

# CAMPAIGN COMMUNICATION AND STRATEGIC RESPONSES TO CHANGE IN THE ELECTORAL ENVIRONMENT

Germany after Reunification

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## ABSTRACT

This study presents a priming model of party competition which proposes that broad-based parties adapt their campaign communication to respond strategically to changes in their electoral environment. Party competition during election campaigns is seen as the struggle to 'prime' the electorate; i.e. to set the electorate's agenda and the criteria for which the electorate will evaluate the parties. This model is used to analyze the strategic responses of the two broad-based parties in Germany – the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) and the German Social Democratic Party (SPD) – to the changes in their electoral environment after reunification. Survey data are used to analyze differences in the East and West German electorate after reunification and a content analysis of the television commercials broadcast by the two parties is used to discern the changing content (i.e. issue dimensions, candidate-orientated appeals) and form (i.e. degree of attack, issue differentiation technique and temporal reference) of campaign communication. This analysis indicates that the nature of party competition in a given party system is not fixed but changes as parties make strategic responses to their electoral environment.

KEY WORDS ■ campaigns ■ electoral change ■ German reunification ■ parties ■ priming

Political parties in parliamentary democracies compete for support by communicating appeals to the electorate during periodic election campaigns. Election campaigns are an especially important period of party competition because they occur at a time of heightened competition in which parties attempt to communicate favorable messages to the electorate.

The electorate's awareness and the impact of this communication on the electorate is high because of the forthcoming vote decision. The messages communicated to the electorate may be analyzed by a systematic evaluation of the content and form of the campaign communication produced by political parties.

Election campaigns are an important mass–elite linkage in democratic societies, aiding our understanding of the basis for which parties are asking for support from the electorate. An analysis of campaign communication informs us about the relative emphasis parties place on the principal dimensions of conflict in a party system, how parties distinguish their positions from those of their competitors, and the extent of candidate personalization. A longitudinal analysis of election campaigns in a given party system allows us to discern how parties may strategically adapt their campaign communication in response to changes in their electoral environment. The adaptation of political parties is central to democratic representation and I assert that changes in the electoral environment play a more crucial role in shaping elite strategies than is generally recognized. Parties are no doubt constrained in their ability to adapt by the need to maintain the support of their core constituencies, but may nevertheless adapt by emphasizing issues on new dimensions of conflict in their party system and by placing increased emphasis on their principal candidate.

In this study, I present a theoretical model which proposes that broad-based parties make strategic responses to changes in their electoral environment by adjusting key elements of their campaign communication. The model is used to analyze the response of the two broad-based parties in Germany – the Christian Democratic Union (CDU)<sup>1</sup> and the German Social Democratic Party (SPD) – to the change in the electoral environment following reunification. Broad-based parties, those that attract voters from different groups and social classes in society which have formed an electoral alliance to win office, are more likely to make such changes than smaller, ideological parties. The study makes an in-depth investigation of party competition during election campaigns in a single party system, in which the normally slow, incremental changes in the electoral environment occurred at one point in time, allowing more concise analysis.

To gain an understanding of party competition during election campaigns it is important that each campaign is not viewed as a singular, unique event, as is typical of journalistic accounts of campaigns. But existing models of party competition in the discipline have viewed competition between parties during election campaigns as fixed and static, suggesting that all parties compete in a certain way at all times. The classical positioning model offered by Downs (1957) theorizes that parties compete by communicating specific issue positions on a whole range of issues. The directional-intensity model offered by Rabinowitz and MacDonald argues that parties send directional and intensity cues to the electorate on selected issues, indicating the direction they wish to move public policy and the

intensity with which they will pursue these objectives in office (Rabinowitz and Macdonald 1989; Macdonald et al., 1991).

I present a model that asserts that the nature of party competition is not fixed but varies as the parties in a given system make strategic responses to changes in their electoral environment. A synthesis is needed in the models of party competition which suggests when parties compete in a positional way, as envisioned by Downs, and when they compete in a directional way, as envisioned by Rabinowitz and MacDonald. To do this, one has to identify the key elements of party campaign communication that parties alter and the key characteristics of the electoral environment that lead parties to adapt their campaign communication. Empirical evidence should also be offered to demonstrate how party competition changes as parties make strategic responses to change in the electoral environment of a given party system.

### Research Design and Method

In contrast to existing static models, this article introduces a dynamic model of party competition which is based on party adaptation to change in the electoral environment. The model is then investigated through an empirical analysis of the responses of the two broad-based political parties in Germany to the changes in their electoral environment after reunification. This event provides a quasi-experimental design in which the parties were subjected to a large change at a single point in time, allowing the researcher an extraordinary opportunity for analyzing the responses of parties to changes in their electoral environment. These responses were isolated from a longitudinal analysis of the campaign communication of the parties during four election campaigns for the German parliament (Bundestag) – the two immediately before reunification in 1983 and 1987, and the first two after reunification in 1990 and 1994. While parties must continually adapt their campaign appeals to changes in their electoral environment, the analysis here is not designed to account for all changes apparent in the election campaigns of the broad-based parties from 1983 to 1994, but to focus on changes that are likely to be due to the changed electoral environment after reunification.

The study focuses on the response of the two broad-based parties in Germany because of the special role they play in their party system. The CDU and SPD must appeal and unite a broad section of the electorate – voters from different social classes and with different orientations toward social values – and thus communicate messages on various dimensions of conflict in the electorate. These parties are also the only ones which can conceivably nominate the chancellor, so that their campaign communication includes information about their chancellor candidate. This results in the communication of these two parties being not only multi-dimensional on issues but also concerned with presenting favorable images of their principal candidates. Although the study does not ignore the other

parties in the German party system, it views them as part of the electoral environment in which the broad-based parties must react. The 1994 election campaign was the first true gauge of the impact of reunification on the German electorate and the political parties, because the first all-German election after reunification was an extraordinary situation which surprised the voters and the parties and was dominated by the theme of reunification.

Prior to analysing the campaign communication of the parties, I describe the changes in the electoral environment facing the German parties after reunification. Differences in policy preferences, cleavage voting and the time-of-vote decision of the western and eastern electorate have been analyzed using a representative sample of eligible voters in West and East Germany immediately after the 1994 Bundestag election.<sup>2</sup> In turning to the responses of the broad-based parties to the changes in the electoral environment after reunification, I performed a content analysis of all the campaign television commercials broadcast by the parties during the four Bundestag election campaigns.<sup>3</sup> Survey research indicates that over 80 percent of both electorates watched at least one CDU campaign commercial and a similar percentage watched at least one SPD commercial prior to the 1994 Bundestag election.<sup>4</sup>

The campaign commercials analyzed consist of both the public service commercials which the two German public television networks (ARD and ZDF) are required to broadcast free of charge and the paid commercials which are aired on the private television networks. The broad-based parties each produced between 3 and 15 campaign commercials for each of these election campaigns. The unit of analysis for the content analysis was the appeal contained in the spoken text of the campaign commercials.<sup>5</sup>

The analysis of campaign communication is divided into priming content, the mix of issues appeals and candidate-orientated appeals in the communication, and priming form, which provides additional information about how issues and candidate-orientated appeals are presented to the voters. The changing issue content of the campaign communication was analyzed by placing the issue appeals in a two-dimensional issue space – a left–right economic dimension and a progressive–conservative social values dimension. The candidate-orientated appeals were placed in three categories: leadership, competence and personal qualities. The changing priming form – degree of attack, issue differentiation technique and temporal reference – were measured by an analysis of their rate of occurrence in the campaign communication.

### **The Priming Model of Party Competition**

Party competition during election campaigns is the struggle to ‘prime’ the electorate; that is, the attempt to set the electorate’s agenda and the criteria for which the parties will be evaluated by the electorate. Broad-based parties

will make strategic responses to changes in their electoral environment by adjusting the priming content and form of their campaign communication in an attempt to win support from their core constituencies and late-deciding, floating voters.

*Strategic responses* are reactions by parties to changes in their electoral environment which are evident in their campaign communication and intended to maintain or increase their electoral support or ability to assume office and exercise power. The *electoral environment* consists of the conditions under which parties compete for votes and includes:

- 1 important characteristics of the electorate, including the distribution of policy preferences, cleavage voting, and the time-of-vote decision in the electorate;
- 2 strategies of competing parties;
- 3 ease of entry and likelihood of new parties emerging in the party system;
- 4 state of the real world – the domestic and foreign policy problems facing a country at any given time;
- 5 a party's current status at the time of an election as an incumbent, governing party or as an opposition party.

The *mix of issue appeals* is the relative emphasis given to various issue dimensions in the campaign communication of a party, either the historical principal issue dimension of competition in the party system or newly emerging dimensions. The *candidate-orientated appeals* are those made by a party designed to highlight the leadership, competence or personal qualities of a party's principal candidate. The other property of campaign communication, the priming form, are adjustments in the way appeals are made to the electorate and include:

- 1 the orientation of the message, whether positive (referring to one's own issue positions or candidate traits) or negative (referring to an opponent's positions or traits), which determines the *degree of attack* in the communication;
- 2 the *issue differentiation technique* used in the communication, either sharp-positional, in which one's own positions are contrasted with those of an opponent, or diffuse-directional, in which the direction one would like to change policy is communicated, but no specific position is taken;
- 3 the *temporal reference* of the communication, either retrospective, referring to past performance or prospective, referring to future promises of the party.

*Core constituencies* are voters who belong to groups or social classes in the electorate which a party has traditionally relied on for electoral support. *Late-deciding voters* are those who decide during the final two months of the campaign itself which party to support in the forthcoming election.

The emphasis on priming proposes that parties do not primarily attempt to change the attitudes, values or issue preferences of the voters, but

attempt to focus the attention of the electorate during an election campaign on a chosen agenda. Party competition is thus viewed as the competitive struggle between parties to have the issues they select, and their policy approaches to the issue, dominate the electorate's agenda. It is premised on research finding that individuals have a set of enduring attitudes which are unlikely to change during the course of a campaign, but whether these attitudes will have an impact when the vote decision must be made is dependent on which attitudes are retrieved from memory (see Iyengar and Kinder, 1987; Aldrich et al., 1989; Iyengar, 1990; Krosnick and Kinder, 1990; Lavine et al., 1992).

Broad-based parties communicate a mix of issue appeals on the historic principal dimension of conflict in a party system, primarily to mobilize the party's core constituencies, and on newly emerging dimensions to appeal to and mobilize late-deciding voters. Parties will alter their mix of communication on the dimensions in response to changes in their electoral environment. In the party systems of Western Europe, the principal dimension of competition between the parties has been economic. Thus there have been two main groups of parties in these systems: parties on the left, representing workers and advocating greater societal control over the economy and efforts at the redistribution of wealth; and parties on the right, representing the middle and upper classes and advocating the interests of private capital and the right to retain private wealth.

A process of 'culture shift' has gradually redirected substantial portions of these electorates away from an emphasis on economic matters toward a greater concern for social value issues. Inglehart (1977, 1990, 1997) has documented this shift from material to postmaterial values in many advanced industrial democracies. In terms of government policy, increasing proportions of the electorates in these societies wish steps be taken to improve the quality of life in terms of environmental protection, cultural offerings and an expansion of personal freedom. However, there also seems to be an increase in the portion of the electorate concerned with conservative social value issues related to family, religion and nation. Kitschelt (1994) has hypothesized that changes in the electorates in Western Europe have resulted in a change in the main axis of party competition from a left-right economic dimension to one which combines this traditional dimension with a new dimension. I identify this new axis of competition as a social values dimension with one pole labeled progressive (emphasizing issues designed to appeal to postmaterialists) and the other conservative, emphasizing issues designed to appeal to traditional, social conservatives.

When the salience of a predominant, historical issue dimension declines, broad-based parties of a system will react and strive to create and define a new issue dimension. Parties strive to do this for the purpose of obtaining votes, despite organizational constraints, in order to avoid the loss of votes to their competitors or to parties that might emerge to compete on new dimensions (see Riker, 1986). The parties will alter their campaign

communication in an attempt to make the new issue dimension salient in the minds of the voters and to make differences from their competitors apparent. The expectation is that this newly intensified basis of conflict will be especially apparent in parties' campaign communication because it is on this new dimension where a party can gain votes. Parties will continue to have differences in emphasis on historically important dimensions to appeal to their core constituencies, but a party is most likely to win new voters by communicating issue positions on newly emerging dimensions.

Parties may not only adjust the mix of issue appeals on various dimensions in their campaign communication in response to changes in their electoral environment, they may also adjust the degree of emphasis given to their candidate-orientated appeals. The degree of personalization evident in a party's communication indicates the extent to which a party wishes voters to focus on the characteristics of their principal candidate in making their vote decision. As the number of late-deciders increases in an electorate, parties are likely to increase the degree of personalization in their communication.

For voters with low attachments to political parties, the information and images received in the time shortly before they decide whether to cast a vote for a particular party play an especially important role (Zaller, 1992; for Germany, see Kaase and Klingemann, 1994). A focus on candidate-orientated appeals is likely to be a better strategy for attracting late-deciding voters than an exclusive focus on issues. Persuasion on issues is unlikely to occur during the course of a campaign (see Campbell et al., 1960; Page and Shapiro, 1992; Finkel, 1993); creating positive feelings toward a candidate is more probable. In Germany, evidence from a panel study conducted during the 1990 parliamentary election campaign showed that individuals exposed to positive images of Chancellor Kohl from media sources during the campaign had significantly increased sympathy for him (Semetko and Schoenbach, 1994).

The degree of attack evident in the campaign communication of a party indicates the degree to which a party wishes to focus the electorate's attention on its own positions or on those of its competitors. A party will emphasize negative appeals in its communication when it wishes to accentuate its differences from competing parties. A high degree of attack by an opposition party against a governing party is typically an attempt to make the election a referendum on the performance of the governing party during the previous legislative period. It attempts to make the election agenda for the voter one of evaluating the performance of the party in office, so that they cast their vote on the basis of this evaluation. In such cases, the opposition party is placing less emphasis on how it would govern differently – how its policies might solve the problems facing the country; it merely asserts that another party did not perform well. Parties in government may also pursue a high degree of attack, concentrating their appeals on the shortcomings of opposition parties and their policies, instead of stressing the party's own accomplishments or its plans for the future.

Parties also decide what type of issue differentiation technique to use in their communication. There are various ways in which parties may communicate their position on issues to the voters. A party may either take very specific positions on a few issues and contrast its position with those of its opponents, which I refer to as sharp-positional positioning, or it may communicate a wider range of issues broadly indicating to the electorate a direction and intensity on issues, which I refer to as diffuse-directional positioning. High-contrast campaign rhetoric, in which a party's own position is presented as being in very close proximity to a negative issue appeal directed at a competing party, results in sharp-positional issue positioning. It provides the voters with a concrete issue position of the party on a very limited number of issues and an assertion by the party on where another party stands on these issues. It invites voters to take a position on the issue which has been contrasted and then cast their vote for the party which is most in agreement with their own view. It is thus an attempt to 'prime' the voters on a very narrow set of issues. It turns an election from one giving voters a choice concerning the broad direction of government into a referendum on a very limited number of issues. Parties will emphasize sharp-positional issue differentiation when they wish to strongly contrast their issue positions with those of a competitor, and diffuse-directional differentiation when they want to stress their suitability to govern and the continuity of their policies with existing government policy.

Finally, parties may adjust the temporal reference of their campaign communication. This indicates whether a party is attempting to have the electorate focus on its past performance or its future promises. A party that has governed successfully in the past may choose to emphasize its performance more than its promises for the future. This ability to stress accomplishments is a major benefit for a governing party because past actions are more believable than promises of future action (see Fiorina, 1981). A challenging party must rely primarily on promises.

### **The German Case**

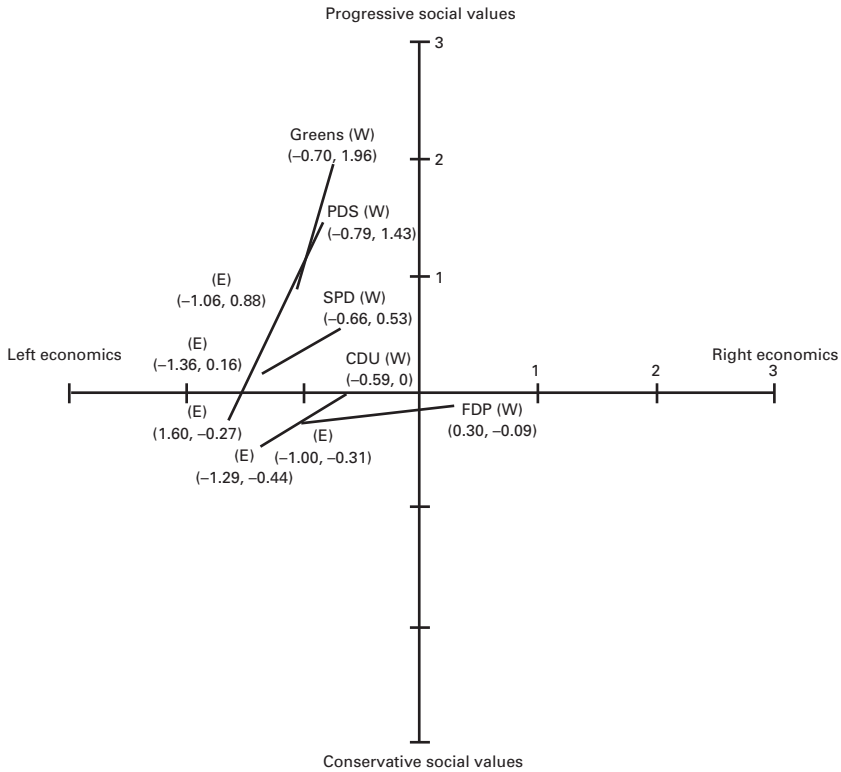
The electorate of the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) was profoundly transformed by the addition of almost 17 million new entrants to the political system from the former German Democratic Republic (GDR). The reunification of Germany on 3 October 1990 brought together two very different societies: the western one had enjoyed the fruits of over 4 decades of democracy and prosperity while the eastern one had only recently emerged from communism and economic stagnation. Reunification thus brought a society heavily impacted by postmaterial values together with one much less affected by the economic and socio-political developments that accompany advanced industrialism. The new voters from the former GDR make up approximately one-sixth of the total electorate of the reunified

Germany. The different historical experiences of the East and West, and the continuing political, economic and social differences between the two regions, has resulted in two very different electorates. There are perceptible and often large differences in their employment opportunities, housing quality, and other objective measures of their standard of living. But there are also, not surprisingly, important differences in their policy preferences and voting behavior.

In discussing the changes in the German electoral environment after reunification, I first discuss differences in the policy preferences of the eastern and western electorates. Two questions prepared for the 1994 German election survey were used to measure these differences. A broader range of issue questions would have provided superior measurement, but issue questions are not a standard component of German election surveys. An attempt was made to select issue questions relating to the broad themes of public debate and controversy that typically emerge during political campaigns in Germany and can be used to place voters in a two-dimensional issue space.<sup>6</sup> Respondents were presented with a policy question and two opposing views for addressing the issue and were asked to place themselves on a seven-point scale. A question concerning economic policy was designed to locate the voters on the economic dimension and one on environmental policy to locate the voters for each party on the social values dimension.<sup>7</sup> The mean values for the East and West German electorates on the two dimensions by party vote are shown in Figure 1. The results of this analysis indicate that the eastern voters for every political party are decidedly to the left economically and less socially progressive (at least on environmental issues) than their counterparts in the West. It is significant to note that the cross-electorate difference (that is, the difference between the eastern and western electorates of both the CDU/CSU and SPD) is considerably larger on the economic dimension than on the social values dimension.<sup>8</sup> Thus the internal split of the preferences of the supporters of each party is greater on the economic dimension.

However, the cross-party difference (that is, the difference between the supporters of the two broad-based parties within a single electorate) is much greater on the social values dimension. There is virtually no difference between CDU/CSU and SPD voters on the economic dimension in the West or East.<sup>9</sup> Thus, what mainly separates CDU/CSU from SPD voters within a given electorate are their different preferences on the social values dimension. This may result in the broad-based parties increasingly competing on the social values dimension in order to emphasize their differences from their main opponent and de-emphasizing the internal split of each party on the economic dimension.

The second change in the German electorate concerns differences in the pattern of cleavage voting in East and West. Cleavage voting has been a characteristic of the German electorate, allowing the political parties to build core constituencies on which they can depend for support. For the



**Figure 1.** Mean values on the economic and social values issue questions by party vote in the East and West

*Note:* The eastern supporters of every political party are to the left economically and less socially progressive than supporters in the West. Also note that whereas there are essentially no differences between the position of the supporters of the CDU/CSU and SPD within a single electorate on the economic dimension, there are considerable differences on the social values dimension.

*Source:* Analysis by the author from the 1994 German post-election study conducted by the Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin für Sozialforschung (WZB) and the Zentrum für Umfragen, Methoden und Analysen (ZUMA). Mean values on a seven-point scale for each question. See note 6 for question wording.

purposes of analyzing cleavage voting, the electorate has been divided into three main socio-economic classes: a working class, a new middle class and an old middle class.<sup>10</sup>

An analysis of the voting patterns of these classes indicates that the CDU/CSU has a solid hold on the old middle class in both the West and the East, winning 56 percent of such voters in the West and 44 percent in the East (see Table 1). The CDU/CSU is able to win almost as many votes among the new middle class as the SPD – 33 percent in both West and East.

However, a portion of the new-middle-class vote is being won by the environmental and activist party, Alliance '90/Greens, especially in the West, and a portion of this vote is being won in the East by the Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS), the successor party to the communists who governed the GDR. The CDU/CSU is able to win only half as many votes from the working class in the West (28 percent) as the SPD, but is surprisingly able to win a greater percentage of workers in the East than the SPD, winning 39 percent of such voters. The CDU's ability to win a sizable portion of the eastern working class is a major change from the traditional cleavage voting pattern which existed in the West before reunification.

The SPD, on the other hand, has been able to win a majority of the working class in the West (63 percent) but only 34 percent in the East. This eastern-working-class vote is not only being lost to the CDU/CSU, but also to the PDS. The PDS is able to win 18 percent of the eastern-working-class vote. The SPD is able to win a slightly larger share than the CDU of the new-middle-class vote in both West and East (37 percent). The fundamental change facing both the broad-based parties is thus the SPD's failure to replicate in the East its support among workers and to add this group to its core constituency.

**Table 1.** Voting in the 1994 Bundestag election by social class (%)

	CDU/CSU	SPD	FDP	Greens	PDS
West German electorate					
Working class (45.3%) <i>n</i> = 153	28	63	2	8	0
New middle class (44.1%) <i>n</i> = 149	33	37	5	23	3
Old middle class (10.7%) <i>n</i> = 36	56	17	14	11	3
East German electorate					
Working class (52.3%) <i>n</i> = 158	39	34	4	4	18
New middle class (37.1%) <i>n</i> = 112	33	37	1	6	23
Old middle class (10.6%) <i>n</i> = 32	44	19	16	3	19

*Note:* Percentages significant at the .05 level (Pearson's chi-squared test)

*Observation:* The SPD has failed to add the East German working class to its core working class constituency in the West.

*Source:* Analysis by the author from the 1994 German post-election study conducted by the Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin für Sozialforschung (WZB) and the Zentrum für Umfragen, Methoden und Analysen (ZUMA).

The final difference between the eastern and western electorates which is critical to the campaign strategies of the parties is the proportion of late-deciders in the electorate. In the West, 83 percent of CDU/CSU voters and 74 percent of SPD voters had decided 'for a long time' before the 1994 election which party they would support (see Table 2). In the East, the percentage of such voters was considerably lower, 76 percent for the CDU and 63 percent for the SPD. For these voters the campaign probably only plays a role in activating their prior attitudes – particularly their long-held allegiance to a political party – and mobilizing them to vote.

On the other hand, 17 percent of CDU/CSU voters in the West and 24 percent in the East decided during the campaign itself, having reached their decision 'for a few months' or 'in the last weeks' or 'the last days' before the election. Such voters accounted for an even greater percentage of SPD voters – 26 percent in the West and 38 percent in the East. It is these voters whom the parties must reach and influence during the election campaign. It is here that the parties have the most to gain by a strategy of priming during the election campaign because the information and images received in the time shortly before the vote decision is made may influence these undecided voters. The large number of late-deciders in the eastern electorate means that the election campaign has become a more important determinant of the success of the German parties than before reunification. This makes the strategic responses of both parties to reunification important to the parties' future electoral success (especially for the SPD with its larger number of late-deciders).

The addition of the eastern electorate at reunification was only one of the changes in the electoral environment which had an impact on the strategic

**Table 2.** Time-of-vote decision by party and electorate: 1994 Bundestag election (%)

	CDU/CSU*		SPD*	
	West (n = 265)	East (n = 295)	West (n = 318)	East (n = 235)
For a long time	83	76	74	63
During 'hot phase' of campaign <sup>a</sup>	17	24	26	38

\*Significant at the .05 level (Pearson's chi-squared test).

<sup>a</sup>Combined responses from the time-of-vote-decision question: 'for a few months', 'in the last weeks' and 'in the last days'.

*Observation:* Whereas a large percentage of voters have made up their mind which party to support even before the campaign has begun, a significant percentage decide during the campaign itself. It is these voters that the parties hope to appeal to during the campaign. The eastern electorate, especially eventual SPD voters, are more prone to making up their minds during the election campaign itself.

*Source:* See Table 1.

decisions of the CDU and the SPD. The second component is the strategies of competing parties. Reunification ushered in a period of uncertainty for the parties concerning the behavior of their competitors. The German parties knew that the strategies of competing parties would probably change in response to an event like reunification, but they did not know *how* they would change. Under normal circumstances, the changes in the strategies of competing parties can be expected to develop slowly – perhaps even to evolve in predictable ways – allowing a party to adjust its own strategies in response. The level of predictability in competitors' actions declines after a cataclysmic event like reunification. This is likely to mean that it will take two or three federal election campaigns after reunification to know the long-term, significant impacts which reunification is having on party competition in Germany. It may take parties that long to both fully recognize the changes that have occurred in the electoral environment since reunification and to experiment with various strategic responses to this change.

It is also the case that the broad-based parties face different competitors in the East and West which could influence their strategic decisions. In the West, the CDU and SPD essentially compete for votes with the FDP and the Alliance '90/Greens. In the East, however, the FDP and the Alliance '90/Greens are relatively weak but the PDS is strong. These differences in the party system configurations must be taken into account in campaigns for *Land* elections and in efforts to build a party organization in the East. However, the national character of the campaigns for the Bundestag makes it difficult for the parties to take these differences in the strength of the small parties in the East and West into account in their nationwide media campaigns.

The third component of the electoral environment having an impact on party strategies is the likelihood of new parties emerging. Reunification increased the likelihood that new parties would enter the party system and compete for voter support with the traditional West German broad-based parties because of the addition of new voters from the East with no prior attachments to the western parties. In fact, the PDS successfully entered the system during the first Bundestag election after reunification and has been able to increase its support since then. This has provided a competitor to the left of the SPD and one able to win at least some of its support among workers in the East. The existence of the PDS has also given campaign fodder to the CDU which can be used effectively against the SPD. In 1994 the CDU warned voters of the possibility that the PDS would either enter government as a coalition partner of the SPD or would have influence in an SPD-led government by tolerating an SPD and Alliance '90/Green minority government.

The other new party which entered into competition with the western parties after reunification was the Alliance '90, which had formed previously from a consolidation of citizen protest groups of the GDR. The present Alliance '90/Greens party was created by a merger first between the western

and eastern Green parties after the 1990 election, and then with the Alliance '90 in 1993. The combined party has proven to be a potent competitor for the broad-based parties on the progressive pole of the social values dimension. The presence of these competitors in the German party system after reunification impacts on the strategies of the broad-based parties.

The final change in the electoral environment at reunification concerns the state of the real world – the domestic and foreign policy problems facing the country, to which the parties must respond. In terms of domestic policy, the German government since reunification has faced the enormous task of integrating the East into the West's political and economic structures. The 1990 election campaign was fought during a period of prolonged European recession which affected Germany especially severely, and the 1994 campaign was fought under economic difficulties related to the restructuring of the economy in the East. In terms of foreign policy, reunification and the end of the cold war have resulted in Germany regaining its full sovereignty. It no longer confronts the Warsaw Pact in the East and instead faces the task of defining its new role within Europe and the wider world, particularly within such institutions as the European Union, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and the United Nations. These changes in the real problems facing a country will influence the mix of issue appeals and the priming form used by the parties to communicate with the electorate.

The final factor affecting the campaign strategies of parties is a party's status as incumbent or challenger. The CDU/CSU, in coalition with the FDP, voted Helmut Kohl into the chancellorship in October 1982 in a constructive vote of no-confidence against Helmut Schmidt of the SPD. The CDU, as the dominant partner in the coalition, has remained the incumbent, governing party since that time, with the SPD as the main opposition party. The SPD has not been able to achieve its electoral objectives and must adapt to win supporters from the CDU, the Alliance '90/Greens and the PDS.

To summarize the changes in the electoral environment of the CDU and SPD after reunification, the parties were confronted by an eastern electorate which:

- 1 is further to the left economically and less socially progressive than the western electorate;
- 2 contains a working class which tends to support the CDU, not the traditional party of the working class in the West, the SPD;
- 3 has an electorate which is deciding which party to support considerably later than in the West, with voters often arriving at their decision during the election campaign itself.

After reunification the parties also entered into a period of uncertainty regarding the strategies of competing parties, faced new competitors from the East (the PDS, the eastern Greens and the Alliance '90), and were forced to confront new issues due to the changing domestic and international problems facing the country.

## General Hypotheses from the Priming Model and Specific Predictions for the German Case

A set of general hypotheses regarding the responses of broad-based parties to changes in their electoral development will now be proposed, along with a set of specific predictions for the German case. In other words, what would be considered strategic responses by the CDU and the SPD to the changes in the German electoral environment after reunification? The hypotheses are as follows.

- 1 Parties will respond to changes in the preferences of the electorate by changing the issue emphasis of their campaign communication in the direction of potential new supporters. This is called the issue-emphasis hypothesis. Because voters in the eastern electorate of both the CDU and SPD are to the left economically and less socially progressive than voters in the western electorate, both parties will change the mix of issue appeals in their campaign communication to better appeal to their new supporters by moving left economically and down on the social values dimension, away from the progressive pole toward the conservative social values pole.
- 2 Parties will respond to a failure to maintain their success with a core constituency by emphasizing issue appeals directed at the core constituency. This is termed the core-constituency hypothesis. Because the SPD has failed to replicate its success with the working class in the East, it will change its mix of issue appeals to emphasize left economic issues in order to appeal to them.
- 3 Parties will respond to an increase in late-deciders in the electorate by making appeals more likely to influence such voters. Because it is easier to increase favorable feelings for a candidate than it is to persuade on issues during the short period of a campaign, parties will increase the candidate-orientated appeals in their campaign communication. This is termed the late-deciders hypothesis. Because of a moderate increase in late-deciding voters for the CDU and an even larger increase of such voters for the SPD, the parties will change the content of their communication to make appeals more likely to appeal to such voters. As it is easier to increase favorable feelings toward a candidate than it is to persuade on issues during the short period of a campaign, the parties will increase the amount of candidate-orientated appeals in their campaign communication.
- 4 Parties that have failed to meet their electoral objectives and remain in opposition will exhibit a greater tendency than governing parties to adjust the content and form of their campaign communication in an attempt to find a winning strategy. This is termed the adaptation hypothesis. Because the SPD has failed to meet its electoral objectives and remains in opposition, the party will exhibit a high degree of adaptation in its campaign communication.

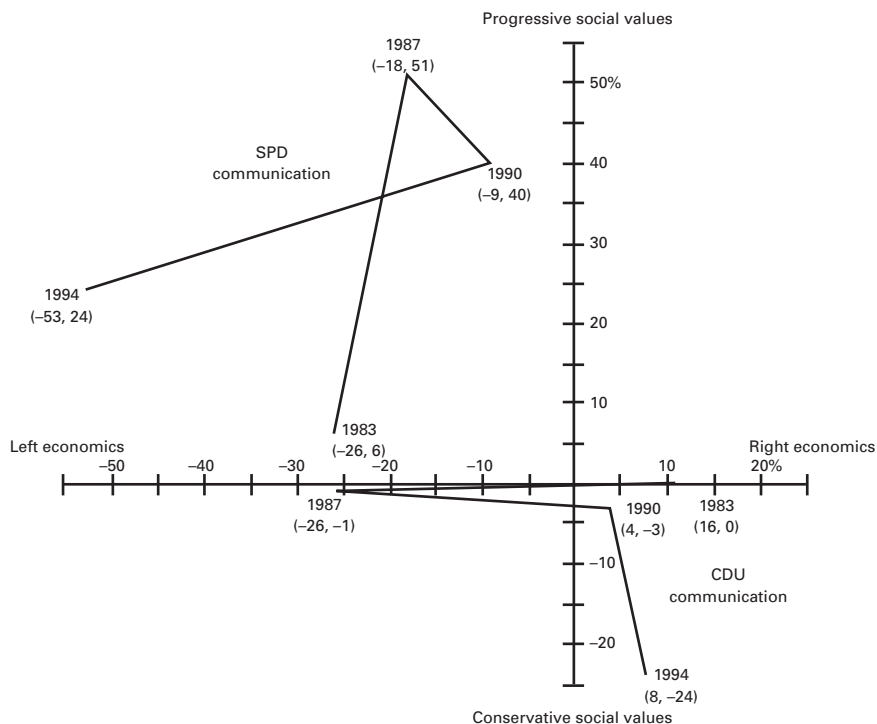
## The Campaign Communication of the Broad-based German Parties

The dilemma facing the broad-based German parties after reunification was that they needed to appeal to the very different electorates in the East and West but had to nonetheless run a unified national election campaign. The media in Germany, especially television but also news magazines and the regionally based quality newspapers, are national in scope. The national character of the media makes it extremely difficult for parties to differentiate the messages and appeals sent to voters in the East and West to any considerable degree. One of the CDU's campaign strategists explained the difficulties involved: 'A modern state reaches its citizens through the mass media, and normally a state is more homogeneous than is now the case in Germany. We now have a situation in which the electorate is relatively heterogeneous and a mass media that is heard the same overall.'<sup>11</sup> This is true not only because of the national scope of television news and newspaper coverage of campaigns, but also because it is not possible for the German parties to buy time for their television commercials to be aired regionally, only nationally.

### *The Priming Content of Campaign Communication*

An analysis of the content and form of these nationally broadcast television campaign commercials produced by the broad-based parties in Germany was performed to determine whether the parties have made strategic responses in their campaign communication to the change in their electoral environment after reunification. To trace the change in the communication of the parties in a two-dimensional issue space, the issue appeals of the parties were categorized into left and right economic appeals and progressive and conservative social value appeals. Appeals placed on the economic dimension were stances on issues regarding the state's proper role in the economy, particularly goals for managing the economy and issues regarding the welfare state.<sup>12</sup> The appeals to place the parties on the social values dimension were selected from three themes: governmental priorities, civil and human rights, and morality and culture.<sup>13</sup> To place the parties on the economic dimension, the percentage of the right economic appeals communicated by a party is subtracted from its percentage of left economic appeals. To place a party on the social values dimension, the percentage of the progressive social value appeals is subtracted from its percentage of the conservative social value appeals. The resulting point may be considered the preferred perceived location of a party based on their mix of issue appeals communicated to the electorate during a given election campaign. The result of this procedure is shown in Figure 2.

From this diagram, the broad shift in the SPD toward an emphasis on progressive social value issues in 1987 and 1990 is visible. This was most



**Figure 2.** Communicated issue emphasis of the German political parties based on an analysis of the television campaign commercials 1983–94

*Note:* The SPD changed its issue emphasis from left economics toward the progressive social values dimension in 1987 and 1990 as a result of a growth in postmaterialist values in society and the presence of the Greens competing for voters in this portion of the issue space. After the impact of reunification became clear, the SPD returned to an emphasis on left economic appeals in an attempt to add the working class in the East to its core constituency. The CDU generally presents a mix of right economic and conservative social value appeals in its campaign communication, except in 1987 when its many appeals on preserving the welfare state pushed the party to the left economically. After the impact of reunification, the party in 1994 began to emphasize conservative social value appeals to downplay the economic difficulties of reunification and to appeal to voters with various preferences on the economic dimension.

*Source:* The campaign communication placement of the parties for each election is based on the net percentage of the positive issue appeals on each dimension. See notes 12 and 13 for the issue categories used to place the parties in the two-dimensional issue space.

likely done to appeal to the growing number of postmaterialists in the advanced industrial electorate and to avoid a loss of support to the Greens, who entered the party system in the early 1980s with a strong emphasis on progressive social value issues like the environment. However, after the impact of the change in the electoral environment at reunification became apparent to the SPD, in 1994 it returned somewhat to its more traditional mix of left economic and progressive social value appeals.

The content analysis of the SPD campaign commercials before and after reunification supports the issue-emphasis hypothesis for the case of the SPD. The SPD changed its campaign communication in the 1994 campaign and responded to potential new supporters in the East by emphasizing left economic appeals and placing less emphasis on progressive social value appeals. The content analysis of the SPD campaign commercials also supports the core-constituency hypothesis – the SPD's failure to replicate its success in the East with its working-class core constituency led the party to change its mix of appeals to better appeal to such voters by emphasizing left economic appeals.

The movement of the CDU through the issue space is more sporadic. The CDU has (in three of the four elections) presented a mix of right economic and conservative social value appeals in its communication. The exception to the CDU's standard mix of messages occurred in 1987, when the party's many messages concerning the welfare state pushed it to the left on the economic dimension. These messages argued that the welfare state is best preserved and sustainable under a CDU government. In 1994, the CDU greatly increased its emphasis on conservative social value appeals.

The content analysis of the CDU campaign commercials thus indicates that the issue-emphasis hypothesis is only partly supported for the case of the CDU. The hypothesis predicted that the CDU would seek to appeal to its new supporters in the East by emphasizing left economic appeals and conservative social value appeals. While the party did move toward an emphasis on conservative social values, it moved slightly to the right on the economic dimension, not left as expected. This was most likely done to downplay differences on the economic dimension among its supporters and to highlight differences with the SPD.

It is clear from this analysis that the broad-based parties in Germany continue to compete on the principal historic dimension of conflict in the party system – a left–right economic dimension – but are also communicating on the newer progressive–conservative social values dimension. However, these parties not only present their issue emphasis to voters during election campaigns, they also communicate a great deal of information about their chancellor candidates. I have categorized these appeals into three categories:

- 1 leadership messages, presenting a strong image of a person who will lead the country and inviting an evaluation of the candidate on the basis of his ability to lead the country;
- 2 competence messages that invite a meritocratic evaluation of the candidate based on qualifications, past accomplishments and ability to accomplish objectives;
- 3 personal-quality messages that stress the candidate's integrity, care and compassion, ordinariness ('he's one of us'), or connectedness to the common person ('he is on our side') that invite an evaluation of the candidate based on characteristics that one might use to judge any individual.

**Table 3.** Candidate-orientated appeals in television campaign commercials (%)

<i>Party</i>	1983	1987	1990	1994
CDU				
Leadership	33	— <sup>a</sup>	75	31
Competence	33	— <sup>a</sup>	8	53
Personal qualities	33	— <sup>a</sup>	17	16
Number of appeals	9	2	12	33
SPD				
Leadership	70	0	19	41
Competence	10	0	32	6
Personal qualities	20	100	49	53
Number of appeals	10	11	59	17

<sup>a</sup>The CDU made very few appeals concerning their chancellor candidate in 1987. No meaningful conclusions can be drawn from an  $n = 2$ .

*Observation:* The CDU since reunification in 1990 has stressed the leadership qualities of its candidate, Chancellor Helmut Kohl, in leading reunification and in 1994 his competence and leadership in handling the difficulties emerging from reunification. The SPD since reunification has especially emphasized the personal qualities of its chancellor candidates, but also their leadership and competence.

CDU commercials have generally stressed the competence and leadership traits of their chancellor candidates and have only moderately emphasized personal quality traits (see Table 3). In 1990, the CDU placed more emphasis on the leadership ability of the chancellor (75 percent of candidate-orientated appeals), stressing his role in leading the nation to reunification. In 1994, the CDU stressed Chancellor Kohl's competence in rebuilding and integrating the East into West Germany (53 percent of candidate-orientated appeals). Thus the CDU after reunification attempted to prime voters to consider the leadership qualities and competence of the chancellor candidates of the parties.

Candidate-orientated appeals are especially important to the SPD because in each of the election campaigns analyzed here the party had a new chancellor candidate to introduce to voters. Nevertheless, chancellor candidate-orientated appeals accounted for only a small percentage of the appeals of the SPD before reunification. Thereafter, however, the SPD placed much more emphasis on its chancellor candidate. After reunification, the party presented a mix of all three types of candidate-orientated appeals but emphasized personal-quality appeals (about half of the positive chancellor-orientated appeals in 1990 and 1994). Thus the SPD after reunification has attempted to prime voters to consider the personal qualities of the chancellor candidates and to cast their vote on this basis.

In comparing the changing mix of issue appeals and candidate-orientated appeals to determine the degree of personalization in the campaign

**Table 4.** Issue vs candidate-orientated appeals in television campaign commercials (%)

<i>Party</i>	1983	1987	1990	1994
CDU				
Issues	60	72	63	48
Chancellor candidate traits	13	2	14	19
Other <sup>a</sup>	27	24	21	34
Number of appeals	70	99	84	176
SPD				
Issues	69	62	49	43
Chancellor candidate traits	15	13	50	43
Other <sup>a</sup>	17	24	1	15
Number of appeals	67	82	119	40

<sup>a</sup>The 'other' category of appeals includes overt ideological appeals, general appeals presenting the party's conception of the past or future (e.g. the good times under the party's prior leadership or the good times to come if the party is elected) and direct appeals to vote for the party. *Observation:* The SPD since reunification has increased the percentage of its candidate-orientated appeals considerably. No systematic change is seen in the CDU.

communication, changes are also apparent after reunification. The CDU devoted about 15 percent of its total positive appeals to chancellor-orientated appeals (except in 1987 when there were almost no such appeals) over the four election periods, indicating no clear change in the emphasis on the chancellor before and after reunification (see Table 4). However, in terms of the SPD, there has been a large increase in the percentage of chancellor candidate-orientated appeals.

The focus on the SPD chancellor candidate changed dramatically from about 15 percent of positive appeals in the 1980s before reunification, to between 40–50 percent after reunification. This indicates a clear strategic change by the SPD to not only prime the electorate during election campaigns based on its particular mix of issues but also on the traits of their chancellor candidate. These results indicate that the late-deciders hypothesis – as the number of voters making their decision during the campaign increases, parties will increase their communication on candidate characteristics – is supported by the content analysis for the case of the SPD, but not for the CDU. It is likely that because the SPD has a larger percentage who decide to vote for the party during the election campaign that it had much more reason to increase its emphasis on its chancellor candidate.

### *The Priming Form of Campaign Communication*

The German parties have not only changed their priming content after reunification but also in some cases have adjusted their priming form. Here

I discuss the degree of attack, issue differentiation technique and temporal reference in the communication of the parties before and after reunification.

*Attack.* The CDU and SPD presented a mix of positive and negative appeals in their television commercials during the 1980s, with the SPD focusing more heavily on negative appeals than the CDU (see Table 5). Whereas negative appeals accounted for 25 percent of total CDU appeals in 1983 and 17 percent in 1987, negative appeals accounted for more of the SPD appeals – 30 percent in 1983 and 45 percent in 1987. At reunification, the CDU focused on the need for national unity and avoided negative appeals. The SPD reduced its degree of attack to 15 percent of total appeals in 1990. In 1994, the CDU returned to its traditional mix of positive and negative appeals, with negative appeals accounting for 15 percent of all appeals. The SPD, on the other hand, has abandoned its prior strategy of a high level of negative appeals, making virtually none in 1994. Thus the SPD, which previously highlighted its role as an opposition party, now makes positive appeals to the electorate to present itself as a realistic governing party. This supports the adaptation hypothesis – parties that have failed to meet their electoral objectives and remain in opposition will be more likely to adjust their campaign strategies.

*Issue differentiation.* Parties not only communicate a set of issue positions to voters during election campaigns but also attempt to communicate how their own positions should be viewed by voters in relation to the positions of their competitors. Parties may use various issue differentiation techniques to communicate these comparisons to the electorate. The analysis of the campaign television commercials of the CDU does not indicate a change in its issue differentiation technique before and after reunification.

Table 5. Degree of attack: positive vs negative appeals in television campaign commercials (%)

Party	1983	1987	1990	1994
CDU				
Positive	75	83	99	85
Negative	25	17	1	15
Number of appeals	93	119	85	207
SPD				
Positive	70	55	84	100
Negative	30	45	15	0
Number of appeals	96	149	143	40

*Observation:* The SPD decreased its negative campaigning considerably after reunification. No systematic change is apparent in the CDU's communication.

It has maintained an emphasis on diffuse-directional positioning, indicating broadly the direction it would like to move public policy. In 1983 and 1987 there was only one example in each campaign when the CDU contrasted a position with the SPD; both concerned ability to manage the economy. Additionally, in 1994 the CDU asserted that the policies of the SPD and the Alliance '90/Greens toward drugs minimized their dangers and advocated instead harder laws to fight criminality. But in all three of these examples where the CDU contrasted its policies with those of the opposition, it does not appear to be an attempt to make a single issue the basis for voter choice in the election.

The SPD, on the other hand, during the election campaigns before reunification engaged in high-contrast rhetoric which attempted to turn the elections into referendums on a very limited number of issues. The party has moved from this confrontational style in the 1980s, when their differences with the CDU were highlighted, to a much more subtle approach since reunification. In 1983 the SPD offered two high-contrast issues for voters' consideration: the stationing of new intermediate-range rockets in Germany (which the SPD did not favor and the CDU did) and the way unemployment should be reduced in the country (the SPD favored state intervention and the CDU market-orientated solutions). In 1987 the SPD presented four high-contrast comparisons for voters' consideration. Two were related foreign policy issues: the importance of continued détente with the Soviet Union to assure peace in Europe and the importance of beginning disarmament in Europe. The other two high-contrast comparisons were progressive social value issues: the right to participate in demonstrations and the importance of seeking environmental solutions to the country's problems.

After reunification, in 1990 and 1994, the SPD did not engage in any high-contrast rhetoric. In 1994 the SPD offered the '*Kanzlerwechsel*', a change in chancellors, and it broadly indicated the direction and emphasis it would give to the important issues facing the country. The priming form utilized by the SPD had thus become diffuse-directional instead of sharp-positional. The SPD in 1994 was not offering specific contrasts to the main governing party, but a moderate platform around four themes: increased emphasis on fighting unemployment, maintenance of the welfare state, attention to the environment, and a general appeal to build a more 'just' society. These are all traditional SPD concerns to be sure, but they were now offered as a subtle shift in government emphasis, not as a fundamental alternative to the policies offered by the CDU government of late. This change by the SPD in issue differentiation technique from sharp-positional to diffuse-directional supports the adaptation hypothesis – parties that have failed to meet their electoral objectives will more likely change their strategy in an attempt to find a winning one.

*Temporal reference.* Finally, I turn to the temporal reference of the campaign communication. Due to its position as the party in government over

**Table 6.** Temporal reference: television campaign commercials (%)

<i>Party</i>	1983	1987	1990	1994
CDU				
Prospective appeals (future promises)	62	66	43	57
Retrospective appeals (past performance)	38	34	57	43
Number of appeals	70	99	84	176
SPD				
Prospective appeals	76	98	98	98
Retrospective appeals	24	2	2	0
Number of appeals	67	82	119	40

*Observation:* Incumbent parties may communicate a mix of prospective and retrospective appeals, making promises for the future and taking credit for past performance. Opposition parties are usually limited to making prospective appeals. The SPD only made retrospective appeals in 1983 when it had been in office up to a few months before the election. The CDU since reunification has increased its reliance on retrospective appeals, touting its success at reunifying the country.

the entire time period covered by this analysis, the CDU has been able to present a mix of prospective and retrospective appeals to the electorate, inviting voters to evaluate the performance of the party in office and its vision for the future (see Table 6). The CDU has increased its reliance on retrospective appeals since reunification, capitalizing on its role as the party which guided the reunification process. Its reliance on retrospective appeals changed from about a third of appeals (38 percent of issue appeals in 1983 and 34 percent in 1987) to around half (57 percent in 1990 and 43 percent in 1994) after reunification. The SPD only stressed its accomplishments in 1983 (about 24 percent of the positive issue appeals), when it had been in office up until a few months before the election. Since then it has overwhelmingly emphasized prospective appeals.

## Discussion

The broad-based German political parties have made strategic responses to the change in the electoral environment after reunification which have resulted in a change in the nature of party competition in the party system. Both parties continue to compete on the principal historic dimension of conflict in the party system – a left–right economic dimension – but they are increasingly also communicating on the progressive–conservative social values dimension. The CDU responded strategically in 1994 by altering the dimension of conflict apparent in the priming content of its campaign

communication, emphasizing conservative social value appeals and de-emphasizing economic appeals. In terms of the candidate-orientated appeals, the CDU has maintained a moderate emphasis on the traits of its chancellor candidate, stressing the leadership and competence of Chancellor Kohl.

The CDU has not made many changes in the priming form used to communicate with the electorate. In terms of the degree of attack, the CDU has continued after reunification with a moderate level of negative campaigning. It also continues with a diffuse-directional issue differentiation technique. The CDU presents its issue direction and emphasis to the voters, but does not normally take concrete policy positions which it contrasts with the SPD. In only one respect has the CDU modified its priming form, the temporal reference of its communication. The party has increased its reliance on retrospective appeals, capitalizing on its position as the party that led the process of reunification.

The SPD has made a much greater strategic response to the change in the electoral environment after reunification, altering its priming content considerably. It has changed its mix of issue appeals in its communication, emphasizing left economic issues and de-emphasizing progressive social value issues. It has also increased its candidate-orientated appeals, offering more candidate-orientated appeals which focus on the personal qualities of its chancellor candidate. In addition, the SPD has made changes in its priming form. These include a diminished degree of attack on the CDU and a change in its issue differentiation technique from sharp-positional to diffuse-directional. There has been no change in the temporal reference of the SPD communication, which remains overwhelmingly prospective. These changes in the priming content and form of the SPD after reunification support the adaptation hypothesis that parties which have failed to meet their electoral objectives will exhibit a greater tendency to adjust their campaign communication in an attempt to find a winning strategy.

Why should these be considered strategic responses by the parties to the change occurring in the electoral environment after reunification? The analysis has shown that the primary response of the CDU to reunification has been an increased emphasis on conservative social value issues. This may be considered a strategic response because it downplays the internal split of the party's supporters on the economic dimension, a split that has become accentuated with reunification. The success of the CDU in attracting eastern workers (likely to be a result in part of the efforts of Chancellor Kohl and the party to bring about reunification quickly) has widened the range of preferences on the economic dimension among CDU/CSU supporters. This was demonstrated in the analysis by comparing the mean position of eastern and western party supporters on the economic dimension. The CDU/CSU after reunification has strengthened its position as a party able to appeal across different social classes.

At the same time that an emphasis on conservative social value issues

minimizes the internal conflict of the party on the economic dimension, it serves to highlight the party's differences with the SPD. It has been noted that when considering only one of the electorates, either eastern or western, the supporters of the CDU/CSU and the SPD do not differ much on the economic dimension, but differ considerably on the social values dimension. This makes the response by the CDU/CSU of emphasizing this dimension a strategic one because it provides a way of emphasizing its differences from the SPD without emphasizing the internal split of the party. Differences remain between the CDU and the SPD on the economic dimension, but the CDU has diminished its use of these differences in its efforts to prime. The strategy to prime on the social values dimension, a cross-cutting dimension to the traditional economic cleavage dimension, has been a strategic response by the party likely to maintain or increase its share of the vote.

The response of the SPD to reunification consisted of both changes in priming content and the priming form of its communication. The increase in its candidate-orientated appeals may be seen as a strategic response to the large increase in the number of late-deciders in the electorate at reunification, a phenomenon especially acute for the SPD. The SPD emphasis on left economic appeals and de-emphasis on progressive social value issues in its campaign communication may be seen as a strategic response by the party to attempt to attract East German workers to the party and add them to its core constituency. Workers remain a very important part of the core constituency of the party in the West, and the failure to attract a majority of the eastern workers is a major challenge to the party. It is likely that these workers can be appealed to best by stressing the traditional left economic appeals of the SPD, such as increased government efforts to fight unemployment and maintenance of the protection afforded citizens by the welfare state. Too much emphasis on progressive social value issues may distract and alienate these voters who are more concerned with materialist issues than postmaterialist ones.

The change in emphasis by the SPD may also be seen as a strategic response to other types of change in the electoral environment, specifically the strategies of competing parties and the entry of new parties into the party system. It is now apparent that the forces that became the Alliance '90/Greens have survived the reunification process after a shaky start due to organizational difficulties at uniting the western Greens, eastern Greens and the Alliance '90 and the temporary overshadowing of their issues during the process of reunification. The merged Alliance '90/Greens have become a potent force, able to win a sizable portion of voters who are intensely interested in progressive social value issues. That means there is diminishing marginal utility for the SPD in moving in the progressive social value direction to appeal to postmaterialist voters. In addition, as the expected coalition partner of the SPD, the ability of the Alliance '90/Greens to win some of its support from potential CDU/CSU voters strengthens the combined SPD and Alliance '90/Green vote. Thus the existence of this party in the competitive

space is probably beneficial to the SPD's chances of forming a government and implementing its policies.

The SPD emphasis on left economic appeals can also be traced at least partially to the appearance of a competitor on its economic left in the issue space. The PDS has been surprisingly successful in at least temporarily entering the party system and is able to win votes that might otherwise be cast for the SPD. A move to win votes from this party may successfully eliminate this competitor in the issue space. The PDS is in a rather precarious position because it is unable to win the 5 percent of the votes necessary to enter the Bundestag under German electoral law (section 6.4 of the *Bundeswahlgesetz*), but is able to enter under another provision which allows a party that is able to win at least three direct mandate seats based on the first ballot to enter parliament.

The continued existence of the PDS creates other problems for the SPD, likely to be even more important than the relatively small number of votes it takes away from the party. The existence of the PDS makes a coalition of left economic and progressive social value parties harder to build because the PDS is an unacceptable coalition partner for the SPD. Additionally, even the suggestion that the PDS would tolerate an SPD and Alliance '90/Greens minority government hurts the SPD, creating powerful material for the CDU's negative campaign appeals.

The SPD, unlike the CDU, has also made a large change in priming form during these election campaigns. This change may also be considered a strategic response to the change in its electoral environment after reunification. The decrease in the use of negative appeals to attack the CDU is a notable change in strategy for the SPD. This is likely to be a result of the change in the real-world problems facing Germany after reunification. The foreign policy issues which the SPD and CDU raised during the election campaigns of the cold war period are no longer relevant. The SPD is also no longer proposing economic policies that differ greatly from those of the CDU. The debate is more now one of emphasis, for example between the sometimes competing demands of preventing unemployment and the need for a competitive economy which is growing. Finally, the change in issue differentiation technique from sharp-positional to diffuse-directional may be seen as a strategic response by the SPD designed to win the party votes. The SPD's former reliance on sharp-positional issue differentiation is a high-risk strategy not well geared to the undecided voter with no clear policy preferences. Presenting a general direction that the party desires to move policy may be a message more acceptable to less partisan late-deciding voters.

## Conclusion

This article has presented a theory and method for analyzing the electoral environment and the strategic choices faced by parties in their efforts to

prime voters during election campaigns. The priming model of party competition views campaigns as the struggle to prime the electorate – to set the electorate’s agenda and the criteria for which the parties will be evaluated by the electorate. The model asserts that broad-based parties will make strategic responses to changes in their electoral environment by adjusting two properties of their campaign communication – the priming content and priming form. The priming content concerns the issue emphasis and candidate-orientated appeals in the campaign communication of the parties. This informs us as to the main dimensions of conflict in the party system which are being contested by the political parties. It also indicates to what extent the traits of a party’s principal candidate are presented as the basis of choice to the electorate. The priming form gives us information on other aspects of party campaign communication and their strategies vis-a-vis other parties in the system, including the degree of attack, issue differentiation technique, and the temporal reference of the communication.

The empirical research demonstrates that the broad-based parties in Germany made a considerable change in the issue emphasis of their campaign communication after reunification. The SPD moved away from emphasizing progressive social value issues to a renewed emphasis on left economic appeals, most likely in an attempt to add the East German working class to its core constituency. The CDU after reunification is increasingly attempting to appeal to diverse social classes on the economic dimension of conflict in the party system, so it has increased its emphasis on conservative social value appeals. Additionally, after reunification, both parties, but especially the SPD, have increased their reliance on presenting favorable traits of their chancellor candidates to the electorate during election campaigns. This is likely to be a typical response of parties faced with many late-deciding voters in the electorate.

The analysis of the campaign communication of the broad-based parties in Germany indicates that the nature of party competition in a given party system is not fixed and static but dynamic, changing as broad-based parties make strategic responses to change in their electoral environment. Whether parties compete in the positional way envisioned by the spatial model developed by Downs (1957) or the directional model envisioned by Rabinowitz and MacDonald (1989) depends on the strategic actions of parties themselves as they respond to their electoral environment. In the analysis of the German case, we have seen that prior to reunification the SPD competed in the sharp-positional way envisioned by Downs, taking very specific stances on key issues and contrasting its positions with those of the governing CDU. Since reunification, the party has shifted its strategy and uses a diffuse-directional method to prime the electorate. This is likely to be a typical response of a party wishing to be viewed by the electorate as a moderate alternative to a long-time governing party, instead of a party offering a fundamental change to the country.

This research suggests that the discipline’s static models, which attempt

to fix the nature of party competition, should yield to dynamic models which acknowledge that the strategic responses of parties to change in their electoral environment alters the nature of party competition in a party system. A dynamic model of party competition which requires one to analyze the electoral environment and the strategic adaptation of parties assists in the understanding of election campaigns as a key mass–elite linkage institution in modern democracies.

## Notes

I wish to thank Professors Max Kaase and Hans-Dieter Klingemann for the invitation to conduct this study as a Visiting Scholar at the Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin für Sozialforschung, funded by the German Academic Exchange Service.

- 1 The CDU does not technically compete for votes in Bavaria, where the CDU sister party, the Christian Social Union (CSU) competes. Each party produces its own television campaign commercials; only the CDU commercials, which are broadcast nationwide, were analyzed.
- 2 The analysis was carried out by the author using data from the survey conducted by the Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin für Sozialforschung (WZB) and the Zentrum Für Umfragen, Methoden und Analysen (ZUMA).
- 3 As a measure of coding reliability, a sample of 20% of the transcribed commercials were randomly selected for re-coding by a second coder: 77% of the appeals contained in the commercials were coded the same and 23% differently. In an analysis of those coded differently, over half were coded in the same broad issue category (left or right economics, progressive or conservative social values) or as a candidate-orientated appeal, but differed in the exact issue or candidate appeal category.
- 4 See note 2.
- 5 An appeal typically consisted of a sentence or two making a single argument, but in some cases consisted of a sentence fragment or single word. The total of 55 commercials (all of the commercials broadcast by the two parties during the four Bundestag campaigns) yielded 932 appeals which were coded by the author using a detailed coding scheme. Coding items adapted from the Election Manifesto Project (see Budge et al., 1987).
- 6 The question to place respondents on the social values dimension asked (translated from the German): ‘And now to several themes which are currently being publicly discussed and on which there are different opinions. Beginning with the issue of nuclear energy. To this question there are opposing opinions held by the public. What is your opinion? The position 1 means further building of nuclear power. The position 7 means closing all nuclear power plants immediately. With the positions between you may place your opinion.’ Position 1 determines the conservative pole on the social values dimension, position 7 the progressive. The second question was used to place respondents on the economic dimension and asked: ‘There are different opinions as to how the economy can be made to grow again. What is your opinion of this issue? Please use the scale. Position 1: The state should encourage the economy to grow through investment programs,

- subsidies, and stronger political initiatives. Position 7: Only when the state remains out of the economy, can the economy recover.' Position 1 here determines the left pole on the economic dimension, position 7 the right pole.
- 7 Empirical research by other scholars has demonstrated that a new dimension of political cleavage has emerged in most West European countries. Knutsen (1989, 1995), following Inglehart, describes this as a materialist/postmaterialist values cleavage and demonstrates the importance of issues such as environmentalism and nuclear power to this new dimension. Thus, while a broader array of issue questions would be quite valuable in placing the voters of parties along the two-dimensional issue space, it is expected that the economic and nuclear power question are adequate for the purposes used here and the best available. A broader array of issue questions might reveal that the new dimension of conflict in East Germany, an area more influenced by socialism and much less impacted by advanced industrialism, is somewhat different from that in the West.
  - 8 The absolute difference in the mean of the CDU/CSU voters East and West on the economics dimension is 0.70, but only 0.44 on the social values dimension. For the SPD, the difference in the means is only 0.70 on the economic dimension but only 0.37 on the social values dimension. These mean value differences are significant at the .05 level (*t*-test).
  - 9 The absolute difference in the means of CDU/CSU and SPD voters on the economic dimension in both the West and East is only 0.07 (difference not statistically significant). This compares with a difference of 0.53 in the means of the western electorate on the social values dimension and 0.60 for the eastern electorate on this dimension (statistically significant at the .05 level).
  - 10 For purposes of analysis from the survey data, the working class includes all traditional workers plus their lowest-level supervisors (*angestellter Werkmeister*) and salaried employees with simple tasks (*angestellter mit einfacher Tätigkeit*) such as clerical workers. The new middle class consists of salaried employees with tasks above the simple level, academics, and civil servants (*Beamter*). The old middle class consists of professionals and the self-employed.
  - 11 Personal interview with a CDU campaign strategist conducted in November 1995. I was able to interview two or three top campaign strategists from both the CDU and SPD after the 1994 election campaign. In order to avoid specific attribution to individuals and preserve a degree of confidentiality for what may at times be sensitive information, I agreed that attribution from the interviews would only be made to the campaign leadership of a party as a whole.
  - 12 More specifically, appeals to economic growth, a high living standard, inflation, stability of the currency, the national debt and the social market economy (*soziale Marktwirtschaft*) were coded as right economic appeals. Appeals categorized as left economic appeals consisted of such economic appeals as fighting unemployment, building a more just society (*Gerechtigkeit*), calls for industrial codetermination, progressive forms of taxation, and rent control; as well as positive references to such welfare state issues as state pensions, health care, education, housing, supplements for raising children (*Kindergeld*), concern for the poor, and broad references of support for social security or the social welfare state (*Sozialstaat*).
  - 13 Appeals categorized as progressive social value issues consisted of the following appeals related to governmental priorities – environmental appeals, including restrictions on nuclear energy; the following appeals related to civil and human

rights – general appeals to civil rights, the right to protest, women’s rights, abortion rights, rights of the disabled, consumer rights, data privacy rights; and appeals related to morality and culture – liberalizing divorce laws, recognition of new ways of living, and the acceptance of foreigners in Germany. Appeals made by the parties which were categorized as conservative social value issues were the following appeals related to government priorities – order and security, fighting criminality, and providing for a strong defense; and the following appeals related to morality and culture – appeals to German national identity or patriotism, restrictions on immigration, and appeals to family values.

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