London ▪ Thousand Oaks ▪ New Delhi

PARTIES AND THE EXPANSION OF DIRECT DEMOCRACY

Who Benefits?

Susan E. Scarrow

ABSTRACT

This article considers the extent to which political parties can use direct democratic reforms as an effective tool for reshaping political behavior. It investigates the interaction between behavioral and institutional changes associated with recent German extensions of direct democracy and intra-party democracy. The examination finds clear links between individual participation preferences and the evolution of the institutional framework: parties promoted reforms in hopes of making 'conventional', electorally oriented political participation more appealing to citizens who were increasingly attracted by 'unconventional' political outlets. The parties were less successful in using institutional design to achieve specific modifications in patterns of political participation.

KEY WORDS ▪ direct democracy ▪ intra-party democracy ▪ political participation ▪ political parties

Ever since the emergence of mass democracy, analysts have explored connections between political parties and individual political participation. Investigations of this link have generally taken two very separate directions, focussing primarily on parties or on individual behavior. The former tend to take human behavior as a given, examining how parties structure political processes so as to encourage or discourage citizen involvement. The latter tend to take political institutions as a given, invoking structural incentives and psychology to explain when and why individuals employ available participation opportunities. Largely lacking are efforts to study the interaction between parties' actions and individuals' participatory behavior. In the absence of such research, two important questions remain unanswerable. To what extent do political parties tailor political institutions to match citizens' preferences for specific modes of participation? And to what extent

can parties use institutional reforms to reshape citizens' political behavior? Answers to both questions are crucial for enhancing our understanding of supposed tensions between direct and mediated democracy, and between the individuals and organizations that help maintain the balance between the two.

To explore these relations, this study investigates the interaction between behavioral and institutional changes associated with recent 'democratizing' reforms in Germany, reforms that expanded citizens' chances of directly influencing party and governmental decisions. As will be shown, Germany's established parties initiated these changes as part of self-proclaimed efforts to cater to changing patterns of citizen participation. As such, they seem to be examples of party-mediated institutional responsiveness. However, the parties were not being purely reactive in promoting these institutional changes; instead, many of the party-led alterations were designed to change behavior by making traditional political outlets more appealing to citizens with new interests and values. The study concludes by examining the initial effects of the reforms, asking whether they altered either patterns of participation or political outcomes.

Political Participation and the Study of Parties

Scholars long have argued about how parties affect citizen involvement in democratic self-government. Some have asserted that they provide benign or even essential channels for political activity in mass societies, while others have sought to expose party-mediated participation as a worthless facade. Still others have portrayed partisan participation as a poor substitute for more direct action, denouncing parties for deliberately limiting other avenues for citizen self-government.

The most positive picture of the relation between parties and participation has been painted by those who focus on the effectiveness of individual political activity. From this perspective, parties enhance individual participation opportunities, because citizens who unite within a party can better translate their efforts into actual achievements. Parties also stimulate wider civic involvement, attempting to mobilize citizens and increase their interest in political affairs (Grimke, 1848; Ford, 1898; Delbrück, 1914; MacIver, 1948). The emphasis on the effectiveness of partisan-organized activity is shared by those who depict parties as either defenders, or tools, of group-defined interests (cf. Koellreutter, 1925; Truman, 1953). Others have portrayed party-organized activity as a means of forming a national, democratic community out of fragmented societies. Commentators in this vein have praised parties for channeling citizens' energies in ways that strengthen the political system, and for integrating isolated individuals into groups united for common ends (Sait, 1927; Neumann, 1956; LaPalombara and Weiner, 1966).

Those who focus more on process than on outcome have been more suspicious of parties. In particular, parties have aroused the ire of those who consider individual political participation to be a good in itself, an activity with both educational and character-building effects. Related to this is a long tradition of excoriating parties because they stifle independent political behavior and instead strive to infect both voters and office-holders with unthinking party loyalty (see Stickney, 1906; Belloc and Chesterton, 1911). Some have accused parties of playing a more subtle game, appearing to offer members opportunities for meaningful participation, when in fact party leaders manipulate intra-party democracy for their own ends (most famously, Ostrogorski, 1902/1964; Michels, 1915/1959). These early critiques helped to foster continuing skepticism about whether parties ever offer what Lawson (1988: 16) dubbed 'participatory linkage', in other words, whether their internal structures ever truly permit citizens to affect party decisions about personnel and policies.

Further indictments of parties' failures to foster citizen participation have come from critics who note that parties have often used their privileged governmental positions to exclude effective alternatives to party-organized politics (Goodnow, 1900). These views have more contemporary counterparts among those who suggest that parties may collude to create or retain party-dominated systems (Katz and Mair, 1995), and among those who lump parties with other mechanisms of representative democracy that undermine citizens' rights to make their own political decisions (Pateman, 1970; Barber, 1984; Burnheim, 1985).

On the other hand, some would admit that these charges are true, but would deny their importance, arguing that parties' effects on individual behavior are irrelevant in comparison with their pre-eminent role of providing voters with viable political alternatives. As Schattschneider put it: 'Democracy is not to be found in the parties but between the parties' (1942: 60).

Whatever their overall assessments, participants in this long-running debate agree that party rules, party attitudes and party-sponsored legislation crucially influence how and how much ordinary citizens engage in potentially meaningful political activity. In contrast, studies of individual political behavior seldom assign parties such a central role.

Parties and the Study of Political Participation

Investigations of political participation differ in their relative emphases on institutional incentives or individual predispositions. Parties usually play a subordinate role in studies that stress individual resources and attitudes. While such studies often acknowledge the potential importance of party actions, they explain variations in participation primarily in terms of individuals' differing resources and values (see Almond and Verba, 1963; Barnes

and Kaase, 1979; Inglehart, 1990; Jennings and van Deth, 1990; Verba et al., 1995).

Other studies of individual participation put more emphasis on the institutional setting. Parties figure in this second type of study not just as objects of identification, but as actors whose strategies and internal organizations can affect whether and how individuals become active in political life (DiPalma, 1970; Verba et al., 1978; Powell, 1982; Parry et al., 1992). Indeed, Rosenstone and Hansen found the constraints and opportunities defined by public rules and party processes to be so powerful that they argued that social scientists should 'take political participation out of the realm of the attitudinal and place it in the sphere of the political' (Rosenstone and Hansen, 1993: 234).

But emphasizing the importance of institutional incentives and organizational mobilization does not necessarily entail removing attitudes and values from models of participation. Instead, political participation may be seen as the combined product of political, structural and attitudinal factors. In this light, some shifts in political participation may best be explained by combining both attitudes and institutions in a dynamic and circular model in which political parties crucially mediate between public opinion and the rules that form the context of participation in (party and public) political institutions.

Because parties hold a central procedural role in all electoral democracies, they are especially well placed to initiate or block changes to the institutions that provide the setting, and the incentives, for individual participation. It is unclear how parties use this power. They may indeed function as oligarchies, with party leaders consistently concerned to maximize their own autonomy. They may also collude to increase party control of the political system, and to limit opportunities for effective non-partisan political action. Yet parties are also electoral competitors, with strong incentives to respond to changing popular preferences, including preferences about modes of political activity and organization. Parties' responses to such shifts may include promoting institutional reforms designed to appeal to, or to counteract, voters' evolving participation preferences. For instance, throughout the 20th century legislative parties all over the world have responded to perceived popular demands by expanding the franchise to include women, poor people, or younger citizens. The parties that have altered electoral rules have usually done so out of self-interest, hoping the newly enfranchised voters would reward the authors of the electoral change.

In changing the composition of the electorate, parties alter individual decisions about political participation, giving some citizens new opportunities to decide whether or not to vote or to stand for office. Similarly, individual choices about political participation may be affected by legislative action concerning the number and timing of elections, the legality of protests, or the extent to which petition-signing can be used to initiate legislation. Parties can also affect the availability of participation outlets by

changing their internal decision-making procedures. Thus, parties and party-controlled legislatures have wide scope to expand or shrink opportunities for citizens to voice their political views. In this way, party politics help link attitudinal and institutional influences on individual action.

The remainder of this study examines one example of how such connections work in practice. The argument here is that in the 1980s and 1990s German parties responded to shifts in public attitudes and behavior by modifying both party and public decision-making rules. They did so in order to encourage specific types of political activity, and in hopes of pleasing citizens who seemed increasingly distant from traditional, partisan, electoral processes. The investigation then focusses on the second side of the triangular relation between parties, institutions and individual behavior, asking how patterns of participation responded to German parties' efforts at institutional engineering.

Political (In)action and Party Responses

In recent decades German political life has been characterized by two complementary trends in mass behavior: increased mobilization outside established political parties and decreased participation in the institutions and processes most closely connected with electoral politics. This shift can be characterized as a move away from 'conventional', electorally orientated, political behavior towards 'unconventional', direct-action activities outside the electoral arena (Kaase and Marsh, 1979). The new style of German politics emerged in the 1960s and 1970s, when protests proliferated and single-issue citizens' initiatives flourished. In the 1980s similar impulses helped fuel the success of the Greens.

While the 1980s and 1990s brought a levelling off of unconventional politics, it also brought a marked decline in more conventional political activities, such as voting and joining parties. Turnout in German federal elections fell from a high of 91 percent in 1972 to 79 percent in 1990 (in western Germany), barely above the post-war low set in 1949. Voting in state elections also dropped steadily after the mid-1980s (Figure 1). Party membership showed a similar pattern, with enrollments booming in the 1960s and 1970s, stagnating in the early 1980s, then plummeting thereafter (Table 1). Unification did little to change these pictures of decline.

Social scientists were quick to provide explanations for these twin indicators of decreasing participation in electorally orientated politics. Many have linked them to the spread of postmaterialist values and to increasing individualization in society. According to this view, those with more traditional values prefer to channel their political energies into conventional electoral activities. In contrast, postmaterialists favor unconventional political activities because they are less mediated and therefore give participants more direct influence over decisions. The second type of explanation argues that the same

Table 1. Party membership CDU and SPD

	CDU			SPD		
Year	No.	Yearly % change (net)	Female (%)	No.	Yearly % change (net)	Female (%)
1970	329,000		18.0	820,202		17.3
1971	355,745	+8		847,456	+3	17.8
1972	422,968	+19		954,394	+13	18.7
1973	457,393	+8	16.0	973,601	+2	19.0
1974	530,500	+16		990,682	+2	19.7
1975	590,482	+11		998,471	+1	20.2
1976	652,010	+10	20.0	1,022,191	+2	21.1
1977	664,214	+2		1,006,316	−2	21.7
1978	675,286	+2		997,444	−1	22.2
1979	682,781	+1		981,805	−2	22.7
1980	693,320	+2	21.0	986,872	+1	23.1
1981	705,116	+2		956,490	−3	23.4
1982	718,889	+2		926,070	−3	24.0
1983	734,555	+2	22.0	925,630	0	24.5
1984	730,395	−1		916,485	−1	24.8
1985	718,590	−2	22.0	916,386	0	25.3
1986	714,089	−1	22.2	912,854	0	25.6
1987	705,821	−1	22.4	910,063	0	25.9
1988	676,747	−4	22.8	911,916	0	26.4
1989	668,115	−1	22.8	921,430	+1	26.9
1990	655,200	−2		911,600	−1	27.3
1991	756,519	+15	25.6	919,871	+1	27.4
1992	725,369	−4	25.3	885,958	−4	27.6
1993	694,932	−4	25.1	861,480	−3	27.9
1994	674,279	−3	24.9	849,374	−1	28.0
1995	657,643	−2	24.9	817,650	−4	28.2
1996	646,000	−2	24.9	793,797	−3	28.5
1997	636,285	−2	24.9	780,154	−2	28.7

Note: 1970–90 = West Germany; 1991–7 = United Germany
Sources: party reports, various years.

social forces that are altering individual values are also eroding the social structures that once conveyed strong political identities. The products of these attitudinal and social structure shifts are weakening political attachments. This dealignment also promotes the simultaneous decline in electoral turnout and party membership (Baker et al., 1981; Inglehart, 1990; Kaase, 1990; Bürklin, 1992; Eilfort, 1994; Kleinhenz, 1995, and many others).

Strategists in German political parties are avid consumers of such research into political attitudes and behaviors. In response to the apparent implications of dealignment and postmaterialism, in the late 1980s and early
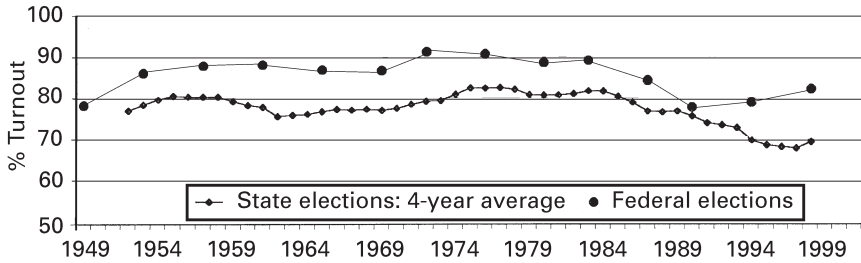
Figure 1. Turnout in German elections

Note: 1990–8: united Germany.

Sources: Mintzel and Oberreuter (1990); Conradt et al. (1995); newspaper accounts for
later state elections.

1990s many politicians from Germany's 'established' parties began urging
their colleagues to combat biases against conventional political activities by
creating new, more direct opportunities for citizens to participate in parti-
san and governmental decision-making. Some reformers justified such insti-
tutional changes as ways of preserving the legitimacy of the political order,
but many others argued in more partisan terms, asserting that their parties
could gain votes by responding to the new participation preferences (for
instance Wassermann, 1989; Stöss, 1990; Apel, 1991; Haungs, 1992;
Hofmann and Perger, 1992; Kauder, 1992; von Weizsäcker, 1992; Blessing,
1993; Rüttgers, 1993).

As described below, these words were followed by action. In the early
1990s German parties were not content merely to register their vulnerabil-
ity to changing political behavior. Instead, they reacted by introducing new
opportunities and incentives for citizens to participate in electorally orien-
tated politics. These changes were pressed above all by the SPD and CDU,
which altered their own statutes to expand intra-party democracy, and spon-
sored the expansion of direct democratic procedures at the state and local
levels.

Making Partisan Participation Seem Less Conventional
and More Attractive

From the early 1990s onwards, Germany's two largest political parties, the
SPD and CDU, began changing their internal rules in ways explicitly aimed
at making partisan participation more appealing to those who appreciate
the direct influence offered by more 'unconventional' political outlets.
Spurred on by a combination of declining party membership and electoral
losses, both parties attempted to encourage party enrollment by giving
members new opportunities to select and constrain party leaders. The FDP

introduced measures to give members greater say in party policy decisions. In addition, the two larger parties adopted rules designed to make party activity more appealing to specific demographic groups.

Increasing Direct Decision-making

At the beginning of the 1980s the originally 'anti-party' Greens stimulated German debates about how relations between party members and party leaders should best balance democracy and efficiency. In this decade the CDU was the first of the traditional parties to debate whether expanded intra-party democracy and other internal reforms might combat partisan attrition. The CDU began these discussions in the late 1980s, at a point when its central planners feared the CDU's vulnerability to partisan dealignment. In response, the party's general secretary launched a 'modernization' program intended to win voters by making the CDU more attractive to members. The pre-scribed remedy for overcoming apparent organizational problems was to give members greater participatory rights, better information and more equal access to party and public offices (CDU, 1989b: 460–1).

Although the federal party was slow to enact such changes, some CDU state parties moved more quickly to expand members' political privileges. Thus, in the early 1990s the CDU in North-Rhine–Westphalia and Saarland authorized using membership ballots for candidate selection. In several other states (Baden-Württemberg, Schleswig-Holstein, Lower Saxony) most local CDU associations began using membership-wide meetings to select candidates, instead of relying on conference delegates to do this job. At the same time, the CDU in North-Rhine–Westphalia, Saarland and Berlin also introduced the option of using membership ballots to decide policy ques-tions (Beil and Lepsky, 1995: 25–35). In 1995, under pressure from party chair Helmut Kohl, the CDU's national conference finally changed federal party statutes to authorize the use of membership ballots for selecting candi-dates and party officials.

The SPD began a similar debate about organizational reform in the early 1990s, after losing its third consecutive federal election. At this point, as in the CDU, top party leaders began endorsing organizational 'modernization' as a means to boost the party's electoral fortunes. For the SPD, as for the CDU, a central feature of the 'modernization' discussed in these debates was a revitalization of the party's grassroots, which was to be fostered by expand-ing opportunities for intra-party participation (SPD, 1992; Blessing, 1993).

The SPD took its most celebrated step in this direction in 1993, when it balloted members before designating a new party leader. Later in 1993 the new party leader and his team persuaded the SPD conference to authorize all levels of the party to hold internal plebiscites on both personnel and policy questions. However, lack of intra-party support forced the leadership to withdraw a proposal to endorse 'consultative' (non-binding) policy polls. Even so, several states subsequently used such polls on matters ranging from

selecting coalition partners (Bremen 1995) to deciding policy emphases (Rhineland-Palatinate 1995).

In mid-1995 the FDP party conference approved the use of binding internal policy 'referendums', thereby emulating and even exceeding the plebiscitary impulses of its larger rivals. Within a few months this party became the first (and as of the end of 1998, the only) German party to ballot all its members on a policy issue. In 1997 the FDP once again turned to the device. In both cases, party leaders viewed membership consultation as a way of settling potentially divisive internal debates.[1]

Thus, in recent years leaders of Germany's 'established' parties have pressed for internal organizational reforms seemingly designed to weaken – though certainly not to repeal – the 'iron law of oligarchy', creating channels to transfer powers from party leaders and party conferences to the entire party membership. Rohrschneider (1993: 168) has argued that such changes are likely to occur because of the growing influence of New Politics activists inside Old Left parties. However, this scenario does not account for the reforms described here, which have not been limited to the SPD, nor primarily pushed by those who started their political careers as New Politics activists. Nor should the reforms be seen merely as part of wider trends in which moves towards intra-party 'democratization' are thinly disguised attempts to disempower party activists. Though the German reforms may well have this long-term effect, it is important to note that, in contrast to reforms in the British Labour Party, they were not primarily prompted by leaders' dissatisfaction with activists' roles in determining party policy or shaping the party image. Instead, the internal changes were driven by shifts in the political market: because they were persuaded that voters in general, and potential party members in particular, would welcome the new procedures, state and national party leaders backed cautious membership 'empowerment' initiatives despite (understandable) resistance from mid-level activists. One of the clearest confirmations of these image-fed motives is the fact that party leaders have shown much more interest in publicizing than actually employing the new channels.

Changing Demographic Patterns of Participation

Strategies to revitalize the parties not only considered the extent but also the composition of partisan participation. Because they viewed the support of young people and women as crucial to electoral success, party leaders endorsed initiatives to elect more young and female candidates, and to boost the presence of both groups in party ranks.

The SPD began treating internal gender imbalances as a serious problem in the mid-1980s, soon after the Greens publicized the issue with their all-female and gender-balanced slates. In 1988 the SPD national conference endorsed phased-in gender quotas for candidates for party and for public offices (see Lösche and Walter, 1992: 252–6). A few years later, the SPD's

'modernization' initiative reaffirmed the goal of increased female partici-
pation throughout the party and also endorsed achieving a more represen-
tative age balance among party members and office-holders. In keeping with
this second goal, local parties were encouraged to ensure that at least 10 per
cent of their local government representatives were not over 30 years old
(Blessing, 1993: 32). The national party went no further than this recom-
mendation, though one state party (in Schleswig-Holstein) reacted to its
own poor record of youth recruiting by adopting youth quotas for candi-
dates on all party slates.[2]

At the end of the 1980s CDU strategists also began expressing similar con-
cerns about their party's demographic (un)representativeness. Federal party
organizers collected and publicized data on branch party memberships,
hoping to boost local activists' awareness of the problem. These stark figures
showed that 22.5 percent of CDU members were female, and only 7 percent
were under 30 years old. The aggregate figures hid even worse local-level
imbalances: in some states as many as 13 percent of local associations had
not a single female member, while as many as 22 percent lacked members
younger than 30 (CDU, 1989a: 3–4). As in the SPD, CDU analysts linked
the demographic imbalances in the party's membership and among its office-
holders: young and female supporters were less likely to join a party whose
public face excluded people like them, but the party had a hard time identi-
fying promising female or young candidates because it lacked members in
these categories. Both deficits made it harder to appeal to young voters and
female voters. Given this diagnosis, party leaders and party reform commis-
sions urged state and local branches to boost recruitment of female and
younger candidates for party and public offices (CDU, 1989b: 456–7).

At first, the CDU's top leaders ruled out using gender quotas to change
the complexion of candidate slates. However, official attitudes changed as
it became clear that state and local parties were not responding to exhorta-
tions. The failure of these appeals became clear after the 1994 federal elec-
tion, when the proportion of women in the CDU/CSU delegations increased
only minimally over its previous level (13.9 compared with 13.8 percent).
In contrast, the overall proportion of female Bundestag members rose from
20.5 to 26.3 percent (Hoecker, 1996). Immediately after this election
Helmut Kohl and his general secretary persuaded the CDU conference to
endorse the principle of reserving at least one-third of the party's offices and
legislative seats for women. However, many members of the CDU presid-
ium opposed Kohl on the idea of quotas and the 1995 conference failed to
adopt rules for implementing the quotas (Kornelius, 1995: 5). Only in 1996,
after Kohl refused to back down from the idea, did the CDU conference
finally implement specific gender quotas. The CDU did not consider issuing
similar statutory guarantees to recruit candidates from specific age groups.[3]

As these accounts have shown, in the late 1980s and early 1990s electoral
considerations prompted some of Germany's 'established' parties to attempt
to alter internal participation patterns. Spurred by growing antipathy

towards parties and by declining electoral participation, reformers hoped to make partisan life appear more attractive, and party decisions more legitimate, by introducing new opportunities for members to take direct action within parties. They hoped to boost support from critical electoral groups by altering the demographic profile of their most visible supporters. As the next section details, fears about the electoral implications of changing participation preferences also help to explain why parties in state legislatures were simultaneously changing public decision-making procedures. Here, as with their internal reforms, parties expanded opportunities for unmediated decision-making in hopes of luring citizens back to conventional, electoral politics.

Making Electoral Participation Seem Less Conventional and More Attractive

In the 1980s and 1990s Germany's largest parties overcame their earlier antipathy to direct democracy and began backing legislation that increased opportunities for citizens to decide questions of policy and personnel directly. They also began lowering some barriers to electoral participation. Reformers portrayed such measures as improving the political system by expanding formal channels for expressing political discontent. Whatever the arguments, party competition for electoral support was crucial in securing passage of these institutional reforms.

Increasing Direct Decision-making

Germany's 'established' political parties were the main force behind the expansion of direct democracy in German states and municipalities. From 1989 to 1997 four of the eleven states in western Germany, and all five eastern states, introduced procedures for citizen-initiated ballot propositions and referendums. (All German states now provide such opportunities.) During the same period twelve states (seven in the west, five in the east) authorized similar plebiscitary procedures at the local level. (All thirteen non-city-states now provide such opportunities.) At the same time, German parties also supported other local reforms which increased opportunities for citizens to influence political outcomes directly. Six western states and all the eastern states introduced the direct election of mayors. One western state and all the eastern states also altered electoral procedures to enable voters to cast preference votes for local council candidates.

Typical arguments on behalf of the new provisions stressed how these changes would provide disaffected citizens with increased opportunities to exert direct (not party-mediated) influence. Legislative proponents of local government electoral reform also claimed that such changes would combat declining electoral participation by making voting a more consequential act.

However, closer examination of the legislative battles makes clear that most changes were adopted because institutional reforms seemed to offer promising issues for party competition: politicians responded to citizens' supposed new desire for more direct political participation (for details see Scarrow, 1997).

Changing the Demographics of Participation

In addition to these efforts to expand opportunities for direct decision-making, parties in a few states sought to expand political participation by reducing barriers for entry into active citizenship. In 1995 the SPD government in Lower Saxony, under pressure from the Greens and from the youth wing of their own party, reduced the voting age in local elections to 16. In 1996 the same government backed legislation enabling citizens aged 16 and above to vote on ballot issues, and those older than 13 to sign petitions requiring local councils to discuss specific issues (*Einwohneranträge*).[4] In 1996 the SPD in Schleswig-Holstein acceded to pressure from its coalition partner, the Greens, to reduce that state's local government voting age to 16. Sachsen-Anhalt took the same step in 1996.[5] Supporters of the lower voting age portray it as a tool for combatting younger citizens' disproportionately low turnout: young people are supposed to get accustomed to voting while still in school. Changing the voting age is thus supposed to foster new patterns of political participation.[6]

The preceding discussions have shown how German parties responded to changing behavior, and to perceived changes in public attitudes, by offering citizens new opportunities to exercise political influence. As public interest in political action apparently shifted away from the conventional arena of partisan electoral competition and towards outlets giving participants more immediate impact, party politicians sponsored changes designed to lend similar 'unconventional' qualities of direct action to traditional political institutions. The question that remains is whether these efforts at institutional redesign achieved their proponents' declared twin aims of boosting participation in 'conventional' political channels and of winning votes for the parties that sponsored the reforms. In other words, to what extent do these cases provide evidence of a direct link between party actions, institutional parameters and individual participation patterns?

Institutional Reforms and Patterns of Political Participation

Because most of the institutional reforms discussed above are very new, it is too early to issue a final verdict on their consequences. Even so, initial indications suggest that these changes have done less to increase the appeal of partisan channels than to boost the influence of those already active within them.

Reforms to Party Institutions

The internal reforms discussed above were justified as measures to increase overall participation in parties and to change the demographic composition of avowed partisans. These aims have met with limited success. From the standpoint of altering participation patterns, the most successful of the initiatives have been efforts to make elected delegations more representative. Most strikingly, the SPD's introduction of gender quotas for party candidates helped produce immediate changes. In 1994 and 1998 about 34 percent of the SPD's Bundestag delegation were female, more than double the 16 percent figure from 1987, the last pre-quota election. Although the number of women in the SPD delegation began rising even before gender quotas were introduced, the quota is at least partially responsible for this increase. Similar increases were registered at other levels in the party. The CDU's temporary 'quorum' had a similar, though less dramatic, effect. After it was implemented, the number of women elected to state party leaderships immediately rose, and the proportion of female CDU Bundestag members rose from under 14 percent in 1994 to over 18 percent after the party's electoral loss in 1998 (Lambeck, 1997: 6).

Thus, it seems certain that parties can use candidate quotas to change the gender composition of their most visible 'activists', the elected officials. Such quotas may also help parties attract and retain particularly engaged or ambitious female supporters. However, neither candidate quotas nor calls to recruit have significantly altered the composition of the wider party memberships. In the first 7 years after the SPD introduced candidate quotas, the proportion of female members rose only slightly, growing from 26.4 percent in 1988 to 28.8 percent (in the western party) in 1997. This was little better than the CDU, which relied on exhortation and then quotas to boost female participation in the party. Despite these efforts, the proportion of women CDU members only rose from 22.5 percent in 1988 to 24.0 percent in 1997 (in the western party) (see Table 1).

The parties had even less success in realizing their proclaimed aim of making party membership more attractive to young people. The SPD and CDU relied almost exclusively on exhortation to increase the representation of younger people among the ranks of elected office-holders, but this seldom sufficed to persuade established politicians to yield safe seats to younger candidates (Lohse, 1997: 3; Schneider, 1997: 19). The parties' overall membership efforts were equally unsuccessful. Whereas in the 1990s the CDU and SPD at least registered very slight increases in the proportion of female members, both parties suffered a declining proportion of younger members. From 1988 to 1997 the proportion of CDU members under age 30 fell from 6.4 to 4.7 percent (in the western party; CDU, 1989a; 1997). In the SPD those under 31 constituted 9.1 percent of the membership in 1993, down from 13.3 percent in 1983 (SPD, 1995: 14).

If the parties have enjoyed uneven success in boosting participation by

Table 2. Membership ballots and enrollment trends

Party	Date	Purpose of ballot	Participation rate (%)	State party membership trend	National party membership trend
SPD Federal	May 1993	Select party chair	57		1992–3: –3%
SPD Hamburg	April 1994	Select party chair	34	1993–4: –7%	1993–4: –1%
CDU N. Rhine–Westphalia	May 1994	Select party chair	45	1993–4: –1%	1993–4: –3%
SPD Berlin	May 1995	Select mayoral candidate	55	1994–5: –2%	1994–5: –4%
FDP Federal	Autumn 1995	Decide policy: wiretapping	43		1994–5: –4%
SPD Bremen	Nov. 1995	Select mayoral candidate	54	1994–5: –1%	1994–5: –4%
SPD Thuringia	Feb. 1996	Select party chair	56	1995–6: –2%	1995–6: –2%
FDP Federal	Autumn 1997	Decide policy: conscription	20		1996–7: –6%

Note: All membership figures for year end.
Sources: Hirscher (1996); *Frankfurter Rundschau* (1997); party reports.

specific groups, they have been even less successful in boosting overall partisan activity by granting members new privileges. Adding new decision-making options to party statutes has not halted party membership declines (Figure 2). Nor have the new procedures proven to be a good recruiting tool for the state parties that have employed them. While some state parties registered modest growth after employing membership ballots, others experienced above-average enrollment declines (Table 2).

On the other hand, the party reforms did alter the activity of many who were enrolled. The new opportunities for intra-party democracy can boost member participation, at least when members are offered real choices. Thus, in 1993, 57 percent of SPD members voted in the ballot to designate the party leader, and 54 percent of the Bremen SPD voted in a 1995 post-election advisory ballot. In contrast, only about one-third (34 percent) of the Hamburg SPD participated in its 1994 poll to select the state party chair, probably because the contest was a very lopsided race with a predictable outcome.[7] Similarly, whereas 43 percent of FDP members participated in the party's first policy ballot, only 20 percent voted in the party's next ballot, in 1997, probably because the latter (on conscription) generated little controversy.

In most cases, these participation figures considerably exceed the reported 10–35 percent of members who regularly attend SPD and CDU functions (Falke, 1982: 75; Becker et al., 1983: 80; Veen and Neu, 1995: 11–12). Such relatively high turnout rates suggest that when new opportunities for member democracy are used, they can encourage participation by some who are otherwise relatively inactive, and probably uninfluential, in party circles.
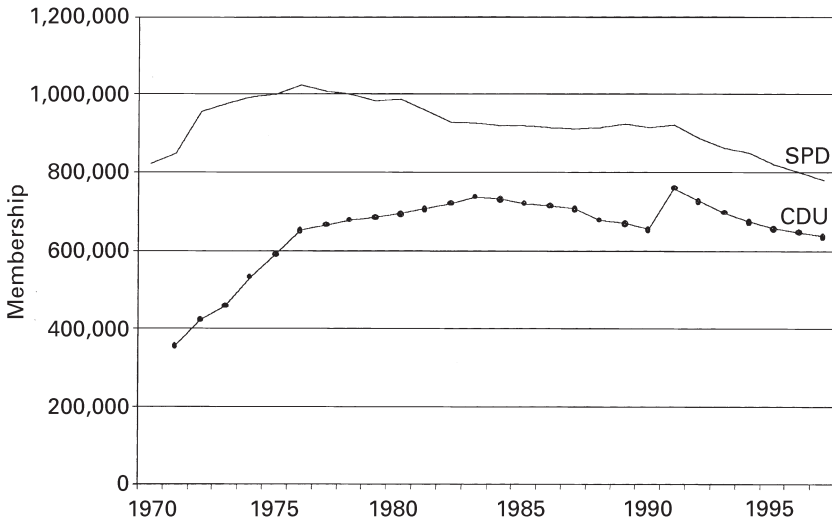

Figure 2. CDU and SPD membership 1970–97

Sources: See Table 1.

In addition, the new procedures almost certainly affected certain outcomes. This was most evident in Bremen in 1995, when SPD members were asked to indicate both their choice of party leader and their preferred coalition partner. Members selected as party leader a man who had campaigned *against* the coalition they endorsed; the new leader conformed to members' wishes when forming his government (Schieren, 1996). The 1995 FDP vote not only fixed the party's position on wiretapping; it also prompted the immediate resignation of the party's justice minister.

These accounts suggest that party members have welcomed intra-party plebiscitary reforms and, to the limited extent that they have been offered, have used the new opportunities to influence party decisions. However, while the changes may have altered the participation patterns and potential influence of those already active enough to join a party, they have not altered general patterns of political engagement. The impact of rule changes in the public sphere seems similarly mixed.

Reforms to Public Institutions

The parties' efforts to boost electoral participation have met with little success. In the 1990s the general trend of declining turnout continued, even in cases where citizens could use new decision-making procedures. For instance, in the 1996 local elections in Lower Saxony, in which citizens had their first opportunity to cast a direct mayoral vote, turnout declined by 4 percent (to only 64.5 percent). Participation dropped below 50 percent in the subsequent mayoral run-off elections (*Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 1996c: 4). Similarly, turnout fell from 71.3 to 66.1 percent in the 1997 local elections in Hesse, another state where citizens had their first opportunity to vote for mayors. Lower Saxony's reduced voting age for local government elections also failed to boost civic enthusiasm among the newly enfranchised. In the first election after this change, turnout among 16- and 17-year-olds was below average (*Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 1996a: 4; Sattler, 1996: 18).

Nor have the new local initiatives proven reliable in boosting electoral participation, though they sometimes do generate high levels of interest. This was clear in 1996, the first full year in which Bavarians could call local referendums. Turnout reached as high as 80 percent in some of the state's local referendums, but often it was much lower – sometimes as low as 25 percent (Eitler, 1997). Here and elsewhere, average local referendum turnout was below that for local government elections (Table 3). Thus, there is little evidence that the addition of new decision-making opportunities has had the desired effect of expanding overall electoral participation.

As with party reforms, however, the electoral reforms *do* seem to boost the amount and impact of participation by those who are already politically active. Past studies of local elections suggest that those who bother to vote tend to use opportunities to cast preference votes. One result may be to

Table 3. Participation in local elections (selected states)

State	1996 average turnout for local referendums (%)	Average turnout for local government elections (%) (Year)
Baden-Württemberg	53	66 (1994)
Bavaria	48	69 (1996)
Schleswig-Holstein	49	70 (1994)

Source: Rössler (1997: 7); *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (1994a, 1994b, 1996d).

make local party leaders anticipate popular preferences when assembling party lists (Wehling, 1992: 140). In two senses, then, the introduction of preference voting may increase the impact exercised by those who do participate.[8] Similarly, voters have shown their partisan independence in the newly introduced direct mayoral contests, splitting their votes for mayors and for local councillors. Because of this, states that have held their first direct elections for mayors have witnessed an influx of mayors who lack the support of a majority party or coalition on the local council.[9]

Some citizens have also employed the new opportunities to call local plebiscites, though patterns of use differ widely between the states. For instance, at the higher end, local communities placed 54 items on local ballots in Schleswig-Holstein during the first 2 years after this option became available (1990–2), and held an annual average of 20 referendums in the following 4 years. North-Rhine–Westphalia held 32 local referendum votes in the 3 years after their introduction in mid-1994 (Paust, 1998). In Bavaria, where referendum use is relatively easy, citizens put a record 121 proposals on local ballots in 1996, the first full year in which they could be used – and voters approved about half these proposals. On the other hand, in some states local referendums have received little use, particularly – but not exclusively – in states that make it comparatively difficult to place items on the ballot (Hilbig, 1997: 75; Rössler, 1997: 7). Even so, it is clear that the new availability of local referendums has encouraged some issue-activists to direct their energies into electoral channels.

In sum, recent reforms to party rules and public institutions have shown only limited success in achieving parties' proclaimed aim of shifting patterns of participation towards conventional electoral activities. Only quotas for female candidates have markedly altered demographic imbalances in the composition of the most active part of the citizenry. Other reforms have increased the influence of those who already are politically active, but have neither lessened demographic inequalities nor expanded the pool of participants in conventional, electorally orientated, activities.

Moreover, neither the SPD nor CDU have received much electoral credit for supporting these reforms. The combined CDU/SPD vote share continued to fall in the 1990s. Nor have the parties been able to translate the popularity of membership 'primaries' into election victories. So far no state or

national party that has used a membership ballot to select its top candidate has won the subsequent contest (the CDU in North-Rhine–Westphalia in 1994, the SPD in the 1994 federal election and in Berlin in 1995). This record does not prove that 'primaries' produce no electoral bonus. After all, the parties opting for these procedures were already in opposition, and in some cases use of the procedures clearly produced at least temporary surges in popularity. However, even in the best circumstances, when membership ballots enjoyed a certain novelty, the electoral benefits of intra-party democracy were clearly circumscribed. Probably because of this, by the end of the 1990s party leaders had become much less interested in using devices of intra-party democracy as a technique for building party popularity.

Conclusion

This investigation of Germany's recent institutional reforms has shown clear links between individuals' participation preferences and the evolution of the institutional framework in which individuals act. In the cases described above, this relationship was heavily weighted towards party-responsiveness to behavioral change. Because of the mediating pressure of party competition, even long-established political institutions proved malleable in the face of changing values and behaviors. Confronted with signs of citizen disenchantment with partisan politics, German parties tried to regain sympathy by extending direct democracy and by increasing intra-party democracy.

The links on the other side of this relationship have proven to be much weaker: the German parties have been much less successful in using institutional redesign to achieve specific modifications in patterns of political participation. While the changes the parties introduced suited popular sentiment, they have not been sufficiently attractive to counteract declining trends in party enrollment or electoral participation. They have also not produced noticeable shifts in the party support patterns of those who do cast votes.

If the parties have not reaped hoped-for benefits from their efforts to expand participation opportunities, who has? As has been found elsewhere, the recent German experiences suggest that those who are already active are most likely to benefit when barriers to participation are lowered (Verba et al., 1995). This hints at the difficulty of using institutional engineering to achieve specific participatory goals, at least when the intent is to encourage greater civic engagement. While rule changes can be very effective in excluding certain groups or certain types of activity, they prove to be blunt instruments for increasing voluntary action.

More generally, these experiences contribute to our understanding of the relationship between parties and direct democracy, showing that mediating parties will not necessarily view unmediated decision-making as an outright rival, nor as an either/or alternative. Instead, under some circumstances they

may embrace them as devices intended to combat citizen disaffection with, and to boost support for, the processes upon which the parties depend.

Notes

1 In 1992 the Greens changed their federal party statutes to include provisions enabling members or party bodies to petition to call binding membership votes on policy questions. The CSU has not introduced similar plebiscitary reforms.
2 10% of places on candidate lists are now to be reserved for those under 35 years old. When it acted, only 12% of the state party's members were younger than 35, and only one member of the party's state legislative delegation was under 40 (*Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 1996b: 5).
3 Neither the FDP, CSU, nor PDS had implemented gender quotas for candidates. However, the topic was raised in the CSU after women received few promising spots on the party's 1998 federal slate.
4 In both cases, the reform was supported by the governing SPD and particularly by Bündnis 90/Greens, and was opposed by the CDU.
5 The SPD in North-Rhine–Westphalia promised to lower the local voting age as part of its 1995 coalition agreement with the Greens, but was slow to implement this provision.
6 Of course, it is no accident that the SPD, and above all the Greens, were the strongest initial supporters of this innovation; both have traditionally drawn disproportionately high support from younger voters. Nor is it surprising that the SPD in North-Rhine–Westphalia began expressing doubt about the change immediately after local governments in Lower Saxony showed that new voters would not necessarily reward the SPD for enfranchising them (Breuer, 1996: 5).
7 The winner of the three-way contest received 72% of the vote. All polls mentioned here were held in local branch headquarters on a single day, with provisions for early postal voting in all but the Berlin election.
8 It is not yet clear whether preference ballots will counteract parties' efforts to expand the political repertoire of particular demographic groups. While studies agree that voters do use preference ballots to override parties' initial candidate rankings, they differ on whether they help or hurt female candidates (Lösche and Walter, 1992; Mielke and Eith, 1993: 192).
9 See, for instance, Hesse in 1997 (Witte, 1997: 13).

References

Almond, Gabriel and Sidney Verba (1963) *The Civic Culture*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Apel, Hans (1993/1991) *Die deformierte Demokratie: Parteienherrschaft in Deutschland,* 2nd edn. Munich: Droemersche Verlagsanstalt.

Baker, Kendall, Russell Dalton and Kai Hildebrandt (1981) *Germany Transformed*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Barber, Benjamin (1984) *Strong Democracy*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Barnes, Samuel and Max Kaase, eds (1979) *Political Action.* Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

Becker, Horst et al. (1983) *Die SPD von Innen.* Bonn: Verlag Neue Gesellschaft.

Beil, Stefan and Norbert Lepsky (1995) *Die Reformdiskussion in den Volksparteien.* Sankt Augustin: Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung.

Belloc, Hilaire and Cecil Chesterton (1911) *The Party System.* London: Stephen Swift.

Blessing, Karlheinz (1993) *SPD 2000: Die Modernisierung der SPD.* Marburg: Schüren Presseverlag.

Bürklin, Wilhelm (1992) 'Gesellschaftlicher Wandel, Wertewandel und politische Beteiligung', in Karl Starzacher, Konrad Schacht, Bernd Friedrich and Thomas Leif (eds), *Protestwähler und Wahlverweigerer: Krise der Demokratie?*, pp. 18–39. Cologne: Bund Verlag.

Burnheim, John (1985) *Is Democracy Possible?* Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

CDU (1989a) *Bericht der Arbeitsgruppe 'Struktur der Partei'.* Bonn: CDU.

CDU (1989b) 'Moderne Parteiarbeit in den 90er Jahren', in *Protokoll der 37 CDU Bundesparteitag*, pp. 454–69. Bonn: CDU.

Conradt, David et al., eds (1995) *Germany's New Politics.* Tempe, AZ: German Studies Review.

Delbrück, Hans (1914) *Regierung und Volkswille.* Berlin: Georg Stilke Verlag.

DiPalma, Giuseppe (1970) *Apathy and Participation.* New York: The Free Press.

Eilfort, Michael (1994) *Die Nichtwähler.* Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh.

Eitler, Wolfgang (1997) 'Zweifel an 'Triumph der Bürger'', *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, online edition (22 Feb.).

Falke, Wolfgang (1982) *Die Mitglieder der CDU.* Berlin: Duncker and Humblot.

Ford, Henry Jones (1898) *The Rise and Growth of American Politics: A Sketch of Constitutional Development.* New York: The Macmillan Co.

Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung (1994a) 'CDU liegt im Südwesten vorn' (14 June): 4.

Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung (1994b) 'Nach der Wahl in Schleswig Holstein' (22 March): 2.

Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung (1996a) 'Kein Dank an die SPD' (18 Sept.): 4.

Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung (1996b) 'Kieler SPD beschliesst "Jugendquote"' (23 Sept.): 5.

Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung (1996c) 'SPD gewinnt die meisten Direktwahlen' (1 Oct.): 4.

Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung (1996d) 'Die CSU in Hochstimmung' (12 March): 1.

Frankfurter Rundschau (1997) 'Thema Wehrpflicht lockte FDP-Basis nicht' (17 Nov.): 5.

Goodnow, Frank J. (1900) *Politics and Administration: A Study in Government.* London: Macmillan.

Grimke, Frederick (1848) *Considerations upon the Nature and Tendency of Free Institutions.* Cincinnati, OH: H. W. Derby & Co.

Haungs, Peter (1992) 'Aktuelle Probleme der Parteiendemokratie', *Jahrbuch fur Politik* 2: 37–64.

Hilbig, Michael (1997) 'Plötzlich zittern die Genossen', *Focus*, No. 19: 74–5.

Hirscher, Gerhard (1996) 'Zur Diskussion um die Reform der innerparteilichen Mitwirkung bei den deutschen Parteien', paper presented at German Studies Association Annual Meetings, Seattle.

Hoecker, Beate (1996) 'Innerparteiliche Frauenförderung in Grossbritannien und Deutschland', *Zeitschrift für Parlamentsfragen* 27: 642–57.

Hofmann, Gunter and Werner Perger (1992) *Die Kontroverse: Weizsäckers Parteienkritik in der Diskussion*. Frankfurt am Main: Eichborn Verlag.

Inglehart, Ronald (1990) *Culture Shift in Advanced Industrial Society*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Jennings, M. Kent, Jan van Deth et al. (1990) *Continuities in Political Action*. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter.

Kaase, Max (1990) 'Mass Participation', in Jennings et al., pp. 23–64.

Kaase, Max and Alan Marsh (1979) 'Political Action: A Theoretical Perspective', in Barnes and Kaase (eds), pp. 27–56.

Katz, Richard M. and Peter Mair (1995) 'Changing Models of Party Organization and Party Democracy', *Party Politics* 1: 5–28.

Kauder, Volker (1992) 'Mut zu neuem Aufbruch', *aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte* No. 37: 47–51.

Kleinhenz, Thomas (1995) *Die Nichtwähler*. Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag.

Koellreutter, Otto (1925) *Die politischen Parteien im modernen Staate*. Breslau: Ferdinand Hirt.

Kornelius, Stefan (1995) 'Idealmasse, aber unpassend', *Süddeutsche Zeitung* (6 July): 5.

Lambeck, Martin (1997) 'Zu einer Volkspartei Gehören Frauengesichter', *Die Welt* (11 April): 6.

LaPalombara, Joseph and Myron Weiner (1966) 'The Impact of Parties on Political Development', in Joseph LaPalombara and Myron Weiner (eds) *Political Parties and Political Development*, pp. 399–438. Princeton. NJ: Princeton University Press.

Lawson, Kay (1988) 'When Linkage Fails', in Kay Lawson and Peter H. Merkl (eds) *When Parties Fail: Emerging Alternative Organizations*, pp. 13–38. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Lösche, Peter and Franz Walter (1992) *Die SPD: Klassenpartei – Volkspartei – Quotenpartei*. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft.

Lohse, Eckart (1997) 'Die Verjüngung der SPD-Fraktion kommt trotz des Parteitags-beschlusses nicht voran', *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (3 Sept.): 3.

MacIver, R. M. (1948) *The Web of Government*. New York: Macmillan.

Michels, Robert (1915/1959) *Political Parties* (translated by Eden and Cedar Paul). New York: Dover Publications.

Mintzel, Alf and Heinrich Oberreuter, eds (1990) *Parteien in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland*. Bonn: Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung.

Neumann, Sigmund (1956) 'Towards a Comparative Study of Political Parties', in Sigmund Neumann (ed.) *Modern Political Parties,* pp. 395–421. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Ostrogorski, Mosei (1902/1964) *Democracy and the Organization of Political Parties* (ed. Seymour M. Lipset). Chicago, IL: Quadrangle Books.

Parry, Geraint, George Moyser and Neil Day (1992) *Political Participation and Democracy in Britain*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Pateman, Carole (1970) *Participation and Democratic Theory*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Paust, Andreas (1998) 'Bürgerbegehren und Bürgerentscheid in Deutschland', in *Bürgerbeteiligung und Demokratie vor Ort*. Bonn: Verlag Stiftung Mitarbeit.

Powell, G. Bingham (1982) *Contemporary Democracies: Participation, Stability and Violence*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Rohrschneider, Robert (1993) 'Impact of Social Movements on European Party

Systems', *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Sciences* 528: 157–70.

Rosenstone, Steven J. and John Mark Hansen (1993) *Mobilization, Participation, and Democracy in America*. New York: Macmillan.

Rössler, Hans-Christian (1997) 'Gegen Parkuhren und für die Ruhe vor der Haustür', *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (10 July): 7.

Rüttgers, Jürgen (1993) *Dinosaurier der Demokratie: Wege aus Parteienkrise und Politikverdrossenheit*. Hamburg: Hoffmann und Campe Verlag.

Sait, Edward (1927) *American Parties and Elections*. New York: Appleton Crofts.

Sattler, Hans-Peter (1996) 'Für Schröder ein Schuss vor den Bug', *Das Parlament* (20 Sept.): 18.

Scarrow, Susan E. (1997) 'Party Competition and Institutional Change: The Expansion of Direct Democracy in Germany', *Party Politics* 3: 451–72.

Schattschneider, E. E. (1942) *Party Government*. New York: Rinehart & Co.

Schieren, Stefan (1996) 'Parteiinterne Mitgliederbefragungen: Ausstieg aus der Professionalität?', *Zeitschrift für Parlamentsfragen*, No. 2: 214–29.

Schneider, Christian (1997) 'Wie Jugendträume platzen', *Süddeutsche Zeitung* (3 July): 19.

SPD (1992) *Materialien: aus Erfahrung lernen*. Bonn: SPD.

SPD (1995) *Materialien: Abschlussbericht der Arbeitsgruppe 'Mitgliederentwicklung'*. Bonn: SPD.

Stickney, Albert (1906) *Organized Democracy*. Boston, MA: Houghton, Mifflin and Co.

Stöss, Richard (1990) 'Parteikritik und Parteiverdrossenheit', *aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte* No. 21: 15–36.

Truman, David (1953) *The Governmental Process*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.

Veen, Hans-Joachim and Viola Neu (1995) *Politische Beteiligung in der Volkspartei*. St Augustin: Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung.

Verba, Sidney, Norman Nie and Jae-on Kim (1978) *Participation and Political Equality: A Seven-nation Comparison*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Verba, Sidney, Henry Brady and Kay Lehmann Schlozmann (1995) *Voice and Equality*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Wassermann, Rudolf (1989) *Die Zuschauerdemokratie*. Munich: Piper Verlag.

Wehling, Hans-Georg (1992) 'Politische Beteiligung und kommunale Demokratie – Direktwahl, Sachplebiszit, Kumulieren und Panaschieren', in Karl Starzacher, Konrad Schacht, Bernd Friedrich and Thomas Leif (eds) *Protestwähler und Wahlverweigerer: Krise der Demokratie?*, pp. 131–45. Cologne: Bund Verlag.

Von Weizsäcker, Richard (1992) *Richard von Weizsäcker im Gespräch*. Frankfurt am Main: Eichborn Verlag.

SUSAN E. SCARROW is Associate Professor of Political Science at the University of Houston. Her research interests include the development and impact of political parties.

ADDRESS: Department of Political Science, University of Houston, Houston, TX 77204-3474, USA. [email: sscarrow@uh.edu]