



## Coalition type and voter support for parties: Grand coalitions in German elections<sup>☆</sup>

Lee Ann Banaszak<sup>a,\*</sup>, Peter Doerschler<sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup>The Pennsylvania State University, 219 Pond Lab, University Park, PA 16802, USA

<sup>b</sup>Bloomsburg University, Political Science Department, Bloomsburg, PA 17815, USA

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### ABSTRACT

While scholars have generally acknowledged that coalition governments are less accountable to voters than single party majorities, surprisingly little differentiation is made among different types of coalition governments. In this paper, we examine voter support for two very different types of coalition governments: those with a single large party and a junior partner and grand coalitions—governing coalitions between two large but ideologically dissimilar parties. We argue that grand coalitions differ from the more typical senior–junior partners in terms of the ability of individual parties to respond to their constituencies. We test this argument using survey data from four German Election Studies (GES), before and after each of the two German grand coalitions (1965, 1969, 2005, and 2009), which provide a unique opportunity to compare voter support for grand coalitions to those of the more typical senior–junior party model. We find evidence that voters responded to grand coalitions by moving away from their traditional voting patterns, and increasing their support for parties outside of the grand coalition, although this effect varies by the number of alternative parties.

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### 1. Introduction

Democracies rely on the ability of voters to hold political parties accountable for their performance while in government. Yet, as scholars of government formation note, the ability of parties in power to determine a government's policies depends on the form that the government takes. In coalition governments, where two or more parties share governance, it is more difficult to hold

a particular party accountable for resulting policy than in single party majority systems (see for example [Strom, 1985](#); [Narud and Valen, 2008](#)).<sup>1</sup> This is further complicated by the fact that coalitions vary considerably in how they distribute power and responsibilities among parties. We argue here that the type of coalition government significantly affects vote choice by influencing how voters assess a party's ideological position and responsibility for policy.

We show evidence of this by examining voter support for political parties in two different types of coalition governments in post-war Germany. Specifically, the Federal Republic has witnessed the formation of two grand coalitions (1966–1969, 2005–2009), defined as a coalition that splits portfolios relatively evenly between two large parties with significant ideological differences (in the case of

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\* Corresponding author. Tel.: +1 814 865 6573.

E-mail address: [lab14@psu.edu](mailto:lab14@psu.edu) (L.A. Banaszak).

<sup>1</sup> Results for single party minority governments where a single party controls government but may rely on other parties for support in parliament are somewhat more mixed.

Germany between the CDU/CSU and SPD). These grand coalitions contrast with the more common post-war German coalitions, which occur between a large party (e.g., the CDU/CSU or SPD) and a smaller party (e.g., the FDP or Greens) that shares some policy positions with the larger party. The unexpected occurrence of the two grand coalitions, following in the wake of the more typical coalition between a larger and smaller party, allows us to examine whether a shift in coalition type affects voter responses to incumbent parties.

To do so, we draw on survey data from the German Election Study and the Politbarometer, assessing changes in the main indicators of voter behavior before and after each grand coalition. We begin by developing a theory of why grand coalitions might alter vote choice in comparison to the more traditional large party–small party coalitions. We then compare grand coalitions with their predecessors, looking particularly at the shifts in power sharing, cabinet composition and policy formation that might affect voter perceptions. After explaining our data and methods – particularly our use of a pre- and post-analysis of both grand coalitions – we turn to our analysis and results. Our analysis suggests that grand coalitions differ from the more common partnership between ideologically similar large and small parties in that they reduce support among the core constituencies of the large parties. However, the effect of grand coalitions on electoral behavior depends also on the specific constellation of political parties in the political system.

## 2. Coalition governments and accountability to voters

Scholars recognize that government institutions structure and shape vote choice. First, we know that electoral systems influence the number of parties, thereby altering the choice set for voters (Powell, 2000; Lijphart, 1999). In countries with consensus systems, characterized among other things by coalition governments, supporters of non-governmental parties are less likely to feel they have lost completely, develop higher levels of satisfaction with democracy, and are less likely to become disillusioned with the system (Anderson et al., 2007; Chap. 7). Such beliefs encourage voters to consider smaller parties as viable alternatives. However, these analyses typically compare institutional settings across countries, leaving open the issue of how changes within a country from one type of coalition to another influence voters.

Second, many authors have argued that voters make calculations about what the likely coalitions between parties will be before they step into the voting booth, and that their vote choice is based partially on coalition preferences (Blais et al., 2006; Duch et al., 2010; Kedar, 2005; Pappi, 2007; Bargsted and Kedar, 2009). Much of this literature assumes that voters are well able to estimate the probabilities of each coalition because coalition patterns are stable over time (Duch et al., 2010: p. 702), or because parties signal coalition preferences ahead of or during the election (see, for example Golder, 2006). For example, Schoen (1999: p. 476) notes that “German parties generally reveal their preferences concerning coalition building well *before* election day”. Knowledge of the probability of coalitions may lead voters to

choose their most preferred coalition rather than their most preferred party (Austen-Smith and Banks, 1988; Pappi, 2007) or more extreme parties if they believe the likely coalition will moderate policy outcomes (Kedar, 2005).

A coalition of ideologically similar large and small parties typical of most German governments and the “grand coalition” between the two large parties that are ideologically distant will differ in their effects on vote choice in three ways. First, differences in the distribution of portfolios and the weight of the head of government create changes in government accountability. In the typical German coalition, voters have an easier time assigning responsibility to the larger party because it controls a majority of portfolios and the chancellor position. Assigning accountability for policy outcomes becomes more problematic in a grand coalition where cabinet posts are more evenly divided and there is less assurance that the party that controls the chancellorship can control its equally powerful partner. On the other hand, in a grand coalition both major parties have more accountability than the junior partner in a typical large party – small party coalition. Thus, core constituencies of the large parties are likely to be disappointed by their party’s responsiveness in grand coalitions.

Second, because coalition partners are more ideologically distant in a grand coalition, the resulting policy outcomes represent more policy compromise than in coalitions with ideologically similar parties. The most common assumption is that individuals choose parties that are the closest to them ideologically (see e.g., Blais et al., 2001; Downs, 1957; Kedar, 2005; Hinich, 1978; Westholm, 1997).<sup>2</sup> However, alternative models of decision-making also exist; for example, other scholars have argued that voters prefer parties that are ideologically in the same direction as, but are more intense than, their own views on the relevant issues (e.g., MacDonald et al., 1991 and MacDonald et al., 2001). Furthermore, in a fragmented party space voters may simultaneously identify with more than one party (Eijk and Niemoeller, 1983). In the typical large party–small partner coalition, large parties often dictate the terms of the coalition agreement, minimizing the ideological or policy shifts necessary to appease the junior partner. This relationship is fundamentally different in a grand coalition since neither large party can dictate the terms of the agreement to the same extent; both must make more fundamental programmatic shifts if the coalition is to be viable and at least somewhat effective in governance. For that reason, large parties are more likely to lose core constituents in a grand coalition because these voters will likely be less willing to make the compromise toward the ideological center that the large parties must hold to maintain the coalition. Particularly, where viable more ideologically-similar parties exist, core constituents of large parties participating in a grand coalition may shift their support as a result of coalition compromises.

Third, the occurrence of a grand coalition creates greater uncertainty among voters in assigning the probability of future coalitions. This is true because it shows that

<sup>2</sup> Kedar (2005) labels these models Proximity Models.

alternative types of coalitions are possible, and that the voter cannot count on “the relative stability of coalition configurations” (Duch et al., 2010: p. 702). Particularly in the German context, both grand coalitions were unanticipated in the election which preceded them. The occurrence of such radically different forms of government coalition provided voters with evidence that unexpected coalitions might develop after the election is over, raising the overall uncertainty that expected coalitions might occur. This in turn creates greater volatility particularly among supporters of the larger parties, because they are less able to assure that a vote for the large party results in the coalition of their choice. Thus, we expect supporters of large parties to be more volatile in their vote choice as a result of the uncertainty brought on by unexpected grand coalitions.

Our understanding of how coalitions affect vote choice is complicated by differences in how scholars include non-voting as a choice for voters. If non-voting is considered as an alternative that occurs in the same choice set as the different party options (as opposed to a decision that occurs prior to the choice of a particular party), voters may choose to abstain when they are equidistant from a number of parties or if they become alienated from their party’s policy choices (Taylor, 2000; Hinich, 1978). In these theories, voters’ ideological preferences are usually assumed to be relatively permanent and political parties position themselves to attract the largest number of voters through their policies and party programs, and by the ideological positions of their activists.<sup>3</sup> This means that a party’s position is constrained by its participation in government coalitions. In the typical senior–junior coalition, large parties often have greater power over the terms of the coalition agreement and can minimize the ideological or policy shifts created by the junior partner. However, neither large party can dictate policy to the same extent in a grand coalition. For that reason, voters whose preferences are not midway between the large parties but rather are ideologically close to (or more extreme than) the larger parties will react more strongly to policy compromises in grand coalitions. Voters may alter their behavior in two ways. First, voters might choose to abstain because they view the (moderated) party position as unsupportable or because they think that the probability that voting for the party will produce the desired policy outcomes low. This is particularly true for those voters who lie to the ideological extremes of their party since the moderation of the party position pulls the political party even further from their own ideological position. Thus, we expect to find:

H1: Voters on the ideological extremes are more likely to abstain after a grand coalition than in the election right before it.

Alternatively, the major parties may lose more ideological voters to smaller parties in nearby ideological space. Clearly, in this case the configuration of the party system

also matters. When no viable smaller party exists in the same ideological area, such voters have fewer alternatives; they can choose to abstain or continue to support the party that has moved away from them ideologically. Thus, we expect that:

H2: Voters on the ideological extremes are more likely to vote for small ideological parties after a grand coalition than in the election right before it.

### 3. Voters from core constituencies

The previous discussion treats models of voter choice as equal across all voters. However, one long-recognized factor in understanding the development of party systems and individual parties’ electoral support has been the importance of social cleavages in creating core constituencies (for recent examples see Brooks et al., 2006; Stoll, 2008). According to Lipset and Rokkan’s (1967) seminal work, partisan support is largely a function of individuals’ membership in longstanding social groups that in most European societies include some combination of class, religion (church/state), urban/rural and center/periphery. Partisan attachment is believed to be strong where cleavages have remained largely unchanged or “frozen” over time, giving voters a sense of continuity between their social identification and where parties mobilize the cleavages and make them politically relevant.

However, several scholars have noted that traditional cleavage structures such as class and religion began to erode beginning in the 1970s, reducing their importance in determining vote choice (see, for example, Evans, 1999; Dalton et al. 1984; Dalton, 2008; Franklin, 1985). These scholars cite a number of different causes of the decline including the development of new cleavages (cleavage realignment), demographic changes that reduce the importance of traditional cleavages, or the increasing alienation of citizens from party politics (dealignment). These changes, particularly shrinking church and union membership, have contributed to declining membership and electoral support for mainstream parties on the left and right (Clemens, 2007: p. 3). Several scholars also attribute the decline in class cleavages to the parties themselves, arguing that as parties have moderated their position they no longer emphasize the traditional cleavages that had previously served as a mobilization tool (Elif, 2009; Evans et al., 1999; De Graaf et al., 2001; Przeworski and Sprague, 1986).

Grand coalitions, as opposed to the more normal senior–junior partnership coalitions, may contribute to the decline in social cleavages. First, they may play a large role in reducing support among the traditional class and religious supporters. As senior partners in the more conventional senior–junior coalitions, large mainstream left and right parties are able to demonstrate their continued support for issues key to their traditional voters without alienating junior partners of the same ideological camp. Grand coalitions may attenuate political parties’ ability to link to their core cleavages by drawing on social identity and political relevance because grand coalitions alter their traditional policy positions and negate the social identity

<sup>3</sup> Rohrschneider (2002) argues that these two positions – mobilizing core constituents or mobilizing the middle – represent two sides of a single dimension.

built on opposition to the other, ideologically different, large party. This is likely to reduce the connection between the major parties and their traditional constituencies and blur the division between the major left and right parties for many voters. We therefore expect members of the major parties' core constituencies to become non-voters or chose other parties after grand coalitions, further reducing the importance of cleavages. Thus, we expect:

H3: The effect of the social characteristics relevant to major social cleavages on vote choice should be weaker in the election after a grand coalition than in the election right before it.

H4: In elections after grand coalitions, core constituencies defined by social cleavages are more likely to become non-voters than in the election before the grand coalition.

To better understand how the two coalitions affect vote choice differently, we turn to an analysis of the two time periods that encompass our study: 1965–1969 and 2005–2009. By looking at specific party system differences between the two periods as well as the specific form these grand coalition governments took, it is easier to understand why these coalitions should have affected voter decisions differently.

#### 4. The story of two grand coalitions

Although both of Germany's grand coalitions united the SPD and CDU/CSU in government, the two cases differ in a number of ways, including their political party systems, the nature of the government coalitions preceding the grand coalition, and the ruling parties' relationships to the economic situation. Moreover, while both grand coalitions led to the SPD and CDU/CSU compromising on their policy positions during the coalition, analyses of manifesto data suggest that the parties' political positions differed more during the second grand coalition than during the first.

Germany's two grand coalitions were not obvious outcomes following the 1965 and 2005 elections and could not have been anticipated by voters. The first grand coalition from 1966 to 1969 occurred approximately one year after 1965 federal elections when the coalition between CDU/CSU and its junior partner FDP collapsed after the defection of four FDP ministers from Chancellor Erhart's cabinet. Following a brief period of minority rule under Erhart, the CDU and SPD agreed to enter a grand coalition with the CDU's Kurt Georg Kiesinger as Chancellor and Willy Brandt from the SPD as Vice Chancellor and Foreign Minister. The second grand coalition occurred when Chancellor Schröder called for early federal elections in 2005 after an embarrassing defeat in his party's stronghold of North Rhine Westphalia (see Schoen and Falter, 2005: p. 33; König, 2008: p. 189; Richter, 2008: pp. 169–170). After the election, neither the SPD nor the CDU/CSU commanded sufficient seats to assume a majority with their favored coalition partner. A continuation of SPD–Greens was ruled out by both parties (Richter, 2008: p. 172), and the SPD was unwilling to coalesce with the newly formed Left Party. The CDU/CSU and FDP had announced their intention to form a coalition, but fell short of a majority, while other more far-

fetched options<sup>4</sup> drawing across ideological camps were considered and quickly abandoned. Thus, as in the first grand coalition, unintended consequences and a dearth of alternatives made the grand coalition an option of last resort (see Jesse, 2006: p. 28).

Germany's party system underwent significant change in the decades between the two grand coalitions, which has clear implications for voter behavior. From 1949 to the end of the first grand coalition in 1969, the FRG's party system consisted of three core parties: two large parties – the Christian Democrats and sister party Christian Social Union (CDU/CSU) on the right and Social Democratic (SPD) on the left – and the smaller liberal party, the Free Democrats (FDP). From 1949 to 1965 the CDU/CSU served as the senior partner in governing coalitions with parties on the right, most notably the FDP (see also Scarrow, this issue). During the first years in the post-war period, the SPD remained largely committed to its Socialist roots, which limited its electoral appeal to a core working class constituency and forced the party into permanent opposition. However, beginning in 1959 at the Bad Godesberg Conference the SPD moved to the center and toward a more free market-oriented economic platform. This programmatic shift, illustrated in Fig. 1 using data on German parties' manifestos from the Comparative Manifestoes Project, resulted in electoral gains for the SPD in subsequent elections. In the critical elections of 1965 and 1969 before and during the first grand coalition, few viable alternatives existed outside of the "Big 3".<sup>5</sup> Consequently core constituencies and more ideological voters were forced to either abstain or remain hopeful that their preferred party could rebound in the next election.

By 2005 Germany's party system had become more fragmented and polarized. Specifically, the vote share of the SPD and CDU/CSU declined from 88.8% in 1969 to 69.4% in 2005, leading some experts to foretell an end to the two *Volksparteien* (Economist, 2009) and the emergence of a two-bloc party system (Lees, 2008; p. 36). This decline coincided with the rise of two new parties on the left—the Greens and the Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS)/Left Party.<sup>6</sup> No similar development has occurred on the right, where the CDU/CSU and FDP have not been faced with a coherent far-right challenger. These developments mean that ideological voters on the left as well as supporters of the SPD and CDU have different options. While SPD supporters are able to defect and vote for established party options to the left of the SPD, CDU/CSU voters can only

<sup>4</sup> A "traffic light coalition" of SPD-FDP-Greens and a "Jamaica coalition" of CDU/CSU-FDP-Greens. For more information about these coalition options, see Proksch and Slapin, 2006: pp. 549–551.

<sup>5</sup> The most serious contenders were the German Nationalist Party (NDP) on the far right, which had received some support in several state elections (e.g., gaining 7.9% in Hessen in 1966 and achieving similar results in Bavaria, Rheinland-Palatinate, Schleswig-Holstein, and Lower Saxony), and a reconstituted German Communist Party (DKP) on the far left. However, neither was able to garner the support necessary to cross the 5% hurdle.

<sup>6</sup> The Greens first entered the Bundestag in 1983 and the Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS) in 1990 following the first all-German election. To expand its electoral base in the western *Länder*, the PDS merged in 2005 with the Electoral Alternative for Labour and Social Justice (WASG) to form the Left Party (*Die Linke*).

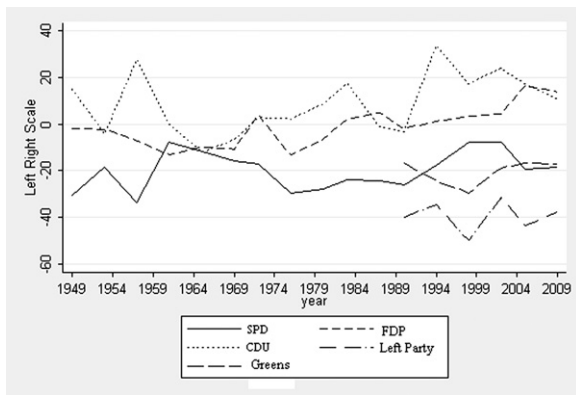


Fig. 1. Party left-right position (based on Comparative Manifestos data) by year.

abandon their party for radical alternatives or the more centrist FDP.

Among the traditional social cleavages identified by Lipset and Rokkan, class and church–state relations have been particularly germane in explaining electoral support in the Federal Republic (Dalton, 1996; Arzheimer and Schoen, 2007; Green et al., 2008: p. 85; Conradt, 2009; Lees, 2008). During the first grand coalition, the CDU/CSU attracted a majority of middle class voters, farmers, Catholics as well as more active and conservative Protestants while the SPD was viewed as the party of the working classes, union members, secularists and less devout Protestants (for example, Green et al., 2008: p. 85). In the four decades between the two grand coalitions, Germany experienced dramatic social change, including a shift away from an industrial base to a post-industrial economy along with growing secularism. These changes resulted in a decline in the number of blue collar laborers, union members and church goers – the traditional bases of electoral support for the CDU/CSU and SPD (Arzheimer and Schoen, 2007: p. 91; Schroeder and Neumann, 2010: p. 262; Dalton, 2008; Green et al., 2008: p. 85; Neller and Thaidigsmann, 2007: p. 189).

Table 1 depicts how these changes in party system and traditional bases of support influenced the vote by showing how survey respondents' party preference shifted from before to after each grand coalition. After the first grand coalition, the CDU encountered a higher number of defections than the SPD, which proved it could govern effectively in a limited three-party system. In contrast, after the second grand coalition, over 20% of SPD supporters in 2005 voted for either the Greens or Left Party in 2009. With fewer options in Germany's asymmetrical party system, fewer CDU supporters defected.<sup>7</sup>

Because voters assess parties based on their policies, the distribution of portfolios is important to parties creating a coalition government. Germany's two grand coalitions were characterized by markedly different distributions of cabinet posts compared to the preceding

Table 1

Voter support for the CDU/CSU and SPD pre- and post-grand coalitions, 1965 to 1969, and 2005 to 2009.

2nd vote, post-grand coalition	2nd vote, pre-grand coalition					
	SPD		CDU/CSU		FDP	
	1965/1969	2005/2009	1965/1969	2005/2009	1965/1969	2005/2009
SPD	85.6%	55.6%	18.5%	1.9%	24.1%	1.7%
CDU/CSU	9.9%	7.3%	77.5%	80.2%	37.9%	4.1%
FDP	3.2%	4.0%	2.2%	8.0%	37.9%	81.8%
Greens	–	5.5%	–	0.8%	–	1.7%
Left party	–	15.2%	–	1.3%	–	5.8%
Far right party	1.4%	0.2%	1.1%	0%	0.0%	0%
Other party	0.0%	0.7%	0.0%	1.1%	0.0%	0%
Did not vote	0.0%	11.5%	1.0%	6.7%	0.0%	5.0%
Total N	100%	100.0%	100.3%	100%	100%	100.1%
	(222)	(453)	(271)	(526)	(29)	(121)

Note: Entries are column percentages representing the percentage of the SPD, CDU or FDP voters before the grand coalition who for the same or different parties after the grand coalition. Some rounding error occurs. The data are taken from the 1969 German Election Study (ZACAT # 7098) – v617 and v185 – and the 2009 GLES q40b and q51b.

coalitions. From October 1965 to December 1966, the CDU/CSU held the chancellorship and fifteen additional portfolios while the FDP held only four. The domination of portfolios by CDU/CSU enabled voters to hold the party accountable for most policy decisions. Assigning accountability became more difficult during the first grand coalition in December 1966. The CDU/CSU was forced to cede nine of nineteen portfolios to the SPD, including the ministries of foreign affairs and economics. Similarly, prior to the second grand coalition, the SPD under Chancellor Schröder controlled eleven out of fourteen policy portfolios. During the second grand coalition, however, the SPD held eight out of fourteen cabinet positions, accounting for approximately two-thirds of the national budget (Proksch and Slapin, 2006: p. 553).

Voters also judge political parties' performance by their policy outputs. In most German coalitions, large parties lead in determining the government's position, compromising only modestly with their junior coalition partners. However, in grand coalitions, large parties are either forced into more significant policy concessions or into stalemates on issues where neither party is willing to make concessions (see Merkel and Weßels, 2008: p. 164). In Germany's first grand coalition, the two major parties compromised on several issues including the ongoing economic crisis, where the CDU/CSU permitted tax increases while the SPD allowed spending cuts. On other issues, such as foreign policy, where the two parties were sharply at odds, the issue was set aside. In the case of foreign policy, the SPD favored greater détente as part of a new *Ostpolitik* and the CDU/CSU preferred a less conciliatory position, especially after the 1968 Prague Spring. During the first grand coalition a significant shift in decision-making processes also occurred. Under Article 65 of the Basic Law (*Richtlinienkompetenz*) the Chancellor sets general policy guidelines while individual ministers exercise more independence to conduct departmental affairs. From 1949 to 1963 Chancellor Adenauer used a more authoritative

<sup>7</sup> We provide data on the FDP as well, but because there are fewer than 30 cases in column 5 not to interpret these data.

style (*Kanzlerdemokratie*), taking more leadership on individual policies. In the grand coalition, Kiesinger utilized a consensus style, relying heavily on working groups (the *Kressbronner Kreis* was the most prominent) composed of leading politicians from both parties (see Schönhoven, 2004: pp. 25–28).<sup>8</sup>

In the second grand coalition although the CDU/CSU held the chancellorship, the SPD, with a majority of portfolios representing two-thirds of the budget, was able to negotiate a number of policies in its favor, including increasing child support for new parents. The SPD was also able to extend unemployment payments for older recipients (Poguntke, 2008: p. 987). However, facing a dire economic situation, SPD ministers were also forced to compromise on such policies as austerity measures in public spending, raising the retirement age to 67, a 3% increase in Germany's Value-Added Tax (VAT) and a loosening of collective bargaining and job protection (see, for example, Richter, 2008: p. 179). Much like the first grand coalition, Merkel's decision-making style shifted away from a prominent role of the Chancellor toward consensus through the use of informal working groups of members of both parties (Helms, 2006: p. 54).

To better understand how the grand coalitions in 1966 and 2005 affected vote choice in the following elections in 1969 and 2009, we turn now to an analysis of vote choice in the 1965, 1969, 2005 and 2009 elections.

## 5. Data and methods

We examine the above hypotheses using data from four different German election studies: 1965 (DIVO-Institut für Wirtschaftsforschung, Sozialforschung, und Angewandte Mathematik, 1965), 1969 (Klingemann and Pappi, 1974), 2006 (Berger et al., 2006a, 2006b), 2009 (Rattinger et al., 2009).<sup>9</sup> We compare these four cross-sections to examine the effect of cleavages and spatial voting within grand coalitions (see Doerschler and Banaszak, 2007 for a similar design). This pre and post design allows us to compare the factors that influence vote choice before and after each grand coalition. While additional factors, especially the economy, can shift from the beginning to the end of a grand coalition, the election immediately preceding

<sup>8</sup> Observers at the time noted the failure of “chancellor democracy” under Kiesinger (see Helms, 2006: p. 52).

<sup>9</sup> To study the first grand coalition, we employ 1965 (ICPSR 7105) and 1969 (ICPSR 7098) German Election Studies. Both involved face-to-face interviews with a stratified, multistage, random sample of voting-age citizens of the Federal Republic of Germany, excluding West Berlin, who live in private households and are registered in the Community Central Registry of Inhabitants. The 1965 survey was fielded in October 1965, and the 1969 survey between October 17 and November 9, 1969. To study the second grand coalition, we utilize data from the 2006 Politbarometer (ZA Nr. 4550, 4551) and 2009 German Longitudinal Election Study (1102). 2006 data combine respondents living in the old and new *Länder* into an all-German sample. Gathered between January and December 2006, these data utilize telephone interviews with a multistage random sample of all voting-age citizens. The 2009 survey employed face-to-face interviews conducted between September 28 and November 23 2009 of a (multistage) random sample of eligible voters throughout the FRG living in private households.

the grand coalition provides the best comparison, since social cleavages and the party system should remain relatively stable over this period. We also compare the effects of the first grand coalition to the second. Differences in the constellation of the party system allow us to examine how contextual effects might influence voters' behavior after a grand coalition. This sort of comparison over time presents a difficult challenge in measurement as we needed to find measures of our key concepts in all four data sets.

### 5.1. Dependent variable

Respondents' vote choice is measured as choice of a specific party as well as whether the respondent chose to vote at all.<sup>10</sup> Such a dependent variable addresses whether voting is contingent upon party space with the acknowledgment that changing a vote from one party to another may be significant even if it is within the current coalition (Dorussen and Taylor, 2001). As a result, our dependent variable is nominal with choices to not vote, vote for the CDU, vote for the SPD, vote for the FDP, or vote for another party in 1965 and 1969 (for the same decision, see Rohrschneider et al., this issue, and Anderson and Hecht, this issue). In analyses of the 2005 and 2009 elections, two additional choices are vote for the Greens or vote for Die Linke. We utilize multinomial logit models because the voter decides by picking among a discrete number of parties or choosing to abstain (Tillman, 2008). In multinomial logit each category is compared to a single baseline category which serves as a reference point against which all others are compared. We chose the SPD as our baseline (or omitted) category because many of the hypotheses above focus on changes from the SPD to other categories (voting for the other Left party or choosing not to vote).

### 5.2. Social cleavages

The first set of variables measures class and religious cleavages. To capture class cleavages we have two sets of variables. First, we included a measure of the respondent's occupation with dummy variables representing those in working class occupations, those who are paid employees but not working class, and those who were not employed. This latter category is composed of all respondents who are not full or part-time employed such as students, retirees, housewives, those in training, the unemployed and women on maternity leave.<sup>11</sup> Second, given the historical connection between the SPD and trade unions, we included

<sup>10</sup> This contrasts with the more common tendency to utilize a simple dichotomous variable to indicate whether the voter chose any incumbent party (see for example Anderson, 2000; Anderson, 2006; Nadeau et al., 2002) or vote for the party of the chief executive (Anderson, 2000; Duch and Stevenson, 2005).

<sup>11</sup> The blue collar and paid employee variables come from “occupation” variables in the four surveys, which place respondents' occupations within broad categories. Workers (*Arbeiter*) include highly skilled, skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled blue collar laborers; employees (*Angestellte*) include all salaried white collar positions from managers (*leitende Angestellte*) on down to lower level employees (*einfache*).

a specific measure of whether the respondent was a member of a trade union.<sup>12</sup>

Because religious cleavages divide both among religious denominations (Roman Catholics vs. Protestants) and along a secular/religious divide, we use two measures. First, we use a dummy variable to capture Roman Catholics – a core constituency of the CDU/CSU. To capture the secular/religious divide we use a measure of the strength of religious belief, in this case, how often the individual attends church. The measure runs from 1 to 5, with 1 indicating that the respondent seldom or never attends and 5 indicating weekly attendance or more.

### 5.3. Ideological position

We also need to measure the respondent's ideological position vis-à-vis the political parties. Unfortunately, in 1966 and 1969 respondents were not asked to place themselves or the parties on an ideological left–right scale. Hence, measures of respondents' ideological proximity to the parties are not available. However, in all four years, respondents were asked to use 11-point scalometers to state what they thought of each political party, with 1 indicating rejection and 11 full support for the party. We include scalometers for the SPD and the CDU to give us a sense of where the individual stands vis-à-vis each party. In addition, we include an average measure of the SPD, CDU, and FDP scalometers to capture the respondent's political extremism.<sup>13</sup> A respondent who likes all three parties – and therefore has a high average – will lie somewhere in between the CDU and SPD. An individual who likes the CDU and FDP but dislikes the SPD and one who likes the SPD (and FDP) but not the CDU will have middle values on the average of the scalometers. Finally, high negative evaluations of all three parties – thus alienation from the party system – result in the lowest value on the average scalometer.<sup>14</sup>

In addition to these variables we also include several control variables. Because the economic situation often varies significantly between the election before the grand coalition and the election after the grand coalition, we

include the respondent's evaluation of the economy as a control variable.<sup>15</sup> Responses were coded into three categories: 1 = good, 2 = part good/part bad, and 3 = bad; a higher number thus indicates the respondent thinks that their economic condition is worse. We also include measures of the respondent's age, education<sup>16</sup> and sex. Appendix A provides descriptive statistics for all variables in each year of the survey.

## 6. Results

We begin by comparing vote choice models before and after each grand coalition separately, looking first at the 1965 and 1969 elections and second at the 2005 and 2009 elections. For brevity the control variables are not reported in the tables but full results are available from the authors by request. We then discuss the implications for each election on our understanding of how grand coalitions might influence vote choice.

### 6.1. 1965–1969

For each year we report a partial model that includes only the variables measuring traditional constituencies of the parties (with control variables) and a second model that adds the three ideological measures (see Table 2).

Looking first at the traditional bases of support for the large parties, we find that class cleavages have a diminishing effect after the grand coalition. The partial models (including only cleavage variables) show a well-defined class cleavage in both 1965 and 1969. Specifically, union members are more likely to vote for the SPD than either the CDU or the FDP in these partial models. However, we also see evidence that the effect of these class cleavages on vote choice diminishes in the 1969 election. Blue collar workers and those not in the work force in 1965 are more inclined to vote for the SPD over the CDU in the base model. Yet, by 1969 the unemployed and blue collar workers were not significantly more likely to favor the SPD over the CDU. In the full models which include variables reflecting closeness to the SPD and to the CDU as well as our measure of ideological extremism, blue collar respondents in 1965 and 1969 were no more likely to vote for the SPD over the CDU. Union members, however, were supporters of the SPD over the CDU in 1965, but by 1969 they were no more likely to pick the SPD over the CDU. In addition, while blue collar workers in 1965 were significantly more likely to support the SPD relative to the FDP, by 1969 they were not. Hence, we see some evidence of the loss of union support for the

<sup>12</sup> Surveys in 1965, 2006, 2009 asked if the respondent was a member of a trade union, however, in 1969 respondents were asked separate questions about their membership in 1) the Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund (DGB), 2) the Deutsche Angestelltengewerkschaft (DAG) and 3) the Christlicher Gewerkschaftsbund Deutschlands. We combined these three variables into a single measure. The DGB is the largest umbrella organization of unions in Germany (6.37 million in 2008, <http://www.dgb.de/uber-uns/dgb-heute/mitgliederzahlen>) though not every union is represented in the DGB. As evidenced in Table 3 the proportion of respondents claiming union membership in 1969 is similar to 1965 and higher than 2006 and 2009 when union membership declined significantly (see, Fitzenberger et al., 2006), suggesting that the three questions capture most union membership.

<sup>13</sup> This measure also captures “charitability” toward political parties as a whole (Green, 1988: pp. 763–7644 see also Wilcox et al., 1989).

<sup>14</sup> In the 2005 and 2009 elections we are able to replicate the analyses with direct measures of ideological extremism because respondents were asked to place themselves on a left–right ideology scale. We replicated the analysis reported in Table 3 by folding the left–right self-placement measure to create a measure indicating whether the respondent self-placed on the ideological extremes or in the center. These analyses are available on request.

<sup>15</sup> Since no single economic evaluation measure was repeated throughout the four surveys, we use equivalent measures in 1966 and 1969, and a different measure from the 2006 and 2009 surveys. In the earlier years, a retrospective pocketbook question asks whether the respondent's financial situation had improved (coded 1), stayed about the same (coded 2) or gotten worse (coded 3). In 1966, respondents compared their situation to a year before, in 1969 to three years prior. Surveys in 2006 and 2009 asked respondents about their current economic situation.

<sup>16</sup> Education is measured with two dummy variables – one for respondents who completed *Hauptschule* and one for those who received their *Abitur*.

**Table 2**

Multinomial models of voter choice in 1965 and 1969.

	1965 Base model			1965 Full model			1969 Base model			1969 Full Model		
	Coef.	s.e.	Sig.	Coef.	s.e.	Sig.	Coef.	s.e.	Sig.	Coef.	s.e.	Sig.
<i>CDU (vs. SPD)</i>												
Employee	-0.41	0.21		0.00	0.32		-0.60	0.48		-0.88	0.68	
Blue collar worker	-0.85	0.18	**	-0.27	0.28		-0.46	0.25		-0.22	0.33	
Not in work force	-0.42	0.19	*	-0.36	0.30		-0.32	0.30		0.01	0.31	
Union member	-0.99	0.22	**	-0.77	0.33	*	-1.15	0.30	**	-0.67	0.39	
Freq. attending church	0.38	0.06	**	0.26	0.09	**	0.38	0.07	**	0.21	0.09	*
Catholic	0.79	0.17	**	0.57	0.26	*	0.39	0.21		0.18	0.27	
Ave. scal. of major parties	-	-		0.34	0.17	*	-	-		-0.02	0.18	
CDU scalometer	-	-		0.86	0.10	**	-	-		0.71	0.12	**
SPD scalometer	-	-		-0.78	0.09	**	-	-		-0.85	0.12	**
<i>FDP (vs. SPD)</i>												
Employee	-0.96	0.34	**	-0.71	0.45		0.19	0.79		0.63	1.00	
Blue collar worker	-1.85	0.40	**	-1.34	0.52	*	-0.72	0.65		-1.15	0.90	
Not in work force	-0.63	0.34		-0.62	0.46		0.25	0.55		0.23	0.70	
Union member	-0.89	0.45	*	-0.47	0.58		-2.13	1.06	*	-1.35	1.12	
Freq. attending church	0.02	0.10		-0.02	0.14		0.07	0.17		0.07	0.21	
Catholic	0.16	0.32		0.20	0.43		-1.55	0.68	*	-1.08	0.75	
Ave. scal. of major parties	-	-		3.33	0.36	**	-	-		1.88	0.48	**
CDU scalometer	-	-		-1.00	0.16	**	-	-		-0.82	0.21	**
SPD scalometer	-	-		-1.83	0.15	**	-	-		-1.28	0.25	**
<i>Nonvoter (vs. SPD)</i>												
Employee	-0.44	0.37		-0.15	0.43		-0.51	1.10		-0.34	1.16	
Blue collar worker	-1.06	0.33	**	-0.75	0.41		-0.42	0.52		-0.31	0.61	
Not in work force	0.13	0.33		-0.10	0.40		-0.07	0.47		0.22	0.54	
Union member	-1.08	0.56		-1.02	0.67		-0.40	0.62		0.33	0.69	
Freq. attending church	-0.1	0.1		-0.16	0.13		0.11	0.13		0.05	0.16	
Catholic	0.36	0.32		0.26	0.38		0.29	0.41		-0.10	0.47	
Ave. scal. of major parties	-	-		0.61	0.25	*	-	-		0.17	0.34	
CDU scalometer	-	-		0.14	0.13		-	-		0.18	0.18	
SPD scalometer	-	-		-0.79	0.12	**	-	-		-0.82	0.19	**
N	1139			1078			650			599		

\*\* $p < .01$ , \* $p < .05$ .

Note: Controls were included for respondents' age, gender, education and retrospective pocketbook economic evaluations. For the sake of parsimony, results for these controls are not included in the table. We do not report results of other smaller parties.

SPD relative to the CDU and blue collar workers relative to the FDP although difference of slope tests did not indicate that these were significant.<sup>17</sup>

In addition, in the partial models that include only the cleavage measures, we also see some evidence that the SPD became less able to mobilize their core constituencies to vote vs. non-voting between 1965 and 1969. Specifically, blue collar workers were significantly more likely to vote for the SPD in these partial models than abstain in 1965. Yet, by 1969 blue collar workers are just as likely to abstain from voting as support the SPD, although a difference of slopes test was again inconclusive.

Some evidence also exists for the declining effect of the religious cleavage in the course of the 1966–1969 grand

coalition. In 1965, Catholics were significantly more likely to support the CDU over the SPD; yet, by 1969 Catholics were no more likely to choose the CDU over the SPD once other factors were considered. On the other hand, church attendance did have a significant influence in all years on the decision to choose the CDU over the SPD. While not conclusive since tests for differences in slopes were not significant, the shifts among working class and union members as well as Catholics between 1965 and 1969 could be partially a product of the party strategies of engaging in a grand coalition. However, the 1965–1969 differences are not alone strong enough to suggest that important core constituencies of both major parties were alienated by the existence of a grand coalition.

To examine the hypotheses related to voter ideology, we use the scalometer variables assessing perceptions of the SPD and CDU, as well as the average of the FDP, SPD, and CDU scalometers to determine the alienation from the mainstream parties generally. Looking at the full models in 1965, we find that party perceptions help drive vote choice for the SPD and CDU. For example, more favorable perceptions of the SPD significantly increase the probability of voting for the SPD (see Fig. 2). The same holds true for perceptions of the CDU. Sticking with 1965, we find that as

<sup>17</sup> To perform a difference of slopes test, we pooled the 1965 and 1969 data sets and ran the same models including a dummy variable for the year 1969 as well as interaction terms between the year 1969 and the cleavage variables. While the interaction variables did not obtain statistical significance in explaining a vote for the CDU as compared to the SPD, they were in the expected direction. This was also true for the interaction between 1969 and being a Catholic in understanding the vote for the CDU vs. SPD and for blue collar workers and union members in looking at the choice not to vote vs. voting for the SPD.



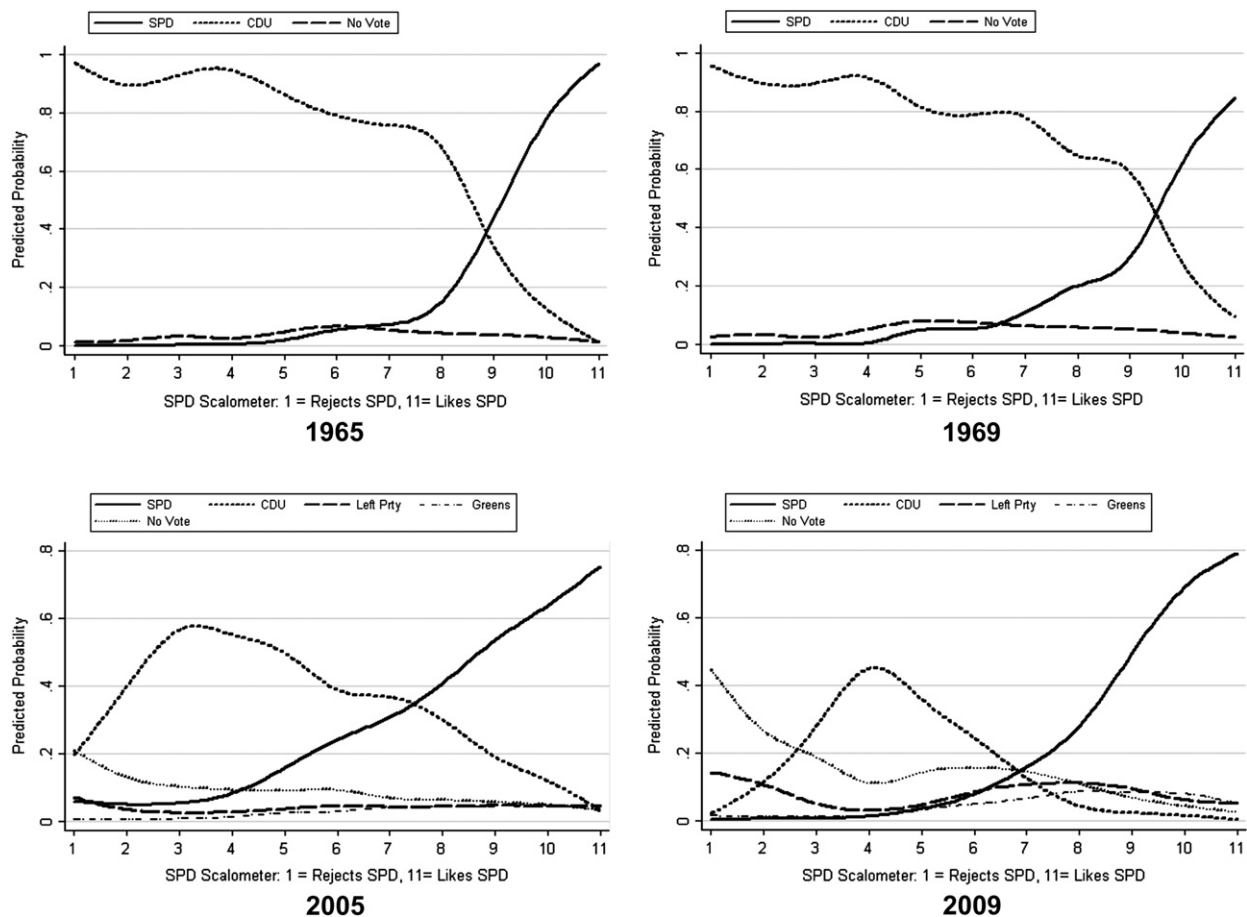


Fig. 2. Predicted probabilities by SPD Scalometer.

perceptions of the SPD become more favorable, individuals are likely to choose the SPD over the FDP or abstaining.

The grand coalition had only minimal impact on how views of the parties affected respondents' vote choices. Specifically, in 1969 positive views of the SPD continue to significantly increase the likelihood of voting for the SPD over the CDU, FDP or not voting. Similarly, positive views of the CDU as a party significantly increase the likelihood that the respondent chooses the CDU over the SPD. Not surprisingly, respondents in both 1965 and 1969 are more likely to choose the FDP over the SPD if they have negative views of both parties in the grand coalition. On the other hand, it does not appear that our expectations about voters on the ideological extremes were supported. We expected that such voters would choose not to turn out in the 1969 election; yet, controlling for other variables in the model, voters on the ideological extremes were not more likely to abstain. We did however find that ideological moderates became more supportive of the SPD between 1965 and 1969. While ideological moderates were more likely to support the CDU over the SPD in 1965, the coefficient in the 1969 models on our measure of extremism was not significant, indicating that these voters were now

indifferent between the two parties. There was also a strong drop in the strength of the coefficient for supporting the FDP over the SPD between 1965 and 1969. A joint test of the slope differences suggested that there was a significant change in these coefficients between 1965 and 1969.<sup>18</sup>

## 6.2. 2005–2009

Results from the 2005 and 2009 elections are reported in Table 3. As before, we report both a partial model including age, sex, education and the cleavage variables and a full model. Because of the rise of the Greens and Die Linke as viable alternatives, Table 3 also reports coefficients explaining voters' choice of each of these alternatives over the SPD.

Focusing first on traditional core constituencies, we see some of these constituencies abandoning the SPD in 2009

<sup>18</sup> The difference of slopes test is described in footnote 16. The measure for change in slope between 1965 and 1969 on all the comparisons for ideological extremists or moderates was jointly significant at the 0.1 level across all choices.

**Table 3**  
Multinomial models of voter choice in 2005 and 2009 elections.

	2005 Base Model <sup>a</sup>			2005 Full Model <sup>a</sup>			2009 Base Model			2009 Full Model		
	Coef.	s.e.	Sig.	Coef.	s.e.	Sig.	Coef.	s.e.	Sig.	Coef.	s.e.	Sig.
<i>CDU (vs. SPD)</i>												
Employee	−0.31	0.37	**	−0.13	0.05	**	−1.21	0.34	**	−0.51	0.44	
Blue collar worker	−0.28	0.05	**	−0.14	0.06	*	−1.15	0.38	**	−0.63	0.50	
Not in work force	−0.22	0.04	**	−0.18	0.04	**	−0.79	0.33	*	0.02	0.42	
Union member	−0.69	0.05	**	−0.43	0.06	**	−0.22	0.24	**	0.17	0.34	
Freq. attending church	0.28	0.01	**	0.22	0.02	**	0.21	0.07	**	0.08	0.11	
Catholic	0.44	0.04	**	0.32	0.05	**	0.50	0.18	**	0.19	0.25	
Ave. scal. of major parties	–	–		0.66	0.03	**	–	–		0.35	0.15	*
CDU scalometer	–	–		0.45	0.02	**	–	–		0.71	0.09	**
SPD scalometer	–	–		−0.99	0.02	**	–	–		−1.10	0.08	**
<i>FDP (vs. SPD)</i>												
Employee	−0.48	0.07	**	−0.27	0.08	**	−1.50	0.37	**	−0.74	0.58	
Blue collar worker	−0.59	0.10	**	−0.42	0.12	**	−1.21	0.43	**	−0.31	0.55	
Not in work force	−0.26	0.07	**	−0.17	0.08	*	−0.89	0.36	*	−0.12	0.45	
Union member	−0.88	0.12	**	−0.53	0.13	**	−0.19	0.30	**	0.17	0.40	
Freq. attending church	0.10	0.03	**	0.11	0.03	**	0.10	0.09	**	0.02	0.13	
Catholic	0.16	0.08	*	−0.04	0.09		0.62	0.23	**	0.28	0.30	
Ave. scal. of major parties	–	–		2.50	0.08	**	–	–		3.16	0.23	**
CDU scalometer	–	–		−0.58	0.03	**	–	–		−0.93	0.11	**
SPD scalometer	–	–		−1.54	0.03	**	–	–		−1.95	0.10	**
<i>Greens (vs. SPD)</i>												
Employee	−0.36	0.06	**	−0.29	0.07	**	−1.14	0.38	**	−0.93	0.41	*
Blue collar worker	−0.71	0.11	**	−0.69	0.12	**	−1.14	0.46	*	−1.21	0.50	*
Not in work force	−0.40	0.07	**	−0.34	0.07	**	−1.39	0.38	**	−1.17	0.41	**
Union member	−0.20	0.09	*	−0.24	0.09	*	0.00	0.32		−0.04	0.34	
Freq. attending church	0.13	0.03	**	0.16	0.03	**	0.06	0.11	**	0.15	0.11	
Catholic	0.09	0.07		0.11	0.07		−0.05	0.27		−0.28	0.29	
Ave. scal. of major parties	–	–		−0.26	0.04	**	–	–		0.07	0.16	
CDU scalometer	–	–		−0.05	0.02	*	–	–		−0.16	0.09	
SPD scalometer	–	–		0.05	0.02	*	–	–		−0.39	0.08	**
<i>Die Linke (vs. SPD)</i>												
Employee	0.19	0.07	**	0.21	0.07	**	−0.60	0.41		−0.31	0.46	
Blue collar worker	0.35	0.08	**	0.40	0.09	**	−1.06	0.47	*	−1.16	0.52	*
Not in work force	0.20	0.06	**	0.29	0.06	**	−0.37	0.40		−0.13	0.45	
Union member	0.04	0.07		0.04	0.08		0.77	0.25	**	0.82	0.28	**
Freq. attending church	−0.50	0.04	**	−0.45	0.04	**	−0.52	0.11	**	−0.38	0.12	**
Catholic	−0.87	0.10	**	−0.86	0.10	**	−0.12	0.27		−0.54	0.29	
Ave. scal. of major parties	–	–		0.19	0.04	**	–	–		0.12	0.15	
CDU scalometer	–	–		−0.33	0.02	**	–	–		−0.23	0.09	**
SPD scalometer	–	–		−0.16	0.02	**	–	–		−0.59	0.07	**
<i>Nonvoter (vs. SPD)</i>												
Employee	−0.10	0.06	**	−0.04	0.07		−0.76	0.39		−0.33	0.44	
Blue collar worker	0.26	0.07	**	0.27	0.08	**	−0.68	0.42		−0.64	0.48	
Not in work force	0.15	0.05	**	0.29	0.06	**	−0.06	0.37		0.37	0.42	
Union member	−0.46	0.07	**	−0.34	0.08	**	−0.65	0.29	*	−0.41	0.33	
Freq. attending church	−0.21	0.03	**	−0.19	0.03	**	−0.26	0.09	**	−0.15	0.11	
Catholic	0.05	0.06		−0.04	0.07		0.19	0.22		−0.23	0.25	
Ave. scal. of major parties	–	–		0.29	0.04	**	–	–		0.26	0.14	
CDU scalometer	–	–		0.04	0.02		–	–		−0.05	0.08	
SPD scalometer	–	–		−0.58	0.02	**	–	–		−0.83	0.07	**
N	26027			23697			1850			1806		

\*\* $p < .01$ , \* $p < .05$ .

<sup>a</sup>2006 models with weighted data.

Note: Controls were included for respondents' age, gender, education and current pocketbook economic evaluations. For the sake of parsimony, results for these variables are not included in the table. We do not report results of other smaller parties.

after supporting the party in 2005. This can be seen most of all in the coefficients for union membership. In 2005, both the base model and the full model show that union members were significantly more likely to support the SPD over the CDU, FDP and Greens. By 2009, however, union members were no less likely to vote for the CDU/CSU, FDP or Greens in comparison to the SPD in both models.<sup>19</sup> Evidence of union members abandoning the SPD is even stronger when we look at the comparison between Die Linke and the SPD. In the 2005 election union members were indifferent between Die Linke and the SPD but in 2009 union members were significantly more likely to choose Die Linke over the SPD.<sup>20</sup> Because of the SPD's traditional connection to trade unions and because trade unions regularly mobilize their members, this represents an important shift in the lines of cleavage. Die Linke rather than the SPD now benefits from trade unionism.

Blue collar workers who are not connected with unions do appear to continue to support the SPD to some extent. In both the partial and full models of the 2005 election, blue collar workers were significantly less likely to vote for the CDU/CSU, FDP, and Greens than the SPD. Moreover, the tests for differences in slopes suggest that blue collar workers are significantly *more* supportive of the SPD compared to the CDU/CSU and the FDP in 2009. Similarly, although blue collar workers were significantly more likely to support Die Linke over the SPD in 2005, by 2009 they appear to have left Die Linke and returned to the SPD.<sup>21</sup> Thus, while the SPD appears to have lost its connection to trade union members, it did not completely lose all of its traditional bases of support after the grand coalition.

As was the case with the first grand coalition, we also see some indications of a shift in the role of religion as a social cleavage in the second grand coalition. As was the case in 1965 and 1969, the religious (as defined by church attendance) and Catholics continue to vote for the CDU/CSU over the SPD in the 2005 election, even when ideological proximity to the two major parties are included in the model. However, in the analysis separated by individual years Catholics are not significantly more likely to support the CDU/CSU in 2009, once all other variables are included in the model. A joint test of the difference for the slope for Catholics across all party comparisons was significant at the 0.05 level in the base model (although this difference just barely missed significance in the full model). Thus, we see some indication that the lines of the religious cleavage between the CDU/CSU and SPD blurred during the second grand coalition as well.

<sup>19</sup> We also pooled the 2005 and 2009 data sets to run difference of slope tests as we did in 1965 and 1969 (see footnote 16). While individual difference in slopes tests were not significant in the full model, joint tests of significance of the slopes based on interaction terms were significant at the 0.05 level for union members (analyses available upon request).

<sup>20</sup> This is confirmed in the pooled analysis where the coefficient of the union membership measure in 2009 is positive and significant, indicating that union members were significantly more likely to choose Die Linke over the SPD.

<sup>21</sup> This is confirmed in the pooled analysis where the variable indicating blue collar workers in 2009 is negative and significant.

In examining voters' proximity to the political parties, we find evidence that non-voting and voting for left parties are influenced by the experiences of the second grand coalition in contrast to what was found in 1966 and 1969. This is seen most clearly in Fig. 2 which shows the predicted probabilities for voting for each party and abstaining at different values of the SPD scalometer. It shows that respondents who disliked the SPD in the 2005 election voted largely for the CDU. But by 2009, respondents at the extreme dislike side of the SPD scalometer (1 and 2 on the 11 point scale) were more likely to vote for Die Linke than they were to vote for the CDU. Even more significantly, voters who rejected the SPD in 2009 were most likely not to go to the polls at all.<sup>22</sup> This suggests that the grand coalition did have a significant effect in 2009 on those voters at the extremes of the ideological spectrum, moving them more toward abstention or parties to the left of the SPD.

Overall then, the 2005–2009 grand coalition had the effect of blurring the lines of cleavage between the SPD and CDU, moving traditional supporters (specifically union members) from the SPD to Die Linke. In particular, union members in 2009 no longer chose the SPD over the CDU, FDP or Greens and were more likely to vote for Die Linke than the SPD. The grand coalition also increased the tendency of voters to abstain from voting altogether. Those individuals who rejected the SPD were no longer more likely to vote for the CDU; rather they were most likely to abstain from voting altogether or chose to vote for Die Linke. Below we discuss the implications of these findings for the influence of coalitions on vote choice.

## 7. Conclusion

The grand coalitions of 1966–1969 and 2005–2009 represent significantly different forms of coalition governments compared to the other coalitions that have occurred in the post-World War II Germany. This paper uses these two types of German coalitions to investigate how different forms of coalitions influence the voters' choices. Despite differences between them, both grand coalitions, unanticipated in the election prior to their creation, forced the major parties to divide government portfolios relatively equally, to compromise their policy positions and to implement policies for which they shared responsibility. These characteristics of grand coalitions helped to blur the differences between these parties in the elections which followed. In both periods, the grand coalitions influenced the CDU and SPD's abilities to mobilize electoral support from traditional cleavages, and altered their position in ideological space vis-à-vis their constituencies.

We also examine whether these effects were similar in the first and second grand coalition, which differed historically in several ways. The second grand coalition took place in a party system with other well-established

<sup>22</sup> Graphs of the CDU scalometers against predicted values show similar relationships between non-voting and dislike of the CDU (figure available from the authors by request).

parties to the left, and after a significant decline in the importance of some cleavages for voting behavior. The first grand coalition took place in a three-party system where cleavages had not suffered much erosion and where the SPD had not yet participated in government. Die Linke's position to the left of the SPD and the declining role of cleavages during the second grand coalition had a strong effect on how voters were mobilized. The attachment of union members to the SPD had certainly already declined between 1969 and 2005 but it is also clear that the second grand coalition contributed to decoupling this core constituency even more. While the evidence is weaker for other core constituencies of the SPD and the core constituencies of the CDU, there is some suggestion that their traditional attachments to the large political parties have weakened. Given the importance that decreases in partisan attachment have for politics (see for example [Kayser and Wlezien, 2010](#)), our findings suggest that we should pay much more attention to the electoral implications of differing forms of coalition governments.

These findings buttress existing research on institutional characteristics' affect on individual behavior by showing that the form of coalitions may influence vote choice in future elections. We show that both grand coalitions, though quite different from each other, weakened the connections between the major parties and their core class and religious constituencies, thereby blurring cleavage boundaries in the election after the grand coalition. Class divisions were muted in the 1969 and 2009 elections compared to the preceding elections, even as cleavages themselves had declined in the forty years between grand coalitions. Similarly, the divide between Catholics and Protestants also blurred even though religiosity continued to play a role. Thus, we find evidence that the form the coalition takes may influence voters.

We saw evidence of differences between the grand coalitions as well, albeit not exactly what we had anticipated. We expected to find that voters ideologically distant from the SPD would choose not to vote in 1969 but might vote for left parties in the 2009 election. Instead we found that non-voting was not strong among voters ideologically distant to the SPD in 1969 but that such voters were more likely both not to vote and to vote for the other parties on the left in 2009. Clearly, the different party system provided voters with more options in 2009 as we expected, but it is also true that the second grand coalition also inspired more non-voting. Not only were those individuals who rejected the SPD more likely to abstain than to vote for another party, but union members, who traditionally voted for the SPD, were no longer more likely to vote for the SPD than abstain from the polls. The decision not to vote thus became an important alternative to voting for another party in the last election. Given that increases in non-voting and increased fragmentation of the party system have occurred in all European democracies, it raises the question of whether countries, like Austria, with traditions of grand coalitions might be even more starkly affected by such trends.

Our findings, summarized above, suggest that coalitions shape voter behavior by providing individuals with information for evaluating incumbent parties. During the formation of a new coalition, as parties create the new government's policies, voters update their information on the parties' policies. Changes in party policies are particularly important to supporters of parties in government who will likely expect policies to be consistent with the parties' previous position. Voters are also likely to hold large parties more responsible for policy changes since they have greater control over government policy. The traditional German coalition between a large political party and an ideologically similar smaller party does not usually force parties to engage in dramatic programmatic shifts. Hence, voters tend to find the new information alters little in terms of the congruence between themselves and their preferred party. On the other hand, grand coalitions between two ideologically dissimilar parties force the governing parties, in the interest of maintaining effective governance, to deviate from standard policy and ideological positions. These shifts, though often temporary, may set the party at odds with the more steadfast cleavage structures and individual ideological positions of some core supporters. Voters are then required to consider alternatives and adjust their behavior accordingly either by choosing rival parties or abstaining altogether.

Finally, these findings have implications for the German party system as well as other party systems experiencing electoral decline of its mainstream parties. On the one hand, realignments and new parties on the Left have eroded support of the *Volksparteien* to the point where securing a majority of seats in the traditional coalition of a large and small party with similar ideology is increasingly difficult. This means that grand coalitions, minority governments and odd coalitions across ideological camps are ever more likely outcomes of elections. However, such coalitions threaten the ability of large mainstream parties to market themselves to distinct constituencies, particularly their traditional bases of support, thereby contributing even further to the erosion of traditional cleavages and the strength of smaller third parties. Hence, large mainstream parties such as the CDU and SPD may be caught in a catch-22, increasingly forced into grand coalitions which hasten their own electoral decline when they enter into them.

For those studying the effect of coalitions on vote choice, our findings suggest that in addition to information about future coalition possibilities, scholars should also consider the particular arrangements of previous coalitions as part of the institutional context that structures how voters decide. Coalitions affect choice because they give voters evidence to evaluate governance and programmatic shifts, at the same time as they constrain the positions the parties may take. However, as this paper demonstrates, both the constraints and the programmatic shifts that parties undergo differ when comparing grand coalitions to other coalitions. The institutional and programmatic differences among other types of coalitions remain to be explored.

## Appendix A

Descriptives of Independent Variables.

	Min	Max	1965		1969		2006		2009	
			Mean	Sd	Mean	Sd	Mean	Sd	Mean	Sd
Paid employee	0	1	0.213	0.410	0.045	0.207	0.480	0.500	0.245	0.430
Blue collar worker	0	1	0.363	0.481	0.263	0.441	0.189	0.392	0.113	0.317
Not in work force	0	1	0.423	0.494	0.469	0.499	0.404	0.491	0.552	0.497
Union member	0	1	0.139	0.347	0.133	0.339	0.117	0.322	0.109	0.312
Church attendance (once a week or more = 5)	1	5	3.167	1.518	3.071	1.543	2.129	1.218	1.921	1.113
Catholic	0	1	0.440	0.497	0.485	0.500	0.386	0.487	0.263	0.440
Abitur or more	0	1	0.063	0.243	0.037	0.189	0.381	0.486	0.170	0.376
Hauptschule or less	0	1	0.774	0.418	0.810	0.392	0.290	0.454	0.412	0.492
Female	0	1	0.534	0.499	0.537	0.499	0.501	0.500	0.527	0.499
Age (in categories)	1	5	3.053	1.378	3.159	1.360	3.142	1.380	3.378	1.506
Ave. scal. of major parties	1	11	7.125	1.344	8.022	1.497	6.636	1.862	5.695	1.923
CDU scalometer	1	11	8.261	2.549	8.704	2.301	6.857	2.696	6.052	2.882
SPD scalometer	1	11	7.448	2.839	8.711	2.294	6.834	2.577	5.779	2.561
Retrospective pocketbook	1	3	1.994	0.577	2.185	0.921	–	–	–	–
Current pocketbook	1	3	–	–	–	–	1.637	0.685	1.887	0.790

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