GERMANY: Macro-level data

General context of the German CNEP study

The CNEP survey focussed on the 1990 general election which was a historically unique event as it was the first all-german election after the second world war. On October 3, 1990, the two German states were formally united, and on December 2, 1990, the first general election for the German Bundestag was held. Since unification took place by the GDR (German Democratic Republic, i.e. East Germany) joining the FRG (Federal Republic of Germany, i.e. West Germany), the political system has not changed in its basic structure. However, Germany has been undergoing fundamental changes during the last ten years with regard to the party system, cleavages and voting behavior, and socioeconomic development. As far as it is necessary for a general understanding of the country, the following description includes information about the specific situation in 1990 as well as recent developments.

1. Structure of national government

Germany is a strictly parliamentary system. The Chancellor as the head of government is elected by the majority of the national parliament. Formally he (so far, it has never been a “she”) is then free to select the ministers of his cabinet. In practice, however, he is constrained by coalition agreements. German governments have almost always been coalition governments between one of the two major parties (for parties see below) and the small liberal party. Exceptions are 1957, when the Christian Democrats won the absolute majority of the seats, the Grand Coalition between the two large parties 1966-1969, and the present government which for the first time includes the Greens.

Germany is a federal state consisting of 16 (before unification: 11) member states (Laender). It is a bicameral system, of which only the members of the lower house (Bundestag) are determined in general elections. The second chamber (Bundesrat) is the representation of the Laender, consisting of the the prime minister (Ministerpraesident) of each Land plus a number of representatives roughly reflecting the population size of the respective member states.

The federal government is the main actor in the legislative process. Only 41 % of the proposals (1949-1994) were initiated by the parliament. (However, this should not be interpreted as weakness of the parliament, but as a normal pattern in parliamentary systems.) The Bundesrat (second chamber) has consultative or veto rights for a number of legislative proposals, mainly those which directly affect the Laender. The legislative autonomy of the Laender is restricted in that they are required to be in accordance with federal law. The only area where the Laender do have true autonomy is cultural matters, i.e. schools, universities and - last not least - media regulation.

Another increasingly important actor in the legislative process is the Constitutional Court as over the last years the principles laid down in the Court’s decisions became central guidlines for legislation. Amongst others the decisions refer to the legitimacy of the five-percent threshold, the replacement of MPs during the legislative period, and the structure of the broadcasting system. Since the growing weight of the Constitutional Court draws the
legislative competences away from Parliament, its influence has been frequently criticized by political observers.

2. Electoral system

In essence, the German electoral system applies proportional representation which is modified in several ways. Half of the seats (328) of the Bundestag are allocated to candidates who win the plurality of votes in single-member districts. The other half of the seats is based on the proportional distribution of votes for party lists with the country being treated as one constituency. Thus, voters are given two votes, the first ballot for the candidate, the second ballot for the party list. The reason for this dual system is to allow for a certain amount of localized „personalization". In effect, direct candidates enjoy little personal recognition, though, while party affiliation is the main criterion for individual vote decision.

Sometimes the German electoral systems is refered to as a „mixed" system. However, this classification is mistaken because the number of seats is exclusively calculated on the basis of the proportion of votes on the party-list ballots, whereas the ballots for direct candidates influence only to which member of the same party these seats will be given.

Fragmentation of parties in parliament is restricted by a five-percent threshold which excludes all parties from parliamentary representation that fail to gain nation-wide 5 % of the votes. An exception is when a party is able to win three directly elected mandates in single-member districts. In order to increase proportionality the electoral formula has been changed in 1987 from d’Hondt to Hare-Niemeyer.

3. Parties and cleavages

Traditionally, voting behaviour in Germany is characterized by the religious cleavage and the class cleavage. In terms of religious denomination the population is divided into Catholics and Protestants who in 1995 amounted to 35 % and 40 % of the population respectively; 22 % do not belong to any religious organization. Unification has increased the level of secularization as after 40 years of socialism most of the East German citizens are non-believers.

Class voting has declined dramatically during the post-war period. The Alford index (which measures the difference between the percentage of the working class voting for the left and the percentage of the middle class voting left) has decreased from 36,0 in the period 1945-1960 to 13,4 in 1981-90.

Along with cultural changes and growing affluence issues of New Politics have gained more and more relevance for political attitudes and political behaviour.

As a consequence of unification the cultural and economic differences between the eastern and the western Laender of Germany can be regarded as a new regional cleavage. East Germans largely regard themselves as disadvantaged - and objective socioeconomic indicators partly support this perception - and have developed a certain kind of eastern group identity.
The following political parties won seats in the 1990 (as well as 1994, 1998) general election (for detailed election results see Table 1):

The Christian Democratic Union (CDU) attracts religious, specifically catholic voters. The party also represents business interests and scores high with regard to competence ratings for economic policy. In parliament the CDU forms a faction together with the Christian Social Union which ideologically is located further on the right and runs only in Bavaria. Electoral success of the CDU/CSU (between 1949 and 1998) varies between 31 and 50 percent of the votes (second ballot). In the 1990 election the party was extremely successful in the East because Chancellor Kohl was regarded as a guarantor of a successful unification. However, support for the CDU in the East has dropped by about 15 percentage points in 1998.

The Social Democratic Party (SPD) is the traditional working class party. More than the CDU the SPD suffers from social structural changes. While the core group of working class voters is melting away, the party is also threatened from competitors on the left side of the political spectrum (Greens and PDS). Thus, the SPD tries to bridge the gap between welfare policy on the one hand and attracting middle class voters on the other hand. Obviously inspired by Tony Blair's „New Labour“ the slogan of the SPD in the 1998 election was „The New Center“. Electoral success of the SPD varies between 29 and 46 percent of the votes. In 1990, the SPD failed to get support in the East although in pre-war times this part of the country was one of its main strongholds. The party’s open scepticism about the speed of economic transformation in East Germany and the resulting budget problems have certainly contributed to the defeat. However, in 1998 the SPD was able to increase its vote share by more than 10 percentage points compared with 1990.

The Free Democratic Party (FDP) is a typical liberal party emphasizing free market economy. The party mainly attracts the affluent middle class and entrepreneurs. Electoral success varies between 6 and 12 percent. However, the effective impact of the party on German politics is unproportionally higher than its electoral support because both the CDU and SPD depended on the FDP as a coalition partner. The FDP is now increasingly struggling with a structural problem which a leading party figure, Graf Lambsdorf, has called „the lady without a bottom“, indicating that the party is mainly active on the federal level while it lacks grass root organization. In most of the recent Laender elections the FDP failed to meet the five-percent hurdle in Laender elections.

The Greens (GRUENE) represent the New Politics cleavage as their roots are anchored in the ecological, feminist, and peace movements. After conservative ecological groups have left the party, it is clearly located on the left side of the political spectrum. Since 1998, the Greens together with the SPD form the government.

The Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS) is the successor of the communist ruling party of the former GDR. It almost exclusively attracts east German voters, mainly old communist cadres and people who are loosers in the transformation process. At the same time the PDS tries to develop the image of a modern, young party. Programmatic focus is the interests of East Germans, welfare policy and - for actual reasons - pacifism. Electoral success is now about 5 percent on the federal level. It is mainly based on support of East German voters, which in 1998 amounted to almost 22 percent. Although in the 1990 and 1994 election the PDS did not meet the five-percent hurdle, it gained seats in the Bundestag because it won
enough direct mandates. In two of the East German Laender the SPD government depends on
the support of the PDS.

With now five parties in parliament the German party system has experienced dramatic
changes. For a long time, the party system could have been classified as a two-and-a-half
system, with the two major parties, SPD and CDU, and the small FDP as coalition partner. The
Greens have effectively challenged this balance when in 1983 they won parliamentary seats for
the first time. With the PDS it may become increasingly difficult in the future to ensure stable
majorities as the party is still stigmatized for its communist background and therefore not
regarded as „legitimate“ coalition partner. Further, there are virtually two party systems in the
East and the West. In the East, we have a three-party system with CDU, SPD and PDS each
gaining roughly similar electoral support. The FDP and the Greens are almost non-existent. In
the West there is still the pre-1990 four-party system, although it is an open question whether
or not the small parties, FDP and Greens, will survive in the future.

4. Media System

4.1 Broadcasting¹

The German broadcasting system is a mixed system after in 1984 the first commercial
programme was launched. There are two public broadcasting organizations: ARD (first
channel) and ZDF (second channel) producing three programmes. The ARD is characterized
by a decentralized structure as the programme is a joint product of a federalized system of
independent broadcasting organizations of one or more German Laender. In addition, each of
the ARD-stations produces regional programmes on the third channel. The ZDF is a single,
nationally operating broadcasting organization. Public television is financed mainly by licence
fees, about 20 percent of the revenues stem from advertising.
The two major commercial channels are RTL and SAT1. There are several other private
channels on the national or regional level, but none of them exceeds a market share of more
than 10 percent.

The relationship between the public and the private segment of the broadcasting system was -
and still is - highly disputed amongst policy makers. The main issues are the quality standards
for the commercial channels, the core functions of public television in an increasingly
diversified media environment, and the extent to which public television should be protected
from market competition. In several decisions the Constitutional Court laid down central
guidelines for the structure of the German broadcasting system, specifically that the viability
of public broadcasting has to be safeguarded in order to guarantee the provision of a broad and
high-standard programme for all citizens, and that for commercial stations the standards with
regard to diversity are reduced in order to give them more economic flexibility. Thus, at least
formally public television is the central pillar of the German broadcasting system.

Due to commercial competition the market share of public television has considerably
declined. ARD and ZDF on the one hand and RTL and SAT1 on the other hand are now
about equal with regard to viewer ratings. In East Germany commercial programmes achieve

¹ Only television.
higher ratings, whereas West Germans still prefer the public channels. However, for political information the vast majority of television viewers turns to the public channels.

Each segment of the broadcasting system is supervised by separate regulatory bodies. The Councils of the public broadcasting organisations are formed in a pluralist fashion. The major groups of the society, such as unions, employers’ associations, churches, welfare organisations, journalists’ associations, political parties etc., nominate their representatives. The German broadcasting councils are frequently criticized as being too much dominated by the political parties, which can be attributed to the dominant role the parties generally play in the political and societal life.

Commercial television is usually supervised by small expert bodies. Besides ensuring minimum standards for the protection of minors and advertising rules, the main task of the bodies is to prevent monopolies. However, it can be said that supervision of commercial television was not very successful as the degree of concentration is very high and cross-ownership between broadcasting and print media is not prohibited.

4.2 Newspapers

The German press system is characterized by a decentralized structure. There exist about 360 independent regional titles, most of which can be classified as broadsheets providing fairly serious political information together with local news, sports and entertainment. Inspite of the large number of titles, about one third of the citizens do not have a choice between different sources of information on the local level. In 1985, almost half (47.9%) of the newspaper distribution areas were without competition (so-called single-newspaper districts). In East Germany the situation is even worse. In the course of privatising the former state-owned industry the centralized regional newspapers were sold to West German publishing houses without breaking them up into smaller, more diverse units.

Only a relatively small number of newspapers are distributed on the nation-wide. One outstanding title is the Bild-Zeitung which is not only Germany’s, but also Europe’s largest tabloid. The daily circulation amounts to 4.4 million copies (1990, 1997). On the national level, Bild is in a monopolistic position, and even the few regional tabloids cannot be regarded as serious competitors.

Probably due to its monopolistic position, the Bild-Zeitung does not reveal a clear political bias. If there is any bias, it would be in favour of ‘ordinary people’, meaning pro-welfare policies as well as anti-foreigners. In average, the political bias can be classified as slightly right-wing.

Further, there exist five leading quality papers on the national level which provide comprehensive, high-standard information. Although only 9 percent of the population (only West Germans, the papers were not successful with expanding to the East) at least occasionally read one of these titles, their impact is much higher as they function as opinion leaders both for other media and the political elite.

The editorial policy of these five papers can quite clearly be located on a left-right spectrum: Die Welt marks the far right end of the spectrum, the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung can be classified as right-liberal, followed by the left-liberal Sueddeutsche Zeitung, the Frankfurter Rundschau is a left-wing paper, and Die Tageszeitung can be located at the far left end with close connections to alternative movements.
In an even more pronounced way, the two national weeklies, *Der Spiegel* and *Die Zeit*, serve an opinion-leader function.

5. Campaigns

There is no clear-cut beginning of the campaign. The big party conventions which take place about three months before election day are certainly an important event. The so-called „hot phase“ of the campaign extends over a period of about six weeks, when billboard are plastered with campaign posters and ads are cast in radio and television so that the campaign becomes visible for everybody.

Advertising possibilities in the electronic media are strictly limited. On public television air time is provided freely, but the allocation of time is restricted according the parties’ electoral strength. Parties have only to carry the production costs of their spots. On commercial television it is also impossible to purchase air time freely. The stations are obliged to offer time slots strictly in proportion to the parties’s electoral success at the cost-price.

Funding of election campaigns is increasingly problematic for the political parties as on the one hand costs are rising immensely, on the other hand the financial resources are limited. Individual and corporate contributions are narrowly restricted in order to reduce the influence of „big business“ on political parties. Instead, parties receive significant public funds which largely depend on their electoral success in the previous election. Together with membership dues public funds make up between two thirds and three quarters of a party’s income.

6. Basic election data

Election results for the general elections between 1949 and 1998 are provided in Table 1. For general implications concerning the party systems see chapter 3.

Turnout is traditionally quite high in Germany, ranging between 78,5 percent in the first election and 91,1 in 1972; in 1990 it amounted to 77,8 percent with a slightly lower rate for East German voters. High turnout is fostered by automatic registration and the fact that elections are always held on Sundays which both makes it easy for everybody to participate.

7. Female participation in labor force

Of all women in the age between 15 and 65 63,0 percent are participating in the labor force; the number for men is 80,2 %.

8. Secondary organizations

The German system of interest organizations is characterized by a high degree of concentration and centralization. Many groups are represented by all-inclusive, national peak organizations. Further, some organizations - in particular those of labor relations and the churches - are vested with substantial legal privileges of „private government“. 
The German trade unions are structured according to industrial sectors, rather than along ideological lines or occupational status. The peak organization, the German Federation of Trade Unions (DGB) comprises more than a dozen separate unions (like metal workers, public services, constructions workers, etc.). Besides the unions of the DGB, there exist small unions of white-collar employees (DAG, DBB). Together their membership amounts to 13 millions of which only 2 millions belong to the DAG and DBB. Traditionally there exist close linkages between the trade unions, especially those organized in the DGB, and the Social Democrats (SPD).

The dominant religious organizations are the Catholic Church and the Protestant Church. Small denominations, especially within or close to the Protestant Church, are marginal and do not play a significant role. Despite the formal division of state and church, both churches are granted extraordinary legal privileges, one of which being the so-called church-tax, i.e. a surcharge on personal income taxes that the state collects automatically from all formal members of the churches. The churches are also entitled to organize religious curricula in schools. Recently, this privilege has been expanded to islamic education. Traditionally the Catholic Church holds close relationships with the Christian Democrats (CDU), whereas the political affiliation of the Protestant Church is diffuse.

9. Socioeconomic structure

Of all people who are economically active, 2.9 % are working in agriculture (primary sector), 33.8 % in manufacturing (secondary sector) and 63.3 % in commerce and services (tertiary sector). The numbers are similar for East and West Germany.

Unemployment rate is 10.5 % (1998; numbers for 1990 will be given later!), but there are enormous differences between East and West indicating the economic troubles that accompany the transformation of the former state-socialist economy of the East. While „only” 10.5 % are unemployed in the West, it is 19.5 % in the East. In addition, women are more affected by unemployment in the East than in the West. In the East, 54 % of the unemployed are women, whereas in the West the share of women is 43.5 %.
Table 1: Election Results, 1949-1994 (second votes)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Turnout</th>
<th>CDU/CSU</th>
<th>SPD</th>
<th>FDP</th>
<th>Greens</th>
<th>PDS</th>
<th>Other parti</th>
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<td>29.2</td>
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<td>-</td>
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<td>9.5</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>16.5</td>
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<td>31.8</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>10.3</td>
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<td>36.2</td>
<td>12.8</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>5.6</td>
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<td>39.3</td>
<td>9.5</td>
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<td>1969</td>
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<td>46.1</td>
<td>42.7</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>5.5</td>
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<td>44.9</td>
<td>45.8</td>
<td>8.4</td>
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<tr>
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<td>44.3</td>
<td>35.7</td>
<td>10.6</td>
<td>4.8</td>
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<td>12.9</td>
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<td>6.2</td>
<td>6.7</td>
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<td>35.1</td>
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East German People's Chamber, 18 March 1990

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Turnout</th>
<th>Alliance for Germany</th>
<th>SPD</th>
<th>PDS</th>
<th>BFD</th>
<th>Alliance 90</th>
<th>Greens/UFV</th>
<th>DBD</th>
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<td>CDU</td>
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<td>DA</td>
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<td>93.4</td>
<td>40.8</td>
<td>6.3</td>
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<td>21.9</td>
<td>16.4</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1 In East Germany only CDU.
2 In 1990: Greens in West Germany, Alliance 90/Greens (combined list) in East Germany; in 1994: Alliance 90/Greens.
3 Results for 1949 through 1987 refer to West German states only (due to the Four-Power-Status of Berlin, West-Berlin citizens were denied voting rights for the German Bundestag before 1990); results for 1990, 1994 and 1998: West = West German states plus West-Berlin, East = East German states plus East-Berlin.

GERMANY: Macro-level data

Candidates in the 1990 election

Only the two largest parties - the Christian Democrats (CDU) and the Social Democrats (SPD) - nominate candidates for the office of the chancellor. The chancellor is elected by the new parliament. In the 1990 election the two candidates were Helmut Kohl and Oskar Lafontaine.

Helmut Kohl was the incumbent chancellor since 1982. Since 1973 he was also leader of the Christian Democratic party which he dominated undisputedly after he had removed any intra-party challengers. Within the ideological spectrum of the CDU Kohl holds centrist and pragmatic positions.

Kohl’s overwhelming electoral success in 1990 was clearly based on his image as „unification chancellor“. Especially East-German voters regarded him as a guarantor for a fast unification. In fact, Kohl realized that the „window of opportunity“ may only temporarily be open and successfully settled the international as well as domestic conditions for Germany’s unification within a few months. During the election campaign Kohl proclaimed a very optimistic view of the prospects of the future development of the unified Germany. The slogan „flourishing landscapes“ expressed his conviction that the introduction of market conditions in the East would trigger a similar „economic miracle“ as in post-war West-Germany.

Oskar Lafontaine run as the candidate of the SPD. Since 1985 he served as Chief Minister in Saarland, one of the German states, where he had won the absolute majority of the votes in January 1990. Within the ideological spectrum of the SPD Lafontaine represents left positions which he often combines with modern, unconventional ideas. In contrast to Kohl, Lafontaine was not the leader of his party (which in 1990 was Hans-Jochen Vogel).

During the election campaign the SPD, in particular Lafontaine, found it difficult to adapt to the new situation and to unequivocally support fast and complete unification. Instead, Lafontaine stressed the enormous costs of unification and blamed Kohl of ruining the state budget. In April, Lafontaine became the victim of an assassination attempt. For about three months he was not able to engage in public campaigning. Long before election day it was already clear that the SPD wouldn’t be able to win the election.