9

Elections in the Länders

Introduction

Five phases can be distinguished in the development of political parties in the Länders. The first phase, from 1945 to 1953, was the period during which older parties were reestablished, e.g., SPD, and new parties were founded, e.g., the refugee party (BHE), CDU, and FDP (although the CDU has its roots in the old Center Party [Zentrum] and the FDP could be traced back to liberal parties of the Empire and Weimar Republic). The second phase, from 1953 to 1969, saw the developing concentration of parties culminating in the three- (or “2 1/2”) -party system of CDU/CSU, SPD, and FDP. The third phase, from 1969 to 1983, was the period of three-party dominance, while in the fourth phase, from 1983 to 1990, the Greens emerged as a fourth party. Finally, following a reorientation after unification in 1990, a five-party system has developed at the national level with the rise of the PDS which, however, has a special regional character, and in Landtag elections has been confined to the new Länder and Berlin in the East just as the Greens and FDP have been successful only or mostly in the West.¹

In order to provide the reader with some of the flavor and spice of Landtag elections, and to assess better some of the hypotheses about Land elections and parties that were mentioned in the previous chapter (pp. 267–273), a very brief overview of political developments in the Länder since 1945 is presented below. This overview also contains a summary of the major issues, personalities, and events associated with the most recent Land elections.
The old Länder

Baden-Württemberg

Baden-Württemberg is an industrialized region with important sectors in engineering, automobiles (Daimler-Benz and Porsche), and many industrial suppliers. It also boasts many renowned educational and scientific institutions. The last Land to be formed from previous Länder in 1952 — this time by the Germans themselves rather than by the Allies — Baden-Württemberg held its first parliamentary (Landtag) election in 1952. Since then the CDU has been the leading party. Nevertheless, the first government was made up of a coalition of SPD, FDP/DVP, and GB/BHE (a refugee party that played an important role in the politics of several Länder after 1945 until the early 1960s), and the first prime minister (Ministerpräsident) was from the FDP. By 1953 the CDU had joined the coalition to form an all-party government. From that time until 1972, the CDU provided the prime minister in a variety of coalition governments with changing partners from the parties above. After 1972 the CDU controlled the government alone. During this time the SPD ranged from 29 to 37 percent of the vote, while the liberals (FDP/DVP) sank from 18 towards 5 percent. But this picture of stability was shaken by the success of the radical right parties, the NPD in 1968 and the Republicans in 1992, and the Greens in the 1980s and 1990s. In 1992 the CDU suffered a major loss to 39.6 percent and formed a grand coalition with the SPD, which had sunk below 30 percent. The “Reps” and the Greens had received 10.9 percent and 12.1 percent, respectively, which then complicated coalition formation, because the Reps were not considered by the other parties to be acceptable coalition partners and the CDU and Greens did not consider seriously sharing governmental power.

In 1996 the most important questions were whether the CDU and SPD would be forced to continue their grand coalition and whether the FDP would receive the required 5 percent of the vote to gain seats in the Landtag. As it turned out, the FDP got a surprising 9.6 percent, which made it possible for it to form a coalition with the CDU. The Greens also increased their vote, and the Reps were pleased with the surprising 9.1 percent they received. The SPD was the big loser, receiving only 25.1 percent of the vote and only one of the 70 direct seats. Since the CDU won only 41.3 percent of the vote but 69 direct seats, it ended up with a surplus of 18 seats (Überhangsmandate). As a balance, the other parties were given 17 additional seats, so that the parliament after 1996 had 155 instead of the official 120 seats.
In spite of the positive trends in the polls for Chancellor Schröder and his government, the decline in popularity for the Christian Democrats since the party financial scandal centering around former Chancellor Kohl became an issue at the end of 1999, and increasingly favorable polling results for the SPD and its leading candidate, Ute Vogt, the Land election in 2001 went well for the CDU. It received 44.8 percent of the vote, 3.5 percent more than in 1996. This was due apparently to the popularity of the prime minister, Erwin Teufel, and his government during the five years since the last election. Nevertheless, the SPD made unusually large gains and received 33.3 percent or 8.2 percent more than in 1996. In spite of its partnership with the CDU in a successful coalition government, the FDP went from 9.6 percent to 8.1 percent. The Greens had trouble mobilizing their voters, many of whom went over to the SPD, and received 7.7 percent in comparison to 12.1 percent in 1996. The Republicans, who received 9.1 percent of the protest vote in 1996, declined to 4.4 percent in 2001 and were no longer in the parliament. In contrast to many other Länder, the CDU received substantially more support than the SPD among workers and voters with modest educations. The SPD led the CDU in support among civil servants and educated women (especially the younger categories), and picked up support among younger women in general at the cost of the Greens (figure 9.1).
Bavaria

Politics in Bavaria are different from the other Länder in some important ways. First, Bavaria is more rural, much more Catholic, and less unionized than elsewhere. All of these factors favor a Christian–conservative party. Second, there is a widespread political–cultural consciousness favoring political independence and cultural uniqueness. Third, economic modernization came late and without the baggage of old conflicts associated with industrialization. Fourth, these background elements brought about an asymmetric party system established in the 1960s, with the Christian Social Union (CSU, the sister party of the CDU) as the hegemonic party vs an opposition with no real chance of dislodging the CSU from government. The CSU won an absolute majority of seats in the Landtag in 1962, and it has won an absolute majority of votes since 1970. The SPD was a government party only between 1954 and 1957 in a four-party coalition. The FDP has failed to pass the 5 percent barrier on several occasions: 1966, 1982, 1986, 1994, and 1998. Characteristic of the CSU’s hegemony is its single-party rule since 1966, its presence in all aspects of society, and its penetration of the state apparatus and mass media, all of which lead to a tendency to identify the party with the Land.7

The CSU has responded to this identity with Bavaria with a nebulous ideology, because its policy positions are a mix of free-market economics, social democracy, catholic–clerical traditionalism in cultural and family policy, and a conservative domestic policy. The SPD has been unsuccessful in its attempts to offer an appealing alternative, and it suffers along with the Greens and FDP from a variety of problems, including organizational weakness, recruitment of elites, little influence with the federal party, and competition with “flash parties” on the right and left.8

Given the date of the election on 13 September 1998 just before the federal election two weeks later, the CSU stressed its distance from the Kohl government and emphasized its various successes under the leadership of its prime minister, Edmund Stoiber. These were contrasted to the alleged failed policies of the SPD’s Chancellor candidate, Gerhard Schröder, as prime minister in Lower Saxony and the SPD’s federal party chair, Oskar Lafontaine, as prime minister in the Saarland. The SPD and Greens tried to identify the CSU with the CDU’s Chancellor Kohl, who had become increasingly unpopular, and to focus on the nation-wide political climate that favored change at the federal level.9

The results of the election were very positive for the CSU. It received an absolute majority again (52.9 percent), which was about what it received in 1994, while the SPD and Greens suffered slight losses and declined to 28.7 and 5.7 percent, respectively. Only these three of nineteen...
parties received more than the required 5 percent of the vote to enter parliament.\textsuperscript{10}

The CSU received above average support (58 percent) from Catholics, below-average support among Protestants (47 percent), and only 28 percent of the non-affiliated vote. It received 77 percent of the frequent church-goers among Catholics, 60 percent among Protestants. Since two-thirds of the voters are Catholic, the CSU has a strong electoral advantage in this population. But the traditionally high percentage of church-goers is declining, and in 1998 only 19 percent of the voters said they attended church every Sunday. The CSU is also the strongest party in all occupational groups and, of course, in rural areas.\textsuperscript{11}

The CSU’s very slight gain in 1998 over 1994 was the first since its high-point in 1974, when it received 62.1 percent of the vote. This success was attributed to the appeal of the prime minister, Edmund Stoiber, who was able to attract uncommitted voters and younger voters. In spite of high unemployment, concerns about the influx of foreigners and asylum seekers, concerns about the environment, and a general disillusionment with politics (Politikverdrossenheit), Stoiber was able to point to numerous positive developments in the Land. As a result, polls suggested that the CSU more than the SPD enjoyed the confidence of voters in the ability to deal with key issues such as the economy and crime.\textsuperscript{12} This election seemed to rebut the thesis that Land elections are basically partial federal elections,\textsuperscript{13} as has been suggested by Georg Fabritius (see p. 327).

\begin{figure}
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{election_results_bavaria.png}
\caption{Election results in Bavaria, 1946–98}
\label{fig:election_results_bavaria}
\end{figure}

Source: www.wahlrecht.de/landtage
Hesse

For the first twenty-five years after the war, Hesse had the reputation of being “red,” i.e., SPD. In the 1974, 1978, and 1982 elections the CDU received relative majorities, but the SPD formed a coalition government with the FDP in the 1970s and tried to muddle through as a minority government after 1982. However, failure to pass its budget led to early elections in 1983. The SPD gained votes in these elections, the CDU lost more than six points, the Greens entered the parliament for the second time, and the FDP returned again, having failed to clear the 5 percent barrier in 1982. At first the SPD formed a minority government that was “tolerated” by the Greens in parliament; then, in 1985, the first Red–Green coalition government at the state level was formed. However, tensions between the SPD and Greens within the government led to the calling of elections six months early in April 1987. The result was that for the first time the CDU and FDP were able to gain a majority of seats and remove the SPD from forty years of uninterrupted rule.\textsuperscript{14}

In the election of 1991, held only seven weeks after the federal election which the SPD and Greens lost badly, the SPD and Greens both gained votes and were able to replace the CDU and FDP coalition government with a coalition of their own.\textsuperscript{15} In 1995, even though the CDU received a narrow relative majority, its 39.2 percent of the vote was not enough to form a coalition with the FDP. The FDP was nevertheless very relieved with its success at gaining 7.4 percent, since it had failed to gain the required 5 percent of the vote for representation in parliament in the last nine Land elections and the European elections. With a two-seat majority in parliament, the SPD, with 38 percent, and Greens, with 11.2 percent, were able to continue their governing coalition under the leadership of Hans Eichel.\textsuperscript{16}

The election in Hesse in February 1999 was not only of great interest due to its timing as the first Land election following the SPD–Green victory in the September 1998 federal elections; it turned out also to be the first in a series of state elections that shocked and seriously damaged the new national government. The press had judged harshly the first 100 days of the Red–Green government in Bonn, and the same coalition of parties in Hesse had been only moderately successful. Hesse had the highest per capita income, and it was the largest net payer in the system of fiscal equalization among the states. But it was unable to balance its budget, and many of the government’s goals remained unmet. Also the SPD prime minister, Hans Eichel, did not enjoy the same degree of personal support
often accorded the *Landesvater*, although he had more personal appeal than his lesser-known CDU challenger.\textsuperscript{17}

The CDU started with the issues of education and crime, but during the campaign it picked up another theme as a main focus: the federal government’s plans to reform the citizenship laws for foreigners. The CDU and CSU started a national campaign to gather signatures for petitions against the dual-citizenship proposals, and the CDU in Hesse initiated its own successful campaign in Hesse three weeks before the election. The SPD, but especially the Greens, objected to the CDU signature campaign, while the FDP sought a compromise formula. Though most voters were also critical of the CDU campaign, even more were critical of the national government’s proposals.\textsuperscript{18}

The CDU emerged with an unexpected victory, receiving 43.4 percent of the vote to 39.4 percent for the SPD. The Greens lost 4 points and ended up with 7.2 percent. The FDP also lost votes, but it still remained barely above the 5 percent clause. As a result the CDU and FDP were able to form a coalition for the second time since 1987 with a bare majority of 56 to 54 seats in parliament. In spite of the agreement by the far-right German Peoples’ Union (DVU) to withdraw from the race in favor of the Republicans (Reps), the far right received only 2.7 percent of the vote.\textsuperscript{19}

The loss of the election by the SPD–Green coalition in Hesse was not only the first of several embarrassing losses in 1999; it also meant the

![Figure 9.3 Election results in Hesse, 1946–99](source: www.wahlrecht.de/landtage)
loss of the federal government’s majority in the Bundesrat. This did not mean that the Opposition had gained the majority, however, because several states had grand coalitions or SPD–FDP coalitions which were generally neutral on controversial issues in the Bundesrat. A second direct consequence of the election for the national government was that it revised its plans for changing the citizenship law and adopted in principle the FDP compromise proposal according to which a foreigner born in Germany would become a citizen at birth but would have to choose between German and foreign citizenship at age twenty-three (figure 9.3).20

Lower Saxony

After a seventeen-year period of rule, the SPD proposed a candidate in 1976 to replace the governing SPD prime minister in the middle of the 1974–78 legislative term. To the surprise and consternation of the SPD, their candidate failed to gain the requisite absolute majority of secret votes in the parliament, in spite of a one-vote SPD–FDP coalition majority in the parliament. The CDU, under the leadership of Ernst Albrecht, first formed a government alone and later a coalition government with the FDP.21 For fourteen years Albrecht remained a highly influential prime minister until his defeat by Gerhard Schröder in 1990.

Schröder and the SPD won re-election in 1994 with virtually the same percentage of the vote as the party received in 1990; however, their Green coalition partner received almost 2 percent more than in 1990. In spite of having received an absolute majority of the vote together, the Red–Green coalition was not renewed; instead, the SPD, with its one-vote majority in parliament, formed a government alone.22

The election of March 1998 was special, because it was the first test election before the national election of September, and because it featured Gerhard Schröder again not only as the SPD’s candidate for prime minister of Lower Saxony but now also as a leading candidate for the federal chancellorship. Schröder said before the election that he would not be a candidate for chancellor if the SPD lost more than 2 percent of the vote received in 1994. This was a risky condition, because the party had lost between 2.8 and 6.8 percent in all of the state elections since 1994. The SPD also had to answer for bad economic data in Lower Saxony, including higher-than-average unemployment and a large budget deficit. But as state issues receded into the background and federal themes became more prominent during the campaign, polling data for the SPD improved. Most voters saw the federal government as being more responsible for
unemployment than the state government, and Schröder’s name recognition and personal appeal made him more popular than his party. Voters also realized the importance of the election to Schröder’s candidacy for the chancellorship, and this consideration also affected their vote. Indeed, the election was perceived by many as a kind of primary.\(^{23}\)

The results of the election were very satisfactory from the perspective of Schröder and the SPD, which received its highest share ever (47.9 percent) in Lower Saxony. The CDU lost less than 1 percent, but that left it with the lowest percentage it had received since 1959. The Greens lost slightly (7.4 to 7 percent), while the FDP gained votes but at 4.9 percent barely missed clearing the 5 percent hurdle.\(^ {24}\) Another important result for Schröder in particular was that he was now the unchallenged chancellorship candidate for the SPD, in spite of previous strong support among party office holders around the country for the prime minister of the Saarland, Oskar Lafontaine (figure 9.4).

### North-Rhine Westphalia

For the first two decades after the war, the CDU was the strongest party in North-Rhine Westphalia, but the 1960s and 1970s were periods of strong competition between the CDU and SPD. The SPD has been the governing party since 1966, and it governed alone from 1980 to 1995 with an absolute

---

**Figure 9.4**  **Election results in Lower Saxony, 1947–99**  
Source: www.wahlrecht.de/landtage
majority of seats in the parliament. Starting with the 1980 election, it looked as though the economically distressed areas of the Rhine and Ruhr had become as strongly SPD as the economically prosperous areas of Baden-Württemberg and Bavaria were entrenched strongholds of the CDU and CSU. In 1995, however, the SPD lost its absolute majority and formed a shaky coalition with the Greens. This coalition was destined for trouble, especially because of a fundamental disagreement from the beginning over the issues of surface coal mining, highway construction, and airport noise.25

Like Schleswig-Holstein, North-Rhine Westphalia was expected to turn toward the CDU in the elections of 2000. The SPD’s long-serving popular prime minister, Johannes Rau, had become Federal President in the summer of 1999, and the new prime minister, Wolfgang Clement, did not yet have the kind of broad-based personal appeal enjoyed so many years by Rau. The conflicts between the Red–Green coalition parties during the 1995–2000 legislative period had not left a positive impression of government competence, unemployment remained high, and the Schröder government’s policies were not popular. To complicate matters for the SPD, it was revealed that government ministers had received free air flights and other benefits in past years from a publicly owned bank.

Having won a series of Land elections and the European elections in 1999, and having emerged as the winner of local elections in September, the CDU was in a strong position to make substantial gains or perhaps even challenge the SPD for leadership in the election of 14 May 2000. But the party finance scandal that erupted at the end of 1999 concerning in particular former Chancellor Helmut Kohl and the CDU leadership in Hesse changed the political atmosphere dramatically, and the CDU candidate for prime minister, Jürgen Rüttgers, did not help his image with his campaign against the federal government’s plan to issue “green cards” for foreign computer experts. The Greens had not gained public confidence as a result of their participation in the government in coalition with the SPD, and they no longer appealed in particular to young voters. The FDP, under the leadership of Jürgen Möllemann, profited from the weaknesses of the other parties and their leaders and was the only party to gain voters from every category of age and vocation.26

The SPD emerged with its smallest proportion of votes since 1958, declining by 3.2 points to 42.8 percent, while its coalition partner, the Greens, lost 2.9 points and ended up with 7.1 percent. The results of the election were unusual in that the opposition CDU failed – because of the party finance scandal involving former Chancellor Kohl – to gain against
the government parties in spite of the widespread dissatisfaction with these parties at the national level, receiving 37 percent, or 0.7 percent less than 1995. The only winner was the FDP, which received a sensational 9.8 percent, up from a mere 4 percent from 1995 when the party failed to enter parliament. Voter turnout, at 56.7 percent, was among the lowest ever in a state election since the war.27

In theory the SPD had three coalition alternatives: CDU, Greens, and FDP. Even though there was considerable speculation about an SPD–FDP coalition that Prime Minister Clement reportedly favored, the SPD agreed in June to stay with its partner of the previous five years, the Greens, under the continued leadership Wolfgang Clement (figure 9.5).28

**Rhineland-Palatinate**

The CDU dominated the electoral scene in Rhineland-Palatinate for forty-four years beginning with the first election in 1947, and it received absolute majorities in 1975, 1979, and 1983. It was able to govern alone from 1971 to 1987. But the CDU suffered serious losses in 1987 and was forced to form a coalition with the FDP. This led to a considerable loss of authority for the long-serving CDU prime minister, Bernhard Vogel (now prime minister of Thuringia), who then became the object of internal party conflict. In November 1988 Vogel lost his party chairmanship and

---

**Figure 9.5  Election results in North-Rhine Westphalia, 1947–2000**

Source: www.wahlrecht.de/landtage
resigned as prime minister a short time later. Unfortunately for the CDU, this did not end internal divisions, and the party entered the 1991 elections with weak leadership and a frustrated membership. The SPD became the strongest party in local elections in 1989, and in the 1991 Land election it gained an additional 6 points to reach 44.8 percent of the votes. The CDU lost more than 6 points and dropped to its lowest percentage ever, 38.7 percent. The result was a coalition between SPD and FDP led by the SPD’s Rudolf Scharping and the loss of the Kohl government’s majority in the Bundesrat.

In 1994 prime minister Scharping became the SPD’s candidate for the chancellorship in the federal elections, after which he moved to the Bundestag as party group leader. His successor was Kurt Beck, who assumed office in October 1994 and continued the coalition with the FDP. In the 1996 election, which marked the end of the first five-year term for the state, the SPD lost 5 points and dropped to 39.8 percent, but the CDU was unable to benefit from this loss and remained at 38.7 percent. The FDP, which was concerned not only about remaining in the government in coalition with the SPD but even about passing the 5 percent barrier, actually gained 2 percent and had its best result since 1963 with 8.9 percent. The Greens gained slightly, but the SPD and FDP remained in coalition under the leadership of Prime Minister Beck.

In contrast to the political climate in 1999, when elections first in Hesse and then several other Länder led to gains for the CDU, the 2001 elections in Rhineland-Palatinate were held under conditions that favored the SPD. The CDU was still reeling from the party finance scandal surrounding former Chancellor Kohl, Chancellor Schröder had reshuffled his cabinet and gained considerable popularity through his policies and personality, and Prime Minister Beck had proven to be a capable and popular leader. The SPD gained an impressive 4.9 percent over 1994 to reach 44.7 percent, while its coalition partner, the FDP, lost 1.1 percent but still remained well above the 5 percent clause at 7.8 percent. The CDU lost another 3.4 percent from 1994 and received its lowest percentage ever in the Land elections, 35.3 percent. With 5.2 percent, barely above the 5 percent minimum, the Greens also lost votes compared to their 6.9 percent in 1994. In spite of the lowest voter turnout ever (62.1 percent), the SPD picked up voters from both the CDU and the Greens and enjoyed especially strong support among workers and voters with modest educational backgrounds. It also increased its support among the better educated and the youngest and oldest voters (especially women) (figure 9.6).
In 1945 the Saarland was not only occupied by the French; it was incorporated economically into France which had the intention of annexing it later as it had done three centuries before with Alsace-Lorraine. However, as after the First World War, the voters in the Saarland chose in a referendum in 1955 to remain with Germany, and the Saarland was reincorporated into Germany as a separate state in 1957.

In the first state election in 1955, the CDU received a relative majority of the votes with 25.4 percent, and the party’s share increased rapidly thereafter to place the CDU in a dominant position until 1980, when it was eclipsed slightly by the SPD. The SPD gained votes every election from 1955 until 1994, when it still emerged as the strongest party with 49.4 percent. Its high mark of 54.4 percent was reached in 1990. Given the fact that three-fourths of the population of the state is Catholic and except for Saarbrücken and Neunkirchen basically rural and small-town – factors that generally favor the CDU – the CDU should be the dominant party. But severe economic problems, especially the decline of the coal and steel industry, have made the economy the main issue for decades and given the advantage to the SPD. Much of the SPD’s success was due also to the popularity of the prime minister, Oskar Lafontaine, the former mayor of Saarbrücken and a more traditional socialist with populist
tendencies. Lafontaine became the SPD national party leader in November 1995, when he defeated Rudolf Scharping for that post, and he joined the Schröder government as Minister of Finance after the September 1998 federal election. Lafontaine was succeeded by Rudolf Klimmt, who became a popular figure soon after assuming office. But Lafontaine’s resignation in February 1999 from his ministerial and party posts in opposition to Schröder’s economic policy direction and the changed political climate in the country in 1999 had a very negative effect on the SPD’s standing in the Saarland.33

The CDU had gained votes in the 1994 elections over its 1990 results, but with 38.6 percent it still remained far behind the SPD, which had lost 5 percent. The CDU’s candidate for prime minister, Peter Müller, was also less popular than prime minister Rudolf Klimmt. The Greens had cleared the 5 percent barrier in the Saarland for the first time in 1994, but the FDP had failed in 1994 to enter the parliament. The FDP had failed to clear the 5 percent hurdle in seven of the last eight state elections, it had lost almost half of its members, it had no strong personalities to offer, and it had few loyal supporters.34

With a voter turnout of 68.7 percent, a decline of 15 percent from 1994 and the lowest turnout in the state since 1955, the results were dramatic. The CDU became the strongest party with 45.5 percent, barely defeating the SPD which received 44.4 percent. The CDU increased its percentage by a stunning 6.9 percent over 1994 (an increase of 12.1 percent since 1990), while the SPD lost 5 percent (10 percent since 1990). The Greens failed to return to parliament, and the FDP, though gaining 0.5 percent, received only 2.6 percent of the vote. With an absolute majority in parliament of 26 seats to 25 seats for the SPD, the CDU formed a new government, and Peter Müller replaced the very short-term Rudolf Klimmt as prime minister. In spite of his criticism of the federal government during the campaign, the former SPD prime minister entered the federal cabinet as the Minister of Transportation35 but was later forced to resign due to a financial scandal involving his government while he was prime minister (figure 9.7).

**Schleswig-Holstein**

In the first elections after the war, the SPD received the most votes in this northernmost German state known for shipbuilding, fishing, and agriculture. However, the party’s total vote was reduced sharply in the 1950s. This was due largely to the influx of refugees and expellees from the East
who became a significant proportion of the population and formed their own refugee party, the BHE. As the refugees slowly became assimilated, they tended to turn to the CDU, which was the governing party from 1950 to 1988, in coalition with other parties until 1971, alone from 1971 to 1987. In the meantime the SPD steadily increased its percentage of the vote, due in part to the crisis in the shipbuilding industry and in agriculture, bypassing the CDU in 1987 for the first time.

Just as the 1987 election campaign was beginning, the CDU Prime Minister, Uwe Barschel, was involved in an airplane accident in which he was the only survivor. Seriously injured, Barschel did not become active in the campaign until four weeks before the election date. Then one week before the 1987 elections, it was revealed that the SPD’s candidate for prime minister, Björn Engholm, was being followed by two private detectives and that an anonymous charge had been made that Engholm had cheated on his taxes. The CDU government, under Prime Minister Barschel, denied all charges implicating it, but hours before the election it was revealed that a close associate of Barschel had signed a statement according to which Barschel had been advised of the plan to accuse Engholm with tax fraud, to have Engholm followed, and to engage in other practices that would embarrass the Opposition. Barschel rejected these revelations as lies, and the suspicion arose that because of its timing and

![Figure 9.7: Election results in the Saarland, 1955–99](source: www.wahlrecht.de/landtage)
reputation, *Der Spiegel*, the news magazine that printed the exposé, had itself engaged in highly questionable behavior.\(^3\)

The results of the election were a tie in seats for the CDU and FDP vs the SPD and *Südschleswiger Wählerverband* (SSW), the Danish minority party that does not have to receive 5 percent of the vote to enter parliament. Only two weeks after the election, during negotiations with the FDP and SSW to form a new government, Prime Minister Barschel resigned from office. The tumult surrounding him refused to subside, and he left for a vacation in Switzerland. On 12 October he was found dead in his hotel in Geneva.\(^3\) Whether it was murder or suicide has never been determined with certainty. Given the circumstances, the CDU, FDP and SPD agreed to hold new elections in May 1988.

Not surprisingly, the “Barschel affair” completely dominated the spring campaign, and the vote received by the CDU declined from 42.6 percent in 1987 to 33.3 percent in 1988. The SPD, on the other hand, increased its vote from 45.2 percent to its first absolute majority of 54.8 percent. The FDP, which had hoped to gain votes in comparison with 1987, failed to pass the 5 percent barrier, as did the Greens. Björn Engholm became the first SPD prime minister in thirty-eight years.\(^3\)

By the time the election of 1992 was held, the SPD could no longer expect to benefit from the “scandal bonus,” and it received 46.2 percent. This figure was still historically very high and enough to give the party an absolute majority of the *Landtag* largely because the Greens, with 4.97 percent, barely missed passing the 5 percent barrier. In spite of the SPD’s losses, the CDU did no better than in 1988 with 33.8 percent. Engholm, who had assumed a national leadership role in the SPD, became prime minister again, but a year later he and one of his ministers were forced to resign owing to additional revelations concerning the “Barschel affair.” The Minister of Finance, Heidi Simonis, replaced Engholm as prime minister, and by the time the 1996 elections were held she had made quite an impression as a successful and ambitious “Powerfrau.”\(^3\) While far more popular than her challenger from the CDU, she could not prevent her party from receiving only 39.8 percent of the vote while the CDU gained 3.4 percent to reach 37.2 percent. The Greens increased their proportion of the vote to 8.1 percent, and the FDP entered the *Landtag* again with 5.7 percent. These results meant that a coalition government would be necessary, and only the SPD had a realistic chance of forming a government. With some reservations owing to a number of differences in policy positions, especially regarding highway construction, the SPD joined with the Greens.\(^4\)
Toward the end of 1999, it looked as though the CDU would have a very good chance of becoming the strongest party again after twelve years in opposition and recapturing the prime ministership with its leading candidate, former defense minister Volker Rühe. The SPD and Greens had lost a significant percentage of votes in a series of Land elections following the federal election of September 1998, and there was no reason to believe the losses sustained elsewhere would not occur in Schleswig-Holstein as well. But the party finance scandal involving former Chancellor Helmut Kohl broke in December 1999, and the favorable prospects of the CDU suddenly turned bleak. The elections in Schleswig-Holstein were the first Land elections to take place after the scandal broke, so a great deal of attention – even from American newspapers – was devoted to the elections.

The CDU lost votes, but not as many as expected, receiving 35.2 percent as opposed to 37.2 percent in 1996. The SPD received 43.1 percent, 3.3 percent more than its proportion of the 1996 vote (39.8 percent). The FDP improved its position also by almost 2 percentage points, receiving 7.6 percent in contrast to 5.7 percent in 1996. The Greens dropped from 8.1 percent in 1996 to 6.2 percent in 2000, which was the same percentage loss as the FDP’s gain. The Danish minority party, SSW, improved its position rather dramatically, receiving 4.1 percent as opposed to 2.5 percent in 1996 which was also more than it normally receives. Neither the PDS on the far left nor the NPD on the far right received significant

![Figure 9.8 Election results in Schleswig-Holstein, 1947–2000](Source: www.wahlrecht.de/landtage)
support (1.4 and 1.0 percent, respectively), and three other small splinter parties received a total of 1.5 percent. Thirty days after the election, the SPD and the Greens formed a new coalition government headed again by Heide Simonis, still the only female prime minister in the sixteen German Länder (figure 9.8).42

The city-states

Bremen

Bremen (which includes Bremerhaven), an old Hanseatic League city-state like Hamburg, is the smallest in population of the sixteen German Länder. It is also one of the three former West German Länder (together with Hamburg and Bavaria) that existed long before 1933, when the then existing German states were dissolved by Hitler. For more than four decades after the war, the SPD was the hegemonic party. Not until the 1990s did it become merely the strongest party, in part because of the emergence of the Greens. In 1991, when it lost 12 percentage points, it was forced to form a coalition government. It did so with both the Greens and the FDP, which had received 11.4 and 9.5 percent, respectively.43

Owing to strong conflicts within the cabinet, particularly between FDP and Greens,44 new elections were called for under the newly revised constitution. The results of the May 1995 elections were that the SPD received slightly more, the CDU slightly less, than one-third of the vote, the Greens gained almost 2 points to reach 13.1 percent, and the FDP failed to clear the 5 percent barrier. On the other hand, a new party, “Jobs for Bremen and Bremerhaven” (AFB), formed only a few months before the election by leaders who were interested in promoting a nonpartisan coalition to deal more effectively with the serious economic and fiscal problems confronting the city, received a remarkable 10.7 percent.

The Lord Mayor, Klaus Wedemeier, resigned the day after the election and was succeeded as the result of an unprecedented selection by vote of party members by former Minister (Senator) of Education and Justice, Henning Scherf. Negotiation between SPD and CDU then led to the formation of a grand coalition between the two parties. Each party received four ministers in the cabinet, and both parties agreed to the necessity of reducing the extremely high public debt and bringing some order to the city state’s finances.45

In spite of the closing of a major shipbuilder in 1996, Bremen achieved above-average economic growth after 1995, success in reducing the debt,
and success in attracting new business to the city; however, high unemployment remained a serious issue. Still, the population had become more optimistic, and the prospects of the AFB had declined dramatically by the time the September 1999 elections were held. Though his party preferred an SPD–Green coalition, Scherf made clear he wanted a renewal of the grand coalition with the CDU. The CDU had demonstrated government competence in the ministries it controlled, and polls showed the voters liked Scherf and the SPD but thought the CDU was more competent in dealing with some of the major issues, especially the economy. The CDU campaigned for a renewal of the grand coalition, while the SPD hoped for an absolute majority.46

In spite of the lowest voter turnout (60.1 percent) since the Second World War, the results of the election were an increase of over 9 percent for the SPD to 42.6 percent and of 4.5 percent for the CDU to a high of 37.1 percent.47 The Greens campaigned against a grand coalition and for an SPD–Green coalition and lost clearly, receiving 8.9 percent. The FDP warned precisely against such an alliance in its campaign and still received only 2.5 percent, about the same as the AFB.48

Although a Red–Green coalition would have been possible, Scherf announced on the evening of the election that the grand coalition would be continued with the goal of “saving” Bremen from those who would like to see it consolidated into Lower Saxony. The SPD and CDU agreed to

![Election results in Bremen, 1947–99](source: www.wahlrecht.de/landtage)
reduce the size of parliament from 100 to 80 over the next four years and to continue to focus on the economy and city finances (figure 9.9).\textsuperscript{49}

\textit{Hamburg}

As in Bremen, the SPD has been the dominant party in Hamburg since the end of the war; however, the CDU has been able on three occasions (including 1953, when it was part of a larger alliance) to gain more votes than the SPD, though, unlike the SPD, never an absolute majority. In June 1982 and June 1986 the CDU received 0.5 percent and 0.2 percent more than the SPD but was unable to form a coalition; the SPD was also unable to form a coalition with either the CDU or the Greens.\textsuperscript{50} In each case new elections had to be called in which the CDU lost votes and the SPD regained a relative majority. In 1991 the CDU declined further to 35.1 percent, and the SPD gained more votes to reach 48 percent. After the 1991 election, a CDU member, Markus Wegner, complained before the courts that the CDU had been nominating its candidates in an undemocratic and therefore illegal manner, and in 1993 the Hamburg Constitutional Court agreed. The parliament was forced to dissolve itself, and new elections were called for September 1993.\textsuperscript{51}

Following his success in court, Wegner announced that he would form a new voter group that would be against the party-dominated politics of the past. Common sense and citizen expertise rather than party dogma and discipline would be stressed. Thus he named his new group the \textit{STATT-Partei}, literally the “instead-of-party.” Its slogan was “Citizen responsibility \textit{instead of} party power.” There was no need to take stands on controversial issues, such as the city debt, housing, crime, or unemployment; solutions to such problems would be found by engaging normal citizens in the political process, including measures of direct elections and direct democracy.\textsuperscript{52}

The CDU, of course, was on the defensive as the party whose practices had led to the early election which a majority of people opposed. As expected, its fortunes declined sharply, and it lost 10 points, reaching an all-time low of 25 percent. The SPD also lost 7.6 percent, down to 40.4 percent. The Greens, led by a candidate who had defeated her more left-wing female opponent, increased their vote by 6.3 points to 13.9 percent. The FDP failed to clear the 5 percent barrier, but the new \textit{STATT} Party entered the parliament with 5.6 percent of the vote.\textsuperscript{53}

While a variety of coalition options for the SPD were available, the Lord Mayor, Henning Voscherau, made it clear he preferred a coalition
with the *STAT* Party. His party, however, favored a coalition with the Greens, and Voscherau was forced to enter negotiations with them. Unable to reach agreement with the Greens on fundamental issues, negotiations with the *STAT* Party were begun and a cooperation agreement reached according to which the *STAT* Party would not join a coalition but would receive two cabinet positions for independents with expertise. It also received promises by the SPD to introduce a number of direct democratic practices, cuts in expenditures, and a reduction in the number of cabinet positions.54

After the new government was formed in 1993, there were, as expected, numerous conflicts between the SPD and the *STAT* Party. In 1996 the parliament gave up its formal part-time status and, like all of the other *Land* parliaments, became a full-time professional parliament. One result, of course, was considerably more compensation for the deputies. By 1997 the economy was somewhat better than average in Hamburg, but unemployment and crime were persistent problems. Only about one-third of the electorate expressed satisfaction with government performance, and the SPD–*STAT* Party cooperation agreement was not viewed with favor. Indeed, voters preferred either a Red–Green or a grand coalition, not another agreement with the *STAT* Party.55

Some saw the September 1997 election in Hamburg as a test election for the national level a year later, and both the CDU and SPD had high hopes that they could give their parties a boost. Mayor Voscherau retained majority support in the polls, but only about one-third of the voters were satisfied with government performance. The results of the election were not particularly favorable for either party. The SPD lost a little more than four points to 36.2 percent, the CDU gained 5.7 points to 30.7 percent, still far below their results in 1991 or the 1980s. The Greens continued to improve their standing, but only slightly, to 13.9 percent, the highest percentage the Greens had received in any state or national election to that time. The *STAT* Party failed to pass the 5 percent barrier, as did the FDP and the numerous small parties that participated in the election. With 4.9 percent the right-wing DVU barely missed clearing the 5 percent hurdle; however, together with the Reps and NPD the far-right parties received a total of 6.8 percent of the vote, even though they failed to gain any seats. Accepting responsibility for the SPD losses, Henning Voscherau resigned as lord mayor. Ortwin Runde succeeded him and formed a coalition with the Greens.56

Those who thought the failure of the *STAT* Party to win any seats in 1997 meant the return to political party “normalcy” were shocked on 23
September 23 2001, when a brand new party, the “party for a rule of law offensive” (PRO, i.e., Partei Rechtsstaatliche Offensive), emerged suddenly in the city election to win almost 20 percent of the vote, the most ever received by a “flash party” in Germany. This party, founded by a local judge, Ronald Schill, promoted itself as the “law and order” alternative to the political establishment which had allegedly failed to protect the citizens of Hamburg from growing crime, drugs, and violence and a feeling of general insecurity, especially after the 11 September terrorist attacks in the United States. The SPD received 36.5 percent, about the same percentage as in 1997, but this was not enough to form a majority coalition government with its former partner, the Greens, who saw their vote reduced from 13.9 to 8.5 percent. On the other hand, the CDU, in spite of dropping from 30.7 percent in 1997 to 26.2 percent, was nevertheless able to think about forming a coalition with the FDP, which had re-entered the city parliament with 5.1 percent, and the upstart “Schill Party.” The CDU rejected the idea of a grand coalition with the SPD.

So, in spite of its rather poor showing, the CDU, under the leadership of Ole von Beust, was able to form a government with the FDP and Ronald Schill without the SPD, which had been the leading party in all coalitions in Hamburg for forty-four years. Whether the “Schill Party” is a strictly temporary Hamburg phenomenon or whether it will be able to spread to other areas of Germany as it hopes to do remains to be seen (figure 9.10).
Berlin

Berlin differs from most other Länder not only because it is one of three city-states but also because it combines the former West Berlin and East Berlin, which were very separate and divided cities during most of the period from 1948 to 1990. West Berlin was especially isolated and cut off from its surrounding territory by the infamous Berlin Wall which was constructed in 1961 to prevent the flow of people from East Germany to the West via Berlin. In 1990 not only were East and West Germany united, but also East and West Berlin. The result was that politics in Berlin changed dramatically, and it was no longer possible to generalize from previous experience. In some respects, Berlin has become a microcosm of the two-party systems described above, i.e., one party system in the former West Berlin, another in the former East Berlin.

From 1946 to the 1970s, the SPD was the dominant party in West Berlin. Starting in 1975, the CDU gained at first a small lead over the SPD, and then an ever-larger lead until 1989, when the two parties received virtually the same percentage of the vote. The decline in support for the SPD was due in large part to the rise of the Greens, whereas the CDU suffered a sharp decline in 1989 owing to the sudden success of the far-right Republikaner, who received 7.5 percent of the vote but never gained more than 3.1 percent after that year. From 1990 to 1999 the CDU and SPD formed a grand coalition, with the CDU as senior partner.

The election in 1999 was supposed to bring about a change in Berlin just as the federal election in 1998 had brought change at the national level. It had been difficult for the SPD to join a coalition with the CDU in 1995, at which time the SPD received its lowest percentage of votes ever in the postwar era. But with the CDU and Greens too far apart and the PDS not acceptable as a coalition partner, there was no alternative to a grand coalition. The conflicts in the coalition between the parties and the numerous problems confronting the city led to considerable public dissatisfaction with the performance of the government in spite of its successes, for example, in putting its finances in order and introducing territorial and administrative reforms along with implementing a reduction in the size of parliament. But several major projects were not realized, e.g., the construction of a new airport and consolidation with the surrounding state of Brandenburg; unemployment remained high, and economic growth was the lowest in all of Germany.

The continuing deindustrialization of Berlin has resulted in a decline in the traditional base for the SPD. The SPD also suffered from its reputation...
as a party of patronage and personal favoritism. Nevertheless, the SPD had reason to hope for more support after its success in the national elections in 1998. But the change in the political climate in Germany by the beginning of 1999 and mistakes during the campaign led to the party’s lowest percentage of the vote (22.4 percent) in a Land election since 1950 and failure to win a single direct seat.60

The CDU not only benefited from the change in the national political climate but also from the popularity of the Lord Mayor, Eberhard Diepgen. Diepgen enjoyed the support of a unified party, while the SPD was divided by personality, by the participation of the party in a grand coalition with the CDU which made it difficult for it to be too critical of the cuts its own finance minister had made to consolidate the city’s finances, and by attacks from unions and the leftist PDS. The CDU received 49.3 percent in West Berlin but only 26.9 percent in the East for a total of 40.8 percent of second votes.61

The Greens also suffered from the changed political climate. There was considerable dissension in the party over German involvement in Kosovo, but the party focused its campaign on its leading female candidate and ended up receiving 9.9 percent of the vote, or 3.3 percent less than in 1995. The FDP’s efforts to get CDU voters to give it their second vote were largely ignored, and the Reps did not play a major role in the campaign in spite of the withdrawal of the DVU in its favor. Neither party received the requisite 5 percent. The PDS, next to the CDU the major victor in the 1999 elections, gained 17.7 percent of the vote, up 3.1 percent from 1995.62

In West Berlin after unification in 1990 the CDU enjoyed generally stable support of around 50 percent, while the Greens and the PDS improved their standings by a few percentage points. The SPD and FDP lost about 4 or 5 percent each. In East Berlin the CDU gained about 5 percentage points, while the SPD dropped from about one-third to less than one-fifth of the vote. The FDP and Greens also suffered sharp declines. The PDS increased its vote from about one-fourth to almost 40 percent, becoming the largest party in the East. By the election of 1999 the results for Berlin as a whole were that the FDP was no longer in the parliament, while the PDS, with increasing numbers of seats, was not a viable coalition partner for either the SPD or CDU, and the Greens could hardly coalesce with the CDU. This left a grand coalition between the CDU and a reluctant SPD as the only alternative for a functioning government.63

However, in June 2001 the SPD withdrew from the grand coalition owing to a financial scandal involving a publicly owned bank in Berlin that was managed by a member of the CDU. After joining with the Greens and
PDS against the CDU in a vote of no-confidence, the SPD, under the leadership of Klaus Wowereit, formed a minority government with the Greens with the toleration of the PDS. Soon thereafter the parliament agreed to call for new elections on 21 October 2001.64

The results of the election for the CDU were disastrous. It received 23.8 percent, or a loss of 17.1 percent from its best result ever in 1999, the largest loss it had ever suffered in a Land election since 1945 and the largest any party has suffered since 1950. It lost its only 2 direct seats in East Berlin and most of its direct seats in West Berlin, where it had dominated during the 1990s. Its leading candidate, Frank Steffel, had ranked a distant third, behind the SPD’s Klaus Wowereit and the PDS’s Gregor Gysi, when the public was polled about their choice for mayor. Though in a coalition government with the SPD until June of 2001, the CDU was blamed far more than the SPD for the severe financial problems of the city, which at the end of 2001 had a debt of DM 80 billion (about 40 billion Euros).65

The SPD gained 7.3 percent and ended up with 29.7 percent. The PDS also gained 4.9 percent, which, at 22.6 percent, was only about 1 percent less than the CDU’s total. In East Berlin the PDS came close to an absolute majority, and it enjoyed widespread support among young people and the better educated. With 9.9 percent, the FDP was also a big winner, returning to the parliament which it had failed to enter for the past six years. The Greens received 9.1 percent which, while only a slight reduction from 1999, was the seventeenth electoral loss in a row for them in Land elections.66

The question after the election was what kind of coalition government should be formed. An SPD–CDU coalition would have a majority in the parliament, but the SPD and its mayoral candidate, Klaus Wowereit, were no longer willing to share power with the CDU. That left two alternatives: a so-called “traffic light coalition” (Ampelkoalition) made up of the SPD (Red), FDP (Yellow), and Greens, or a Red–Red coalition of SPD and PDS. The charismatic leader of the PDS, Gregor Gysi, argued that only with its participation could the deep division of the city be overcome. In the meantime the national leadership of the SPD, including Chancellor Schröder, made known their preference for a Red–Yellow–Green coalition.67

By the beginning of December 2001, it was clear that a traffic light coalition would not be formed, because the FDP rejected tax increases favored by the SPD and Greens. Especially the Greens and the FDP disagreed sharply on other issues as well. As a result the SPD began negotiations with the PDS, and the SPD national leadership signaled its approval in spite of its doubts about the PDS position on various issues, including its
opposition to German participation in the international military actions against terrorism. Though eager to join the SPD in governing the city, the PDS was faced with the problem of having to share responsibility for cutting the budget deficit of around DM 10 billion and reducing the city's debt of DM 80 billion (figure 9.11).  

The five new Länder

Brandenburg

Before the Wall fell in November 1989, conventional wisdom held that the SPD would be the strongest party in any free election in the former East Germany. This assertion was based on voting history before 1933, especially in the industrialized areas of the East around Berlin and Saxony, and on the presumably leftist political culture inculcated by the East German regime for forty years. As it turned out, the CDU emerged as the strongest party in the first and only elections for the East German parliament (Volkskammer) in March 1990 – except in East Berlin – and as the strongest party in the Land and federal elections in the Fall of 1990 following unification. The one exception was the Land election in Brandenburg in 1990, when the SPD won by about 9 points.
Manfred Stolpe, a former high official of the Lutheran Church in East Germany, became the prime minister in 1990. In spite of charges raised by the CDU opposition and others – but never proved – that he had collaborated with the Communist regime, Stolpe became immensely popular in Brandenburg. This was due in part without doubt to his identification with the East, in contrast to his counterparts in the other new Länder, and his reputation as a fighter for Eastern interests even, if necessary, against his own national party. In 1994 the SPD under Stolpe’s leadership increased its lead by more than 15 points to over 54 percent, while the CDU and PDS tied at 18.7 percent.

Nevertheless, the popular assessment of the Stolpe government before the elections in 1999 was mixed. In spite of government efforts to improve economic conditions, unemployment remained high (17.4 percent in summer 1999). The poor economy had undoubtedly contributed to anti-foreigner incidents. Popular programs such as the 1000 DM “welcome money” for each newborn child had to be cancelled, but the bloated bureaucracy was not cut. Consolidation with Berlin had been rejected in a referendum in 1996 in spite of Stolpe’s support, and no progress was made on major infrastructure projects, such as the new airport for Berlin and Brandenburg. There had been considerable turnover in the cabinet, and controversy surrounded Welfare Minister Regine Hildebrandt’s management of money. The Education Minister pushed through a “life-formation, ethics and religious studies” course that replaced the conventional religious instruction classes in the public schools in spite of the vehement opposition of the Catholic and Protestant Churches and the CDU. The Minister was forced to back down in the summer before the September 1999 elections, and she resigned. But Stolpe enjoyed the benefit of an ineffective opposition by the CDU and PDS, and the CDU had received the lowest percentage of the party’s vote in any Land in the 1998 national election.

In spite of the past support for Stolpe, most voters indicated before the election that they favored change, including if necessary a grand coalition of SPD and CDU. The SPD had received only 2.5 percent more votes than the CDU in the June 1999 European Parliament elections (with only 30.1 percent voter turnout, the lowest of all the Länder!). The change in the political climate since the national elections in 1998 also made the SPD defensive a year later, having to fight a two-front battle against the CDU on the right and the PDS on the left. In the latter case the SPD had also to decide during the campaign whether to exclude the PDS from a possible coalition, which was an internally divisive issue. Stolpe refused to commit
himself one way or the other, but Welfare Minister Hildebrandt said a coalition with the CDU would be unthinkable for her.73

The result of the election of September 1999 was a continuation of the trend toward a concentration of the many parties that had run. A three-party system was evident, with the PDS receiving more than 20 percent for the first time. The SPD lost almost 15 percent but still emerged as the strongest party with 39.3 percent, and the CDU increased its vote by almost 8 points to 26.5 percent. The DVU, which as a “phantom party” had campaigned with slogans but hardly with candidates or an organization, received somewhat more than the required 5 percent for gaining seats in the parliament. Both the FDP and Greens received less than 2 percent.74

Following the election, Stolpe held negotiations with both the CDU and PDS, but he rejected the PDS offer because he said the goals of the PDS could not be financed. After strenuous negotiations with the CDU, a grand coalition was formed; however, Regine Hildebrandt refused to accept any position in the cabinet and even gave up her seat in parliament in opposition to the CDU’s participation in government.75 Manfred Stolpe, of course, remained prime minister until he stepped down in a surprise move in June 2002. He was replaced by the mayor of Potsdam and former Brandenburg cabinet minister, Matthias Platzeck (figure 9.12).76

Figure 9.12  Election results in Brandenburg, 1990–99
Source: www.wahlrecht.de/landtage

The Länder and German federalism
Mecklenburg-Vorpommern

The elections in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern were held on the same day as the federal elections in both 1994 and 1998, so there can be little doubt about the influence of federal politics and themes in these elections. In 1990 the CDU won a plurality of the votes with 38.3 percent, followed by the SPD with a mere 27 percent. While the FDP gained entry into the parliament with 5.5 percent, the Greens did not. The PDS was the third most popular party with 15.7 percent. The combined seats of the CDU and FDP were matched by those of the SPD and PDS, so neither a coalition of CDU and FDP nor SPD and FDP would have had a majority. Then an unhappy SPD deputy joined the CDU party group, so a shaky CDU–FDP coalition was formed. However, a series of personnel problems soon plagued the CDU and the government: several CDU deputies lost their seats owing to their activities on behalf of the communist regime before unification; more than half of the cabinet ministers were relieved of their posts; the prime minister, Alfred Gomolka, was replaced in midstream by Berndt Seite; and the CDU state party chair, Günther Krause, was replaced by Angela Merkel, who was finally able to discourage the internal conflicts within the party. In the meantime the SPD, under its leader, Harald Ringstorff, presented a picture of relative unity and seriousness.77

In 1994 the CDU lost slightly but still retained a plurality with 37.7 percent. The SPD gained 2.5 percent, and the PDS gained 7 points. The FDP and the Greens failed to pass the 5 percent barrier. The leader of the SPD, Ringstorff, had indicated before the elections that he might be interested in the “Magdeburger Modell,” i.e., the example set in Saxony-Anhalt where an SPD minority government was being “tolerated” by the PDS in parliament. He even held exploratory talks with the PDS after the election simultaneously with the CDU. But in the end, in spite of considerable tension between the two parties and, especially, between Seite and Ringstorff, the CDU and the SPD formed a grand coalition for the period 1994–98 with Seite as prime minister.78 Relations between the parties were not good, and Ringstorff renewed discussions with the PDS, only to have the national party leaders intervene against any kind of coalition with the former communists. The result was that the CDU–SPD coalition limped along under a climate of “mutual contempt.”79

By the summer of 1998 the national SPD leadership had decided to give Ringstorff a free hand, and the PDS made it clear that it was willing to cooperate with Ringstorff. The CDU was in a difficult situation, since on the one hand Prime Minister Seite tried to point to coalition successes,
while the CDU party group leader focused on the differences with the SPD and its power-hungry leader. The CDU was also hurt by the general climate in the country at the time that favored the SPD and change. The state was known as the “poor house of the republic” and had an unemployment rate of 20 percent and in some regions over 30 percent. In addition, the CDU had to ward off charges that it wanted to repeal the land reforms that had taken place under Russian occupation between 1946 and 1948 and return land to the former large land owners. Warning against the “SPDS” did not have much effect. Ringstorff and the SPD could emphasize the need for change and the need to create jobs, while the PDS could appeal to the need for “full employment before profit.”

It was no surprise that the results of the election favored the SPD, though less than one might have expected. The SPD received 34.3 percent, the CDU 30.2 percent, and the PDS 24.4 percent. No other parties cleared the 5 percent hurdle. After the election the SPD took up negotiations with the CDU and PDS, but it was soon clear that it favored a coalition with the PDS. The PDS made certain concessions, such as agreeing to a signed statement that political forces that do not recognize the Basic Law should have no influence on state policy making and admitting that the SED (the Communist Party of the former East Germany) was responsible for political injustice in the old German Democratic Republic (GDR). The SPD, in return, agreed to stop checking backgrounds of public servants for connections with the old regime (figure 9.13).
Saxony

In spite of its reputation gained during the Weimar Republic of being a socialist stronghold, Saxony was the only state in the East to give the CDU an absolute majority in the 1990 elections. Kurt Biedenkopf, a longtime member of the Bundestag and state legislature in North-Rhine Westphalia, General Secretary of the CDU in the mid-1970s, and state party chair, had gone to the University of Leipzig as a guest professor in March 1990 and become the CDU candidate for prime minister in the October 1990 state elections. His leadership proved decisive then and later.82

Being matched in popularity only by Prime Minister Manfred Stolpe in Brandenburg, Biedenkopf and the CDU could face the elections in 1994 with confidence. Indeed, the CDU’s 58.1 percent was the highest percentage of the vote ever received by the CDU in a state election and was exceeded only by the CSU in Bavaria in the mid-to-late 1970s and early 1980s. The SPD lost 2.5 points and dropped down to 16.6 percent, while the PDS gained 6.3 points to tie the SPD. Neither the FDP nor the Greens received the required 5 percent to return to the parliament.83

As in 1990, the CDU formed a government alone with Biedenkopf as prime minister.

The CDU did not do so well in Saxony in the federal election of September 1998, but it rebounded in the European elections in June 1999. At the time of the state elections in September 1999, the CDU was at a high point and the SPD at a low point because of the national political climate. The state CDU, the “Saxon Union,” could point to several successes as well: Saxony was in fourth place nation-wide in the number of jobs per 1,000 inhabitants; no other state had so many self-employed or so few public employees; and it had the fewest people receiving public assistance. The only question was whether the SPD or the PDS would come in second. The CDU victory, with 56.9 percent of the vote, was expected; however, the success of the PDS in gaining another 5.6 points to reach 22.2 percent and the decline in support for the SPD from 16.6 to 10.7 percent were not expected. This was the lowest percentage of votes for the SPD in any state election since 1949. In spite of the influence of federal politics on the outcome, it was clear that Prime Minister Biedenkopf had been a key factor in the “Saxon Union’s” victory.84

But Biedenkopf turned 70 in 2000, and he appeared to resist the idea of a “crown prince.” Indeed, internal conflict between Biedenkopf and others plagued the CDU in 2000 and 2001. Nevertheless, Biedenkopf was succeeded in May 2002 by Georg Milbradt, a long-serving CDU minister of finance in Biedenkopf’s cabinet (figure 9.14).85
Politics in Saxony-Anhalt have been more tumultuous since 1990 than in any of the other new or old states. In the first election in 1990, the CDU received a plurality with 39 percent of the vote and formed a coalition with the FDP, which had received 13.5 percent. The SPD had received 26 percent, the Greens 5.3 percent, and the PDS 12 percent. Less than a year after the coalition government was formed under Prime Minister Gerd Gies, who had emerged from the pre-unification East CDU, Gies was replaced by Werner Münch, who had been serving as finance minister and was from the West. Two years later Münch and his cabinet resigned over charges that he and several cabinet ministers had arranged excessive compensation packages for themselves. In November 1993 Münch was replaced by the CDU party group leader, Christoph Bergner, while the SPD and Greens demanded new elections. The FDP was divided over new elections, but soon after Bergner was elected prime minister in December with FDP support, elections were called for June 1994 before, rather than after, the summer vacation time.

With a decline of 10.3 percent to 54.8 percent, the lowest voter turnout figure in any state election in Germany since the war, the CDU still received a plurality with 34.4 percent, followed closely by the SPD with 34 percent. The Greens squeaked through with 5.1 percent, whereas the FDP lost...
almost 10 points and fell to 3.6 percent. The PDS was able to gain almost 8 points to reach 19.9 percent. On the morning after the election, both Bergner and the SPD’s leading candidate, Reinhard Höppner, laid claim to the right to form a cabinet. A minority government seemed inevitable, since the SPD ruled out a grand coalition with the CDU and the CDU had no other potential coalition partners. The SPD, like the CDU, also rejected the idea of a coalition with the PDS. That left the possibility of a minority SPD government with the Greens tolerated by the PDS, which had indicated its willingness to play such a role. A coalition government with Höppner as prime minister was formed, and the CDU became the opposition party with Christoph Bergner as party group leader.

The state election in April 1998 took place under unusual circumstances in that for the first time since the war a government was up for re-election that had not had a majority throughout the legislative term but had depended, instead, on the toleration of the PDS. This had become known as the “Magdeburg Model,” named after the state’s capital city. This had inspired the CDU to initiate a campaign in 1994 against the SPD–PDS “red socks,” but the campaign was not very effective. The SPD–Green government had been unable to do much to reduce unemployment, which was the highest in the country, and it had accumulated a huge debt, the largest on a per capita basis in Germany. The Greens were frustrated over their limited influence in the government and divided over the proper course to follow. The CDU had been obstructionist during the first two years of the legislative term, but then it realized its strategy merely encouraged more cooperation between the government and PDS. After discussions with the government, the CDU took a somewhat more cooperative stance after 1996 and actually supported the government on some occasions. A CDU-sponsored vote of no confidence was rejected by all three of the other parties. The PDS had demonstrated its dependability by tolerating the government in parliament, but it also ignored any sense of fiscal responsibility by demanding increased funds for teachers and local government social services.

Since the election was only five months before the national elections in September, many prominent federal politicians appeared during the campaign, the main theme of which was unemployment. The CDU tried to tie unemployment to the “Magdeburg Model,” but the polls showed that most dissatisfaction about the economy was directed at the federal government under Helmut Kohl. The CDU rejected a new “red socks” campaign, but it did focus on cooperation between the SPD and PDS. Prime Minister Höppner rejected the idea of a grand coalition after the election.
as well as a coalition with the PDS. But he also rejected demands by the
Greens and PDS that he drop his economics minister who had good rela-
tions with the CDU. The PDS could not really campaign as a normal
opposition party, because it had tolerated the government throughout the
legislative term. This had apparently led to some confusion in the party.90

The results of the election were dramatic. Not because the CDU lost
more than 12 points and received only 22 percent of the vote, not because
the Greens failed to return to parliament and the FDP again failed to pass
the 5 percent barrier, not because the SPD gained a little less than 2 points
at 35.9 percent, and not because the PDS remained stagnant with 19.6
percent. The sensational and unexpected development was the explosion
of votes for the far-right DVU, which jumped from 1.3 percent in 1994 to
13.6 percent in 1998. The party’s massive campaign spending in the last
few days before the election had obviously paid off. With slogans such as
“German Workplaces for German Workers,” “Expel Criminal Foreigners
Immediately,” and “Save the D-Mark!” (a reference to the Euro), the DVU
appealed as a protest party to a young, especially male, xenophobic pro-
letariat in spite of a mere 1.8 percent foreign population in the state.91
This success was less attributable to CDU voters switching to the DVU
than to a significant increase in voter turnout (54.8 to 71.7 percent),
which stands in sharp contrast to Brandenburg, Saxony, and Thuringia.
Indeed, 28 percent of all new voters gave their votes to the DVU.92

It was again apparent that a single party could not form a majority gov-
ernment, and it was apparent that the new party in parliament, the DVU,
was even less acceptable as a coalition partner for the SPD – or CDU –
than the PDS. After unsuccessful talks with the CDU, Prime Minister
Höppner again rejected both a grand coalition93 and a coalition with the
PDS, which left as the only option a return to the simple toleration of an
SPD government by the PDS. Attacked by the CDU for being soft on the
PDS, Gerhard Schröder, the Chancellor candidate for the SPD in the
upcoming federal elections, tried to get Höppner to form a grand coal-
ition, but Höppner refused, thus increasing his popularity in the state. The
SPD was in a stronger position than before, because as long as the PDS
abstained, it could outvote the CDU and DVU together. This was seen as
an inducement for the CDU to be more cooperative, since it did not want
to be associated in fundamental opposition with the DVU.94

In 2002 elections were again held in Saxony-Anhalt five months before
the federal elections, and with devastating results for the SPD. Voter
turnout was 56.5 percent, down more than 15 points from 1998, and nei-
ther the previously successful DVU, the Greens, nor the “Schill Party”
received the 5 percent required for admission to the parliament. But the FDP did gain seats, with a sensational 13.3 percent, and the CDU saw its support rise from 22 to 37.3 percent. The SPD, on the other hand, dropped from 35.9 to 20 percent, mirroring the CDU’s loss in the previous Land election in Berlin. The PDS experienced a slight gain of 0.8 percent to 20.4 percent, which put it in second place, as in Saxony. The SPD blamed its loss on its leader, Reinhard Höppner, high unemployment, and the “Magdeburg model,” while the CDU saw its success tied to the dissatisfaction with the policies of Chancellor Gerhard Schröder, high unemployment, and the SPD’s party finance scandal in Cologne which pushed the older scandal involving former Chancellor Kohl into the background. In any case the results were a very bad omen for the SPD in the upcoming federal elections, and, more to the point, the SPD lost its working majority in the Bundesrat with the gain of four votes for the CDU–FDP coalition government led by Wolfgang Böhmer (figure 9.15).95

Figure 9.15 Election results in Saxony-Anhalt, 1990–2001
Source: www.wahlrecht.de/landtage

Thuringia

Like the other new Länder, excluding Brandenburg, the CDU received the most votes in the first state election in 1990; however, only in Thuringia and Saxony did the CDU remain the leading party in 1994 and 1999.
Following the 1990 elections, the native East German, Josef Duchac, formed a coalition government with the FDP. Duchac was prime minister for only fourteen months, however, owing to revelations of his past involvement with the Communist regime. In 1992 he was replaced by Bernhard Vogel, who was the former CDU prime minister of Rhineland-Palatinate and the only state prime minister since 1945 to hold that office in two different states. In 1994 the FDP and Greens both failed to receive the required 5 percent of the vote, and, as in the other eastern Länder, a three-party system emerged with the CDU, SPD, and PDS gaining seats in the parliament. Though by far the largest of the three, the CDU needed a coalition partner, and it formed a government with the SPD from 1994 to 1999.

In contrast to Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, the grand coalition in Thuringia was not controversial. The SPD leadership never considered either a toleration model or a coalition with the PDS, relations between the two coalition partners remained relatively good, and the PDS faced a united cabinet and a relatively quiet legislative session. Favored by geography over some of its counterparts, Thuringia enjoyed the strongest economic growth of all the new states from 1991 to 1998. Together with Saxony, it had the most industrial jobs, and its unemployment rate of 15.1 percent in July 1999 was the lowest in the East. Its public debt, on the other hand, was above average for the states. Nevertheless, concerns about the economy,
jobs, social justice, education, crime, and traffic were major issues. According to the polls, Vogel and the CDU enjoyed more public confidence in their competence to deal with these issues than did the SPD or PDS.97

As in Brandenburg, the SPD suffered in the 1999 Land elections from the declining popularity of the SPD–Green government in Bonn, it could not criticize effectively the government of which it had been a partner, and its leading candidate could hardly challenge seriously the popular CDU prime minister. The result was an absolute majority of votes for the CDU, which won all 44 direct seats. The SPD lost 11 points, fell below its 1990 vote, and, for the first time in one of the new Länder, received fewer votes than the PDS. The PDS, with 21.3 percent, gained almost 5 percent over 1994. No other party cleared the 5 percent barrier (figure 9.16).98

**Summary**

Since elections in one or more of the Länder take place every year, only a kind of temporary snapshot of the array of leading parties and governments can be made at any particular time. Table 9.1 presents the governing parties and prime ministers of the Länder as of summer 2002. The Christian Democrats governed alone in four Länder, together with the FDP in three Länder, and with the FDP and PRO in one Land. The SPD governed alone in only one Land and together with the CDU in two Länder, with the Greens in two Länder, with the FDP in one Land, and with the PDS in two Länder.

These variations show clearly both the volatility of Land elections and the “promiscuity” of the two major parties in forming governments.99

**Are Land elections “partial” federal elections?**

As in other federal systems, a recurring question in Germany is the extent to which the elections in the Länder reflect more the popular assessment of political developments and policies of the individual Länder governments or of the federal government. In the United States one general school of thought centers around the idea that state gubernatorial elections are basically national referenda which express approval or disapproval of the sitting president and his policies, especially in terms of the economy. Another school suggests that voters focus on the performance of the incumbent governor and the state of the regional economy. In any
case state contests are affected by news media which focus on national and international events, and the national political parties exercise some influence in the states through their funding and assistance in state campaigns. It also seems clear that evaluations of the president and the national and international environment can lead to a form of referendum voting in the states. On the other hand, incumbent governors, like incumbent politicians in Congress, are not easily defeated.\textsuperscript{100}

| Länder governed by the CDU or CSU alone: | Bavaria since 1996 | Prime Minister Edmund Stoiber |
| | Saxony since 1990 | Prime Minister Kurt Biedenkopf (since 5/2002, Georg Milbradt) |
| | Saarland since 1999 | Prime Minister Peter Müller |
| | Thuringia since 1990 | Prime Minister Bernhard Vogel |

| Länder with CDU/FDP coalition governments: |
| Baden-Württemberg since 1996 | Prime Minister Erwin Teufel |
| Hesse since 1999 | Prime Minister Roland Koch |
| Saxony-Anhalt since 2002 | Prime Minister Wolfgang Böhmer |
| Lower Saxony since 2003 | Prime Minister Christian Wulff |

| Länder with CDU/FDP/PRO coalition government: |
| Hamburg since 2001 | Lord Mayor Ole von Beust |

| Länder with SPD/CDU coalition governments: |
| Bremen since 1995 | Lord Mayor Henning Scherf |
| Brandenburg since 1999 | Prime Minister Manfred Stolpe (since 6/2002, Matthias Platzcek) |

| Länder with SPD/Green coalition governments: |
| North-Rhine Westphalia since 1995 | Prime Minister Wolfgang Clement (since 11/2002, Peer Steinbrück) |
| Schleswig-Holstein since 1996 | Prime Minister Heide Simonis |

| Länder with SPD/FDP coalition governments: |
| Rhineland-Palatinate since 1991 | Prime Minister Kurt Beck |

| Länder with SPD/PDS coalition governments: |
| Mecklenburg-Vorpommern since 1998 | Prime Minister Harald Ringstorff |
| Berlin since 2002 | Lord Mayor Klaus Wowereit |
Rainer Dinkel, who has studied the relationship between Land elections and federal influences, found that in sixty-five of sixty-seven Land elections the federal government coalition received less support than expected based on federal election results. He also cited polls showing that public support for the federal government tended to be higher shortly after and shortly before federal elections, i.e., the federal coalition parties were likely to lose votes in the Länder especially at mid-term. The reduced support was due especially to floating voters who expressed their judgment of federal policies by voting against the federal coalition in Land elections. Lack of support of the federal coalition might also be seen in the lower voter turnout in Land elections. He did not find, in contrast to some other scholars, that Land elections could be seen as a barometer that measured the strength of the federal government and opposition parties. It is clear, however, that Land elections, like European Parliament elections, are barometer elections in so far as they can and do send signals to the federal government. Dinkel’s general conclusion was that both federal and Land politics were factors in Land elections.

The German scholar who is probably most identified with the question of the relationships between federal and Land politics, Georg Fabritius, has offered a useful set of hypotheses about federal politics and elections in the Länder. First, he suggests that Land elections have not been purely Land-based since the founding of the Federal Republic. Like a number of other observers, he notes the federal themes taken up by the political parties in Land elections, the appearance of national political leaders in the Land during campaigns, the joint membership of Land political leaders in Land and national party committees, and the difficulty voters have in distinguishing between federal and Land politics. For example, the economic conditions in a Land, as is generally the case for an American state, have more to do with federal than Land policies, yet the state of the economy can have a powerful influence on a Land (or, in the United States, state) election.

The second thesis is that in spite of the influence of federal politics, the themes of Land politics are also important. The popularity of the prime minister is a key variable, and Land politics, for example, policies regarding schools, teachers, and curricula have become major issues over the years. But the popularity of the prime minister sinks when his party at the federal level is held in lower esteem. Fabritius argues, furthermore, that the “normal vote” is more likely to be seen in Land elections, because federal elections exaggerate support or opposition. This “normality” exists especially when there is no protest against federal policies. Like Dinkel, he
also suggests that Land election results hardly carry over to the next federal election or vice versa, when the elections do not take place too closely to each other.\textsuperscript{106} While there may be some evidence for the hypothesis that the popularity of the prime minister suffers when his party at the federal level is held in low esteem, a counterexample would be the Bavarian election of 1998 which was held only a few months before the federal election. In this election the prime minister remained very popular, and the CSU actually picked up additional votes in spite of the national party’s weakness. It also seems clear that the personal appeal of the prime ministers in the Eastern \textit{Länder} is a crucial factor in explaining election results in Brandenburg, Thuringia, and Saxony.\textsuperscript{107}

Thirdly, Fabritius argues that the degree of federal influence on the results of elections in the \textit{Länder} varies and is greatest in crisis periods. Then Land elections most clearly have the character of protest elections, where there is a kind of referendum for or against federal policies. He notes that the chief beneficiary of the protest is not necessarily the major opposition party; instead, it is frequently a protest party or group that may have just formed or been relatively dormant.\textsuperscript{108} Examples in the mid-to-late 1960s would be the rightist NPD and the \textit{Ausserparlamentarische Opposition} (APO) or extra-parliamentary opposition which consisted especially of radical left students, the Greens from the late 1970s throughout the 1980s, the right-wing Reps and DVU in the 1980s and 1990s, and the PDS in the East in the 1990s and after 2000.

\textit{Land} elections are also more likely to take on the characteristics of protest elections when they occur at mid-term, i.e., not too soon before or after a federal election. Here they may be seen as a kind of plebiscite – though an unclear one – for or against the federal government, or, in any case, as a kind of barometer or measurement of the current political climate. Voters can abstain or vote for a different party and still return to their normal party in the federal election, which also applies to elections for the European Parliament. Thus there appears to be more solidarity with one’s normal party in federal elections.\textsuperscript{109} If this is true, though, it seems inconsistent with Fabritius’ previous assertion that \textit{Land} elections are the more “normal” elections. Indeed, a recent empirical study, which otherwise generally confirms Dinkel’s and Fabritius’ hypotheses above, lends strong support to the argument that federal elections reflect more the “normal” vote.\textsuperscript{110}

The fourth hypothesis is that the “coordination” between \textit{Land} elections and federal politics which exists to some extent is the result of the interlocking relations (\textit{Politikverflechtung}) between and among the \textit{Länder} and
the federation and the German party state. Thus the division of power between the federation and the Länder does not mean a separation in terms of policies or parties. The thesis of the “unitary federal state” is confirmed in Land elections. Party images are set by the federal parties, but there is a strong mutual dependence between the federal and Land parties. Most obviously the Länder are closely associated with federal politics via the Bundesrat. This is reflected in a clever CDU campaign advertisement in the 1958 Land elections in Hesse:

Deine Wahl in Hessenstaat
zähl im Bonner Bundesrat.
Regierung Zinn stützt Ollenuer,
wählt CDU für Adenauer.

A somewhat related theme to Fabritius’ last hypothesis has been developed by Gerhard Lehmbruch, who suggests that there is an incongruence between the German party system and the federal system. The British parties form a strong party system which leads to majority rule, i.e., the “Westminster parliamentary system” of strong, disciplined party government under the leadership of the prime minister with little necessity of bargaining between Government and Opposition. The strong German parties, in contrast, are forced to bargain because of cooperative federalism or the Politikverflechtung which exists between the federation and the Länder and the role of the Länder in the Bundesrat. The German party system, therefore, is unable to provide the kind of party government found in Great Britain, but must, instead, engage in a highly complex system of bargaining and consensus politics. This can and does lead to blockage, which can frustrate decision makers who are held accountable by the public for their political promises. As a result, the federal cabinet ministers try to work with Land politicians to support their policies, while the Opposition leaders do the opposite.112

In a recent empirical study of the relationship between federal and Land elections, Charlie Jeffery and Daniel Hough note that evidence of a cyclical pattern of support for the main political parties and the national level is now commonplace. Examples are mid-term congressional elections in the United States and other “second-order” elections such as the European Parliament elections in the EU member states.113 Following a review of the literature and data, and focusing especially on the findings of Rainer Dinkel, cited above, the authors conclude that the data for 1949–90 generally support Dinkel’s picture of
Land elections as ‘subordinate’, or second-order elections subject to an electoral cycle whose turning points were set by the rhythm of the federal rather than the Länder electoral arenas. Incumbency in federal government was punished, especially at mid-term. The main federal opposition party held up its vote share better, on occasion doing significantly better than expected, while the gamut of smaller parties, apparently benefiting from voter experimentation when less was at stake, generally did well.\footnote{114}

They also note the importance of voter turnout as a factor in explaining \textit{Land} election results. Turnout is generally considerably lower in \textit{Land} elections, as it is in European Parliament elections, which punishes government parties that fail to mobilize “their broadly contented supporters when less is at stake,” hurts opposition parties less “as their voters are typically willing to get out and make a point,” and reduces barriers to smaller parties, “especially those capable of mobilizing a concerted protest vote.”\footnote{115}

When they looked at the data for the period from 1990 to 1998, however, Jeffery and Hough reached somewhat different conclusions. The trend since 1990 of increasingly lower turnout in \textit{Land} elections appears to be associated with reduced support for both the government and opposition parties, so that “the success of small parties suggests less of an anti-government effect post-unity than a more indiscriminate effect penalising the wider federal party ‘establishment’.”\footnote{116} Jeffery and Hough reserve judgment on the question of whether this means that \textit{Land} elections might have become uncoupled from federal politics and are no longer “second-order” elections. They note the relevance of a number of factors, such as holding \textit{Land} elections on the same day as the federal election and the important role of the personal appeal of the incumbent prime minister. But a brief look at the results of the \textit{Land} elections since 1998 suggests that the relevance of federal politics is still strong, e.g., the CDU opposition made strong gains in all of the \textit{Land} elections in 1998 and 1999, when the SPD–Green federal government seemed to be floundering, but it lost significantly after December 1999 when the party finance scandal involving former Chancellor Helmut Kohl was revealed. On the other hand, the most recent elections in Hamburg and Berlin suggested that local issues dominated the campaigns. Thus the question seems still to be unresolved. There can be no doubt that federal politics can have a decisive influence on \textit{Land} elections, but it is also clear that local conditions and personalities can be important and even decisive as well.\footnote{117}
Conclusion

The brief overview of elections in the Länder provided above suggests some major differences between regional parties and elections in Germany and the United States. Some of these differences, of course, are due in part to the presidential system (directly elected governor and separation of powers) in the American states and the parliamentary system in the German Länder. Germany also has a multiple-party system (“limited pluralism”) in contrast to the American two-party system; indeed, there may be as many as twenty or more parties participating in German Land elections. Even though most of these parties fail to win seats in the parliament, usually three or four parties cross the 5 percent hurdle which is the minimum needed to benefit from the proportional representation features of the electoral laws. But the party systems vary, as they do in the United States, between dominant SPD and CDU parties in some Länder and more competitive systems in others; between Länder that have gone through party realignments and those that have not; and, most importantly today, between the old Länder and the new, where the PDS has replaced the Greens and FDP as the “third force.” The result today is the three-party system of SPD, CDU, and PDS in the East and the four-party system of SPD, CDU, FDP, and Greens in the West. This difference complements the north–south division between SPD and CDU/CSU that increasingly characterized the Federal Republic before unification.

Another difference is that most governments that are formed in the Länder – as well as at the federal level – are two-party coalitions. Most of these are between the SPD or CDU and a smaller party, such as the SPD and Greens or the CDU and FDP; however, by early 2002 there were also two SPD–CDU grand coalitions, one SPD–FDP coalition, one CDU–FDP–PRO coalition, and even two SPD–PDS coalition governments, with the PDS “tolerating” an SPD minority government in Saxony-Anhalt until 2002. Coalition governments are, of course, common in parliamentary systems, while they are virtually unknown in the United States. But the direct election of the governor, lieutenant governor, attorney general, and frequently other state-level officials often results in the representation of both parties in state executive positions. These are not, however, coalition governments in the parliamentary sense of two or more parties sharing responsibility for policy making initiatives. Nor does a governor of one party who faces one or both legislative houses with an opposing majority enter into a coalition, even if and when some cooperation may be required to get legislation or appointments approved.
The timing of elections and voter turnout are related in both countries. Voter turnout rises when the regional elections are held close to or simultaneously with federal elections, and it also rises under the impact of federal politics. For this reason about three-fourths of the American states hold their state elections between federal elections. In Germany most Land elections are held between federal elections, and even when held in the same year they are usually scheduled for different months. But the federal influence on German Land elections is clearly stronger than the federal impact on American gubernatorial elections – there is little federal influence on American state legislative races – as is demonstrated by the fact that during the Reagan and Bush I presidencies the Republicans never had a majority of state governorships. Even for mid-term congressional races, incumbency is more important than federal politics. Yet state politics in the United States are not entirely immune from federal influence as can be seen in the role of the national media and decline of regional differences in helping to bring about a narrowing of the margins in the state voting for president.139

Still another difference is the rise – usually temporary – of anti-establishment protest parties in some of the Ländere at certain times. An important example in the 1960s was the radical right NPD. In the late 1970s and early 1980s the leftist Greens made their first appearance. In the late 1980s and 1990s it was the radical right Republikaner and somewhat later the DVU which largely, but not entirely, replaced the NPD. In the mid-1990s it was the middle-class STATT Partei in Hamburg and the working-class AFB in Bremen; in 2001 it was the PRO in Hamburg. And in all of the new Ländere, the PDS offered an alternative to voters who were disappointed and even disgusted with the CDU and SPD. The closest parallels in the United States would be the extreme right-wing David Duke in Louisiana, who tried to run as a Republican, and the Reform Party, which enjoyed its greatest success with the election of Jesse Ventura in Minnesota in 1998.

In sum, the overview of elections in the German Ländere shows a rich variety of political patterns and developments in the different regions of the country. As in the United States, no two Ländere are the same, and some have a politics and party system that differ dramatically from other regions, e.g., Bavaria vs North-Rhine Westphalia, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern vs Saxony. The overview suggests that the north–south cleavage of the old Federal Republic has been complemented since unification by an east–west cleavage; however, it also shows that the north–south gap may now include the new Ländere (i.e., Saxony and Thuringia in the south), so that in the future a north–south gap may be more prominent and enduring than an east–west divide.
Notes

8. Ibid., pp. 79–80.
9. Ibid., pp. 81–82.
10. Ibid., p. 84.
11. Ibid., pp. 84–85.
12. Ibid., pp. 85–93.
18. Ibid., pp. 8–9.
20. Ibid., p. 15.
28 Ibid., pp. 142–144.
34 Ibid., p. 29.
37 Ibid., pp. 56–58.
40 Ibid., pp. 638–640.
42 Ibid., pp. 173–176.
49 Ibid., p. 25.
51 Ursula Feist and Hans-Jürgen Hoffmann, “Die Hamburger Bürgerschaftswahl vom 19. September 1993,” Zeitschrift für Parlamentsfragen 25, no. 2 (May 1994), pp. 217–218. This was the third time that early elections were called in Hamburg. See n. 50 above.
52 Ibid., p. 221.
53 Ibid., pp. 219–220, 222.
54 Ibid., p. 232.
56 Ibid., pp. 282, 287.
60 Ibid., pp. 88 and 93.
61 Ibid., pp. 89–90, 93.
62 Ibid., pp. 92–93.
63 Ibid., pp. 95 and 99.
65 Ibid., pp. 250–251.
66 Ibid.
67 K. Rüdiger Durth, “SPD, FDP und PDS sind die Gewinner der Berlin-Wahl,”
Das Parlament 44 (26 October 2001), p. 3.
69 In 1992 Stolpe refused to follow the SPD line in the Bundesrat opposing a tax change proposed by the Kohl government, on the grounds that the tax would benefit the East which desperately needed the additional funds.
73 Ibid., pp. 52–53.
74 Ibid., pp. 54–55.
75 Ibid., pp. 63–64.
78 Ibid., pp. 291–292.
80 Ibid., pp. 99–104.
81 Ibid., pp. 112–115.
83 Ibid., pp. 276–277.
86 The FDP’s initial electoral success in the federal and state elections in Saxony-Anhalt was due in large part to the “Genscher Effect,” i.e., Hans-Dietrich Genscher, the West German foreign minister at the time of unification, who had been born and raised in Halle, one of the larger cities in the state.
90 Ibid., pp. 59–61.
91 Ibid., p. 62.
92 Ibid., p. 63.
93 This was due in part because with a grand coalition both opposition parties
would be of questionable loyalty to the democratic system and thus the alter-
native to the government would be anti-system parties. The counterargu-
ment, of course, was that the SPD was breaking a general consensus that
democratic parties would not cooperate with anti-system parties. See 
94 Ibid., pp. 70–75.
95 K. Rüdiger Durth, “Die Union hat jetzt im Bundesrat wieder die Mehrheit,” Das 
96 Ursula Feist and Hans-Jürgen Hoffmann, “Landtagswahlen in der ehemal-
gen DDR am 14. Oktober 1990,” Zeitschrift für Parlamentsfragen 22, no. 1 
98 Ibid., p. 56.
99 Charlie Jeffery and Daniel Hough, “The Electoral Cycle and Multi-Level Vot-
ing in Germany,” German Politics 10 (August 2001), p. 93.
100 Malcolm E. Jewell and Sarah M. Morehouse, Political Parties and Elections in 
102 Christopher J. Anderson and Daniel S. Ward, “Barometer Elections in Compar-
ative Perspective,” Electoral Studies 14, no. 1 (1995), pp. 1–14; Uwe Jun, 
Koalitionsbildung in den deutschen Bundesländern (Opladen: Leske & 
103 Rainer Dinkel, “Der Zusammenhang zwischen Bundes- und Landtags-
104 Georg Fabritius, Wechselwirkungen zwischen Landtagswahlen und Bundes-
politik (Meisenheim am Glan: Verlag Anton Hain, 1978) and “Sind Land-
tagswahlen Bundesteilwahlen?,” Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte 21/79 (26 May 
1979), pp. 23–38.
105 Georg Fabritius, “Landtagswahlen und Bundespolitik,” in Westeuropas 
Parteiensysteme im Wandel, edited by Hans-Georg Wehling (Stuttgart: 
106 Ibid., pp. 118–119.
107 Tilo Görl, “Regionalisierung der politischen Landschaft in den neuen 
Bundesländern am Beispiel der Landtagswahlen 1999 in Brandenburg,
338 The Länder and German federalism

Thüringen und Sachsen,” *Zeitschrift für Parlamentsfragen* 32, no. 1 (March 2001), pp. 94–95, 123.

108 Ibid., pp. 121–122.

109 Ibid., p. 123.


114 Ibid., p. 84.

115 Ibid., p. 85.

116 Ibid., p. 89.

