Otto-Friedrich-Universität Bamberg
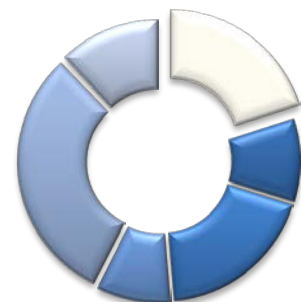
Thomas Saalfeld and Ralf Dobmeier:
The Bundestag and German Citizens:
More Communication, Growing Distance

Working Paper 1/2010

The Bundestag and German Citizens: More Communication, Growing Distance

Thomas Saalfeld with Ralf Dobmeier[1]

Thomas Saalfeld
University of Bamberg
Faculty of Social Sciences, Economics and Business Administration
Feldkirchenstr. 21
96045 Bamberg
Germany
Email thomas.saalfeld@uni-bamberg.de

Abstract: *This contribution examines how links between citizens and Members of the Bundestag have evolved since 1949. The focus will be on institutional incentives relating to the electoral system and the rules of procedure in the Bundestag. In addition, new incentives arising from technological developments (especially internet and Web 2.0 applications) will be explored in their effect on individual parliamentary behaviour vis-a-vis citizens and in the Bundestag's 'corporate' links (i.e., links not based on electoral incentives in the constituencies and the chamber) with citizens. In particular, the development of petitions and electronic petitions will be assessed. While the evidence presented suggests that Bundestag Members have enhanced communication with citizens, this has not halted the decline in popular support for the House. In line with other advanced liberal democracies, trust in parliament is declining as a result of a more critical, less deferential citizenry.*

Keywords: Bundestag, parliamentary reform, parliamentary practice, parliamentary behaviour, institutional trust

Biographical notes:

Thomas Saalfeld is Professor of Political Science at the University of Bamberg. His research has focused on legislative behaviour and coalition politics in Germany. His recent publications include *The Political Representation of Immigrants and Minorities: Voters, Parties and Parliaments in Liberal Democracies* (London: Routledge 2011, co-edited with Karen Bird and Andreas M. Wüst). Email: thomas.saalfeld@uni-bamberg.de.

Ralf Dobmeier holds a 'Diplom' degree in Political Science from the University of Bamberg. In his thesis he investigated how German MdBs are using Web 2.0 applications in the current (2009) Bundestag. Email: ralf.dobmeier@t-online.de.

The Bundestag and German Citizens: More Communication, Growing Distance

Thomas Saalfeld with Ralf Dobmeier

Introduction

It is a necessary condition for political representation 'that the actions of ... policy makers are supposed to be responsive to the wishes of the people' (Powell, 2004: p.273). For representation to be *democratic*, responsiveness must be accompanied by 'institutionalized arrangements that reliably create such connections', most importantly and irreplaceably 'the free and competitive national election in which all citizens can participate equally' (ibid., pp.273-4). Democratic parliaments are assemblies of winners of such competitive elections. In their classic study of substantive representation in the US Congress, Miller and Stokes (1963) identified two mechanisms to ensure the responsiveness of such elected representatives: *(a)* the electoral process itself, which gives constituents the possibility to choose representatives that pledge policies in line with their own preferences; and *(b)* between elections, the representatives' actions in the legislature are connected with constituents through the formers' perceptions of the preferences of the latter (anticipating voter responses in the next election). Assuming that Members of Parliament (MPs) care about getting re-elected and voters care about MPs' responsiveness, MPs have incentives to communicate their policy proposals and explain their legislative activities to voters; voters have incentives to communicate their policy preferences to candidates. While Miller and Stokes (1963) modelled constituent-deputy relations as a dyadic process of representation between voters and representatives, European party democracies require some theoretical and empirical adjustments allowing to analyse the relationship between constituency and individual MP in a model that also accounts for the role of political parties.

This paper will examine how the links between citizens on the one hand and individual Members of the German Bundestag (MdBs), (parliamentary) parties and the Bundestag as an organization are structured, and have evolved, in recent years. The evidence presented suggests that communicative links have become stronger. Simultaneously and seemingly paradoxically, however, the Bundestag has lost support amongst citizens. While it is beyond the scope of this paper to provide an empirically convincing causal explanation for this paradox, a number of plausible reasons for it will be discussed.

Historical Context

Although the tradition of (pre-democratic) parliamentary representation reaches back at least to the Middle Ages in German-speaking territories, the relationship between citizens and their parliament(s) has been fraught with suspicion and outright mutual

contempt since the failed liberal revolution of 1848 (e.g., Patzelt, 2000; Sontheimer, 1983). After the restoration of parliamentary democracy in the Federal Republic of Germany in 1949,regular surveys demonstrated a gradual increase of popular confidence in the Bundestag and other democratic institutions between 1950 and the late 1970s (Schüttemeyer, 1986). Since the 1970s, however, popular scepticism about the performance and legitimacy of the parliamentary institutions has grown again. This change, which follows a trend in many advanced liberal democracies (see, for example, Pharr and Putnam, 2000), resulted largely from the frustration of a younger generation of Germans, who (on aggregate) felt that many MdBs were insufficiently responsive to their concerns. German unification (1990) posed additional challenges for representative democracy and its institutions. A significant minority of East Germans did not feel that their preferences and concerns were represented adequately in unified Germany's national parliament (for a recent account see Gabriel, 2009). This propelled the Party of Democratic Socialism (now Die Linke) into the Bundestag. Initially this party was seen primarily as a 'regional' party particularly responsive to the concerns and ideological preferences of many East German citizens (Hough, 2002). Although its alliance and eventual merger with the predominantly West German WASG (Electoral Alternative Employment and Social Justice) after 2005 contributed to some electoral success in Western federal states after 2005, its electoral strongholds have remained in the Eastern federal states and Berlin (Bundeswahlleiter, 2010: pp.73, 80).

Apart from broader questions of citizens' expectations and evaluations of parliament, long-standing institutional traditions and rules of the Bundestag itself have shaped its relationship with citizens. The Bundestag has traditionally been criticised for being a hard-working chamber with a focus on committee work and deficiencies as an arena for public debate (Hennis, 1966; Steffani, 1971). This criticism, in which the British House of Commons has often served as a normative point of reference, was generally accepted by parliamentarians and underpins a number of parliamentary reforms since the 1960s, which generally aimed to increase the time allowed for short topical debates in the public arena of the Bundestag's plenary. Despite various reforms (for a brief summary see Saalfeld, 2002), the Bundestag's institutional 'culture' has remained one of a parliament focusing on legislative work in committees.

Electoral System

The electoral system is a crucial institution structuring the relationship between citizens and representatives in parliament. German citizens have two votes. With their first vote, they have an opportunity to elect half of the minimum[2] of 598 Members of the Bundestag (MdBs) by plurality vote in single-member districts. With their second vote, they may choose a (regional) party list, thus electing another 299 MdBs. Proportionality of the aggregate outcome is achieved by 'topping up' the candidates elected in the constituency races by drawing an appropriate number from the party lists. If a party wins more seats in the district races than it would have achieved under

proportional representation, it will keep these 'surplus seats' without compensation for the other parties (for details see Saalfeld, 2005).

In recent years, there has been a lively debate whether Germany has a 'mixed-member system' of proportional representation combining personalised elections in single-member constituencies with a system of party lists, or whether it is essentially a system of proportional representation with a certain personalised element and restricted by a five-per cent threshold (Jesse, 2000: p.127). Scholars advancing the former interpretation provide some evidence that the Members elected 'directly' in the single-member districts perceive themselves more strongly as constituency representatives than their counterparts elected through party lists (Klingemann and Wessels 2001). They also tend to be more constituency-focused in their legislative activities (Lancaster and Patterson, 1990; Stratmann and Baur, 2002) and electoral campaigns (Zittel and Gschwend, 2008). Scholars defending the latter interpretation are less convinced of clear behavioural differences (Jesse, 2000; Nohlen, 2004) expressing doubts whether Germany's electoral system really produces two sharply distinctive 'classes' of MdBs.

The evidence provides some support for both interpretations. The view that the German electoral system is primarily a system of proportional representation is supported by the observation that the parties frequently safeguard the election of constituency candidates by simultaneously nominating them for relatively secure positions on the party lists. In 2009, for example, 610 out of the 622 successful candidates (98.1 per cent) had run as candidates in constituencies (Dobmeier, 2010: p.52). This has *generally* encouraged relatively close links between voters and representatives, irrespective of their individual mode of election. In an empirical study comparing the effect of different electoral systems on citizens' ability (a) to name their local parliamentary candidates and (b) the frequency of their contacts with representatives, Norris (2004: pp.238-46) found that the links between citizens and MdBs in Germany are clearly stronger than in countries with pure list systems and do not differ greatly from countries using plurality vote in single-member districts.

Table 1: Attribution of individual and party success to individual campaign effort amongst candidates for the 2005 Bundestag election

Questions: How important was your personal effort in your constituency to (a) your personal election result and (b) your party's share of the 'second votes'? (Answers are average percentage points of the vote individual MdBs perceived to be attributable to their own personal efforts.)

	Obs.	Mean	Med.	Std. Err.	Std. Dev.	95% Conf. Interval	
All candidates							
% of votes in constituency races attributed to candidate's own effort	593	29.97	10	1.37	33.24	27.29	32.65
% of votes for party list attributed to candidate's own effort	585	19.94	7	0.98	23.78	18.01	21.87
MdBs elected in single-member districts							
% of votes in constituency races attributed to candidate's own effort	83	32.24	10	3.81	34.75	24.66	39.83
% of votes for party list attributed to candidate's own effort	78	21.11	6	2.75	24.26	15.64	26.58
MdBs elected via party lists							
% of votes in constituency races attributed to candidate's own effort	97	26.89	10	3.26	32.07	20.42	33.35
% of votes for party list attributed to candidate's own effort	96	18.33	5	2.30	22.55	13.76	22.90

Note: All mean values were tested (t-tests) against a null hypothesis of perceived zero impact. T values not reported. All tests significant at the one-percent level.

Source: Calculated from Gschwend, Schmitt, Wüst and Zittel (2005), items wk_b22_1, wk_b22_2, a7_2_05 and a8_2_05

Table 1 sheds some light on the relationship between citizens and representatives from the MdBs' perspective. It draws on data from the German Candidate Study 2005. This dataset is based on post-election interviews with 1,031 candidates standing for the Bundestag election in 2005. These respondents included 212 elected parliamentarians, 96 of whom were elected 'directly' in single-member constituency races, 116 were elected via regional party lists.[3] Unsuccessful and successful candidates alike believed that their personal campaign effort did make a positive difference to both their individual results in the constituency races and their party lists' results. The belief in a 'personal vote' is statistically significant when tested against the null hypothesis of no personal impact. The median candidate, like the median elected MdB (irrespective of election mode), believed that their personal effort increased their vote in the constituency races by approximately 10 per cent. This was true for both candidates elected in single-member districts and candidates

elected via their parties' lists. All candidates also believed that their effort made a positive difference to their parties' success, albeit to a lesser extent (median values ranging from 5 to 7 per cent). Although these perceptions may be exaggerated, the presented in Table 1 suggests that both types of candidates believe individual campaign efforts to matter for their electoral prospects. There is no evidence to suggest that the individual incentives arising from the electoral system are weaker for MdBs elected via party lists.

Table 2: Election success and personal qualities as perceived by MdBs (2005)

		Constituency MdBs						Party-list MdBs				
Variable	Obs.	Mean	Std. Err.	Std. Dev.	95% Conf. Interval		Obs.	Mean	Std. Err.	Std. Dev.	95% Conf. Interval	
Policy expertise	94	2.06	0.12	1.17	1.82	2.30	114	2.46	0.13	1.43	2.20	2.73
Personal character	95	1.84	0.10	1.01	1.64	2.05	114	2.47	0.14	1.46	2.20	2.74
Leadership ability	95	2.54	0.10	1.00	2.33	2.74	113	3.04	0.13	1.36	2.79	3.30
Being close to citizens	95	1.43	0.09	0.86	1.26	1.61	114	1.94	0.11	1.15	1.73	2.15

Question: How important are the following personal qualities for a candidate's chances of succeeding in the (2005) election (on a seven-point scale from 1=very important to 7=not important at all)?

Note: All mean values were tested (t-tests) against a null hypothesis captured by the statement "not important at all". T values not reported. All tests significant at the one-percent level.

Source: Source: Calculated from Gschwend, Schmitt, Wüst and Zittel (2005), items b23b17_1, b23b17_2, b23b17_3 and b23b17_5.

However, there are differences in emphasis when successful candidates (i.e., MdBs) were asked what specific personal qualities are perceived to have contributed to their electoral success. Table 2 includes four characteristics that were presented to respondents in the German Candidate Study: Policy expertise, personal character, leadership ability and 'being close to citizens'. Since attitudes were measured on a scale from 1 (the respective personal characteristic is perceived to be very important) to 7 (characteristic is not important at all), low mean values suggest that the average MdB attributes high importance to the particular personal trait. All mean values were tested (with a t-test) against the null hypothesis (characteristic perceived not important at all) and were found to be highly significant at the one-percent level. Table 2 demonstrates, above all, that 'being close to citizens' (that is, close interaction with citizens, whether locally in constituencies or elsewhere) is considered to be the most important personal characteristic, whereas leadership ability is deemed least important in the context of elections. This is true for both MdBs elected in single-member districts and those elected via party lists. Nevertheless, the importance attributed to 'being close to citizens', 'personal character' and 'leadership ability' is clearly more pronounced amongst parliamentarians elected in single-member constituency contests. Inspection of the 95 per cent confidence intervals suggests that election mode makes a significant difference in all three items, while there are no significant differences between both types of MdBs in the importance attached to policy expertise. There data do not provide evidence to support the claim that MdBs elected via party lists are significantly more likely than MdBs elected via constituency races to see policy expertise (rather than direct links with citizens) as their key electoral asset.

Communication Between Elections

Miller and Stokes (1963) emphasise that legislators' activities after elections tend to take anticipated voter responses into account, although the authors do not study partisan effects. Given Germany's electoral system, all individual MdBs (irrespective of their party) have strong incentives to cultivate close links with constituents and other citizens (e.g., representatives of interest groups and party activists). A number of general studies of constituency activities (Patzelt, 1993; Patzelt and Algasinger, 2001; Mayntz and Neidhardt, 1989; Schönbohm, 1973) demonstrate that their behaviour is aligned with these incentives. Whether elected as constituency representatives or via a party list, German MdBs tend to invest a considerable share of their funds for staffing in constituency services, including a constituency office and regular surgeries. Public subsidies of approximately 9,000€ per MdB are paid from the Bundestag's budget allowing parliamentarians to employ (usually part-time) staff in the constituencies as well as in the federal capital. More than one-half of all support staff funded from the Bundestag's budget are allocated to constituency work (for some recent data see Feldkamp, 2005: 735-736). Typical activities include the processing of letters to MdBs, visits to companies, organisations and party activists in the constituency and visits of constituents in the federal capital (Bartels, 2008).

As for mediated contacts, studies of media use and coverage suggest that there is a 'communication hierarchy', with leading politicians attracting the bulk of the national (especially electronic) media attention, whereas backbench MdBs maintain closer links with the local press. Four-fifths of all parliamentarians in the Bundestag and the state parliaments seek direct, regular contact with journalists, and the vast majority meet journalists on a regular basis (for an example, see also Bartels, 2008: p.492). In recent years, personal web pages on the internet have become a more important means of communication for MdBs, which often includes interactive channels for constituents to contact MdBs (Zittel, 2003).

Direct, interactive communication between citizens on the one hand and Members of the Bundestag as well as political parties on the other has developed significantly in the past decade. In 2000, only 223 out of 669 MdBs maintained their own personal website. In the vast majority of cases, the information provided was very limited, and the pages were not interactive (Zittel, 2003: p.44). By 2010, virtually all MdBs had personal websites. In most cases, the quantity of information on these sites had increased manifold. Frequently these pages offer possibilities for citizens to interact with MdBs either by sending messages or by participating in discussion forums. These developments were partly driven by technological change, partly by the election of a younger cohort of MdBs and partly by the parties' increasing emphasis on internet-based campaigning.

For the purposes of this study, the use of Web 2.0 applications by Members of the current Bundestag (elected in September 2009) was established by coding whether or not the 622 MdBs maintained active Facebook and/or Twitter accounts on 18 November 2010 (cut-off point), and whether they added information to these sites themselves or via their own offices (as opposed to maintenance and operation by the party or other organizations, for details see Dobmeier, 2010).[4]

Out of a total of 622 MdBs, 439 (70.6 per cent) used at least one of the two applications, 181 (29.1 per cent) used both. Only a minority of MdBs (148, 23.8 per cent of the total) used three Web 2.0 applications or more. The number of people reached via Facebook and Twitter can be estimated by counting the number of Facebook 'friends' and Twitter 'followers'. Only three MdBs with active Facebook accounts (0.8 per cent of all Facebook users amongst MdBs) had more than 10,000 'friends': Federal Chancellor Angela Merkel had the highest number (over 54,000), followed by then Defence Minister Karl-Theodor zu Guttenberg with just over 43,000 and SPD parliamentary party leader Frank-Walter Steinmeier with over 10,000. Yet, these numbers observed for party leaders are relatively untypical and largely owed to their political status or office rather than the attractiveness of the sites themselves. Out of the 383 Facebook users amongst MdBs in 2010, 310 (80.9 per cent), had fewer than 1,500 Facebook friends. Similarly, the vast majority, 140 out of the 208 Twitter users amongst MdBs (67.3 per cent) had fewer than 500 followers.

Although German MdBs seem to have caught up with their colleagues in other advanced countries during the past decade (see Zittel's [2003] comparative study of

Germany, Sweden and the USA), there are significant variations amongst parliamentarians. The odds of an MdB using Facebook or Twitter are significantly affected by party membership and age. The younger the MdB, the higher is his or her likelihood of using of Facebook and Twitter (Dobmeier, 2010). This suggests a generational effect. In addition, MdBs belonging to smaller parties are more likely to make use of social networks than their colleagues from larger parties: Almost three-quarters of all Liberal (FDP) MdBs and more than four-fifths of their Green colleagues have active Facebook accounts, compared to considerably smaller percentages amongst Social Democrats (SPD, 65.5 per cent), members of Die Linke (59.2 per cent) and of the Christian Democrats (CDU/CSU, just under one-half). Precisely the same pattern can be seen in the data on the usage of Twitter, albeit at a lower level. How can this be explained? One reason might be that both FDP and Greens have fewer members and organizational resources they can draw on than the other parties (Die Linke has a strong organizational base in the East). In addition, Greens and FDP made a particularly determined effort to attract young voters wh are more likely to use the internet extensively. Thus, direct communication via Web 2.0 applications may help Liberal and Green MdBs, in particular, to compensate for their parties' organizational disadvantages in targeting particularly those voter groups and in gaining personal visibility amongst party activists.

Table 3: German parliamentary candidates' membership of associations and groups (2005)

Question: Are you a member of any of the organizations or associations listed below? IF so, how often have you attended any meetings in the past 12 months? (Number of respondents and row percentages in parentheses, n=1,031)						
	Member	How many meetings have you attended in the past 12 months?				
Group or association	Yes	None	1 or 2 during the year	About 1 every 3 months	About 1 per month	About 1 per week
Trades union	336	147	162	73	47	38
	(100%)	(31.48%)	(34.69%)	(15.63%)	(10.06%)	(8.14%)
Professional association	237	123	138	46	26	5
	(100%)	(36.39%)	(40.83%)	(13.61%)	(7.69%)	(1.48%)
Interest group, citizen action group	406	67	153	126	135	39
	(100%)	(12.88%)	(29.42%)	(24.23%)	(25.96%)	(7.50%)
Sports club	391	101	128	80	74	91
	(100%)	(21.31%)	(27.00%)	(16.88%)	(15.61%)	(19.20%)
Cultural organization	410	50	153	139	112	35
	(100%)	(10.22%)	(31.29%)	(28.43%)	(22.90%)	(7.16%)
Religions organization	265	69	92	93	79	37

	(100%)	(18.65%)	(24.86%)	(25.14%)	(21.35%)	(10.00%)
Social organization	462	63	164	137	128	52
	(100%)	(11.58%)	(30.15%)	(25.18%)	(23.53%)	(9.56%)
Leisure group	201	84	63	52	52	61
	(100%)	(26.92%)	(20.19%)	(16.67%)	(16.67%)	(19.55%)
Valid responses total	975 (94.57%)					

Source: Calculated from Gschwend, Schmitt, Wüst and Zittel (2005), items a9 and a9_1 to a9_8

Yet, face-to-face or other traditional contacts via civil-society organisations are still extremely important. Table 3 provides some information on the type of contacts German parliamentary candidates (including MdBs) usually maintain via membership in (often local) voluntary associations. These contacts constitute an important part of MdBs' constituency work. Although the data are merely a snapshot that should not be overinterpeted, the information is supported by other data on MdBs' time budgets and the type of direct contacts they maintain with citizens. Over 94 per cent of all respondents to the German Candidate Study 2005 belonged to at least one voluntary organisation. The extent to which MdBs actually devote a significant amount of time to attend meetings of such groups varies. Leisure, cultural, sports and religious groups (including churches) are the most important civil-society organisations whose meetings many MdBs attend regularly. Nevertheless, considerable amounts of time are also devoted to the activities of Interest groups, citizen action groups and trades unions, whereas involvement in professional associations is less important.

Removed from the direct control fo MdBs, the non-partisan charity 'Abgeordnetenwatch' ('MdB Watch') provides an internet-based platform (www.abgeordnetenwatch.de) monitoring the parliamentary and extra-parliamentary activities, the voting behaviour and the income of MdBs since 2004. Most importantly, it allows citizens to address questions to representatives at all levels of the political system and provides an additional forum for direct contact between citizens and representatives. For some MdBs (e.g., Bartels, 2008: p.490), answering questions on this platform has become a regular feature of their communication with citizens. Others boycott the platform for a variety of reasons. These include dissatisfaction with the accuracy of personal information published on the site and the accusation that it offered a forum to racist state representatives of the German National Democrats.

Political Parties in the Chamber: Parliamentary Questions and Interpellation

Debates in the chamber, the adversarial relation between government and opposition parties, is directed at the voters and is an important part of the link between citizens and MdBs. Yet, in its fundamental norms and rules, the Bundestag is not a very 'public' parliament. Compared to the United Kingdom, work in the chamber is more strongly dominated by work in specialised party working groups and parliamentary standing

committees. Legislative standing committees, committees of enquiry, commissions and other bodies do have the possibility to hold public sessions (especially public hearings), but generally meet in private. In the 2005-2009 Bundestag, for example, 110 out of the 2,234 meetings of standing committees (4.92%) were held in public. In addition, there were 475 public hearings and evidence sessions held by the Bundestag's committees and commissions (Enquête Kommissionen). For the entire period of 1949-2009, the ratio of public to non-public sessions in the Bundestag was 1:7.5, with a gradual but significant move towards more frequent public sessions in recent decades (1990-94: 1:6.0; 1994-98: 1:5.8; 1998-2002: 1:5.8; 2002-05: 1:5.4; 2005-09 [under the unusual conditions of a 'grand coalition' of the two major parties] 1:2.5) (all data from Feldkamp, 2010: pp.11-2).

While committees partly operate in a 'cross-party mode' (King, 1976) and allow some access to citizens via organised interest groups (e.g., in committee hearings and calls for evidence), the plenary and its relationship with the public is shaped by the partisan conflict between government and opposition parties. In this institutional context, the communication with voters is structured by strategies and rules of party competition. Prior to 1983, the Bundestag parliamentary parties made relatively limited use of various forms of public parliamentary interpellation and questioning. As a result, the institutionalised channels open to MdBs (especially on the opposition side) to convey partisan messages to citizens on the floor of the Bundestag were not used extensively. Since the advent of the Greens in the 1983 election, opposition parties have made considerably more use of parliamentary questions as a means of holding the government accountable in public debates than previously (Saalfeld, 1998: pp.63-4).

Parliamentary questions provide the best chances for individual MdBs to take up the concerns of constituents. Members of the Bundestag will be collectively allocated up to 180 minutes for *questions for oral answer* in each regular parliamentary week (i.e., when the Bundestag is in session). Each MdB may ask one short question for oral answer per day and up to two questions per week. Yet the scope for individual representation is unclear. Although such questions may be tabled by individual members, they are expected to be cleared with the relevant party working groups, executive committees and whips' offices (Arndt, 1989: pp.670-1). Unquestionably these questions often deal with local issues arising from the MdBs' constituency work, but more than nine out of ten were tabled by members of the opposition parties between 1994 and 2009 (Feldkamp, 2010: p.15), suggesting that they are primarily a partisan instrument of the opposition in its scrutiny of government policies than a means of individualised representation.

Access to the Bundestag as a Corporate Body

Television is the main medium German citizens use to access the Bundestag. Parliamentary proceedings on the floor of the Bundestag are televised. Nevertheless, television footage has not necessarily improved public understanding of how the

Bundestag works. Frequently, the focus of media coverage is on clashes between, or rows within, the parties, on 'empty seats' in plenary sessions and scandals, rather than the day-to-day work MdBs do in parliamentary and party committees, or in their constituencies. Not least for this reason, the Bundestag established its own parliamentary television services (Parlamentsfernsehen) in 1999. The footage is offered free of charge to public and private television stations. It has increasingly been used by private news channels. This may have contributed to an increased willingness of parliamentary committees to meet in public and have their proceedings televised (Feldkamp, 2005: pp.795-6).

The Bundestag has offered information on the internet since 1996 using the domain name www.bundestag.de. The development of internet technology led to a complete redesign of the chamber's internet presence in 2001, including an integration of the Bundestag's intranet and the inclusion of various interactive and multi-media features. In addition, the 2001 redesign allowed adjustments for visually impaired citizens. Step by step, the Bundestag's databases were made available over the internet providing online access to most important Bundestag documents (e.g., parliamentary debates and reports). The public record of parliamentary debates is available online in a searchable data base going back to 1994 (Feldkamp, 2005: pp.793-4). An internet-based 'Web-TV' channel has transmitted some proceedings of the Bundestag (including public committee meetings) online and via 'video-on-demand' services since 2009.

In addition, the Bundestag makes significant resources available to fund visits by ordinary citizens. Each MdB has the possibility to invite up to three groups of up to 50 constituents per annum. Expenses for travel and accommodation of these groups are covered by the Bundestag. In addition, each MdB is allowed to invite 200 further constituents (individuals or small groups such as school classes) per annum to visit the Bundestag with at least their travel expenses covered. Finally, MdBs can host an unlimited number of visitors who cover their own expenses. MdBs make extensive use of these possibilities and invite tens of thousands of visitors per year. In 2001, for example, the total number of funded visits exceeded 45,000, and the total number of all visitors to the Bundestag plenary was in excess of 600,000 persons (Feldkamp, 2005: p.782).

Petitions

Finally, German parliaments as institutions (as opposed to the work carried out by individual parliamentarians and parties) provide a systematic infrastructure to process citizens' grievances and petitions. Article 17 of the Basic Law grants every resident in the Federal Republic (irrespective of citizenship status) the right to address petitions to the responsible authorities as well as to parliamentary chambers both at the federal and state level. Petitions are 'requests' or 'complaints' addressed to the executive branch or the Bundestag requesting legislation, administrative action or the

redress of particular grievances. They are only considered, if they relate to a matter affecting the relationship between residents and the state. Demands for information or expressions of opinion are not admissible. The only formal restriction is that petitions have to be submitted in writing, clearly stating the petitioner's identity. Traditionally, petitions could be submitted by individuals or legally recognised bodies (such as companies, interest groups or charities). If identical petitions were submitted or signed by more than one person, they were generally referred to as 'mass petitions' (Masseneingaben). With the introduction of e-petitions in 2005, it became possible to submit petitions electronically. In this context, two types of e-petition can be distinguished: 'individual' (Einzelpetition) and 'public petitions' (öffentliche Petition). The former are submitted by individuals and will be dealt with individually without publishing them online. The latter are made public revealing the original petitioner's identity. They can be signed online by further persons and often allow a public debate in an internet forum. Requests for public petitions will be pre-checked by the clerks of the committee ensuring that the issue is of sufficiently general interest and 'suitable' for publication (Lindner and Riehm, 2009: p.504).

Figure 1: Average Monthly Number of Petitions Received by the Bundestag, 1949-2009
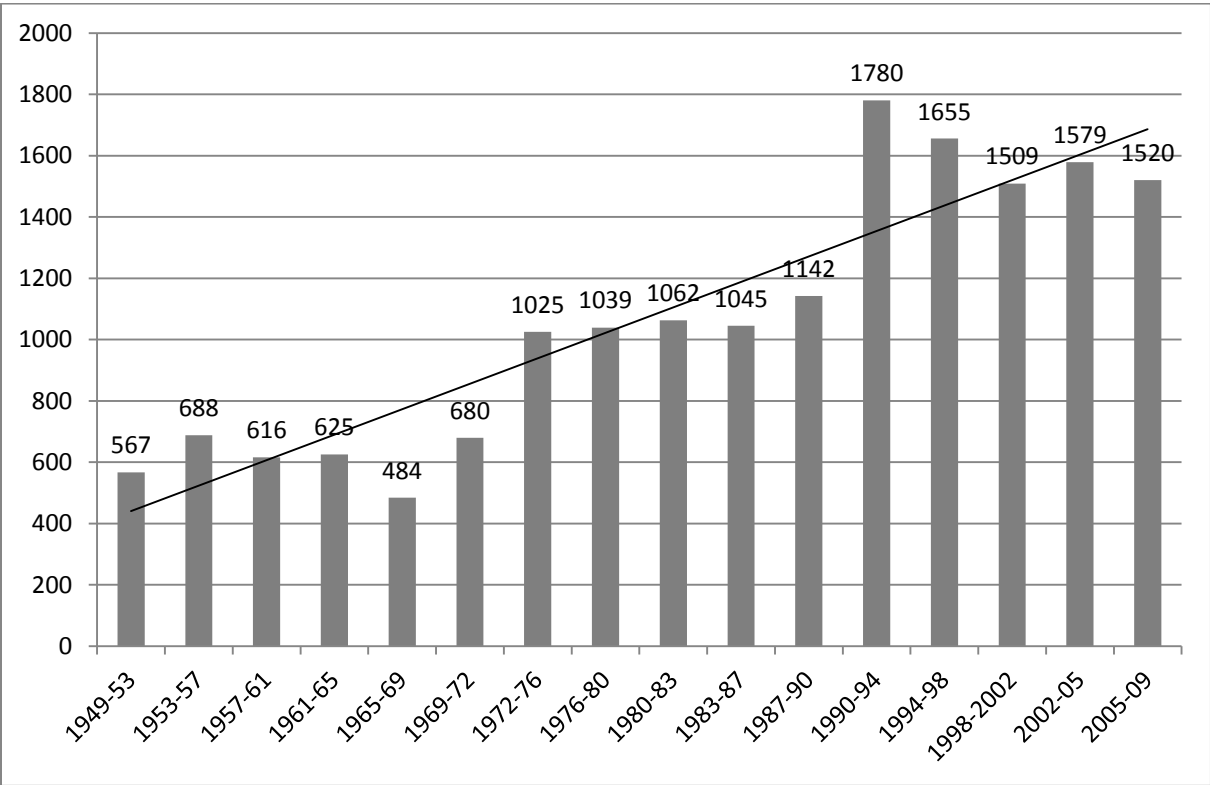
Sources: Calculated from Schindler (1999: 3133) for 1949-90; Feldkamp (2010: 17) for 1990-2009.

In quantitative terms, petitions are arguably the most widely used institutional means of interaction between citizens and Bundestag other than elections. Citizens use this possibility extensively. Between 1949 and 2009, 747,963 persons or organisations submitted individual petitions. In addition to these, 4,702,023 persons supported

mass petitions on a total of 823 different topics (Feldkamp, 2010: p.17). The use of the right to petition by citizens has increased over time. Figure 1 plots the average monthly number of petitions received by the Bundestag in the parliamentary terms between 1949 and 2009. Monthly averages were calculated in order to control for the variations in the duration of parliamentary terms.[5] In the Bundestag terms between 1949 and 1969, the chamber received, on average, between 484 and 688 petitions per month. The average figures increased dramatically to over 1,000 in the 1972-76 Bundestag and remained at that level until 1990. In the 1990-94 Bundestag the average number leaped to nearly 1,780. The 1994-98 Bundestag displayed a similarly high volume (1,655). One of the main causes of the increase in the 1970s is the activity of citizens' initiatives and new social movements which began to utilise all channels available to them in their attempt to bring their concerns on the political agenda and put pressure on governments and parliaments. The sharp rise in the 1990-94 and 1994-98 Bundestag terms may be explained by the economic and social problems of unification in Eastern Germany and the fact that unification led to an increase in the number of citizens by approximately 17 Million. Many East German citizens faced serious problems in claiming their rights in the Federal Republic's welfare regime, especially with regard to pensions. After 1998, the values largely returned to the longer-term (upward) trend line.

According to Article 45c of the Basic Law, citizens' complaints and proposals are to be processed and, if considered necessary, followed up by a Bundestag Committee on Petitions. Currently (2009) the Committee consists of 26 Members nominated by the Bundestag parliamentary parties proportional to their seat shares in the chamber (2009: 10 CDU/CSU, 6 SPD, 4 FDP, Die Linke 3, Bündnis '90/Die Grünen 3). The committee is supported by a staff of approximately 60, about 15 of which are qualified lawyers. The support staff is mainly responsible for the screening and sifting of complaints as well as for the preparation of investigations and reports. Between 1949 and 1975, the Committee was appointed regularly by the Bundestag, although the chamber was not constitutionally obliged to do so. In 1975 a constitutional amendment made it a constitutional obligation for the Bundestag to set up a Committee on Petitions each parliamentary term. In addition, the Committee's rights were strengthened significantly. Except for issues of national security, the federal government and the federation's administrative agencies are obliged to grant the Committee on Petitions access to all documents, information and their premises. The Committee has the power to call witnesses and experts, including members of the federal government and the complainants. It can investigate a complaint directly in the relevant agency and at the appropriate level. It is obliged to inform the minister about its investigation, but does not need the minister's approval. It cannot, however, investigate matters that were not explicitly referred to it in a specific complaint.

In 2005, the Bundestag reformed its rules of procedure for petitions with a view to enhance public access further. It became compulsory for the Petitions Committee to arrange a public hearing of representatives of the petitioners, if a mass petition is signed by at least 50,000 persons. This is relatively rare. Between 2002 and 2009, for example, three mass petitions reached the minimum number of 50,000 signatures

(Feldkamp, 2005: pp.706-709). Moreover, the chamber created the possibility to submit petitions electronically via the Bundestag website (so-called 'e-petitions'). Initially a pilot project conducted in collaboration with the Scottish Parliament, the Bundestag improved the process and accepted it as a permanent feature in 2008. In the case of 'public' petitions, the text of the petition is uploaded to the Bundestag website (usually) for six weeks. During this period, it can be signed by further petitioners who have logged on to the appropriate website and entered their name. Since 2008, e-petitions can also be discussed publicly in an online forum. The recommendations or decisions of the Petitions Committee concerning public petitions are uploaded to the website as well.

The extent to which e-petitions are used by citizens cannot be evaluated yet. The uptake of this possibility was monitored closely and evaluated in a study commissioned by the Bundestag during the first two years after the introduction (Lindner and Riehm, 2009). The trend in Figure 2 suggests that, so far, the introduction of e-petitions has not increased the overall number of petitions submitted to the Committee. They seem to be used as an additional channel and have replaced a certain percentage of the traditional petitons. There is no 'spike' like after German unification. The number of petitions submitted online amounted to 2,878 in 2006 and 2,782 in 2007. These constituted 17.2 and 17.1 per cent of all petitions submitted in these years, respectively. Approximately 1.7 (2006) and 1.5 (2007) per cent of all petitions submitted to the Bundestag were accepted and published on the internet as 'public petitions' (Lindner and Riehm, 2009: p.507). The opportunities to use the online discussion forum has been used extensively by citizens, especially after the initial software was replaced and the system became more user-friendly in 2008. The reforms of 2005/2008 enhanced the publicity of the petitions system, although it is unclear what use members of the Petitions Committee are making of the information produced by online discussions (Lindner and Riehm, 2008; Lindner and Riehm, 2009: pp.506-11; see also Riehm, Coenen and Lindner, 2009; Riehm and Trénel, 2009).

The Committee is an important feedback channel between Parliament and citizens. Like the parliamentarians' constituency 'surgeries', it can be considered to be an important 'fire-alarm' in the sense of McCubbins and Schwartz (1984), which can be raised by citizens in the event of an administrative problem and provides elected politicians with low-cost information on the implementation of policies by administrative agencies. It also gives Members of Parliament feedback on unanticipated effects of laws, which can be addressed in subsequent legislation. Yet, in reality the sheer number of petitions completely overwhelms the Committee. Given its modest resources (especially time), the Committee cannot follow up all complaints and petitions. Even if a complaint is taken up, citizens have to wait several months for a response. Frequently, Members do not have the time to visit the administrative agencies concerned or hear a sufficient number of witnesses. The Committee has a reputation of being 'apolitical' and is often seen to be a typical assignment for parliamentary 'freshers'. In some cases, the Committee makes recommendations to the House, in other cases it requests the Federal Government to deal with a problem. If a petition touches on controversial issues, the Committee often does not make a

recommendation but refers the 'material' to the government. Finally, issues that are controversial between government and opposition or potentially embarrassing for the government have virtually no chance of being followed up by the Committee as the government parties' representatives on it can always block an investigation using their majority.

The 'success rates' of petitions vary from session to session. Data for the 1994-1998 and for the 1998-2002 Bundestag sessions represent a fairly typical pattern, however: In the 1994-1998 Bundestag, the Petitions Committee received a total of 76,150 petitions. Of these 16,520 were not considered.[6] More than nine (9.5) per cent of the petitions (a total of 6,438) were successful, resulting in some form of redress; about two-fifths (42.7 per cent) were rejected. In the 1998-2002 Bundestag, 69,421 new petitions were received of which 10,494 (17.9 per cent) were successful (Feldkamp, 2005: p.703).

How Citizens View the Bundestag and Its Members

Survey questions measuring the 'trust' or 'confidence' of citizens in their political institutions are believed to be a valid indicator of 'diffuse support' in Easton's (1975) sense. Support for, and trust in, the Bundestag have been issues regularly studied in public opinion polls since 1949. Although the wording of questions and the scales used to measure attitudes have not always remained constant, some rough trends are discernible. Between 1949 and the late 1970s the share of respondents to surveys indicating a 'favourable impression' of the Bundestag nearly doubled from 21 per cent in 1950 to 39 per cent in 1978. Since 1978, however, favourable responses dropped dramatically to as little as 15 per cent in 1992 (Saalfeld, 1997). This finding is correlated with a similar drop of people identifying with political parties, the most important agents of parliamentary politics and the key linkage organisations between government and citizens. Based on similar (if not identical) questions on people's trust in the Bundestag as an institution, Gabriel (2009) demonstrates that levels of trust have not recovered since the early 1990s. If anything, they have declined further.

Figure 2: Confidence in the German Bundestag 1984-2006 (Western and Eastern Germany)
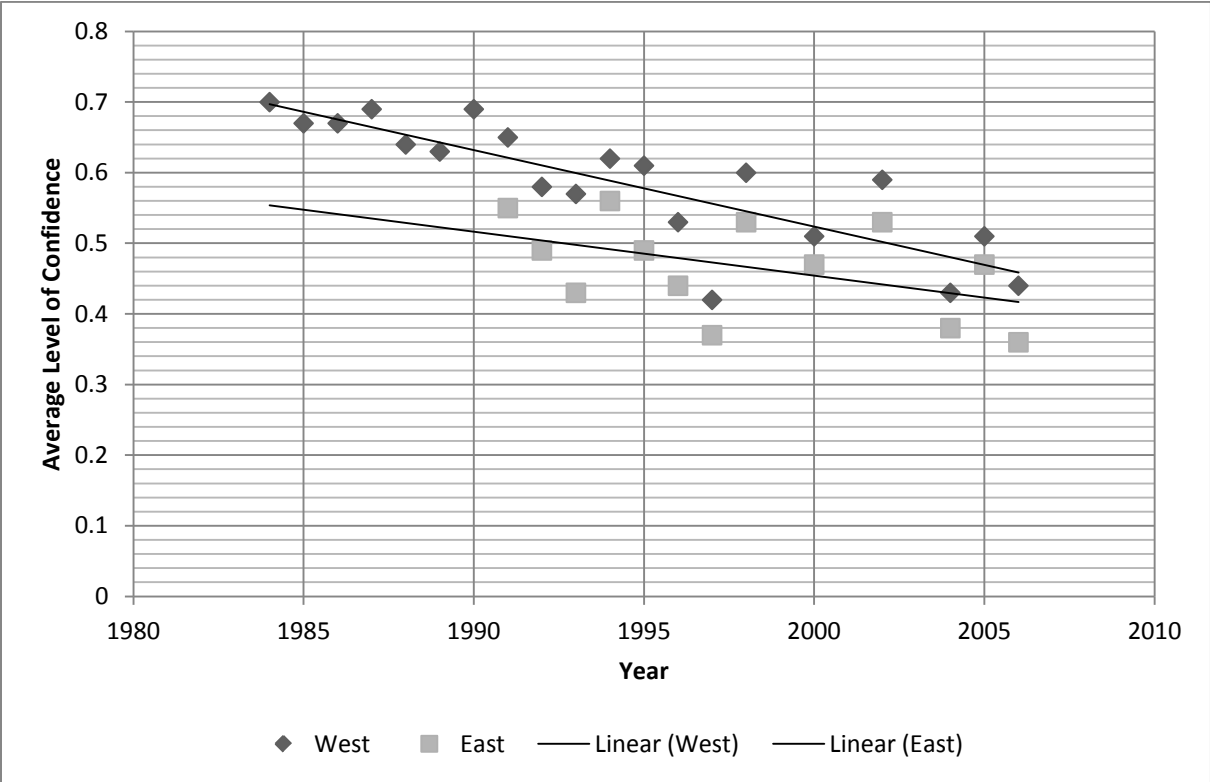
Source: Graph generated from data in Gabriel (2009: 420)

Although surveys of this type provide merely a series of snapshots taken at discrete points in time, there is little doubt that confidence in the 2000s seems to have remained at levels much lower than observed in the 1960s, 1970s or even 1980s. Levels of confidence are declining both in Western and Eastern Germany. Initially the aggregate drop in levels of confidence in Germany may have been partly a result of markedly lower levels of confidence in Eastern Germany. These levels have continued to decline from these lower levels, but the differences between East and West are no longer as clear-cut as in the early 1990s, mainly resulting from an even sharper decline of confidence in the West (Figure 2).

Paradoxically, this decline occurred despite the fact that the Bundestag has become a more professional, open, transparent and active parliament since the 1960s – and despite the fact that German citizens are much better informed. This apparent paradox is similar to the experience of other liberal democracies and has attracted considerable attention in the US (e.g., Hibbing and Theiss-Morse, 1995; 2001) as well as in Germany itself (e.g., Gabriel, 2009; Patzelt, 1998, 2005; Roericht and Patzelt, 2003). Therefore, it is unlikely to be a result of specifically 'German' contextual factors, although specific events may have contributed to the 'ups' and 'downs' observed within that longer-term trend. The gap between improving institutional performance on the one hand and public confidence on the other may be partly due to increasing citizen expectations (Norris, 1999; Putnam and Pharr, 2000), partly owing to continuing deep misunderstandings of the logic of parliamentary

democracy (Patzelt, 1998), or simply result from a dislike of seemingly adversary and indecisive parliamentary politics on the part of citizens (Hibbing and Theiss-Morse, 1995; Patzelt, 2005).

Table 5: Respondents Expressing Confidence in German Institutions: The Bundestag in Comparison, 1984-2008

	1984	1994	2000	2002	2008
Universities	56.9	59.3	69.8	68.0	67.4
Police	64.3	58.3	66.2	64.7	65.5
Federal Constitutional Court	69.8	56.2	59.5	61.6	61.9
Judiciary	55.1	43.9	45.2	46.4	47.0
Newspapers	35.9	31.3	32.0	31.0	35.2
Federal Government	48.3	26.1	26.6	28.2	29.2
Bundestag	50.0	26.1	25.5	30.9	26.9
Television	32.6	23.2	21.0	22.0	24.3
European Parliament	—	20.5	22.7	—	22.6
Political Parties	—	—	—	14.8	14.1
Trade Unions	32.0	28.0	32.6	—	—
Employers' Associations	31.9	23.3	23.8	—	—

Source: Calculated from ALLBUS Kumulation 1980-2008, items V204, V205 (Bundestag),V210, V211, V212, V213, V214, V215, V216, V217, V220, percentage of respondents expressing confidence in the listed institutions (scale values 5 to 7 on a seven-point scale ranging from 1 [no confidence at all] to 7 [very strong confidence]. The institutions are ranked in descending order on their values for 2008.

The latter point is plausible if one considers the trust Germans have in other public institutions. Table 5 demonstrates that non-partisan bodies such as courts, universities or the police force have clearly not suffered as steep a decline in public trust than the Bundestag and, indeed, the political parties.

Conclusions

The link between citizens and Members of the Bundestag has been strongly affected by a number of institutional variables. Despite all changes towards a more open and transparent legislature, the chamber has preserved emphasis on committee work. Detailed scrutiny of legislation in committees has effectively had priority over controversial and lively debate on the floor of the chamber. Unquestionably, reforms of the Bundestag have improved its ability to schedule topical debates. As a result, the chamber has become more active as an arena for public debate since 1983 (as advocated by normative theorists of parliament such as Hennis [1966]). Insofar preference heterogeneity of representatives and controversial debate amongst them enhance the quality of information received by the represented (see Krehbiel, 1991),

the Bundestag has become informationally more efficient (to use Krehbiel's terminology). Yet, this has not reversed its overall perception as a detached parliament of rather 'grey' policy experts. Besides, adversarial debate is not popular with German voters. At the same time, institutional incentives to maintain close links with voters in the electoral districts have always been strong: the constituency focus encouraged by the electoral system, decentralised candidate selection within the parties and state funding to support the staffing of constituency offices have been the main institutional features in this context. Current surveys suggest that MdBs strongly believe in the electoral utility of maintaining a strong constituency presence.

In recent years, technological advances contributed to a strengthening of the communication between MdBs and citizens beyond the constituency level. After a slow start, MdBs are now using the internet more extensively to communicate with citizens directly. The Bundestag as a corporate body has devoted resources and employed new technology as well, including much more developed internet presence and the introduction of e-petitions and associated channels for citizen discussion in online forums.

Despite these developments, trust in the Bundestag and in MdBs has continued to decline both in Eastern and, at an accelerated pace, in Western Germany. While the reasons for this seemingly paradoxical development are not entirely clear, the reasons are unlikely to be related to peculiarities of the German polity, at least not since the 1970s when the Federal Republic had matured as a democracy and its political culture was no longer influenced by the authoritarian traditions of the past. Like in other contemporary advanced liberal democracies, German citizens have become more accepting of democratic norms, but they have also become more critical – and similar to their US counterparts, German citizens seem to prefer decisive, clear, non-partisan action to seemingly unproductive political controversies and 'squabbles' on the floor of the chamber.

References

Bartels, H.-P., 2008. Wahlkreiskommunikation. Daten aus der Praxis eines Bundestagsabgeordneten, *Zeitschrift für Parlamentsfragen*, 39(3), 487-93.

Bundeswahlleiter, 2010. *Wahl zum 17. Deutschen Bundestag am 27. September 2009, Heft 5: Textliche Auswertung der Wahlergebnisse*, Wiesbaden: Bundeswahlleiter.

Dobmeier, R., 2010. *Web 2.0-Anwendungen als Kommunikationsinstrumente von Bundestagsabgeordneten: Neue Medienanwendungen als Katalysatoren für Responsivität?* Unpublished Diploma thesis, Bamberg: University of Bamberg.

Easton, D., 1975. A Reassessment of the Concept of Political Support, *British Journal of Political Science*, 5 (4), 435-57.

Falter, J.W., Gabriel, O.W. and Rattinger, H., eds., 2006. *Sind wir ein Volk? Ost- und Westdeutschland im Vergleich*, München: Beck.

Feldkamp, M.F., 2005. *Datenhandbuch zur Geschichte des Deutschen Bundestages 1994 bis 2003,* Baden-Baden: Nomos.

Feldkamp, M.F., 2010. Deutscher Bundestag 1990 bis 2009. Parlaments- und Wahlstatistik für die 12. bis 17. Wahlperiode, *Zeitschrift für Parlamentsfragen*, 41(1), 3-17.

Gabriel, O.W., 2009. Warum die Deutschen ihren Abgeordneten nicht mehr vertrauen als dem Bundestag, *Zeitschrift für Parlamentsfragen*, 40(2), 414-30.

Gschwend, T., Schmitt, H., Wüst, A.M., Zittel, T., 2005. *Deutsche Kandidatenumfrage zur Bundestagswahl 2005* (Mannheimer Zentrum für Europäische Sozialforschung, Deutsche Kandidatenstudie 2005), GESIS Cologne, Germany ZA4923 data set.

Hennis, W., 1966. Der Deutsche Bundestag 1949-1965. Leistung und Reformaufgaben, *Der Monat*, 18(215), 26-36.

Herzog, D., Rebenstorf, H., and Werner, C., 1990. *Abgeordnete und Bürger: Ergebnisse einer Befragung der Mitglieder des 11. Deutschen Bundestages und der Bevölkerung,* Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag.

Hibbing, J. R., and Theiss-Morse, E., 1995. *Congress as public enemy: Public attitudes toward American political institutions,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Hibbing, J.R., and Theiss-Morse, E., 2001. Process Preferences and American Politics. What the People Want Government to Be, *American Political Science Review*, 95(1), 145-53.

Hough, D.T., 2002. *The Fall and Rise of the PDS in Eastern Germany*. Birmingham: University of Birmingham Press.

Jesse, E., 2000. The Electoral System: More Continuity than Change*. In:* L. Helms, ed., *Institutions and Institutional Change in the Federal Republic of Germany*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 124-42.

King, A., 1976. Modes of Executive-Legislative Relations: Great Britain, France, and West Germany, *Legislative Studies Quarterly*, 1(1), 11-36.

Klingemann, H.D. and Weßels, B. (2001). 'The Political Consequences of Germany's Mixed-Member System: Personalization at the Grass Roots?' In: M.S. Shugart and M.P. Wattenberg (eds.): *Mixed-member Electoral Systems: The Best of Both Worlds?* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 279-297.

Krehbiel, K., 1991. *Information and Legislative Organization*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

Lancaster, T.D. and Patterson, W.D., 1990. Comparative Pork Barrel Politics. Perceptions from the West-German Bundestag. *Comparative Political Studies*, 22(4), 458-77.

Lindner, R., and Riehm, U., 2008. Electronic Petitions and the Relationship between Institutions, Contexts, Technologies and Political Participation. *In:* A. Prosser and P. Parycek, eds. *EDem 2008. Tagung für elektronische Demokratie* (Tagungsband der EDEM 2008, 29.–30. September 2008, Krems). Wien, pp. 157-167.

Lindner, R., and Riehm, U., 2009. Modernisierung des Petitionswesens und der Einsatz neuer Medien, *Zeitschrift für Parlamentsfragen*, 40(3), 495-512.

Mayntz, R., and Neidhardt, F., 1989. Parlamentskultur. Handlungsorientierungen von Bundestagsabgeordneten – eine empirisch explorative Studie, *Zeitschrift für Parlamentsfragen*, 20(3), 370-87.

McCubbins, M. D., and Schwartz, T., 1984. Congressional Oversight Overlooked. Police Patrols versus Fire Alarms, *American Journal of Political Science*, 28(1), 165-79.

Miller, W.E. and Stokes, D.E., 1963. Constituency Influence in Congress, *American Political Science Review,* 57(1), 45-56.

Norris, P., 1999. *Critical Citizens. Global Support for Democratic Government,* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Nohlen, D., 2004. *Wahlrecht und Parteiensystem: Zur Theorie und Empirie der Wahlsysteme*. Fifth edition, Stuttgart: Budrich.

Norris, P., 2004. *Electoral Engineering. Voting Rules and Political Behavior,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Patzelt, W.J. and Algasinger, K., 2001. Abgehobene Abgeordnete? Die gesellschaftliche Vernetzung der deutschen Volksvertreter, *Zeitschrift für Parlamentsfragen*, 32(3), 503-27.

Patzelt, W.J., 1991. Abgeordnete und Journalisten, *Publizistik*, 36(3), 315-29.

Patzelt, W.J., 1993. *Abgeordnete und Repräsentation: Amtsverständnis und Wahlkreisarbeit,* Passau: Wissenschaftsverlag Rothe.

Patzelt, W.J., 1998. Ein latenter Verfassungskonflikt? Die Deutschen und ihr parlamentarisches Regierungssystem, *Politische Vierteljahresschrift*, 39(4), 425-57.

Patzelt, W.J., 2000. Reformwünsche in Deutschlands latentem Verfassungskonflikt, *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte,* B 28.

Patzelt, W.J., 2005. Warum verachten die Deutschen ihr Parlament und lieben ihr Verfassungsgericht? Ergebnisse einer vergleichenden demoskopischen Studie, *Zeitschrift für Parlamentsfragen*, 36(3), 517-38.

Pharr, S.J., and Putnam, R.D., eds., 2000. *Disaffected democracies. What's troubling the trilateral countries?* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Powell, G.B., 2004. Political Representation in Comparative Politics, *Annual Review of Political Science*, 7, 273-96.

Riehm, U., and Trénel, M., 2009. Öffentliche Petitionen beim Deutschen Bundestag. Ergebnisse einer Petentenbefragung, *Zeitschrift für Parlamentsfragen*, 40(3), 512-28.

Riehm, U., Coenen, C., and Lindner, R., 2009. Zur Öffentlichkeit des Petitionsverfahrens beim Deutschen Bundestag und beim Schottischen Parlament, *Zeitschrift für Parlamentsfragen*, 40(3), 529-43.

Roericht, U., and Patzelt, W.J., 2003. Wissen und Vertrauen. Zur öffentlichen Wahrnehmung von Parlamenten. *In:* W.J. Patzelt, ed. *Parlamente und ihre Funktionen. Institutionelle Mechanismen und institutionelles Lernen im Vergleich,* first edition, Wiesbaden: Westdeutscher Verlag, 433-74.

Saalfeld, T., 1997. Germany: From Dictatorship to Parliamentary Democracy, *Parliamentary Affairs*, 50(3), 380-395.

Saalfeld, T., 1998. The German Bundestag: Influence and Accountability in a Complex Environment.' *In:* P. Norton, ed., *Parliaments and Governments in Western Europe*, London: Cass, 44-71.

Saalfeld, T., 2002. Parliament and Citizens in Germany: Reconciling Conflicting Pressures.' *In:* P. Norton, ed., *Parliaments and Citizens in Western Europe*, London: Cass, 43-65.

Saalfeld, T., 2005. Germany: Stability and Strategy in a Mixed-Member Proportional System. *In:* M. Gallagher and P. Mitchell, eds. *The Politics of Electoral Systems,* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 209-30.

Schindler, P., 1982. *Datenhandbuch zur Geschichte des Deutschen Bundestags 1949-1982,* Bonn: Presse- und Informationszentrum des Deutschen Bundestags.

Schindler, P., 1999. *Datenhandbuch zur Geschichte des Deutschen Bundestages 1949 bis 1999*, Baden-Baden: Nomos.

Schmidt, M.G., 2002. Germany: The grand coalition state. In: J.M. Colomer, ed., *Political Institutions in Europe*, second edition, London: Routledge, 57-93.

Schönbohm, W., 1973. Zur Arbeits- und Zeitökonomie von Bundestagsabgeordneten, *Zeitschrift für Parlamentsfragen*, 4(1), 18-38

Schüttemeyer, S.S., 1986. *Bundestag und Bürger im Spiegel der Demoskopie. Eine Sekundäranalyse zur Parlamentarismusperzeption in der Bundesrepublik,* Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag.

Sontheimer, K., 1983. *Antidemokratisches Denken in der Weimarer Republik. Die politischen Ideen des deutschen Nationalismus zwischen 1918 und 1933*, second edition, München: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag.

Steffani, W., 1971. *Parlamentarismus ohne Transparenz*, Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag.

Stratmann, T. and Baur, M., 2002. Plurality Rule, Proportional Representation, and the German Bundestag: How Incentives to Pork-Barrel Differ Across Electoral Systems, *American Journal of Political Science*, 46(3), 506-14.

Zittel, T., 2003. Political Representation in the Networked Society: The Americanisation of European Systems of Responsible Party Government? *Journal of Legislative Studies*, 9(3), 32-53.

Zittel, T., 2010. *Mehr Responsivität durch neue digitale Medien? Die elektronische Wählerkommunikation von Abgeordneten in Deutschland, Schweden und den USA*, Baden-Baden: Nomos.

Zittel, T. and Gschwend, T., 2008. Individualised Constituency Campaigns in a Mixed-Member Electoral System: Candidates in the 2005 German Elections, *West European Politics*, 31(5), 978-1003.

Notes

[1] Ralf Dobmeier is the author of those parts of this contribution that deal with the use of Facebook and Twitter.

[2] There may be so-called 'excess mandates' (Überhangmandate): If a party gains more 'direct' constituency mandates than it would be entitled to according to its proportional share of the vote, the party keeps these seats and the Bundestag is enlarged.

[3] The German Candidate Study 2005 is a largely standardised survey of all 2,346 candidates of SPD, CDU, CSU, FDP, Bündnis90/Die Grünen and Linkspartei standing for the Bundestag election of September 2005. The field phase was October to December 2005. The response rate amongst all candidates was approximately 44 per cent. With 212 responses from those who eventually got elected to the Bundestag, the response rate amongst MdBs was around 34 per cent. For further information see the principal investigators' website on http://www.mzes.uni-mannheim.de/projekte/gcs/homepage_e.html.

[4] So-called 'fake accounts' were excluded.

[5] These averages represent the total number of petitions received by the Bundestag in a parliamentary term divided by the number of full months the respective parliamentary term lasted.

[6] Petitions are not considered, for example, if the issues at stake are subject to court proceedings, if they only express opinions, if they are anonymous or insulting. The largest category of petitions not considered were those referred to the Petitions Committee of state parliaments, because the subject matter fell within the ambit of state competencies.