

POLITICAL PARTIES & INTEREST GROUPS

SHAPING DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE



EDITED BY CLIVE S. THOMAS

Political Parties and Interest Groups

Shaping Democratic Governance

edited by
Clive S. Thomas



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Preface

One of the paradoxes of political science around the world, particularly in liberal democracies, is that broad agreement exists on the importance of the relationship between political parties and interest groups but little research has been conducted on that relationship. By drawing on the experiences of thirteen countries—old established democracies, new ones, and some in transition to democracy—this book provides the first general analysis of the party-group relationship in liberal democracies.

Some studies have been conducted on specific aspects of party-group relations within particular democracies and across Western countries, mainly on the competition between parties and groups for members and on the decline of major parties in the face of expanding numbers of interest groups, social movements, and third parties. But virtually no studies explain the various elements and assess the significance of the party-group connection within individual liberal democracies, and no comparative study exists of the relationship across Western countries. This book seeks to provide a holistic understanding of the party-group relationship, both within individual democracies and across the Western world.

Within this general, holistic objective, four specific goals can be summarized: (1) Why do some interest groups have relations with political parties while others do not, and for those that do, what determines the type and extent of the relationship? (2) What various forms do party-group relations take in democracies, and can these be developed into a model that includes, among other relationships, the close ties of socialist parties with labor groups, the lack of connection of most groups with parties, and situations where groups and parties conflict? (3) How does the party-group relationship, or lack of it, affect the political system, particularly policymaking and representation? (4) Do general patterns exist across countries that explain the party-group relationship and its consequences in liberal democracies

and that can perhaps be developed into a general theory? The party-group relationship across liberal democracies has been in flux for several decades. Thus, an explanation of the past, present, and likely future party-group connection will be helpful in understanding trends in democracies in general, as well as the politics of individual countries, and in providing general background and a context for an understanding of more specific aspects of the party-group connection.

In essence, this comparative analysis draws on scholars who are experts in the party-group relationship in particular democracies and synthesizes their findings to determine general patterns and practices. To ensure that the general analysis—the theoretical synthesis—was as representative as possible, a broad range of democracies was identified for the study. The criteria on which they were chosen included such factors as population size and diversity; federal and unitary systems; two-party and multi-party systems; those with neocorporatist experiences; and well-established, post-World War II, and transitional democracies—those having recently emerged from authoritarian rule. In reaching beyond the Anglo-American and Western European democracies, the analysis provides new insights into the party-group relationship and some indications of likely future developments as more countries move to democracy and existing democracies go through major transitions in the relationship between their parties and interest groups.

As a starting point for the study, Chapter 1 reviews existing knowledge on the party-group connection in liberal democracies, explains the methodology of the study and how the project sought to facilitate comparative analysis, and provides guidelines for approaching the analysis in each country chapter. The country chapters are divided into three sections. Part 1, “The Traditional Democracies,” includes Britain, France, Sweden, and the United States. Part 2, “The Post-World War II Democracies,” examines Germany, Italy, Israel, and Japan. Part 3, “The Transitional Democracies,” considers Spain, the Czech Republic, Poland, Argentina, and Mexico. Based on the analyses in these country chapters, the conclusion returns to the book’s four main questions and summarizes the findings with a view to assessing the accuracy of existing explanations of the party-group connection and providing some theoretical basis for a more in-depth understanding of past, present, and future developments in the relationship.

* * *

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Clive S. Thomas

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questions: (1) What is the nature of the relationship between parties and groups in historical perspective; (2) What shapes the party-group relationship today, and what factors are working to modify it; (3) What are the general patterns to the relationship between parties and groups; and (4) What are some specific arenas of party-group relations in the FRG today—including within parliament, the executive, and other areas of contact—and how does the relationship play out in those arenas?

The essence of the argument we present is as follows. Although in the twentieth century Germany was a major player in international politics—including defeat in two world wars, occupation by the Allies, and as a prominent member of the European Union—and thus external forces have played a part in shaping the party-group connection and will be increasingly important in the future, the major explanation for past, present, and likely future party-group relations is to be found in factors internal to the German political economy.

THE PARTY-GROUP RELATIONSHIP IN RECENT GERMAN HISTORY

In this section we provide an overview of how political parties and interest groups have interacted in the policy process since the late nineteenth century. This review supports our thesis that in the main, internal factors of German politics have shaped party-interest group interactions.

In general, interest groups dominated party factions at the end of the nineteenth century and into the early twentieth century, in part because the character of the authoritarian state allowed no room for political parties, which were supposedly harmful to the common good, whereas interest groups developed as the result of the social and economic emancipation process. This process laid the foundations for class and representative organizations to flourish throughout Germany. The relationship changed during the Weimar Republic when political parties evolved into more powerful institutional actors, although they remained subject to deep suspicion and contempt by a large section of the German electorate (Hesse and Ellwein 1992). As a result of persistent suspicion and disdain for parties, interest groups were able to sustain their influence during this period of political and economic instability. Thus, a pattern of competition and cooperation, dominated by interest groups, best describes the relationship between political parties and interest groups in the period between 1919 and 1933.

For example, the forerunner of the present Federation of German Industry (BDI), which organizes major industrial groupings, was the Reichsverband der Deutschen Industrie (Reich Association of German Industries), the central organization of German industry at the time. The organization was particularly influential in the executive bureaucracy and virtually ignored parties and parliament. All of its top-level officers had

been former bureaucrats in the German Reich under the kaiser. In addition, the Reichsverband was the first organization to use the newly institutionalized *Geschäftsordnung* (rules of procedure established to systematize organization contact with the executive and departments) for lobbying. Another equally successful lobby in the Weimar Republic was farmers' groups. In times of chronic political instability, caused in particular by the parties of the extreme left and right, the bureaucracy was the only lasting and reliable political institution (Ullmann 1988, 138–142, 178–179).

The victory of Nazism and the rise of the Third Reich brought a complete reversal of this pattern, with total domination by a single totalitarian mass political party over society and its various mediating organizations. By the late 1940s, however, this relationship had been totally discarded in the western regions of the old Reich with the emergence of the FRG. Political parties became the primary instruments of democratic consensus and stability within the new democracy. To ensure that parties would be the vehicles through which both interest articulation and aggregation would be assured in the new Germany, parties were constitutionally designed to largely dominate interest groups within the policy process. As we will see in more detail later, the FRG's Basic Law (*Grundgesetz*) guarantees political parties an explicit right to participate in decisions concerning the formulation of public opinion and political demands and objectives (Article 21). This ensures a basic element of parliamentary democracy, which in the German case has been described as a multiparty state or a multi-political party democracy (Haungs 1981; Leibholz 1952; S. Padgett 1993).

The way parties and groups have related to and affected policymaking and democracy in this new German system, given the predominant place reserved for parties and within the context of continuing neocorporatism, is the subject of the rest of this chapter. Although some publications make passing reference to the party-group relationship in Germany (for example, Dalton 1993; Katzenstein 1989) and some deal with it indirectly in investigating topics like social movements and parliamentary behavior (for example, Crouch and Menon 1997; Koopman 1995; Kropp 1997), there is no general work on the subject. Therefore, this chapter synthesizes numerous sources to develop the first specific treatment of the past and particularly the contemporary forms and consequences of this central relationship in German politics.

CONTEMPORARY POLITICAL PARTY AND INTEREST GROUP "BIG PLAYERS"

Political Parties

The big players within the German party system today are the right-center Christian Democratic Union (CDU) and its Bavarian-based sister party, the

Christian Social Union (CSU); the left-center Social Democratic Party (SPD); the Free Democratic Party (FDP); the “postmaterialist” Alliance ’90/Greens; and the leftist Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS). The CDU currently claims 636,000 members (just over 1 percent of the 60.5 million eligible German voters), and the CSU has another 180,000 members. The two parties together control 35 percent of the 676-member Bundestag, the lower chamber of Germany’s Federal Parliament. The CDU-CSU was the plurality party *fraktion* (the caucuses of each political party) within the Bundestag from 1983 through the September 1998 general elections. CDU leader Helmut Kohl served as chancellor from October 1982 until his resignation in the fall of 1998.

The SPD has around 774,000 members and, following the 1998 general elections, controls 41 percent of the seats in the Bundestag, making it the largest party (in terms of seats) in the Federal Republic’s 14th Bundestag session. The party is currently led by centrist Gerhard Schröder, who replaced the more leftist Oskar Lafontaine in April 1999. Schröder was elected German federal chancellor following the September 1998 general elections (*Deutschland*, No. 3, January 1998).

The Free Democrats claim 69,000 members and control 6 percent of the seats in the Bundestag as of 1999. The Alliance ’90/Greens claim 50,000 members and control just under 7 percent of the seats in the 14th Federal Bundestag. The party developed from the merger of the Green Party (Die Grünen), originally founded in 1980 around ecological and anti-nuclear issues, and a number of opposition groups from eastern Germany. In 1998 the Alliance ’90/Greens joined the SPD to form a coalition government for Germany. The PDS, a leftist rump of the former East German Communist party (Socialist Unity Party—SED), has 96,000 members, mostly from the Länder of the former German Democratic Republic (GDR). Following the September 1998 election, the PDS controlled 5 percent of the seats in the German Federal Parliament (*Deutschland*, No. 4, April 1998).

Interest Groups

Although there are currently thousands of interest groups in Germany, the big players are organized around occupational groupings, as one would expect given the economic priorities of the postwar German Federal Republic. These big players are professionally staffed, hierarchically organized within the German federal system, and devoted to a broad range of social, political, and economic issues of crucial importance to their broad-ranging membership and affiliates. They not only pressure members of the German Federal Parliament and their Länder counterparts throughout the republic, but they have been at the forefront of strong lobbying efforts in

the European Union (EU), in both Brussels and Strasbourg, since the 1992 Maastricht Treaty.

German labor and its various unions are represented by the German Trade Union Federation (DGB), which claims to represent 85 percent of the approximately 10 million unionized workers in the German workforce (31 percent of German workers were unionized as of 1995). Because of the FRG's codetermination laws (*Mitbestimmung*—worker representation on company boards), the DGB has maintained close working relations with both the CDU and the CSU, as well as with its natural ally, the SPD. Approximately half of the board members of the 482 largest firms in Germany are elected union members, the vast majority associated with the DGB. The neocorporatist logic of Germany requires that the DGB be an active player in negotiations among government, business, and labor regarding wage levels and pension schemes, as well as actively participating in the shaping of federal policy in both the bureaucracy and the various Bundestag committees (Thelen 1991).

The two peak associations representing employers' interests are the BDI, organizing thirty-nine separate major industrial groups, and the Federation of German Employers' Associations (BDA), consisting of sixty-four employer associations that represent nearly all large and medium-sized businesses within the Federal Republic. The BDI is the more political of the two. It represents employers' interests with government, within the Bundestag, and on various social and economic planning committees at the federal level. The BDA works more closely with unions, negotiating wage levels, pensions, social security, health benefits, and other matters concerning working conditions in Germany (Edinger 1986, 184–186; Essen 1986; Dalton 1993, 238–253).

In addition to the BDI and the BDA, the German Industrial and Trade Conference (DIHT) represents the venerable German *Mittelstand*, or small and medium-sized businesses. Although not as publicly visible as the BDI or the BDA, the DIHT is a powerful force within the German political economy and is a major player in structuring policy and coordinating interests among government, business, and labor. The *Mittelstand* is defined specifically as employers within industry, commerce, skilled trades, and service sectors who employ fewer than 500 persons and have a gross sales turnover of less than 100 million marks annually. As of 1996 it consisted of approximately 3 million small and medium-sized firms. In the new federal states of the former GDR, the *Mittelstand* alone accounts for 500,000 small and medium-sized enterprises that provide more than 3 million skilled jobs for German workers. Across the republic as a whole, the *Mittelstand* represents 99.6 percent of all enterprises subject to German VAT (value added tax) laws, accounts for over half of all sales in Germany, employs over two-thirds of the German workforce, trains nearly 80 percent of apprentices and

trainees, and accounts for 44 percent of the gross value added to the German gross domestic product. Germany's federal and state governments maintain approximately 600 different programs designed to assist the *Mittelstand* (*Deutschland*, No. 3, June 1996).

Although naturally closer to the center-right CDU-CSU, these three employer associations have also maintained close working relationships with the SPD. Indeed, with the election of Schröder as chancellor (and especially following the resignation of the more left-wing Lafontaine as SPD chair in April 1999), these three associations have found a more sympathetic ally than they likely imagined.

The German agricultural sector is represented by the German Farmers Association (DBV). Much smaller in size than the major employer and union peak associations, the DBV nonetheless has fervently and tenaciously defended the interests of German farmers. This role has become increasingly important as German farmers have fought to stave off assaults on the European Union's Common Agriculture Policy farm subsidies and threats posed by the expansion of the EU, particularly threats to farm support within the union.

Dalton (1993, 266–267) reported that German citizens clearly perceive partisan preferences among the various peak associations. Seventy-four percent of German citizens (within the western *Länder*) see unions as pro-SPD, 65 percent see business peak associations as pro-CDU-CSU, and 57 percent see farmers as pro-CDU-CSU.

INTERNAL FACTORS IN CONTEMPORARY GERMAN PARTY-GROUP RELATIONS

The diverse but often separate literature on political parties and interest groups draws attention to a number of crucial factors shaping the complex relationship between political institutions and agents of interest aggregation and articulation. Central to this relationship are the lessons of the past that pervade a nation's broader political culture and the constitutional rules that have evolved over time in response to these cultural influences. No country more clearly illustrates these factors at work than the German Federal Republic's liberal democracy. In less than a century the German public has been governed by an imperial monarchy, a semipresidential system, a totalitarian dictatorship in both fascist and communist manifestations, and a parliamentary federal democracy. More recently, the FRG has absorbed the former GDR, ushering in yet another chapter in the complex saga of German politics. Today Germany stands as a model of both political and economic consistency, tempered by a distinct blend of statist authority and balanced with a healthy commitment to political decentralization, mobi-

lized civic participation, and centralized economic coordination that has earned the German Federal Republic a reputation as a stable but flexible democracy.

As explained earlier, the contemporary German democracy is best described as a neocorporatist liberal democracy (Crouch and Menon 1997, 152–154). This classification requires that party-group relations be placed within the context of the unique structural perspective of the German democracy as of the 1990s, in part because this party-group relationship is very much affected by the two critical issues confronting the contemporary German neocorporatist political economy. First, the new Germany must successfully manage its precarious balance between a historical and a cultural commitment to state welfare in the face of an aging population and an increasingly competitive world trade system. Second, in seeking to protect and extend the export-based German political economy, the big players must not only manage the historically complex flow of critical pressures at work in the relationship between political parties and interest groups but must also face up to the difficult tasks of long overdue institutional reform such as improving labor relations and banking laws, structural transformation such as fully integrating eastern *Länder*, and managing the federal system within a broadened European Union.

In line with the basic argument of this chapter, in analyzing the party-group relationship in Germany it is useful to distinguish between internal factors shaping the relationship and the most important external factors affecting it. As we argue that internal factors are more important, particularly in past and contemporary Germany, in this section we focus on those factors and leave external factors to a later section.

The first important internal factor affecting this relationship in Germany is the nature and structure of the federal system (Reuter 1991). German federalism segments the political economy and determines the strategy of party-group interaction within the Federal Republic. The pattern of interaction among government ministries, unions, employer associations, and interest groups is sectionalized and decentralized in accordance with the federal constitutional design of the German democracy (S. Padgett 1993, 12; Klatt 1993; Leonardy 1993).

Second, the modern German democracy is designed to maximize two central components of the contemporary German political culture: the priority of a welfare state system and the demands of economic efficiency. This combination is usually associated with small European liberal democracies such as the Netherlands, Belgium, and Austria, but it is also true of Germany. In combination with the history preceding the current constitutional democracy of Germany, this balance imposes strict discipline on the major institutional actors within that democracy. This discipline is designed to coordinate interests and priorities through a neocorporatist strategy to

ensure a degree of political-economic stability and certitude consistent with the expectations of welfare priorities and economic competitiveness and success (Katzenstein 1989). To illustrate this we can use the example of *Konzertierte Aktion* (concentrated action). Initiated between 1966 and 1969 by then secretary for the economy Karl Schiller, the process successfully brought together representatives from, among others, the DGB, DIHT, BDI, and the large metalworkers' trade union, IG-Metall, to achieve a compromise over economic policy rather than increased competition among the major groups involved (Von Beyme 1969, 123–133). Almost thirty years later the new Social Democratic government sought to emulate that successful role model by creating a *Bündnis für Arbeit* (Alliance for Jobs). This time, however, business groups have been reluctant to join, although they still cooperate (*Die Welt*, 7 July 1999).

Third, a clear appreciation of the party-group relationship must take into account the unique legal provision stipulated in the German constitution regarding the formal role of political parties. This constitutional provision, Article 21 of the *Grundgesetz*, stipulates that parties are to play the leading role not only in formulating and articulating interests but also in aggregating those interests within the FRG's policymaking arena (S. Padgett 1993). On the one hand, this implies that unlike the U.S. political system, political parties are not just another extragovernmental actor fashioning public policy. Rather, parties in Germany enjoy a legal priority over interest groups and any other quasi-public organizations acting to shape the policy process. Equally significant, Article 21 has the secondary effect of casting parties as the embodiment of the political establishment. As such, they become an instrument of governmental policy stability—a clear intention of the architects of the 1948 German constitution (Basic Law).

This has the effect, however, of exposing a gap between the state and its instruments of support and execution—political parties—on the one hand and society on the other. In time, this has loosened the bonds between the electorate and political parties in Germany. Seen less and less as vehicles for change and reform in a era of turbulence and threat wrought by the complexities of the post-Cold War world and global financial and commercial competition, parties have had to adjust to the public's perception of them as part of the often unspecified "problem" rather than as legitimate instruments for rectification (S. Padgett 1993). This gap has been filled since around 1980 by a wide array of social movements with the aim of influencing established interest groups and other quasi-public institutions by shaping public opinion in various ways (Halfmann 1989).

Thus, to understand the role of interest groups in Germany one must extend the scope beyond the traditional groups widely represented within the German corporatist political economy (mainly trade unions and employer organizations). On the one hand, account must be taken of the

relationship between parties and traditional interest groups and, on the other, of the role of social movements and their influence on the dense network of interactions between the more traditional public and quasi-public groups shaping the German political economy and contemporary democracy (Katzenstein 1989; Halfmann 1989). In this regard, Halfmann (1989) identified various voluntary organizations and the equality-feminism, environmental, peace, antinuclear, and various alternative movements as the main social movements coloring the German political landscape from the 1970s until the late 1980s.

These three crucial characteristics of German liberal democracy have come under pressure from three external sources of influence: European integration, especially its broader and recent political and economic union; the financial and social implications of globalized capital markets; and the social and political transformation of Eastern and Central Europe coupled with the lingering effects of the unification of the two German states. However, we argue here that the influence of these external factors on the party-group connection will likely be more significant in the future than it is at present. We will discuss those factors later after characterizing the past and present array of party-group relations in Germany and examining some of their contemporary interrelations.

CHARACTERIZING PARTY-GROUP RELATIONS IN GERMANY

As indicated in Chapter 1, only a few attempts have been made to classify the relationship of political parties and interest groups—for example, Sternberger (1952/1953), who classified systems in general—and two attempts to classify liberal democracies, Yishai (1995) and Thomas and Hrebener (1995). All three classifications can throw light on the party-group connection in Germany. Here, however, we focus on the Sternberger and Thomas and Hrebener models as the most useful in understanding the German experience.

Sternberger (1952/1953) used five classifications in his model. First is the extreme case of direct control of a party by an interest group, usually resulting from the development of a party from an interest group. There are many examples of this type in Germany such as the Christian movement, which between 1870 and 1933 organized itself in the Center Party (*Zentrum*); the Association of the Homeland Expelled and Deprived Germans, which existed between 1950 and 1957; and, more recently, the development of the Greens out of the environmental protection and peace movements.

The second type of relationship is cooperative, characterized by strong, reciprocating dependencies between parties and interest groups. Examples

include the relationship between Social Democrats and the unions and between agrarian associations and the conservative parties.

The third patterned relationship is that of the traditional pluralistic model. This is characterized by strong independence of parties and interest groups, a condition that cannot be seen as typical for the big players in the FRG today. The neocorporatist political economy of Germany complements a production base within which pluralism cannot flourish; nor can it be tolerated within the structural confines of a national consensus model of politics dictated by a statist corporatist political culture. However, the pluralist model does apply to the numerous groups—likely the vast majority of interests in Germany in terms of numbers—that have few, if any, contacts with parties, such as the thousands of citizen lobbies and many new, locally based and organized citizens' initiative groups (the *Bürgerinitiativen*), especially those interested in environmental matters, generally represented by the Federal Association of Citizen-Action Groups for Environmental Protection—BBU (Dalton 1993, 194; Koopman 1995).

Sternberger's fourth category is the party-system domination model, which describes a situation characterized by the clear control of an interest group by a political party. The first two decades following the establishment of West Germany in 1949 were characteristic of this relationship. His fifth pattern is the dominant party model. This depicts a situation where interest groups are completely controlled by a central political party, specifically a totalitarian party, as was the case in the Third Reich and in the GDR.

Whereas the Sternberger model attempts to classify party-group relations at the system level, the Thomas and Hrebenar (1995) model focuses on the relationships between individual parties and groups. Like the Sternberger model, it also offers a five-part typology: the Partisan Model, the Ideological Model, the One Party Leaning/Neutral Involvement Model, the Pragmatic Model, and a Noninvolvement Model.

The Partisan Model depicts a situation where an interest group is attracted to, and dominated in the policy process by, a party that articulates a strong partisan ideological message, usually the result of close organizational ties and long historical association. This was essentially the relationship between the SPD and the unions for many years, but it has weakened somewhat in recent years. The Ideological Model differs from the Partisan Model in that both parties and interest groups have ideological positions derived independent of each other. Their alliance is a direct product of the match between these ideological proclivities. This has been and largely remains the relationship among the CDU-CSU, the FDP, and the business and farmer group.

The One Party Leaning/Neutral Involvement Model depicts a slightly less congruent relationship between a party and an interest group than in