

Polarization and Consensus in West German Foreign Policy, 1949-1990

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Abstract

During its four-decade lifespan, West Germany endured fierce domestic dispute over its foreign and security policies. On at least three occasions, government decisions to make major changes in the direction of Bonn's external relations rocked the Republic's political landscape, triggering intense, ideologically-fueled, partisan conflict—confrontation at times further heightened by a powerful executive's dominant role in decisionmaking and the frustration of a largely impotent legislature. Yet, even in those turbulent phases, respect for democratic process was never in danger or even in question and the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) was generally able to balance robust debate over foreign policy with the need for consensus on substance and democratic process. While West Germany's special sensitivity to its external environment created an incentive for bipartisanship, features of its domestic political setting reinforced this centripetal tendency—and provided ways of forging compromise. Party politics drove domestic confrontation, but also helped to limit it: neither of the two major players could long afford to abandon the political center to its rival without risk of alienating swing voters and the FDP—a vital coalition ally—and, thus, without risk of permanent exile from political power. Moreover, despite the acrimony often generated by a strong chancellorial role in foreign policy, the FRG's institutional framework otherwise mitigated in favor of compromise: even with a Bundestag majority, no government could run roughshod over its opponents, given the risk of a backlash against it in the Bundesrat. On balance, centripetal forces in the formulation of Bonn's foreign policy overwhelmed the centrifugal tendencies that often sparked fierce, if brief, domestic confrontation.

In no other modern European state was the potential for polarizing domestic debate over foreign policy more serious than in postwar West Germany.

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From its birth, the Federal Republic was haunted by history—above all, by the collapse of its shaky democratic predecessor a generation earlier, by the catastrophic legacy of Adolf Hitler’s Nazi dictatorship, and by the results of its cataclysmic war for racial annihilation. Dealing with these shadows of the past would have been challenge enough for any fledgling republic, even in normal circumstances. But to make matters worse, Bonn’s newly-built democratic institutions lay hard against an international minefield: indeed, for much of its existence, the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) was a state on the edge—on the periphery of Europe’s democratic bloc, on a geopolitical fissure dividing Germany itself into two countries, even more figuratively—on the verge of potential nuclear war.

Not surprisingly, then, controversy over external relations boiled over on at least three occasions between 1949 and 1990. The first instance came early, in the 1950s, when Chancellor Konrad Adenauer’s government negotiated his new state’s entry into an evolving set of Western economic and security institutions. Two decades later, fierce turmoil erupted over his successor Willy Brandt’s effort at rapprochement with the Soviet bloc. And in the 1980s, disputes over planned deployment of NATO nuclear weapons rattled the body politic.

Yet, postwar West Germany not only withstood these strains—it flourished. Even in the Cold War itself, the FRG became a synonym for consensual democratic stability and constructive diplomacy. Germans could eventually even take pride in their country’s often boring normalcy. Indeed, after four decades, when circumstances ultimately allowed national reunification, the Federal Republic peacefully absorbed its neighbor, formerly Communist East Germany. And in many respects, the FRG eventually also became a model for other emerging post-Cold War states of Eastern Europe in their own transitions toward stable democracy.

Fully elucidating this apparent paradox of polarization and consensus requires (1) briefly chronicling West Germany’s evolution from 1949 to reunification four decades later, highlighting the major disputes over its foreign policy; (2) analyzing the international environment within which Bonn conducted its external relations; and, (3) scrutinizing the impact of domestic variables in the policymaking process. In this way, this essay will seek to identify the mix of centrifugal and centripetal forces that made some controversies so potentially divisive, and yet that ultimately shielded the democracy’s institutions from serious damage.

The Federal Republic’s Politics and Foreign Policy, 1949-1990

Without question, foreign policy was a high-stakes game for Bonn, more so than for perhaps even the Cold War superpowers themselves, certainly for any of their other allies and clients. The FRG’s fledgling democratic institutions were on the line, as was the prospect of ever ending or even coping with

Germany's national partition; and, of course, no country was more exposed to the risks of Cold War conflict, nuclear or conventional. With so much at issue, it is little surprise that domestic debate could be polarizing—and yet in some ways, the gravity of Bonn's interests also created a natural incentive to contain those internal differences.

For its first two decades, postwar West Germany's parliamentary democracy was governed by a coalition of Adenauer's center-right Christian Democratic Union/Christian Social Union (CDU/CSU), usually allied to its much smaller centrist Liberal Free Democratic Party (FDP) ally. In an ever more authoritative manner, the chancellor and his team put their stamp on the new republic. Its hallmark was increasing "prosperity for all," thanks mainly to so-called social market economics—capitalism cushioned by a welfare state. Adenauer also tied his state closely to the West. In the early 1950s, his FRG became a charter member of the European Coal and Steel Community, as well as the abortive European Defense Community—all forerunners to the European Economic Community. At the same time, so shortly after having been demilitarized by the occupiers, Bonn agreed to establish new armed forces, the Bundeswehr, and to join the NATO alliance in 1955. By the late 1950s, West Germany— heir to a dreaded empire—was firmly anchored within the emerging European Community (EC) and NATO, indeed, a linchpin of Western security as the base for allied armies and even American nuclear weapons.

All of this came amid bitter partisan debate. Adenauer couched his Westpolitik in terms of fierce anticommunism, and depicted it as a decision for democratic values.¹ His camp insisted that a united front against Moscow would also hasten the day when their nation's postwar division might be overcome, and territory lost to Poland and Russia beyond the new German Democratic Republic's (GDR's) Oder-Neisse border regained. Above all, they defended his policies as vital to fending off threats of Soviet bloc conquest or intimidation. But this drew bitter criticism from the opposition Social Democrats (SPD) and a broad pacifist movement. They blasted Adenauer's "new militaristic and nationalistic adventures," arguing that it would play into the hands of "reactionaries and anti-democratic forces."² Some equated the law establishing Bonn's Bundeswehr with the 1933 Enabling Act, a rubber stamp for Nazi rule. Even fiercer debate centered on the national issue. As one author observed, SPD foes warned that "any attempt to create a West German

¹ "The decision of the German political leaders in the western zone to accept the foundation of a state under the best conditions achievable at the time also simultaneously was objectively a decision to give political and legal freedom priority over national unity...." Richard Löwenthal, *Vom kalten Krieg zur Ostpolitik* (Stuttgart: Seewald, 1974), 5.

² Gordon D. Drummond, *The German Social Democrats in Opposition: The Case Against Rearmament* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1982), 21, 150-52, 213, 234, 280-282.

military force would deepen the division of Germany [and] Western integration represented a threat to the chances for reunification.” Social Democratic leader Kurt Schumacher all but accused Adenauer of treason, deriding him as “chancellor of the allies.”³ With Germany already host to occupation forces, critics also claimed it would now become a no-man’s-land in a future war. Adenauer’s policies on rearmament and nuclear weapons sparked mass street protests, with opponents calling it a “matter of life and death.”⁴ He fired back, decrying such protest against acts of parliament as an effort to undermine the constitution and revive the demagogic tactics that had so weakened Weimar democracy. His team also derided its foes for appeasing the Soviet bloc and endangering FRG security. In the end, Adenauer prevailed across the board, and in their 1959 Godesberg program, his SPD rivals conceded that Bonn’s Westpolitik could no longer be reversed and had to be accepted.

In the mid-1960s, prosperity—despite some apparent blips—continued apace. Bonn’s Western ties grew stronger, even if CDU/CSU leaders bickered over whether to lean more heavily on Washington or Paris. But their wariness of moves to ease tensions with the Soviet bloc increasingly isolated Bonn from its Western allies, while their stout anticommunism largely excluded dealing with the GDR. A short-lived Grand Coalition government of the CDU/CSU and SPD from 1966 to 1969 grappled with these issues, as well as with some domestic reforms. It also faced a challenge to the establishment in 1968 from radically leftist university students who claimed to spurn the FRG as nothing but a facade for corporate, militarist, American-dominated, even neofascist, elements.

The second great debate over postwar West German foreign policy began in 1969, when the SPD under Willy Brandt forged a new coalition with the now more progressively inclined FDP. His “social-liberal” government immediately launched a dramatic series of diplomatic initiatives designed to bring Bonn more in line with U.S.-led detente efforts, and, indeed, take them even further. In three years, Brandt’s team negotiated a *modus vivendi* with Moscow and Warsaw, tacitly accepting Europe’s Cold War boundaries—including those that codified the loss of German territory in Eastern Europe. At the same time, Bonn worked out a deal with East Berlin’s suspicious leadership, in effect, tacitly recognizing that communist state.

Brandt linked this Ostpolitik to his call for a new birth of democracy at home, implying that rapprochement with the East would undercut lingering forces of nationalism and militarism: nothing symbolized the new era more dramatically than his kneeling to victims of Nazis in Warsaw. Such an appeal had resonance with his younger, left-wing supporters who had been energized

³ Ibid., 283.

⁴ Ibid., 234.

by the 1968 student revolt. At the same time, his government depicted this policy as a new answer to the national question. It argued that, so long as their two states were integrated into hostile blocs and the GDR's population was cut off by a fortified border, Germans risked losing any sense of a common bond: if dealing with—even financially assisting—the communist regime helped persuade East Berlin to allow more human contact across that dividing line, it could help preserve the “substance” of the nation. Finally, Brandt's government also portrayed Ostpolitik as a means of easing tensions and facilitating arms reduction, even laying the foundation for “a new peace order” in Europe that might gradually render armed blocs meaningless.

In soft-pedaling Bonn's traditional anticommunism, its claim to represent all of prewar Germany, and above all its demand for full-scale reunification on Western terms, this new Ostpolitik triggered intense debate. The CDU/CSU, now in opposition for the first time, bitterly claimed that it would weaken Bonn's ties with the democracies of the West. They warned against “Finlandization,” and “opening the gates of the west to Bolshevism.”⁵ Some charged that this diplomacy was conducted by naive left-wing idealists, or even abetted by subversives sympathetic to communist hegemony.⁶ Above all, critics thundered that, by legitimizing the GDR dictatorship, Brandt's policy would make Germany's national partition more permanent. Spokesmen for those expelled from lands now to be recognized as Polish joined in castigating this “sellout.” Union conservatives also accused Brandt of appeasing Moscow, sowing doubts about Bonn's resolve among its Western partners and tempting the Kremlin to blackmail it into more concessions—all weakening an alliance vital to West German survival.irate CDU/CSU opponents maneuvered to bring down the SPD-FDP government in parliament, but failed. Worse, this hard-line course isolated them from most voters, and even from Bonn's allies, who embraced the new Ostpolitik. Soon, even its harshest Union foes declared their reluctant readiness to acquiesce with the phrase—*pacta sunt servanda* (pacts must be respected).

After the wave of euphoria over detente, Brandt began losing his grip on the fractious SPD, and its left-wing's call for bolder social reforms amid economic stagnation began to irk the more centrist FDP. A spy scandal triggered his resignation and replacement by Helmut Schmidt in 1974. Under this more pragmatic SPD chancellor, Bonn managed the crises of its first major postwar recession and cracked down hard on domestic terrorism in the mid-1970s. Especially as East-West detente cooled and GDR leaders began demanding a higher price for ever fewer concessions of their own, Schmidt also pursued a

⁵ Editorial in the CSU newspaper, *Bayernkurier*, February 15, 1972.

⁶ Clay Clemens, *Reluctant Realists: The CDU/CSU and West German Ostpolitik* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1989), 60.

more sober, hard-headed, businesslike Ostpolitik—based heavily on financial aid rather than on political inducements.

But the third major domestic debate over Bonn's foreign policy began on his watch, for Schmidt also helped launch a NATO plan aimed at pressing Moscow to abandon its expanding arsenal of intermediate-range nuclear missiles (INFs) targeted at Western Europe. This "two-track" plan called for deploying new American INFs, while simultaneously pursuing talks toward a superpower arms reduction accord that might preserve stable mutual deterrence at lower levels of weaponry. Resistance to any new missiles grew ever deeper, splitting his SPD, which in turn unnerved the Liberals. Differences also mounted over economic policy. Despite two election triumphs, Schmidt could not contain the government's fissures, and it fell in 1982.

Under Helmut Kohl, the CDU/CSU revived its old alliance with the FDP, and focused heavily on reviving the economy and Bonn's role within the European Community. Likewise, while pushing final efforts at an arms control solution, Kohl's government announced that it would honor Schmidt's pledge to deploy U.S. missiles. Kohl called this step vital to Western democratic solidarity, as well as to a credible NATO deterrent that could protect West Germany from possible attack or blackmail. But his government faced an ever larger peace movement, supported by a growing number of Social Democrats—now in opposition—and the new environmental-pacifist Green party. These critics condemned deployment as a militaristic scheme being rammed down an unwilling public's throat. Seizing upon threats from Moscow and East Berlin to "freeze" relations—in effect cutting cross-border contacts—INF opponents warned that Germans would also now be further separated by a "palisade of missiles." They echoed GDR talk of the mutual responsibility to ensure that "war never again starts from German soil"—an appeal that struck a "responsive chord" in public opinion.⁷ Above all, critics contended that deployment of new U.S. missiles would raise prospects of a superpower confrontation—even a nuclear war on German soil. Conservatives blasted some in the peace movement as "useful idiots" of communism.

Yet, the missiles were installed in late 1983 "with rather less public protest than had been predicted."⁸ Moreover, neither Kohl's vocal support for U.S. policy during the ensuing flare-up of superpower tensions, nor his insistence that Bonn would still pursue reunification, prevented his government from largely continuing its predecessor's businesslike Ostpolitik. Relying on offers of credit, it continued to negotiate practical arrangements with the GDR. After 1985, Kohl's FDP ally and foreign minister, Hans-Dietrich Genscher, moved the

⁷ Cited in William E. Paterson, "Foreign and Security Policy," in *Developments in West German Politics*, ed. Gordon Smith, William E. Paterson, and Peter Merkl (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1989), 196.

⁸ *Ibid.*

government to embrace initiatives toward another East-West detente launched by new Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev. One of the first would lead to a treaty removing both sides' INF arsenals altogether—a deal that deployment proponents and opponents, alike, could hail as proof that their insistence on arms and arms control, respectively, had ultimately paid off. Thus, as the 1980s ended, West Germany was economically reviving, once again at the heart of both the EC and NATO, and yet also an advocate of rapprochement with the Soviet bloc designed to ease the Cold War—or even end it.

Plainly, the high stakes of West German foreign policy fueled domestic debate over each major course change. And yet, even at the height of all three major debates, efforts were made to find common ground; moreover, where these failed, foes of government policy made their peace. One reason was that the same high stakes fueling debate also ultimately helped compel the major players to prevent differences over approach and priorities from spiraling out of control in ways that might have put those very interests at greater risk. After all, no side wanted to endanger Germany's first democracy. As Wolfram Hanrieder observed, "The history of the domestic political contest over Bonn's foreign policy is the history of a 'great compromise' between the Left and Right, which attests [among other things to the Germans'] adherence to democratic ground rules and constitutional principles, and to the remarkable stability of the Federal Republic's political order."⁹ Shared concern with national division also required ultimately finding common ground. In explaining why his SPD ultimately accepted Adenauer's Westpolitik, Herbert Wehner declared, "Divided Germany...cannot abide an incurable enmity of Christian Democrats and Social Democrats."¹⁰ While the national question polarized Bonn's leaders, it could thus also to some degree bring them together.¹¹ As one writer observed in 1989, "a broad consensus has thus been reached [and] differences have become more subtle, so that it is increasingly difficult to ascribe a single, fixed position on the management of intra-German affairs to any of the major parties [and] the great majority [prefer] the safe middle course."¹² Much the same could be said of West German security: even Union conservatives were careful never to push military measures to the point of serious escalation, while

⁹ Wolfram Hanrieder, *Germany, America and Europe: Forty Years of German Foreign Policy* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989), 333.

¹⁰ Cited in Timothy Garton Ash, *In Europe's Name: Germany and the Divided Continent* (New York: Random House, 1993), 32.

¹¹ Divided Berlin's plight also constituted an incentive for bipartisanship: both sides endorsed the city's legally tenuous ties to West Germany, which could be sustained only so long as the nation's division into two halves was not regarded as formally permanent, yet, they also agreed that this link could be protected only through an accord with the Soviet bloc. One reason the CDU/CSU did not move more forcefully against Brandt's treaties, for example, was fear that their failure could jeopardize the so-called Four Power accord on Berlin.

¹² James McAdams, "Inner-German Relations," in *Developments in West German Politics*, 240.

all but the most ardent pacifists in the SPD and the Greens acknowledged the need for some level of domestic consensus in a country facing a massively armed, hostile foe on its border.

And yet there were many more reasons why, in the long run, even the bitterest domestic debates over Bonn's foreign policy did not ultimately succeed in polarizing the Republic. Some of these factors lay in the Federal Republic's external environment, while others arose from within its body politic. Together, they generated an overwhelming centripetal force.

Context and Constraint: The External Environment of West German Foreign Policy

History and geostrategy framed a unique context within which the FRG conducted its foreign policy. Memories of the death and devastation wrought by Nazi Germany across Europe would not soon fade. Moreover, the FRG was a product of the Cold War, a confrontation that divided and imperiled the nation. As a result, Bonn necessarily faced unique external constraints upon its foreign policy. At times, these limitations could deepen and embitter domestic differences, but, generally, the contending parties and factions in Bonn accepted—indeed, even embraced—its limited latitude, a sensitivity that would spawn consensus on foreign policy.

International System

Postwar West Germany was a product of Cold War international politics. To say the least, Europe's postwar bloc system—its division into two military alliances based on distinct ideologies—severely constrained Bonn's latitude. That is not to say that domestic political actors always accepted those realities: in fact, much of the internal political conflict over foreign policy in the 1950s, the 1970s, and even the 1980s instead reflected—at least initially—a reluctance to acknowledge limits on West German room for maneuver. In resisting Adenauer's Westpolitik, for example, the SPD insisted on its own alternatives: full military disengagement and a collective security system in place of the two alliances, “conceptions that were hard to reconcile with the realities of Europe [and thus] did not find much resonance at home or abroad.”¹³ A decade later, it was the CDU/CSU that found itself clinging to policy prescriptions inconsistent with structural constraints upon FRG policy: by the 1970s, refusal to accept the reality of a Soviet zone and of the GDR's existence, along with a loud insistence upon national reunification, ran against the grain of efforts to ease tensions between both blocs.

¹³ Thomas Enders, *Franz Josef Strauss, Helmut Schmidt und die Doktrin der Abschreckung* (Koblenz: Bernard and Graefe, 1984), 26.

Yet, despite prolonged efforts to swim against international tides, first the SPD and later the CDU/CSU ultimately surrendered to them. Rather than cling to outdated alternatives, they accepted the logic of, respectively, integration into the Western alliance and then rapprochement with the Soviet bloc. SPD policy shifts in the late 1950s marked what one writer called “the conclusion of a learning process about the foreign policy conditions for the existence of the West German state.”¹⁴ While never admitting that they were wrong to have put reunification and disengagement ahead of rearmament and integration, they conceded that, by mid-decade, the superpowers would no longer even consider a negotiated resolution of the German question, preferring instead to preserve their blocs. Likewise, a decade later, despite initial irritation with being prodded by Germany’s major allies to embrace East-West detente, CDU/CSU leaders gradually came to accept that Bonn could not hold up this process by protesting that it would close off hopes of German unity.¹⁵ As Hanrieder observed:

This compromise [between Left and Right], slowly forged over the decades, was effectively imposed by the shifting political, military-strategic and economic realities of the European and global state system. The constraints of necessity always weighed heavily on all aspects of German diplomacy, especially in the formative years of the Federal Republic. They inevitably favored those contestants on the domestic political scene who were attuned to what was possible, and whose sense of priorities corresponded more closely to the opportunities and strictures of the international political environment than did that of their opponents. More than anything else, it was this force of circumstance that in the course of four decades narrowed the gap between the major contending forces over foreign policy in domestic German politics. It required both Left and Right to adjust their respective Western and Eastern policies to changing international circumstances, to move toward a political middle ground, and to legitimate the gradual convergence of their foreign policy programs.¹⁶

Ultimately, this same kind of adjustment to external constraints was made even by some of the most virulent foes of NATO and Bonn’s Western ties, those on the left who underwent their political baptism by fire during debate over INF deployment. As a new East-West detente in the Gorbachev era began to ease and ultimately erode Europe’s bloc division, elements of West Germany’s

¹⁴ Waldemar Besson, *Die Aussenpolitik der Bundesrepublik* (Munich: Siedler, 1970), 247.

¹⁵ Clemens, *Reluctant Realists*, 236-238.

¹⁶ Hanrieder, *Germany, America and Europe*, 333.

peace movement—most notably the Green party—began to grasp that Bonn’s Western ties restrained any temptation toward dangerous unilateralism. As one writer put it, they learned to “love NATO” (an affair that would only grow more passionate after national reunification). This adaptation to the realities of Bonn’s place in an evolving postwar, and now post-Cold War, European state system helped further broaden domestic consensus on foreign policy.¹⁷

Legal Limitations

Especially in its initial years, but even throughout the decades prior to reunification in 1990, West Germany was subject to unusual legal constraints. In 1945, the victorious powers had abolished the old Reich and each exerted full sovereign authority within its own zone of occupation. When the Western allies patched their three zones together to form the Federal Republic in 1949, that state was still legally provisional: it was subject to an occupation statute and the decisions of a High Commission. Consequently, even after 1949, Bonn’s Western patrons routinely involved themselves in its domestic affairs, banning extremist parties, dismantling key industrial plants, and so on. Bonn also did not formally conduct its own foreign or defense policies—or even have corresponding cabinet portfolios—for its first six years. Chafing at such intrusions and restrictions, Adenauer’s government worked to end the occupation statute and regain fuller sovereignty through his Westpolitik. But one price—a price he was ready to pay—was residual constraints on Bonn’s external latitude through certain treaty obligations. Thus, in 1955, West Germany did formally gain full sovereignty, yet subject to certain reservations: any final resolution of Germany’s territorial status—including a peace treaty or reunification—was open to Four Power veto (indeed, the so-called Allied Control Commission, including Soviet representatives, continued to meet even amid the Cold War). Berlin remained an anomaly within an anomaly, formally still-occupied territory and not part of either German state until 1949 (although the GDR openly flouted that restraint). Moreover, in 1955, the Federal Republic subordinated its military to the integrated command structure of NATO and unilaterally foreswore acquisition of weapons of mass destruction. It accepted certain additional limits as part of Status of Forces Agreements governing the basing of U.S. and other allied troops.

As a result of these purely legal limitations, Bonn’s foreign policy—and even its conduct of some domestic affairs, such as the use of emergency powers—would be subject to external constraint for four decades. Peter Katzenstein included these external binds in his explanation of what it was that made the Federal Republic a “semisovereign” state (even if that thesis mainly focuses on domestic institutional constraints), writing, “Semi-sovereignty is

¹⁷ Hans-Georg Betz, “Strange Love?: How the Greens Began to Love NATO,” *German Studies Review* 12, no. 3 (1989): 487-499.

an external condition of West German foreign policy.”¹⁸ Initially, the SPD attacked Adenauer for submitting Bonn to such limitations, at least those imposed by its allies. Yet, after the mid-1950s, the residual Four Power rights, along with the unique status of Berlin, actually exerted a centripetal effect on foreign policy debates. Even while vigorously debating Brandt’s Ostpolitik, for example, both sides carefully avoided taking stances that would call those prerogatives into question. Moreover, despite differing among themselves over how much “federal presence” should be permitted in West Berlin, both parties knew that—stranded deep within GDR territory—the divided city’s protection and its fate lay mainly in the hands of their allies.

Multilateralism

Facing the realities of the European state system and limits upon its sovereignty, political leaders in the Federal Republic became wedded to multilateralism. Especially against the backdrop of German history, acting unilaterally or even openly pursuing national interests, let alone through military power, became generally taboo. As one commentator put it, “The burden of the past rules out categorically and forever any idea of Germany going alone.”¹⁹ While most of its neighbors, of course, also joined multilateral institutions, Bonn went further, conflating its own interests with those of its partners.

At a certain point in each major postwar foreign policy debate, this imperative of multilateralism helped prod both sides toward compromise. SPD foes of Adenauer’s Westpolitik could not hold out for unilateral measures in pursuing reunification. A decade later, despite some annoyance with Bonn’s allies, the CDU/CSU recognized that it could not block Brandt’s Eastern treaties without risking serious friction with Washington, Paris, London, and other allies. Over time, conservatives realized that “adhering too fervently to hardline nationalistic positions...worried West German neighbors”; to placate the latter, they grew more vague on this topic.²⁰ And in the 1980s, foes of INF—while willing to defy U.S. policymakers—had more trouble when it came to their European neighbors. After years of upholding Franco-German cooperation within the EC, SPD leaders were stunned into silence when postwar France’s first socialist president, Francois Mitterrand, used a 1983 speech in the Bundestag to plead for missile deployment. Concern about being out of step with neighboring states ultimately softened their stance. Later, Green leaders also made their peace with NATO, if not the missiles themselves, largely in order to avoid being seen as indifferent to Bonn’s

¹⁸ Peter Katzenstein, *Policy and Politics in West Germany: The Growth of the Semisovereign State* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple, 1987), 9.

¹⁹ Adrian Zielcke, *German Tribune*, September 25, 1992.

²⁰ James McAdams, “Inner-German Relations,” in *Developments in West German Politics*, 240.

traditional multilateralism.²¹

In sum, as Simon Green and William Paterson note, “Neither West Germany’s historical legacy nor the Cold War environment in which it found itself favored a confrontational Westminster-style politics.”²² International structural limits on Bonn’s latitude, legal restraints on its sovereignty, and a growing reliance on multilateral institutions combined to exert a generally centripetal pressure on domestic political players throughout four decades.

Power and Politics: Domestic Variables in West German Foreign Policy

However vital the role played by external constraints, any inventory of centripetal and centrifugal forces in West German foreign policy would also have to include domestic factors that shaped key decisions. Such an assessment of internal variables would begin with the most intangible one, political culture, but focus most heavily on institutional and political structures.

Political Culture

Key orientations in West German political culture, on balance, generally mitigated in favor of consensus on foreign policy. One was the strong strain of antinationalism in the postwar Republic’s first decades, a reaction to zealous pre-1945 chauvinism. For much the four decades after 1949, “many wanted to forget about being German,” opting instead for a broader European identity, subsuming themselves in generic Western consumerism, or retreating into a private sphere of family and friends. Many expressed little pride in being German or happiness at seeing the FRG’s flag and hearing its anthem (though these attitudes would begin to partially dissipate by the 1980s).²³ One federal president famously waved aside the question of whether he loved his country, saying merely, “I love my wife.” As a result of this prevailing mindset, politicians and parties often avoided pitching their arguments in terms of national values or even national interests, reinforcing the tendency to rationalize goals in broader terms—a source of consensus. As Timothy Garton Ash noted, “Governments of centre-left and centre-right were at one...in proclaiming deep harmony, if not complete identity, between German and European interests”—and Europe was needed mainly in order “to save Germany from itself.”²⁴

Another cultural factor mitigating in favor of bipartisanship was a

²¹ Betz, “Strange Love,” 487-499.

²² Simon Green and William Paterson, “Introduction: Semisovereignty Challenged,” in *Governance in Contemporary Germany: The Semisovereign State Revisited*, ed. Simon Green and William E. Paterson (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 6.

²³ David Conradt, *The German Polity* (New York: Pearson-Longman, 2005), 81-82.

²⁴ Ash, *In Europe’s Name: Germany and the Divided Continent*, 19, 38-39.

broad discomfort with open political conflict. According to sociologist Ralf Dahrendorf, an inclination to see competition as dysfunctional had long roots in German history, and facilitated the authoritarianism of earlier regimes. Even in the early FRG, he contended, there was a broad preference for averting partisan strife and winner-take-all outcomes by working to eliminate sources of contention in advance, chiefly through compromise or technical solutions forged by neutral experts. Specifically, polls also indicated grave general mistrust of a single group or political party holding a monopoly on government policymaking, which in turn reflected and fed support for corporatist partnership and consensual “round-table” deliberations. As Dahrendorf wrote, “Still this authoritarian aversion to social conflict persists in the society’s institutions and in the minds of the population. In politics, many long for a ‘grand coalition’ that will put an end to party conflict.” While Germans did become more accepting of the utility of political competition over time, players seen as provoking conflict rather than consensus often still stood to lose.²⁵

Party System

Key features of the postwar West German party system served as a centrifugal force, reinforcing others that polarized debate over foreign policy. Yet, especially with the passage of time, a politics of centrality also asserted itself in the party system, fostering greater consensus.

Postwar West Germany’s first federal election produced a seemingly fragmented party system, with the two largest contenders—Adenauer’s CDU/CSU and its SPD rival—combined winning just over half the vote, and some ten smaller competitors gaining seats. But from that point on, there was rapid consolidation. A 5 percent minimum for Bundestag representation and temporary bans on some extremist organizations culled out smaller parties. Adenauer wooed and absorbed little center and right-wing allies into his CDU/CSU, in exchange for guaranteeing their leaders cabinet seats. The Social Democrats also grew at the expense of left-wing groups. As fringe competition disappeared, the Union and SPD grew into their roles of large, center-right and center-left “catch all” parties, with increasingly moderate—if still distinct—programs.

In many ways, the structure of this party system generally polarized debate over foreign policy. For one, both sides knew, as Hanrieder put it, that “Domestic politics were inextricably tied to foreign policy developments [and] the struggle over foreign policy was at the same time a struggle over the content and direction of domestic policy.”²⁶ In other words, given the high stakes involved, being seen to advocate or pursue a successful formula for the

²⁵ Ralf Dahrendorf, *Gesellschaft und Demokratie in Deutschland* (Munich: DTV, 1971), 461.

²⁶ Hanrieder, *Germany, America and Europe*, 332.

conduct of external relations was also the key to success at home. Vying for domestic political primacy thus gave each large party an incentive to stress, even overstate, its differences with the other, and to portray its rival as beyond the mainstream. Adenauer explicitly aimed to foster bipolarity, with a dominant center-right party facing off against a left-wing rival. Consequently, despite the political culture's preference for consensus and the voting public's preference for a grand coalition government, partisan imperatives—above all the need to sustain morale among and mobilize their own core supporters in closely-contested elections—drove CDU/CSU and SPD into pitched battles, often over largely common ground, including in foreign and international policy.

Moreover, to succeed as broad catch-all parties, the Union and SPD each had to satisfy a broad spectrum of interests and integrate more extreme or fringe elements. In the 1950s, Social Democratic leaders continued assaulting Adenauer's Westpolitik long after having reconciled themselves to it mainly in order to placate trade union and pacifist elements of their party—as well as the large numbers of expellees in the FRG, ethnic Germans who had fled Soviet-dominated Eastern Europe and who passionately supported reunification. A decade later, it was the CDU/CSU's fear of leaking fringe voters—including these same expellees, who had since migrated into their camp—to an upstart right-wing party that fueled their attacks on Brandt's treaties. Likewise, despite Schmidt's role in authoring the NATO two-track INF decision, his SPD had to satisfy the swelling antinuclear movement, including on its own left flank.

And, yet, both major parties also felt pressure to gravitate toward the median voter, and over time—albeit with fits and starts—this electoral imperative produced a convergence on the center.²⁷ As German public opinion became increasingly content with the economic and diplomatic status quo by the mid-1950s, reunification and disengagement receded as important goals. SPD leaders increasingly knew that sharp attacks on Adenauer's Westpolitik made their party appear “purely negative,” and more “uncompromising and uncooperative” than it had, in fact, been in practice on other legislative items. Electoral success required softening that image. Moreover, as one party leader declared at the time, to become Bonn's party of government, his SPD had to prove that it could “handle even the problem of national defense so that the people without fear could place their confidence in our hands.” As a result, noted Drummond, “the political battles of the 1960s would be fought on a different front”—that is not over Westpolitik or rearmament, but mainly over

²⁷ By the 1970s, German opinion was notably centrist. One cross-national survey noted that, while a substantial minority of French and American respondents placed themselves, respectively, well left and right of center, “the British and West Germans are distributed fairly evenly around the center.” Russell Dalton, *Citizen Politics in Western Democracies: Public Opinion and Political Parties in the United States, Great Britain, West Germany and France* (Chatham, NJ: Chatham House, 1988), 121,

domestic socio-economic issues, and then eventually Ostpolitik.²⁸

In much the same way, the struggle for primacy between the two major parties shaped the course of debate over Brandt's Ostpolitik. His coalition had eked out a slim Bundestag majority in the 1969 election—so thin that hard-line CDU/CSU treaty opponents had realistic reason to believe that their attacks might intimidate just enough wavering deputies from the government backbenches to defect, and unseat the chancellor through a no-confidence motion. That scenario hung over Bonn for three years, undermining efforts by moderates on both sides to strike a bipartisan deal allowing parliamentary passage of the accords. But the Union no-confidence motion failed in early 1972, and later that year the party went down to its worst defeat ever in a national election to that point. Hardliners by no means gave in, especially since public enthusiasm for detente also had begun to wane. But from the mid-1970s onward, a more pragmatic calculus suggested that the CDU/CSU would regain office in Bonn only by reconciling itself to the Eastern treaties, accepting their existence as a basis for its diplomacy. Party leader Helmut Kohl presided over this cautious shift, such that by West Germany's 1976 federal election, "almost the whole of the foreign policy and military security sections [of his campaign speeches] could be copied verbatim from the SPD election manifesto."²⁹ Voters came to see little difference between the two parties in this area, and—partly for that reason—the Union was rewarded with a 49 percent vote share, nearly enough to regain power. Kohl continued reminding his party that "binding treaties" were not the "private property of one party." Largely because the SPD left wing continued pressing for new concessions to the Soviet bloc, conservatives could not quite bring themselves to restrain their attacks upon the Ostpolitik, and, thus, there would never be a CDU/CSU "Godesberg" explicitly embracing it. And, yet, in the end, electoral imperatives forced the party to pledge that there would be "continuity" once it regained office.³⁰

In sum, although partisan competition between the two largest rivals often led them to overstate their differences at the outset of debates on foreign policy controversies, over time, what Gordon Smith labeled the "politics of centrality" reasserted itself. As another writer observed, "Governance by consensus, with the associated disappearance of the ideological distance between the main parties became the norm for both the CDU/CSU and the SPD."³¹

²⁸ Cited in Drummond, *The German Social Democrats*, 261, 279, 289.

²⁹ *The Times* (London), May 25, 1976.

³⁰ Clemens, *Reluctant Realists*, 127-145.

³¹ Gordon Smith, "West Germany and the Politics of Centrality," *Government and Opposition* 11, no. 4 (1976): 387-407, and Green and Paterson, "Introduction: Semisovereignty Challenged," 6.

Coalition Politics

Another domestic political factor played a key role in facilitating foreign policy consensus: coalition politics. Voter wariness of a power monopoly, combined with Germany's proportional representation electoral law, made it all but impossible for either major party to win a majority of votes for Bundestag seats on its own. That only happened once, under Adenauer in 1957, and even then, he chose not to form a Union-only administration. Thus, West German governments from 1949 to 1989 all consisted of multiparty, "minimal-winning" coalitions.

And one party was almost always included. While the CDU/CSU and SPD absorbed or squeezed out most other smaller political rivals, the center-right, free-market Liberals survived as an independent player. One of the two larger parties would always need the FDP in order to attain a governing majority in the Bundestag. Thus, from the late 1940s until the late 1990s (except for 1966 to 1969), the Liberals were always key to creating and sustaining minimal winning coalitions in Bonn. As David Conradt observes of the FDP,

[It] has played a role far out of proportion to the size of its electorate. It has participated in 15 out of 19 cabinets formed at the national level since 1949....[Its] extraordinary success is a result of its role as the needed "pivot" party in Parliament. Simply put the FDP has held the balance of power in the Bundestag following most federal elections.³²

Specifically, it was allied with the CDU/CSU for most of the period from 1949 to 1966, with the SPD from 1969 to 1982, and again with the Union thereafter. Moreover, the FDP used its vital role as majority-builder in order to insist on a major policy role. Shedding its initial nationalism, the little party became another vital force for moderation, with a small if loyal middle-class base that supported market economics and civil liberties—along with moderate, multilateral diplomacy. For four decades, the Liberals generally tugged the two larger parties toward the center on foreign policy. Moreover, the FDP specifically demanded the foreign minister's post, which it held from 1969 until reunification (and beyond): first Walter Scheel and then, for eighteen years, Hans-Dietrich Genscher, advocated moderate, bipartisan diplomacy.

As a result, even, or especially, on contentious external affairs, both large parties had to restrain their more extreme tendencies: whether in opposition or in office, either found it vital to avoid alienating the FDP as a present or future coalition partner and, consequently, the Liberals had to be reassured of its moderation. For a brief time at the height of debate over Brandt's Ostpolitik,

³² David Conradt, *The German Polity* (New York: Pearson Longman, 2005), 138.

hard-line CDU/CSU conservatives hoped to smash both their political rivals and somehow win the elusive absolute majority, but more pragmatic heads prevailed. In 1972, the CDU/CSU joined the FDP-led effort at consensus, diluting its more fundamental objections into a list of negotiable demands for textual changes: Scheel sought to satisfy some Union objections to the Eastern treaties, negotiating an exchange of diplomatic letters with Moscow that implicitly upheld Bonn's right to pursue national unity, and helped craft a joint Bundestag resolution upholding the goals of detente. Although these changes were not enough to placate hardliners, they did make it possible for the Union to abstain in a Bundestag vote on both major agreements in 1972, rather than rejecting them outright. After that point, CDU chairman Helmut Kohl would argue that his party had to make its peace with the Ostpolitik partly in order to have any chance of wooing the Liberals into a new coalition under his leadership. In 1976, he did preside over just such a bipartisan, FDP-led effort to help modify the content of a new agreement with Poland, such that his Union could ultimately vote in favor of it—much to the annoyance of more partisan SPD members, who saw greater political gain in having their opponents reject detente.

As the INF debate heated up in 1980-1982, FDP counter-pressure also compelled Schmidt to calm his SPD's antinuclear, anti-NATO wing. Yet, alarmed that the chancellor's party would back out of Bonn's commitment to its allies, Liberal foreign minister Genscher defected in favor of a new coalition with Kohl's CDU/CSU. Among his preconditions was full Union backing for the Ostpolitik agreements already in place, and a strong effort at negotiating arms reductions with Moscow, even if INF deployment proceeded. Kohl was generally willing to go along, partly because he shared the same priorities, but also because his new government depended on the FDP for its Bundestag majority. CDU/CSU colleagues who might have wanted to go a different direction could not get around this coalition imperative. And while furious at what they considered the perfidious FDP's betrayal, even SPD leaders could hardly object to Genscher's insistence on continuity in foreign policy. As a result, Genscher largely set the tone of German foreign policy throughout the 1980s: while CDU/CSU officials bristled at the "tail wagging the dog," and chancellery officials encouraged by Kohl frequently sought to assert their own prerogatives (the latter did play an ever larger, direct role in diplomacy), they did not substantially challenge the priorities set by Genscher on arms control and Ostpolitik. As the foreign minister warned his Union allies, "With us there will be no return...to the time before the Eastern Treaties or the Helsinki Final Act, not in thought, not in action, not in rhetoric."³³ In sum, for a decade, no single veto player was more pivotal in West German foreign policy than the Liberal party.

³³ FDP Press Release, November 22, 1986, cited in Clemens, *Reluctant Realists*, 295.

The only Bonn government to omit the FDP for any length of time was the CDU/CSU-SPD Grand Coalition from 1966 to 1969. If anything, this “marriage of elephants” was even more obligated to pursue a bipartisan foreign policy: as an alliance of equal partners—and rivals—it could only function by operating in a purely consensual manner. As a result, a special steering committee of elite party officials and Bundestag caucus representatives prenegotiated all major measures, reducing the cabinet itself to a minor role. Even though both the Union and the SPD were always jockeying for position in order to do better in the next election, a Grand Coalition by definition could survive only so long as ways were found to contain partisan differences. Thus, there was a modest opening to the Soviet bloc—more than had been undertaken by previous center-right governments, if less than would be chanced by Brandt’s coalition after 1969.

Executive Policymaking

Given West Germany’s unique evolution in the Cold War, foreign policy was of special importance to its chief of government. Thus, Bonn’s chancellor played a major role in shaping his Republic’s external relations “in a way suggestive of postwar American presidents rather than their West European counterparts.”³⁴ This was especially true of Adenauer, but also of his successors, above all Brandt, Schmidt, and Kohl. In most respects, this major role of the chancellor did not further bipartisan consensus on foreign policy—though there were exceptions.

Adenauer thoroughly dominated the diplomacy of his government, thanks in part to his unique status of being not merely chancellor but foreign and defense minister in the early 1950s, and, thus, exclusively empowered to deal with the Western allies—like a “high priest who alone could intercede with the gods on behalf of his people.”³⁵ It also reflected his paternalistic style. Schumacher’s SPD grew ever more bitter at what it considered his preemptive concessions to the allies, and at what one writer called his steadfast refusal “to accede to the Socialist demand for systematic, advanced consultation in the formulation of foreign policy measures.”³⁶ A decade later, Brandt’s chancellery also conducted the key initial Eastern treaty negotiations, and this “strong personalization of the government’s foreign policy actions promoted centralization of the decisionmaking process.” Now it was Union politicians who lambasted a lack of advanced consultation and executive secrecy, charges

³⁴ William E. Paterson, “The Chancellor and Foreign Policy,” in *Adenauer to Kohl: The Development of the German Chancellorship*, ed. Stephen Padgett, et al. (Washington, DC: Georgetown Press, 1994), 128.

³⁵ Arnulf Baring, *Im Anfang war Adenauer: Die Entstehung der Kanzlerdemokratie* (Munich: DTV, 1971), 33.

³⁶ Cited in Drummond, *The German Social Democrats*, 291.

that embittered partisan confrontation.³⁷ Several years after that, Schmidt himself helped conceive NATO's original 1979 dual-track INF decision during talks with fellow alliance leaders; but his personal contempt for opposition leaders such as Kohl made it hard for the two party leaders to cooperate closely on an initiative that both endorsed in substance. When the Union took over in 1982, Kohl also increasingly centralized diplomacy—helped by a chancellory staff that came to resemble the U.S. National Security Advisor's—and key decisions on foreign policy, especially in dealing with the Western allies; opposition leaders again complained about a lack of consultation.

To be sure, after Adenauer in particular, foreign policy was not entirely a solo act. Ministries were still responsible for drafting legislation, including international agreements; the foreign office was by definition responsible for conducting diplomacy. And since the junior coalition partner controlled that post routinely after 1966, major figures such as Scheel and above all Genscher could use their resources to avert confrontation with the opposition parties. After all, there was still the need for an intra-executive consensus—among factions of the senior governing party, its legislative caucus leadership, similar elements of the junior coalition partner(s), and senior staff of the relevant ministries—culminating in formal cabinet approval. Moreover, a subgroup was established to deal with sensitive military measures, including arms transfers and deployment of forces. This nine-member Federal Security Council, chaired by the chancellor, included the foreign, defense, interior, chancellory, justice, and economics ministers.

Broader consultative rounds could be held on foreign and security policy—especially in emergencies (such as the 1970s wave of terror attacks), or on major diplomatic controversies. Government leaders had an even stronger need to consult with opposition counterparts when the former had a thin Bundestag majority and/or dominated the Bundesrat (especially assuming that this chamber's formal approval was needed on the measure at issue).

Legislative Decisionmaking

Formally, the German Bundestag was made a co-equal of the federal government in making foreign and security policy. Bonn's 1949 Basic Law gave it authority to ratify treaties, transfer sovereignty, and declare war, along with budgetary powers—meaning it had the ability to block government external policies requiring expenditure. Yet, in practice, the lower house's role in international agreements was limited, in part, by judicial rulings and by the use of executive agreements rather than formal accords. Beyond that, the parliament early on limited its own authority with procedural rules that, in

³⁷ Gunther Schmid, *Entscheidung in Bonn: Die Entstehung der Ost- und Deutschlandpolitik, 1969-70* (Notbeck: Verlag Wissenschaft und Politik, 1979), 179-202, 262.

effect, relinquished its right to initiate accords or even amend those submitted by the executive. Moreover, the Bundestag remained almost totally dependent upon the executive for information, all the more so with regard to foreign affairs. Finally, the strength of party discipline and chancellorial power functioned to restrain legislative activism, especially in foreign relations. Secure government majorities did not need to worry about Bundestag ratification. Lothar Wilker even went so far as to conclude that the legislature “lacks legitimacy in the formulation of foreign policy [and] has accepted its secondary role.”³⁸

As a result, in many cases, parliament—and above all the opposition caucus—was reduced to merely protesting government policy. As Wilker adds, “The important political control function [of parliament], which is essentially the task of an Opposition, can be exercised virtually only after the fact.”³⁹ Plenary debates, in particular, served mainly as venues for debate with no concrete effect. In 1949, Adenauer circumvented SPD critics in the Bundestag by declaring that one key accord with the allies did not need ratification, ignoring their charge that this, in effect, made the FRG a monarchy. In 1952, the opposition tried to insist that another of his agreements required a two-thirds majority since it would change the constitution, a tact also pursued by the Union in 1972; likewise, foes of INF modernization claimed that the deployment plan was tantamount to a treaty, also requiring two-thirds. All such efforts failed.

Still, the opposition was not without leverage. Aside from using plenary sessions to attack government policy, it could seek information or explanations of government policy from ministers through parliamentary questions or interpellations. If such options for sparking partisan debate and ideally drawing media coverage failed, *in extremis* the opposition caucus could file a complaint against official policy with the Constitutional Court.

But there were also less confrontational avenues. As Wilker observes, “The Bundestag has always been ready for common action between the government’s parliamentary groups and the Opposition parliamentary groups, not only during periods of consensus but also during periods when foreign policy concepts were controversial.”⁴⁰ To be sure, such joint efforts in the Bundestag benefited from a split within the majority, resulting in one part joining its nominal foes against the chancellor’s policy. But in other cases, parliament functioned quietly to avert the worst effects of severe partisan polarization. In early 1972, for example, the CDU/CSU was formally in a position to block Brandt’s Eastern treaties (thanks to a Bundestag deadlock of 247 to 247, and a Union Bundesrat majority). Rather than do so and bear

³⁸ Lothar Wilker, “Foreign Policy in the Bundestag,” in *The U.S. Congress and the German Bundestag: Comparisons of Democratic Processes* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1990), 395-412.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 410.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 401.

the onus for undercutting detente, Christian Democratic leader Rainer Barzel began feverish talks on a joint parliamentary resolution that would outline strict conditions for interpreting these controversial agreements so as to preserve Bonn's options for pursuing national reunification. In the end, despite years of fierce opposition, his party thus largely abstained in the final Bundestag vote. As Frank Pfetsch observes, "The joint resolution can be considered a *modus vivendi* between the government and opposition [and] such a constellation can be labeled a co-governing opposition."⁴¹

On a more routine basis, the most effective parliamentary means for promoting such bipartisan cooperation lay in less public fora. Under its bylaws, the Bundestag assigned most substantive legislative work—including treaties—to its committees, including those responsible for Foreign Affairs and Defense, respectively, both established in 1956. Although membership in each reflected the overall party balance in parliament, the chairs could be from the opposition. They and government officials could use these fora in ways that facilitated bipartisanship. As Pfetsch wrote in describing the practices of the 1970s-1980s:

A minister may use a committee to present or test policies and/or as an authorizing forum for a definite policy. Also, projects may be referred to the committee level to gain time, to avoid controversial debate in the plenary session of the Bundestag, or to clarify matters on factual grounds. Depending on the degree of legitimacy needed, the parliamentary committee is also an effective means to coordinate policies, either with the opposition, or—if their approval is needed—within the governing party.⁴²

Operating in a closed fashion, out of the public eye, made it even easier for the Foreign Affairs committee to eschew partisanship. Amid the heated debates of the 1950s, for example, CDU foreign minister Heinrich von Brentano encouraged it to explore ways of developing Bonn's relationship with Soviet bloc states. Headed by SPD parliamentarian Wenzel Jaksch, this Foreign Affairs subcommittee proposed establishing trade missions in communist Europe as a means of opening dialogue that would not undercut West Germany's official rejection of full-scale diplomatic ties with countries that also already recognized the communist GDR. Such committee level cooperation produced the first real domestic rapprochement over Ostpolitik between the major parties (though it would breakdown again for some years in the late 1960s).

⁴¹ Frank R. Pfetsch, *West Germany: Internal Structures and External Relations* (New York: Praeger, 1988), 28.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 29.

Perhaps no institutional feature of the German system mitigated in favor of bipartisan consensus over time more than the Bundesrat, and in a broader sense, the country's system of cooperative federalism. The Bundesrat was initially conceived as a body in which the states or Länder could guard their interests against central government power. Though not technically a chamber of parliament, it was empowered by the Basic Law to veto any Bundestag bill touching directly on Länder competence. Initially, this was assumed to be around a tenth of all federal legislation, exclusively in limited areas of domestic policy such as education and culture; moreover, it was also assumed that Bundesrat votes would break down along sectional but not partisan lines. Neither proved to be the case. Especially as the federal government began relying on Land administrations to carry out federal policy, the share of bills it could potentially veto shot to nearly 60 percent. And a number of major foreign policy decisions did end up there, including those related to European integration in the 1950s and Brandt's 1972 Basic Treaty with the GDR. Moreover, especially since voters often used regional elections to register protest against the government in Bonn, the federal opposition could win these contests and, as a result, control a majority in the Bundesrat—and chancellors had to worry about their entire agendas in this chamber: even those items not formally subject to veto could be held hostage by threat to block those that were.

As Thomas Saalfeld thus observes, thanks to the Bundesrat, “in most cases, the federal government will have to take the preferences of the main opposition into account.” Manfred Schmidt also described the Federal Republic as a de facto Grand Coalition state, co-governed by the CDU/CSU and SPD (even when the actual government in Bonn did not include one of the two).⁴³ Additionally, West Germany fit the depiction of a state with divided government through “strong bicameralism,” and thus met Arend Lijphart's model of “consensus democracy,” which he set up as the polar opposite of a Westminster majoritarian system.⁴⁴ With regard to foreign policy specifically, it was partly because of the SPD-dominated Bundesrat, for example, that Adenauer made the few concessions that he did on his Western treaties in the 1950s. Later, CDU/CSU control of that chamber helped indirectly to lead to an easing of frictions over Ostpolitik. As noted above, its veto power was one reason the Union could extract concessions from Brandt's government on how it would act upon those accords—concessions spelled out in the 1972 joint Bundestag resolution that then permitted the opposition deputies to abstain in a ratification vote. In 1976, during debate over a new accord with Poland, the CDU/CSU opposition led by Helmut Kohl again used its Bundesrat clout to wring concessions from Schmidt's government in a compromise negotiated by

⁴³ Thomas Saalfeld, “Political Parties,” 65.

⁴⁴ Arend Lijphart, *Patterns of Democracy: Government Forms and Performance in Thirty-Six Countries* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999), 212.

FDP foreign minister Genscher; as a *quid pro quo*, the Union voted yes on the agreement—a big step toward its ultimate embrace of the Ostpolitik.

Constitutional Court

One final institutional constraint on polarization—including over foreign policy—during the FRG’s first four decades was the Constitutional Court at Karlsruhe, which enjoyed broad judicial review powers. Since its members were appointed, in effect, by both major parties, each of the latter hoped to win sympathetic judgments from “their” judges. Thus, in 1952, the SPD Bundestag caucus filed suit with the court for a preventive declaratory judgment against Adenauer’s treaties; in 1973, CSU-governed Bavaria likewise went to Karlsruhe in hopes of blocking Brandt’s treaties. Neither succeeded. While willing to take on political controversies (unlike its American counterpart), including in foreign policy, the court demonstrated bipartisan professionalism. Thus, in 1973, for example, Karlsruhe did not block Brandt’s treaty, but ruled that it would be consistent with the Basic Law only if Bonn’s diplomacy upheld the case for national reunification: that ruling narrowed the government’s diplomatic latitude, which, in effect, also helped conservatives reconcile themselves to a policy of dealing with the Eastern bloc. In 1984, the judges decreed that INF deployment was not a treaty and required no Bundestag approval. However unhappy, missile opponents had to accept Karlsruhe’s ruling. In sum, having the court as a respected, neutral mediator took the edge of partisan conflict in at least a few cases.

Conclusion

During its four decade lifespan, West Germany endured fierce domestic dispute over its foreign and security policies. On at least three occasions, government decisions to make major changes in the direction of Bonn’s external relations rocked the Republic’s political landscape. The high-stakes involved—German security in a nuclear-armed Europe, a painful national partition, a fledgling experiment in democracy—all fueled intense, ideologically-imbued, partisan conflict—confrontation at times further heightened by a powerful executive’s dominant role in decisionmaking and by the frustration of a largely impotent legislature.

Yet, even in those turbulent phases, respect for democratic process was never in danger or even in question. Amid the heaviest political infighting, efforts were made to contain the damage and restore consensus—usually with some success, at least in the longer term. Whichever side lost the initial battle—SPD, CDU/CSU, even extra-parliamentary groups—accepted, however grudgingly, the outcome. Moreover, most ultimately came to embrace the legacy of decisions they had once so firmly resisted. Moreover, these major controversies were themselves exceptional; they punctuated otherwise fairly long stretches of time in which consensus generally prevailed in lower-profile

deliberations over the conduct of more routine foreign policies.

What factors most accounted for the Federal Republic's success in balancing robust debate over foreign policy with the need for consensus on substance and democratic process? To some extent, it was the very stakes of the controversies themselves: security, unity, and democracy all warranted at least an effort at finding common ground, even—or especially—amid times of domestic confrontation. But perhaps a more pivotal part was played by the unique external constraints upon Bonn's conduct of foreign policy: the FRG was, almost uniquely, a product of the international system, and as such, political actors were often forced toward a middle ground. For much the same reason, a characteristic West German commitment to multilateralism, almost as an article of faith, helped contain polarization, even amid bitter controversy.

If West Germany's special sensitivity to its external environment created an incentive for bipartisanship, features of its domestic political setting reinforced this centripetal tendency—and provided ways of forging compromise. Debates on policy belied an otherwise consensus-oriented political culture. Party politics, of course, fueled domestic confrontation, but also helped to limit it: neither of the two major players could long afford to abandon the political center to its rival without risk of alienating swing voters and the FDP—a vital coalition ally—without risking permanent exile from political power. Moreover, despite the acrimony often generated by a strong chancellorial role in foreign policy, the FRG's institutional framework otherwise mitigated in favor of compromise: even with a Bundestag majority, no government could run roughshod over its opponents, given the risk of a backlash against it in the Bundesrat.

On balance, centripetal forces in the formulation of Bonn's foreign policy overwhelmed the centrifugal tendencies that often sparked fierce, if brief, domestic confrontation. Although the term "*Modell Deutschland*" (the German model) was coined strictly in connection with the FRG's unique form of domestic consensus on socio-economic policy, it could apply as well to the conduct of external relations. As a result, when the Bonn chapter ended in 1989, and the Berlin chapter began, there was very little uneasiness abroad and even less at home that a united, postwar Germany would be anything other than a paradigm of democratic stability.