



THE



German Polity

SEVENTH EDITION

David P. Conradt

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Seventh Edition

David P. Conradt

East Carolina University



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To Phillip, Thomas, and Elisabeth

Preface

The end of the Kohl era, the return to power of the Social Democrats, the Greens' assumption of national political responsibility for the first time in their history, the quickening pace of European integration as seen above all in the introduction of a common European currency, German military participation in the NATO Serbian conflict over Kosovo, and the return of the national government to Berlin—these are some of the major developments that necessitate this new edition. These and other topics have been the subject of important research by social scientists on both sides of the Atlantic, which this edition attempts to incorporate.

This edition also gives us the opportunity to consider the first half-century of the Federal Republic—the most extensive and successful democratic political experience that has ever taken place on German soil. The events of the past fifty years—and indeed developments since the first edition in 1978—have confirmed the validity of *The German Polity's* fundamental thesis: The Federal Republic has become an established liberal democracy with all of the problems and potential of other advanced industrial democracies. The success of the unification process thus far has been in part the result of the transformation of West German politics since 1949. Would Germany's neighbors, including those in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, have consented to unification if West Germany had not shown its commitment to democratic values, the peaceful resolution of conflict, and European unity during the past five decades?

During the past decade, unification—the complex and difficult process of putting Germany back together again—has placed an added burden on the political, economic, and social systems. Initial hopes that the forty-year (1949–1989) division could be quickly overcome have been replaced by the sober realization that it will take at least a generation to achieve economic and cultural unification. Such a difficult process—the aftermath of unification—is examined in this new edition, especially in a greatly expanded Chapter 2. I have also attempted in Chapter 10 to explore in greater detail the question of Germany's new international role in the

post-unification period. Sections on the 1998 federal election, the second since the 1990 unification; changes in the party system; and expanded treatments of major policy problems have also been added to this edition. The rest of the work has been updated and the findings of recent research incorporated in the text and cited in the expanded bibliography.

This edition also differs from its predecessors in the emphasis given to the role of international—and above all European—factors as important determinants of German politics and policy. Many of the trends and problems discussed in this new edition, such as high unemployment, slow economic growth, and soaring public deficits, are the result of Germany's poor adjustment to the demands of globalization. The fabled "social market economy" is now in crisis.

This study has benefited greatly from the stimulation and research support provided by institutions and colleagues on both sides of the Atlantic. The generous support of the Press and Information Office of the Federal Republic enabled the author to observe the 1998 campaign and election. Included in this trip were numerous interviews with leading candidates. The German-American *Arbeitskreis*, ably led by Wolfgang-Uwe Friedrich, provided generous support, which enabled me to conduct research in Germany on the aftermath of unification. In Germany, I am indebted to Jürgen W. Falter, Helmut Hoffmann, Max Kaase, Jürgen Kalkbrenner, Werner Kaltefleiter, Hans-Dieter Klingemann, Peter Müller, Ferdinand Müller-Rommel, Franz-Urban Pappi, Walter Picard, Lutz Reuter, Erwin K. Scheuch, Dieter Roth, Hans-Joachim Veen, and the late Rudolf Wildenmann. Special mention must go to the founder and director of the Institut für Demoskopie, Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann, who, over the years, has generously shared her invaluable archive of public opinion surveys. In the United States, Hannelore Köhler of the German Information Center in New York was willing to fax answers to my sometimes arcane queries about fast-breaking developments. All or parts of this and earlier editions were carefully read by Henry S. Albinski, M. Donald Hancock, David Klein, Hermann M. Kurthen, Peter Merkl, Charles A. Miller, Joyce Mushaben, Goldie Shabad, and James H. Wolfe. Their comments saved me from many embarrassing mistakes. Mark S. Wheeler also rendered major assistance in the preparation of this edition. I am also grateful to the following individuals who reviewed the manuscript for the seventh edition of this text: David Patton, Connecticut College; Henry S. Albinski, Pennsylvania State University; Arthur M. Hanhardt, Jr., University of Oregon; and Gebhard Schweigler, Georgetown University. I am, of course, solely responsible for any remaining errors of fact or judgment.

Introduction

This book seeks to provide an introduction to the modern German polity that will enable the student of comparative politics to acquire a detailed knowledge of this particular system and to compare it meaningfully with others.

This study departs from earlier treatments of the Federal Republic in its emphasis on the institutionalized character of the postwar system and the multiplicity of policy changes and conflicts that are now taking place within the Republic. In short, the key question is no longer whether Germany will remain a liberal democratic society, but what kind of democracy the Federal Republic has been and will be in the future. This approach does not deny the influence of the past on current institutions and processes; throughout the work, and especially in the treatment of national identity in Chapter 4, I have attempted to relate historical factors—particularly the Third Reich and World War II—to the current politics of the Republic. But this approach does suggest that a portrayal of the Republic as provisional or as one in which the leadership is insecure or anxious about its abilities to maintain the liberal democratic order is misleading. Indeed, as Josef Joffe has pointed out, the intensive and extensive examination of Germany's tragic past and, of course, above all the responsibility of Germans for the Holocaust, has been and continues to be a vital part of the Federal Republic's identity and a major reason for Germany's half-century of peaceful and positive relationships with its neighbors in Europe and the larger world community.¹ The capacity of postwar Germans to undertake this painful confrontation with their past is an important factor in the Republic's international status. Entering the twenty-first century, the Federal Republic, in stark contrast to the position of earlier regimes, is surrounded by friends. For American and British students whose image of Germany derives largely from movies and television programs dealing with the Third Reich, this approach may provide a surprising but more realistic portrait of how Germans today conduct their politics.

THE STUDY OF GERMAN POLITICS

To the student of comparative politics, knowledge and understanding of the German polity is important for several reasons. First, Germany offers an excellent example of the complexities, difficulties, and tragedies of political development. In contrast to the experiences of the United States or Great Britain, political stability—much less democratic political stability—has been a rarity in the German political experience. Throughout its history, Germany frequently has faced the same basic problem confronting many less-developed countries: establishing a political order that achieves a balance of conflict and consensus, liberty and order, individualism and community, unity and diversity.

Second, German politics offers the student a laboratory in which to study political change. Within the last century not only specific governments but also the entire regime or form of government have been subject to frequent and sudden change. The empire proclaimed in 1871 collapsed with Germany's defeat in World War I and was followed by the formation of a democratic republic in 1919. This first attempt at political democracy lasted only fourteen years and was replaced in 1933 by the Nazi dictatorship. The Nazis' Thousand-Year Reich lasted only twelve years, with catastrophic consequences for Germany and the world. The destruction of the Nazi regime in 1945 brought a system of military occupation to Germany, which was followed in 1949 by the creation of two German states: a Federal Republic of Germany, composed of the American, British, and French zones of occupation; and a communist state, the German Democratic Republic (GDR) in the Soviet zone. In 1989–1990 the communist regime in the GDR collapsed. In East Germany's first free election in 1990, voters left little doubt that they wanted unification with West Germany as soon as possible. On October 3, 1990, East Germany ceased to exist as an independent state and joined the Federal Republic. Europe once again has a single German state. Thus in less than a century Germany has had two republics, one empire, one fascist dictatorship, one period of foreign military occupation, and one communist dictatorship. Few countries present the student with a better opportunity to examine the causes and consequences of such political change.

Third, German politics illustrates the effects of the international political system on domestic politics. As discussed in Chapters 1 and 2, the current political organization of the German people is the by-product of the postwar struggle between East and West and the end of that struggle in the early 1990s. The basic decisions from 1945 to 1949 that established the two German states and ceded large portions of the prewar *Reich* (literally, "kingdom") to the Soviet Union and Poland were not made by German political leaders. Similarly, the breaching of the Berlin Wall in 1989, the end of the East German state, and formal unification in 1990 were in part the consequences of Soviet president Gorbachev's reform policies. The politics of Germany, more than that of any other Western European country, have been affected by decisions made in Washington, Moscow, and elsewhere.

Fourth, the study of German politics gives the student an opportunity to examine one of the most important capitalist or market economies in the world today, and

particularly the relationship between the policies of government and this economic system. For most of the past half-century Germany has dealt with the problems of inflation, unemployment, and economic growth more successfully than most of her neighbors and economic competitors. In fact, economic performance has been cited as a prime factor in the postwar growth of popular support for the values and institutions of liberal democracy. Yet in recent years the German economy has been slow to respond to the challenges of globalization. Unemployment is among the highest in Europe and economic growth now lags behind that of many of Germany's neighbors. What effect will economic "hard times" have on the political system?

Finally, Germany is a very important country in the international political system. It is the strongest member of the fifteen-nation European Union, accounting for over 30 percent of its total economic output. Germany has become the most powerful ally of the United States and will play a key role in the development of postcommunist societies in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. Indeed, a knowledge and understanding of German politics offer the student insights into a key actor in the future of Europe and the international political system.

THE PLAN OF THE BOOK

A knowledge of the major historical developments preceding the establishment of the Federal Republic is essential background for the later chapters. This information is provided in Chapter 1. Chapter 2 examines the rise and fall of the communist regime in East Germany from 1949 to 1989, the unification process that culminated in October 1990 with the accession of the former East German territories into the Federal Republic, and the difficult challenge of putting Germany back together again. The social and economic structure of the Federal Republic is surveyed in Chapter 3. Emphasis in this chapter is placed on postwar changes and their impact on political attitudes and behavior. German political culture and participation, as well as the role and status of minority groups, are discussed in Chapter 4. The postwar party system, the key role of the three established parties (Social Democrats, Christian Democrats, and Free Democrats), and the emergence of the Greens, along with the activity of the major postwar interest groups, are the topics of Chapter 5. Postwar elections and electoral politics are analyzed in Chapter 6. The major national policymaking institutions—the parliament, executive, bureaucracy, courts, and an array of semipublic institutions—are the subjects of Chapters 7 and 8. Germany's subnational governmental units—the states and local communities—are examined in Chapter 9. The work concludes in Chapter 10 with an examination of several current and future policy problems confronting the Federal Republic, including a discussion of Germany's future international political role.

The book attempts to develop two major themes. First, since 1949, the Federal Republic has achieved a degree of legitimacy and consensus unmatched by any other German regime in this century; Germany and the Germans have changed.

Second, within this context, the political system is dealing with a variety of policy problems that could not be addressed earlier because of the country's division and the importance of first achieving a consensus on political democracy. The manner in which these issues are resolved will determine the quality and extent of political democracy in unified Germany. The postwar development of the Federal Republic, examined in this book, is indeed a success story; but whether the past is of value in helping to address the problems of the future in Germany, as elsewhere, remains an open question.

Note

1. Josef Joffe, "Erinnerung als Staatsräson," *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, December 12, 1998 (Internet edition).

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The Historical Setting

Established in 1949, the Federal Republic of Germany is certainly one of Europe's younger states. Yet the people within its borders belong to one of Europe's oldest linguistic, ethnic, and cultural units—the German nation. This nation dates back at least to A.D. 843, when Charlemagne's empire was partitioned following his death into the West Frankish (much of modern France), Central Frankish (the modern Netherlands, Belgium, Alsace, and Lorraine), and East Frankish (modern Germany) empires. The East Frankish empire under Otto the Great (936–973) was later proclaimed the Holy Roman Empire. But neither this first empire, or *Reich*, nor any of its successors has ever united all of Europe's German-speaking peoples into a single state with a strong central government.

THE FIRST REICH

The medieval Reich was, in fact, a loose-knit collection of many different regions, each with distinct dialects and varying degrees of economic and military strength. Although this empire held together formally and was not finally abolished until the time of Napoleon, it had in fact ceased to exist as a viable political entity by the end of the seventeenth century. The first German Reich then became little more than a fragmented collection of hundreds of principalities and free cities.¹ While the process of building a unified nation-state continued in Britain and France, the German peoples of Central Europe were deeply divided. This decentralization of political authority, characteristic of feudalism, meant that many separate political institutions and processes took root within the German nation.

Through Luther's translation of the Bible into High German, the Reformation of the sixteenth century brought a uniform style of written German, but it did little else to facilitate unity and integration. Indeed, it divided Central Europe still further into Protestant and Catholic territories. The Thirty Years War (1618–1648) that followed the Reformation was fought largely on German soil, with the different German states