pluralist system based on a democratic constitutional foundation, funded in part by public outlays, and affected by a hybrid electoral system. In this “party state,” the parties’ political legitimacy has been fully recognized. Chapters 4 to 8 consider each of the major and minor parties in the FRG that have had an effect on the political system. In every instance, we focus on a party’s leadership, organization, membership, ideology, and electoral support to gauge its political effectiveness.

Part 3 deals first with party developments in Soviet-occupied eastern Germany from 1945 to 1949 and in the GDR from 1949 to 1989. In the authoritarian state, the Socialist Unity Party was the dominant political actor, while the vassal bloc parties played bit parts to give the system a false democratic facade. Part 3 next deals with the new democratic parties and groups that surfaced in the 1989 and 1990 collapse of the GDR.

Part 4 examines the parties in unified Germany since 1990, with particular attention to the first all-German election of 1990 and to the effect the western parties had on the emerging party system in eastern Germany. Chapter 12 dissects the 1994 national election to see whether it showed the discontent of voters with the status quo.

The concluding chapter assesses the significance of the German parties in the contrasting democratic and authoritarian systems from 1945 to 1990 and in unified Germany since 1990. In looking at the nebulous future, the chapter speculates on the strength of the leftist, centrist, and rightist parties in a democratic setting. It addresses the question of a crisis in the party system as the country approaches a probably turbulent twenty-first century.

Notes

PART ONE

An International and National Overview
Political Parties:  
A Comparative Perspective

An assessment of the German party system will make comparisons to parties and party systems in other polities more meaningful if the diverse analytical approaches to studying parties in a supranational context are highlighted first. This chapter therefore deals with the historical origins of parties in several countries; the discord on definitions of parties; their competitiveness, or lack of it, in national political systems; their ideological or pragmatic orientation; their organizational structures; their ability to mobilize members and voters; and their functions.

Historical Origins

Parties in different forms have existed since the creation of political systems. In Roman times, circa 450 B.C., the rudimentary ancestors of parties, known as “factions” (derived from the Latin word facere, to do, to act), emerged. At the time, a small privileged patrician class despotically ruled Rome. It took a century for the large plebian class, through numerous struggles, to achieve political equality with the patricians.

From the twelfth to the fourteenth century, two rival political factions of notables—the Ghibellines, supporting the emperors, and the Guelphs, supporting the popes—plunged Italy into warfare. The factions, which had each controlled a few cities, disappeared with the decline of the rivalry between papacy and empire.

In the seventeenth century, the term “party” (derived from the Latin partire, to partition) came into use in Europe. Like the factions, the parties had no mass basis but were groups of aristocratic leaders who surrounded themselves with a coterie of loyal followers. Later these groups became parties of
notables or propertied men who supported candidates for seats in parlia-
ments.

Many political observers denounced parties and factions for undermining
and endangering the governments in power. In Britain, these observers criti-
cized the feuds between the Tories and Whigs, two governing aristocratic fac-
tions, following the restoration of the monarchy in 1660. Viscount
Bolingbroke, statesman and political writer, wrote in 1738: “Governing by
party . . . must always end in the government of a faction. . . . Party is a po-
litical evil, and faction is the worst of all parties.”1

In 1770, Edmund Burke, another well-known British statesman and
writer, rejected the negative image of parties. He developed a more positive
meaning: “Party is a body of men united, for promoting by their joint en-
deavor the national interest, upon some particular principle in which they
are all agreed.”2 Burke saw British parties as organizations contributing to
the consensus on constitutional practices.

In France, the revolutionary ferment in 1789 accentuated the divisions in
society, which led to the founding of political clubs. Representatives to the
Estates General (later, National Constituent Assembly), who met in
Versailles and Paris to discuss the collapse of the royal absolutist regime and
the creation of a republican regime, realized that they shared common inter-
ests spanning the provinces. Girondists and Jacobins, and later Montagnards,
organized, each espousing different ideologies. By the time the French
Constituent Assembly met in 1848, groups of moderate republicans,
Catholic monarchists, rightists, and leftists had formed, creating a system of
modern parties. However, they identified themselves by the name of the
place where they met rather than by their embryonic ideologies.3

In the United States, George Washington and John Madison warned that
factions and parties were divisive and endangered the rights of citizens. But
they could not halt the emergence of the class-based parties—the Federalists,
led by Alexander Hamilton, and the Anti-Federalists, led by Thomas
Jefferson. From the 1830s on, the parties assumed greater importance as leg-
islatures became more representative and suffrage was extended. At the same
time, party politicians, heading the successor parties, the Republicans and
the Democrats, built up a system of patronage under the protection of cor-
rupt state and city machines. As a consequence, around the turn of the twen-
tieth century some writers again characterized the parties and their bosses as
perversions of the general will.4
Discord on Definitions

Once modern parties had developed in many countries, scholars questioned how to define and categorize them—that is, what features and functions characterized them within various governmental systems? According to Giovanni Sartori, “A party is any political group identified by an official label that presents at elections, and is capable of placing through elections (free or nonfree), candidates for public office.”5

Sigmund Neumann, who underlines the importance of a party as a “lifeline of modern politics,” writes that it is “the articulate organization of society’s active political agents, those who are concerned with the control of governmental power and who compete for popular support with another group or groups holding divergent views. As such it is the great intermediary which links social forces and ideologies to official governmental institutions and relates them to political action within the larger political community.”6

Thomas Hodgkin broadens the definition to include parties in one-party noncompetitive states: “It is probably most convenient to consider as ‘parties’ all political organizations which regard themselves as parties and which are generally so regarded.”7 Sigmund Neumann disagrees, arguing that to call the Nazi Party in totalitarian Germany a party is wrong because there was no freedom to belong to another party. According to him, “The dictatorial party’s monopoly, which prevents the free formation and expression of opinion, is the precise antithesis of the party system,” which he characterizes as having more than one party.8

Classifying Parties by Competition

As the controversy over definitions indicates, scholars do not agree on how to best analyze parties and party systems. They therefore study parties from different perspectives, one of which is to classify systems by the degree of competition among parties as measured by their number and strength in any one state. However, there are a very few states, such as Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Iran, in which powerful monarchs, sheikhs, and clerics reign who do not allow any party to operate for fear that it could threaten their rule.
One-Party Systems

More frequently, dictatorial rulers allow only one ideological party or movement to exist as a way of legitimizing the regime and ensuring the population’s loyalty to the state. In the totalitarian regimes of Nazi Germany, the former Soviet Union, and the People’s Republic of China under Mao Zedong, the monolithic party in power controlled all aspects of society and the state. Similarly, in most civilian or military authoritarian regimes, such as those found on nearly all continents (e.g., in various periods, Zaire, Liberia, Portugal, Spain, Pakistan, Indonesia, Argentina, and Brazil), government leaders permitted or permit only one party to function. However, the dictatorial rule is less oppressive and the party less ideologically driven than in totalitarian systems. Opposition groups may be able to operate clandestinely until the system eventually collapses or the military hands over power to party politicians.

Not all one-party states are ruled by dictators. After World War II, the charismatic leaders of newly independent Third World states, especially in Africa, converted the popular movements or parties that had battled the colonial masters into one dominant force within the new democratic political system. To some leaders, granting people the right to participate in local governing units (“people’s power”) was more important during the transition stage than a competitive party system, which might produce rivalries among conflicting regional interests that the country could ill afford. Unfortunately, democracy in many of these countries did not survive the eruption of fierce tribal, ethnic, or religious conflicts; the rise of personal dictatorships; or the seizure of power by military juntas.

In Algeria, for instance, the National Liberation Front (FLN) battled the French colonial government from 1954 to 1962, when independence was finally achieved. Thereafter Ahmed Ben Bella, the highly popular leader of the FLN who became prime minister and president, ruled over a limited democratic and socialist system in which the FLN was the sole party but in which power soon shifted to the bureaucracy and the military. The system lasted only three years. In 1965, an army junta overthrew the government and installed Colonel Houari Boumédienné as head of a revolutionary council. As a result of military rule, opposition groups disagreeing with the policies of the government surfaced. In 1989, short-lived constitutional reforms allowed opposition parties to form legally and made the prime minister responsible to the legislature rather than to the FLN.

In 1992, the Algerian Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) won the election and, under democratic principles, should have been allowed to form a new government. The secular government refused to accept the popular verdict,