

INTRODUCTION

Merkel's Nachsommermärchen?

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A Märchen for Merkel

Not once during the campaign—or actually over the whole course of the seventeenth Bundestag (2009-2013)—was it ever really in doubt that Angela Merkel would continue as chancellor after the 22 September 2013 parliamentary election. Despite the vicissitudes of governing for eight years, most in the midst of the financial and Euro crisis, she has achieved and sustained some of the highest approval ratings of any postwar German politician. Voters trust Merkel as a good manager of the economy and an honest steward and defender of German interests in Europe. Her carefully cultivated image as a steady, reassuring, and incorruptible leader, coupled with her political acumen, ideological flexibility and, at times, ruthlessness—captured in the dueling monikers of Mutti Merkel and Merkelavelli¹—are the keys to her profound success.

She is the first female chancellor, the most powerful woman in the world, and the fifth most powerful person overall.² With ten years in power (as of 22 November 2015), she is the third-longest serving chancellor behind fellow Christian Democrats Helmut Kohl with sixteen years in power and Konrad Adenauer with fourteen, and, currently, she is the longest serving head of government in the European Union. Even more importantly, in the summer of 2014, soccer fan Merkel presided over a real *Sommerrmärchen* (summer fairy tale) with the men's national soccer team's victory in the World Cup (the country's fourth such title, but the first since reunification).³ She has presided over a prolonged export boom, resulting in a record-setting current account surplus of 7.4 percent of GDP in 2014.⁴ Economic performance has remained solid, especially compared to EU partners, many of which are in recession—German GDP grew by 3.9

percent in 2010, 3.7 percent in 2011, 0.6 percent in 2012, 0.2 percent in 2013, 1.5 percent in 2014, and 1.1 percent (predicted) in 2015.⁵ Public finances are sound with the debt burden returning to around 80 percent of GDP and the deficit at only -0.1 percent in 2013, following a budget surplus of 0.1 percent in 2012. Already in 2014, the federal government achieved its long sought-after *schwarz-null*—a fully funded budget with no new debt—for the first time since 1969.⁶

Table I.1. German Economic Performance, 2009-2016

Year	Real GDP Growth Rate (%)	Budget Deficit/Surplus (% GDP)	Public Debt (% GDP)	Unemployment Rate (harmonized)
2009	-5.6	-3.0	77.5	7.64
2010	3.9	-4.1	86.2	6.97
2011	3.7	-0.9	85.8	5.83
2012	0.6	0.1	88.5	5.38
2013	0.2	-0.1*	85.9	5.24
2014	1.5	0.2	83.9	4.99
2015	1.1**	0.0**	79.8**	5.1**
2016	1.8**	0.2**		5.1**

Source: <http://data.oecd.org>; <http://www.oecd.org/economy/germany-economic-forecast-summary.htm>; http://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/economics/government-debt_gov-debt-table-en; accessed 1 March 2015.

* The OECD has a 0.1% surplus for 2013, but official figures now record a slight deficit. See <http://www.dw.de/german-economic-growth-flat-in-2013-but-deficit-under-control/a-17362284>.

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In light of French stagnation, Italian dysfunction, and British withdrawal from Europe, Merkel has overseen an unprecedented rise of German influence and power in the European Union and beyond. Moreover, the so-called German model, in disgrace by the end of the 1990s and early 2000s, has seen a comeback. Countries around the world—including the United States—have grown to admire the German system and are even trying to emulate parts of it.⁷ It is truly Merkel's Germany today, dare one say, Merkel's Europe.

Not surprising, therefore, was the resounding victory of her Christian Democratic Union/Christian Social Union (CDU/CSU or the Union parties) in the 2013 election. In fact, her victory was so decisive that her party came within a handful of seats of achieving an absolute majority—a feat only achieved once in postwar Germany by Konrad Adenauer in 1957 at the height of the *Wirtschaftswunder*. As much as Merkel's re-election was seemingly overdetermined, election night did generate several surprises, most notably the failure of the Liberals (Free Democratic Party, FDP)—the

junior coalition partner since 2009—to surpass the 5 percent electoral threshold. They are thus not represented in parliament for the first time since 1949. This outcome also necessitated a new coalitional partner for the Union, which, as expected, turned out to be the Social Democrats (SPD). These parties negotiated yet another grand coalition (after experiences from 1966-1969 and 2005-2009)—replete with a detailed 185-page coalition agreement⁸—sworn in almost three months after the election on 17 December 2013.

In light of the importance of Germany in European and global politics today, and the current resonance of the German system abroad, this edited volume is devoted to the 2013 Bundestag election and its consequences. The contributions assembled below delve into a variety of salient issues, including the campaign, partisan politics, issues of representation, government formation, and domestic and foreign policies. The reader should gain a fuller understanding of the German political situation, as well as some insight into what one might expect looking into the future. Merkel is at the pinnacle of her power, but her era could come to a close over the next four years. Who and what come next? Moreover, despite the outward signs of success, many challenges have festered underneath the surface—problems that will eventually emerge and demand action. In a few short years, Merkel might very well paraphrase the apocryphal words of France’s Louis XV: “après moi le deluge.” At the least, her stunning electoral triumph, her *Herbstmärchen* (autumn fairy tale), may turn out to be much more ephemeral, a *Nachsommermärchen* (Indian Summer fairy tale).

The Campaign

Onlookers inside and outside of Germany agreed that the 2013 election campaign was one of the most boring and inconsequential ever—even more so than 2009, which was memorably likened to “a city council race in Würzburg.”⁹ Observers widely lamented that the parties did not address the big, existential issues that Germany faces—rising income inequality, stagnant wages, widespread “precarity,” crumbling infrastructure, and lack of domestic investment. This is not even to mention deeper structural issues such as the aging of the population, immigration and integration issues, and, of course, the specter of the simmering Euro crisis. But then, certain highbrow types always think there should be much more thoughtful debate about a political system’s challenges in some kind of fantasy Habermasian public sphere. Yet, even by more realistic standards, candidates dis-

cussed very little of substance during either the six “hot” weeks of the campaign or in the months preceding this phase.

Each party had a substantial enough electoral platform. The center-right parties resisted tax increases and more European oversight of the economy and banking sector. The center-left and left parties advocated higher taxes and more supranational oversight, and everyone seemed concerned about educational outcomes, affordable housing, and, of course, noise (*Lärmschutz*).¹⁰ Only a few issues appeared to gain any kind of traction: proposals for a minimum wage, plans to address rising rents in many cities, lowering the retirement age, a potential toll for foreign cars on Autobahns, or financing more daycare places. There was only one televised debate on 1 September between Merkel and her Social Democratic challenger (Peer Steinbrück)—the so-called *Kanzlerduell*—and another one for the top candidates of the other, smaller parties. Even this failed to generate much drama, although Merkel (Greece never should have been let into the Eurozone) and her opponent (the banks are responsible for the Euro crisis and should be held accountable) landed a few punches. Comedian and co-moderator Stefan Raab’s smart-alecky behavior stole the show—as well as the presumably patriotic necklace that Merkel wore—the so-called *Schlandkette*, which even generated its own Twitter account.¹¹

Pundits largely blamed Merkel and her party for this state of affairs. The CDU centered its campaign almost completely on the figure of the *Kanzlerin*. Campaign posters veritably fetishized Merkel, with outsized photos, and more often (especially in the much derided three-story advertisement near the main train station in Berlin) simply depicting her hands in her famous, rhombus-shaped (*Raute*) gesture—“Maxima Merkel” as *Der Spiegel* put it.¹² Slogans were simple—“gemeinsam erfolgreich” (successful together); “damit Angela Merkel Kanzlerin bleibt” (so that Angela Merkel remains chancellor); “Cool bleiben und Kanzlerin wählen” (stay calm and vote for the chancellor)—perhaps summarized simply by “weiter so” (more, onwards, forward), or “Angie.” As Merkel put it at the end of the *Kanzlerduell*—you know me, you trust me, let’s continue. This encapsulates Merkel’s appeal: no drama, trustworthiness, the reputation for sound management, studiousness, and hard work.

Many commented that it was a classic Christian Democratic campaign strategy dating back to the Adenauer era of “*keine Experimente*” (no experiments). This resonated deeply with an older, conservative German electorate that is deeply satisfied with its prosperity and economic achievements, as well as a little proud, even smug that Germans have been doing so well despite the misery from the financial and Euro crisis

surrounding them. Indeed, unemployment has fallen to an almost historic low, youth unemployment is negligible—under 10 percent, versus an EU average of 23 percent and over 50 percent in Greece and Spain—and taxes have not risen.¹³ Berlin is finally booming for the first time really since before 1945, nation-wide growth is projected to accelerate in 2014 and 2015, and even Eastern Germany is doing reasonably well.¹⁴ The Union would not have benefited from a deeper debate about issues. Merkel basically had to show up and smile—or show her hands—and that is exactly what she did.

Not everyone has been completely taken in by Merkel's appeal. Some liken her to a "*schwäbische Hausfrau*"—a hard-working, thrifty, perhaps stingy, southern German housewife. Guido Westerwelle was the first of many to refer to her as "*Mutti*"—mommy—although I always thought she more resembles a "*Tante*" (aunt)—reassuring, supportive, but also at times patronizing, and even a bit suffocating. More negative is the "Merkelavelli" description, pointing to how well, even ruthlessly, she has played the dirtier game of politics behind the scenes, outmaneuvering enemies and friends, co-opting others' positions, and eliminating rivals. Of course, outside of Germany there is a legion of criticism, especially from the "peripheral" economies that have been in a depression for years now (blamed on Merkel and Finance Minister Wolfgang Schäuble). Images of Merkel depicted with a Hitler moustache or Nazi uniform have been rather ubiquitous in Greece, Italy, and Spain. No longer confined to extreme fringes on the left and right, even mainstream publications like the *New Statesman* have asserted that Merkel is the most dangerous person in Europe since Hitler with "her" austerity doctrines.¹⁵ The February 2014 issue of *Harper's* had a cover of a Nazi uniform with the swastika replaced by a Euro symbol over the headline "How Germany Reconquered Europe: The Euro and its Discontents."¹⁶ The French have long deemed her "Madame Non" and the British love to compare her to their divisive "iron lady" Margaret Thatcher—albeit without the world-changing vision.

Less explosively, others have pointed out that "Merkelism" is a tactic of demobilization and depoliticization—consisting of vacuous platitudes, small-step pragmatism, content-less pronouncements, and now a healthy dose of personality cult/hero worship. Some highbrows feel that she damages Germany's public and democratic culture in such a "Biedermeier" or new Eisenhower era.¹⁷ There are fears that her wishy-washy slogans will prompt—or with the rise of the anti-Euro *Alternativ für Deutschland* (AfD) have already prompted—a more extremist ideological reaction. Some criticize Merkel for having no grand vision, of being ideologically amorphous,

tacking left or right, appropriating seemingly resonant policies (*Energiewende*) first from the SPD and then the FDP. It was rumored that despite a degree of ideological convergence, the Greens would not seriously contemplate joining a coalition as long as Merkel remains in power, precisely because they fear her opportunistic embrace would co-opt and strangulate them.

Given Merkel's unassailable position in the pre-election polls, it almost seemed as if the other parties had given up before they even started. Indeed, their campaigns ranged from lackluster to mediocre, and even shambolic. The Greens could not really recover from a bizarre scandal about permissive attitudes towards pedophilia that some prominent party members such as Daniel Cohn-Bendit and Volker Beck endorsed decades ago.¹⁸ They also had environmentally friendly campaign posters that quickly disintegrated in wind and rain—interpreted as a symbol of their campaign missteps.¹⁹ More generally, despite pervasive support for an environmentalist agenda among the public, the German electorate remains uneasy about spiking energy prices and the perverse effects of subsidies for green energy.

The SPD's campaign seemed cautious and predictable, stressing the minimum wage, lower rents, and vague calls for more social justice. Their slogans surrounding "Wir," (we) "Das WIR entscheidet" (the we decides) were widely panned as vague and undifferentiated from the other parties.²⁰ But then, the most prominent leaders—Peer Steinbrück, Frank-Walter Steinmeier, Sigmar Gabriel—had to be careful as many of them were in government during the Red-Green coalition from 1998-2005 or with Merkel from 2005-2009 and thus share some responsibility for current policies, a point Merkel gleefully hammered home during the televised debate. The party thought it could achieve a breakthrough with the choice of Steinbrück (finance minister from 2005-2009) as their chancellor candidate—considered a witty, straight-talker, but also a bit of a loose cannon. His candidacy never took off and there were some missteps—such as reports about the fees he had received for speeches, complaining about the chancellor receiving inadequate pay, or deriding cheap wine that he presumably would never touch, expressing a kind of effete elitism at odds with the traditional culture of the oldest working class party in the world, which, incidentally, celebrated its one-hundred-fiftieth anniversary in 2013. In an act of seeming desperation, he posed for a controversial magazine cover in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, smirking and giving the *Stinkefinger* (the middle finger) to the camera.

The FDP was almost invisible, had vacuous slogans—"die Mitte entlassen" (relieve the middle), "damit Deutschland stark bleibt" (so that Ger-

many remains strong)—and made an amateurish, last-ditch “second vote” effort, which Merkel assiduously blocked. The party clearly saw the writing on the wall and barely tried to campaign. The Left Party used virtually the same slogans as they always have, recycled from the late nineteenth century—“Miete und Energie: bezahlbar für alle” (Rent and energy: affordable for all), “100% sozial,” “Teilen macht Spass: Millionärsteuer” (sharing is fun: millionaire tax). The insurgent anti-Euro AfD had quite the presence—apparently benefiting from a surge of private donations. “Mut zur Wahrheit: Der Euro ruiniert Europa! Auch uns!” (Courage for the Truth: The Euro is ruining Europe! Us too!); “Der deutsche Frühling beginnt im Herbst” (the German spring begins in autumn); “Griechen leiden. Deutsche zahlen. Banken kassieren,” (Greeks suffer. Germans pay. Banks cash in); and “Einwanderung braucht strikte Regeln” (immigration requires strict rules). The right-radical NPD also caused controversy with its xenophobic posters—“Maria statt scharia” (Maria [depicted as a blonde woman] instead of sharia [with a woman wearing the niqab]); or “Geld für die Oma statt Sinti und Roma” (money for grandma, instead of Sinti and Roma).

Results and Current Trends

In contrast to the campaign, election night was rather dramatic or at least surprising. With 41.5 percent of the second votes, the 311 CDU/CSU seats came within five of an absolute majority. No one expected this decisive a victory for Merkel. The headlines the next day proclaimed—rightfully—the Merkel Republic. This was her achievement and her triumph. She is now the third-longest serving postwar chancellor and the only European leader to have been re-elected (twice) since the beginnings of the financial and Euro crises in 2008. Amidst the jubilation at the Konrad-Adenauer-Haus in the Tiergarten on election night, Merkel was typically humble, although visibly happy, thanking her team and already looking forward to the task of forming a new governing coalition.

The FDP had an apocalyptic evening. The party and its leaders proved hapless in government, seemingly unable to come through on any of their 2009 campaign promises. The leaders’ missteps plagued the Liberals, especially Foreign Minister Guido Westerwelle and party leader Philipp Rösler, whom Merkel also constantly outmaneuvered. In the end, only she could claim credit for and benefit from the economy’s strong performance after 2010. On election night, the FDP garnered only 4.8 percent of the vote, almost 10 percent less than in 2009, coming in below the all-

Table I.2. Bundestag Election Results, 2013 and 2009

	2013		2009		Percent Vote Change (2013 from 2009)		
	Percent Second Vote	Seats	Percent Seats	Percent Second Vote	Seats	Percent Seats	
CDU/CSU	41.5	311	49.4	33.8	239	38.4	+7.7
SPD	25.7	192	30.5	23.0	146	23.5	+2.7
FDP	4.8	-	-	14.6	93	15.0	-9.8
Greens	8.4	63	10.0	10.7	68	10.9	-2.5
Left	8.6	64	10.2	11.9	76	12.2	-3.3
AfD	4.7	-	-	-	-	-	-
Others	6.2	-	-	6.0	-	-	-
All < 5 percent	15.7			6.0			+9.7

Source: http://www.bundeswahlleiter.de/de/bundestagswahlen/BTW_BUND_13/index.html

important 5 percent threshold for being eligible for seats. Thus, for the first time since the Federal Republic was formed, the FDP lacks representation in the eighteenth Bundestag and its market liberal profile will not be heard. The atmosphere at their campaign night event was funereal and the purge of top leaders (Rösler, Rainer Brüderle) started the next morning. The party now places all of its hopes on thirty-six-year-old Christian Lindner from North Rhine Westphalia who became the new party chairman in December 2013. The Union parties gained 2 million second votes from the FDP—other supporters stayed at home or defected to the insurgent AfD. Interestingly, all pollsters had the Liberals over the 5 percent threshold in the weeks before the election—and they were rather defensive after the fact about their erroneous predictions, noting that the actual result was “within the margin of error.”

By early 2015, there were few signs of recovery, with the party hovering between 3 and 4 percent in polls. It garnered only 3.4 percent in the May 2014 elections to the European Parliament,²¹ and in the fall 2014 Land elections, did not surmount the 5 percent threshold (2.5 percent in Thuringia, 1.5 percent in Brandenburg, and 3.8 percent in Saxony). Many pundits believe that the party is finished, although it did well in Hamburg in February 2015, actually increasing its vote to 7.4 percent and greatly boosting Lindner’s position.²²

Assessments of the SPD’s performance depended on the eye of the beholder. Some journalists spoke of the “second worst electoral result in the party’s history,”²³ with 2009 being the nadir. Others saw improvement. The party did marginally better than 2009—increasing its share of second votes by 2.7 percent to 25.7 percent. Yet even the party faithful saw this as a lackluster result. The heartiest cheering at the SPD election

night party in Kreuzberg's Willy-Brandt-Haus occurred when the prognosis came in that the FDP would not surpass the 5 percent threshold—Germans did coin the word *schadenfreude* after all. Of course, the party's structural predicament with an exposed left flank from both the old-old leftist Linke and the new-left Greens has not improved. There is increased talk about the two epochal mistakes of the Social Democrats failing to integrate the Greens in the 1980s and the PDS/Left in the 1990s and 2000s. Even further, the discourse about whether the SPD can even (or should) still be considered a catch-all, people's party (*Volkspartei*) with only about a quarter of the electorate and their old bastions, the unions, seemingly in terminal decline, will certainly continue.²⁴

Indeed, the party leadership is in a bind—they have to move to the center to govern with Merkel, but cannot afford to alienate their ideological left, with other parties waiting to pounce on the disaffected. Gabriel even felt compelled to put the coalition agreement to a vote of the party's membership and there was substantial worry that the laboriously negotiated document would not be endorsed. In the end, 75 percent did vote for the agreement and it should be noted that Gabriel was quite astute in using this tactic to his party's benefit. He got much more from Merkel—control of six out of sixteen ministries, including powerful portfolios such as foreign affairs, economics, and energy, justice, and social affairs, as well as policy concessions like a minimum wage and a lowering of the retirement age—than was expected, given that Merkel needed only five seats to gain a majority and that the SPD leadership at least was seemingly desperate to regain power. As former party heavyweight Franz Müntefering once memorably put the pragmatic case for governing: “Opposition ist Mist” (opposition is dung).²⁵

In any case, about eighteen months after the election, the party had not really gained nor lost support, hovering between 22 and 26 percent according to surveys.²⁶ It scored well in the European Parliament elections at 27.3 percent, a 6.5 percent increase from its 2009 result. Its performance in the September 2014 Thuringian election, however, was abysmal, losing 6 percent compared to 2009 and amassing only 12.4 percent of the votes. Much controversy surrounded coalition negotiations in late 2014 as a Red-Red-Green government was formed under Left Party leadership (Bodo Ramelow)—the first time the Left Party has led a Land government.²⁷ Many predict that this augers closer collaboration among the leftist parties at the national level—until now the Left has not been considered an acceptable governing partner (*koalitionsfähig*). Although this might allow the SPD to regain national power in the medium term, it is a fraught strategy that could backfire and accelerate the Social Democrats' vote loss.

The Greens lost 2.3 percent, winning 8.4 percent of the second votes. Although a decline of 2 percent of the national vote does not appear excessive, this represents a 21.5 percent decrease from their 2009 level of support. Moreover, the outcome seemed much worse because the Greens had been riding very high in the polls in the years before the election. In mid-2011, for example, they were polling over 20 percent, so that their actual 2013 result was 60 percent less than their peak. At one point, they were even more popular than the SPD, prompting much speculation that they were fast becoming the new center-left *Volkspartei* (people's party). They also experienced a string of major victories at the state level—results often interpreted as harbingers of national trends. Most notably, in March 2011 they scored a plurality victory of 24 percent in Baden-Württemberg and now lead that government in conjunction with the SPD—the first time that the Greens have ever been the senior coalition partner at the Land level. Thus, the 2013 national outcome was perceived as an utter failure. There was a major leadership shake-up in the days following the election with the experienced Jürgen Trittin and Claudia Roth both stepping down, eventually replaced by Simone Peter and Cem Özdemir. Since the election, the Greens have recovered slightly, averaging 9 to 11 percent in polls.

The Left lost 3.3 percent compared to the last election and came in at 8.6 percent, an almost 30 percent decline from their 2009 totals. Despite its losses and the almost constant prognostications of the party's terminal decline with an aging eastern electorate and the retirement, death, or decline of charismatic founding leaders like Oskar Lafontaine, Lothar Bisky, and even Gregor Gysi, the Left, always propagandizing, spun their result. They celebrated becoming the third largest fraction in the new parliament and the largest opposition party, as well as rather cockily expressing their desire for a red-red-green coalition, pointing out that the three leftist parties together had a majority. The Left has held up well in surveys—by early 2015 averaging 8 to 10 percent. In the 2014 European Parliament elections, they scored 7.4 percent of the vote, and they continue to prosper in eastern Germany, now leading the governing coalition in Thuringia after receiving 28 percent of the vote.

The Greens and Left are the only two opposition parties in the new Bundestag. The governing parties have rarely dominated to this degree with 80 percent of the seats, compared to 73 percent for the 2005-2009 electoral period and 90 percent from 1966-1969—conferring a visibility and responsibility from which both leftist groupings potentially could benefit, especially if the Social Democrats take a hit due to the inevitable compromises involved with assuming a share of governing responsibility. In light

of the small opposition and declining interest in parliamentary debates among the general public, reforms are now envisioned to spice things up.²⁸

Finally, the AfD, which disgruntled intellectuals formed only in February 2013, almost made it into the Bundestag with 4.7 percent of the vote. Although focused largely on the problems of the Euro and advocating for Germany's withdrawal (or at least reconfiguration of the currency restricted to a hard core of northern and central European countries), the nascent party has also embraced other right-populist themes such as greater restrictions on immigration and less generous welfare benefits. Despite this profile, pollsters noted that this is really a protest movement, gaining many votes not only from easterners who previously had voted for the Left Party, but also from a more educated clientele of disgruntled western FDP and CDU/CSU supporters. The success of this party shows that even Germany is not immune to some destabilization resulting from the festering Eurozone crisis.

For the center-right, the rise of the AfD is structurally similar to the challenge that the Left Party presents to the SPD—creating a constraint that inhibits a policy move to the center. Merkel cannot risk more right-wing voters defecting to this alternative on her right flank, nor could the Union expect the same kind of electoral success that it has recently experienced, if this party were to institutionalize itself at the federal, state, or even European level. Recently, the classic statement of postwar Bavarian leader Franz-Josef Strauß—that there should be no democratic party right of the Union—has been frequently cited implicitly criticizing Merkel's failure to stem the rise of this party.

It is still too early to tell if the AfD will strengthen and root itself in the party system, or—like the Pirates and many others—quickly fade away. Over 2014, the party continued to make impressive gains, scoring 7.1 percent in the May European Parliament elections; 9.7 percent in Saxony, 10.6 percent in Thuringia (siphoning enough votes to thwart a continued black-red coalition), and 12.2 percent in Brandenburg. Nevertheless, in January 2015 it was polling 6 to 7 percent nationally and received 6.1 percent in the February 2015 Hamburg election. By July 2015, it was down to about 4 percent, having taken a hit from its earlier flirtation with the controversial anti-Islam “Pegida” protests and suffering from leadership turmoil that summer.

Plus ça change?

The election results also raise several other issues. Polls consistently showed that voters appreciated Merkel and wanted her to continue as

chancellor. They likewise revealed disdain for the FDP and wanted it to be kicked out of government. This is exactly what happened in a rare enough example of the democratic process working out as it is supposed to, especially in a system like Germany's based on proportional representation in which voters often have little control over the eventual configuration of the government. Moreover, post-election polls show a sizeable majority supporting another grand coalition, again exactly what transpired. There is a deep penchant for Lijphartian consensus politics in Germany—once rightfully called “the grand coalition state.”³⁰

It was also rumored that Merkel prefers such a centrist or even center-left coalition—certainly there was much less drama between 2005-2009 than 2009-2013. (A bitter FDP functionary on election night reportedly kept calling Merkel FDJ—a reference to the former East German communist youth organization, presumably implying that she has more leftist policy preferences). Also, with an absolute majority, Merkel would have been unable to check and balance the more right-wing tendencies of the CDU and especially the Bavarian CSU. Indeed, during coalition negotiations and after the inauguration of the new government, the most tension seemed to result from within the Union parties and not with the Social Democrats. Thus, a grand coalition increased the likelihood of keeping the Bavarians in check.

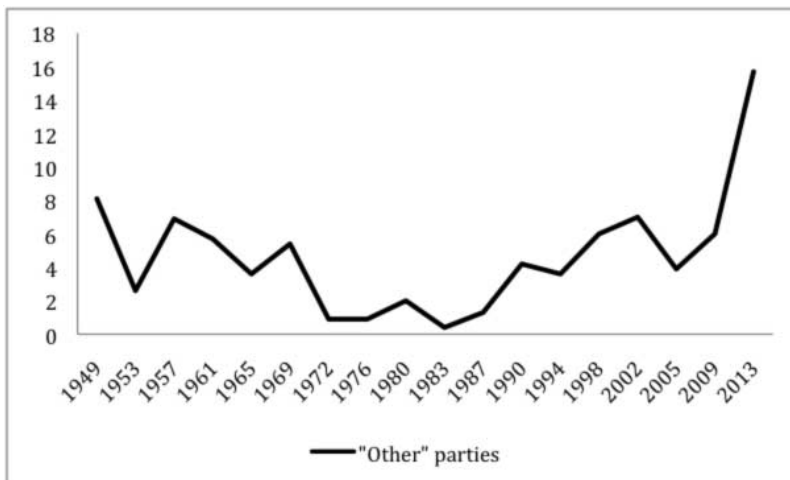
Moreover, the government must still garner a majority of the Bundesrat on about half of all legislation. In that territorially based upper chamber, the governing parties in the Bundestag have only twenty-seven out of sixty-nine votes as of February 2015. Although all other states have at least one of the two governing Bundestag parties in their governments, the vast majority of states will abstain from voting, maintaining neutrality. Had the Black-Yellow coalition continued, it would have commanded only ten votes, and as of early 2015 only Bavaria (six). Centrist, consensual governing is structurally preordained in the German system. This is not even to mention the many laws that are promulgated at the EU level and then rather automatically implemented domestically.

The election also shows that trends previously believed to be inexorable are not. The two “people’s parties” often called the “elephants” did not continue their long-term decline—in fact their combined share of the second vote went up from 56.8 to 67.2 percent between 2009 and 2013. Although this is still far away from the peak of the two-party share achieved in 1976 at 91.2 percent of second votes, obituaries for the *Volksparteien* are perhaps still premature.³¹ Moreover, the participation rate rose from 70.8 to 71.5 percent of eligible voters, reversing another long-term trend and partially belying the allegation that Merkelism embodies

demobilization. Even were one to accept that demobilization is Merkel's tactic, it has proven at least partially counterproductive.

More troubling was the second vote share going to "other" parties, which more than doubled from 6 percent in 2009 to an all-time high of 15.7 percent or almost one in six votes. Even had the FDP made it into the Bundestag, over a tenth of the all-important second votes was still lost. There are several implications. First, these votes are essentially wasted on parties that did not gain seats and that will not have their perspectives aired in the corridors of power. Clearly, there are positions supported by numerous voters that conventional parties fail to represent, pointing to a weakness or shortcoming of Germany's representative democratic system. The rise of this "other" vote might be a kind of canary in the coalmine, indicating a degree of protest voting and dissatisfaction with the current policy course, party options, or even the system. Second, this high level of wasted votes has strengthened advocates for lowering or abolishing the 5 percent threshold, a position that the Constitutional Court may very well endorse (along the lines of its jurisprudence concerning the electoral law for European Parliament elections). Given the original justification behind the threshold, namely to inhibit small extremist parties from gaining legitimizing representation and public financing connected to this, this is potentially cause for concern. The threshold has hitherto successfully prevented right radical parties from making it into the Bundestag.

Figure I.1. Share of Second Votes for Parties Below the Electoral Threshold



Source: Bundeswahlleiter; 2002 data includes 4.4 percent for the former communist PDS although they had two direct mandates.

Some have pointed out that leftist parties have a numerical majority of seats in the Bundestag, although the SPD and Greens have consistently rebuffed the so-called red-red-green coalition—at least for now. This does not mean that Germany is somehow a (majority) center-left nation. Recall that just under 10 percent of the wasted votes went to various (center)-right parties—the Liberals and AfD. The right-radical NPD got 1.3 percent. Even further, it is even unclear that the Greens should be considered a leftist party any longer with many considering them to have become “bourgeois” (*bürgerlich*).³² There were fascinating analyses about how many former CDU supporters moved to the Greens before their landmark 2011 victory in Baden-Württemberg.³³ Once unthinkable Black-Green coalitions have already occurred in many large cities such as Cologne, Bonn, and Frankfurt, and at the Land level in Hamburg (2008-2010) and in Hesse (since January 2014). In a hugely significant gesture, Merkel even engaged in exploratory talks (*Sondierungsgespräche*) with the Greens in October 2013 before negotiating with the Social Democrats.³ Although nothing came of these discussions this time around, it opens a tantalizing prospect for future governing options at the national level.

The Pirates, usually considered leftist, received only 2.2 percent—essentially their share in 2009. Many were surprised at the collapse of the media’s flavor of the month after a string of overhyped regional victories in 2011 (8.9 percent in Berlin) and 2012, including 7.4 percent in Saarland, 8.2 percent in Schleswig-Holstein, and 7.8 percent in North Rhine-Westphalia. There is a lesson here on over-interpreting such protest, new-media parties. In the end, there is no substitute for classic organizational virtues—a clear party program beyond a single issue (here Internet freedom), the necessity of a vetting process for members, and stable leadership. Michel’s iron law of oligarchy has once again been substantiated. It is still too early to know if the Pirates will absorb this lesson as the Greens did (albeit only partially) in the 1980s and early 1990s. If they do not, they are very likely a spent force.

The new election law—an excessively complicated, verging on unintelligible, attempt to address potential problems of a “negative voting weight” and disproportions that could result from overhanging mandates—was not a factor despite predictions to the contrary. In the end, the new Bundestag will have 631 seats (33 more than the legal minimum of 598)—just slightly more than the 622 after 2009. There were only five overhanging mandates (down from twenty-four in 2009), as well as twenty-eight compensatory seats. With its “compensatory mandates” (*Ausgleichmandate*) the law aimed to achieve a better vote-seat correspondence, but with 15 percent of the vote wasted, this did not happen. Also, the law did not particularly aid

smaller parties as it intended. It is important to note that the Union would not have had an absolute majority under the old electoral law either (although they would have been closer to the majority needing only three more seats). Besides, voting behavior and party campaign tactics have started to shift in response to the new incentive structure, making projections based on the old law highly speculative. With the advantage potentially gained from overhanging mandates now muted, there is now much more of a necessity to maximize second vote shares. Every effort will be expended to make sure that voters no longer split their first and second votes, as was increasingly common before the changes.³⁵ This will work to the detriment of the smaller parties, especially the FDP, which successfully used this tactic in 2009.

Finally, the large amount of media coverage that this election received in the international press proved noteworthy. In Europe, this is understandable given the widespread perception that Merkel essentially governs the Eurozone today. Certainly, German policy has a real and material impact in other countries, so it pays for them to care. One might even add that with the exception of Greece, most Europeans support such the German position and role.³⁶ More surprising was that the American print media (*New York Times*, *Washington Post*) devoted numerous stories to the campaign and election results—although this trend of increased coverage of Germany goes back a couple of years and probably has much to do with a renewed commitment on the part of these news organizations to sponsor foreign bureaus in the country. This speaks to the widespread U.S. perception that Germany has become the most powerful, “indispensable” country in Europe today.

Interestingly, the American media seemed genuinely to think that the German elections were a charming, throw-back to simpler, better times—a six-week, relatively inexpensive campaign instead of two-year, bankruptcy-inducing trench warfare. Indeed, estimates are that the German parties spent \$93 million in 2013 compared to \$2.4 billion just for the 2012 U.S. presidential election cycle and as much as \$6 billion overall that year³⁷—approximately \$1.16 per capita in Germany versus \$7.64 or \$19.11 in the United States.

The Contributions in This Volume

The chapters that follow delve into many dimensions of the 2013 Bundestag elections and contemporary German politics more generally. Frank

Decker kicks off the volume by noting that the 2013 election refuted a number of established hypotheses on the development of the German party system and contradicted the electoral strategies of nearly all the parties involved. The outcome was neither a further fragmentation of the parliamentary landscape nor the unavoidable establishment of a grand coalition. On the contrary, various parties failed as a result of their own mistakes in selecting adequate campaign issues, strategies, and/or candidates. He concludes that aside from party-specific questions, such as the trajectories of both the AfD and the FDP, the future of the German party system seems largely dependent on the relationships between the three left-of-center parties at the federal level.

In slight contrast, Charles Lees argues that the elections brought important changes to the Bundestag party system, some of which are contingent, but others of which are more systemic and profound. The narrow failure of the FDP to surmount the electoral threshold had an impact on coalition negotiations and the improvement in the overall vote share for the CDU/CSU and the SPD, for the first time since the 1960s represents a significant, if probably only temporary, concentration of the German party system in the Bundestag. More systemically, the election saw a continuation of the ongoing redistribution of voting power in the Bundestag in favor of the catch-all parties as *formateurs*, despite the steady decline in the catch-all party vote. Lees also discusses how the increased importance of the potential *formateur* parties has gone hand in hand with a greater focus on the individual leading candidates, and concludes that this is particularly good news for the CDU/CSU, given the political qualities of Angela Merkel and the failure of the SPD to find and support a leading candidate who can match her political acumen.

The next two chapters analyze the performance and prospects of individual parties. Looking at the venerable SPD, Jonathan Olsen writes that the party saw its worst results in its almost 150-year history in the 2009 federal election. Immediately afterwards, the party worked to improve its public image and fine-tune its policies and electoral message, hoping that state elections in the ensuing period might provide some momentum going into the next national election. Yet, in 2013, the Social Democrats improved their result only modestly. Olsen explores the reasons behind the SPD's failure to radically improve its electoral showing. Here, he argues that a combination of the impact of the past—namely, the legacy of its economic reforms during the Schröder era and the SPD's disadvantages coming out of the previous grand coalition—as well as the weakness of its 2013 chancellor candidate, Peer Steinbrück, and the popularity of Angela

Merkel best explains the outcome. The chapter therefore suggests that the immediate future does not look particularly bright for the SPD: any chances of gaining the chancellorship are largely out of its hand, dependent on both stumbles by its rival, the CDU/CSU, as well as the taming of a possible coalition partner, the Left Party.

David Patton observes that in the 2009 German federal election, three small parties boasted a result in the double digits, yet four years later, none of the small parties finished above 8.6 percent and only two reentered the Bundestag. Notably, the FDP, one of the original West German parties, dropped out of the federal parliament for the first time. Yet, any talk of catch-all party revival and party system concentration needs qualification. As a group, the small parties received nearly a third of all votes cast—the second highest share in six decades. Those that did not make it into the Bundestag won 15.7 percent, a higher share than in any other federal election. Patton examines the positioning of the leading small parties in the 2013 Bundestag election campaign and their respective electoral results; highlights party systemic as well as internal party factors to explain small party performance; reassesses the commonplace classification of small parties by whether there is an established legislative presence or not; and considers the positioning and performance of small parties in the years to come.

The following four contributions provide more detailed demographic analyses. First, Melanie Kintz discusses the sociodemographic and career profiles of Bundestag members in the current eighteenth legislative period. She notes that the 2013 Bundestag election saw a very high turnover in MPs. The FDP, which previously held ninety-three seats in the Bundestag, did not get re-elected, and about 100 members had announced their retirement prior to the election. The chapter looks at whether the 217 new members have significantly different sociodemographic and career profiles compared to the re-elected members. While providing an insight into the profiles and career tracks of German MPs, Kintz finds that not much has shifted. Changes in the occupational structure, however, signal that for an increasing number of MPs politics is becoming a long-term career.

Louise K. Davidson-Schmich focuses her chapter on gender and constituency candidate nomination processes. Since the adoption of candidate gender quotas, women have always fared better in the “second” or PR tier of Bundestag elections than in the “first” or plurality tier, where quotas do not apply. This gap, however, has been closing. In the 2009 Bundestag election, 27 percent of the major parties’ direct mandate candidates were women compared to almost 30 percent in 2013. All parties

experienced an increase in the percentage of women among their nominees for direct mandates between 2009 and 2013. Why have the numbers of female candidates for the 299 directly elected Bundestag constituencies been increasing? This increase is puzzling because gender quotas have not been extended to this tier of the electoral system and candidate selection rules have not changed. Davidson-Schmich explores five potential mechanisms that may be driving the observed rise in women nominated as constituency candidates. She argues that the main reasons for these increases lie in the advantages female incumbents incur, the openings presented when male incumbents retire, and the diffusion of female candidates across parties and neighboring *Wahlkreise* after one woman manages to win a direct mandate.

In the following chapter, Andreas M. Wüst writes about immigrant-origin politicians running for a Bundestag mandate in the 2013 election, systematically analyzing patterns of candidacy and the electoral success or failure of the respective candidates and parliamentarians. The main finding is that politicians of immigrant origin are serious contenders for seats in the Bundestag, and political parties seem to have quite some interest in their election. It is increasingly the second immigrant generation that is involved politically, and, as the career patterns indicate, it is likely that many of them are going to stay longer in politics. Consequently, a closer look at immigrant-origin candidates and parliamentarians is of merit for both the study of parliamentary representation and of the political integration of immigrants and their descendants.

Dovetailing with Wüst, Lars Rensmann notes that while still vastly underrepresented and lagging behind political representation in several other European democracies, more ethnic minorities and immigrants have entered the German Bundestag in 2013 than ever before. This is one of several indicators of Germany's political departure from hegemonic ethnic self-understandings, signaling the nation's complicated, partly still-contested evolution towards political self-conceptions as a "country of immigration." A significant unanswered question is how and how far this process, which can be conceived as cosmopolitanization, has transformed party politics. Rensmann examines the scope and causes of cosmopolitanization in three dimensions of German party politics after the 2013 Bundestag election: political discourse and programmatic positions on immigration, citizenship, identity, and ethno-cultural diversity; the policy regime of mainstream parties on immigration and the inclusion of ethnic minorities; and the fielding of minority candidates for national public office. He argues that transformed demographic realities, value change, and new electoral demands

have primarily caused the belated postethnic cosmopolitanization of German party politics. Mainstream political parties—including the center right—have been reluctant but ultimately rational strategic agents reacting to these transformations in the electoral market. Yet, the scope and character of cosmopolitanization also depend on external and internal supply side conditions that enable parties to make programmatic changes, depolarize key issues of the immigration and citizenship policy regime, and recruit ethnic minorities for political representation. In European comparative perspective, the German case may serve as a model for theorizing the cosmopolitanization of party politics.

The next set of contributions looks at European issues and foreign policy. The point of departure for Steven Weldon and Hermann Schmitt is the global financial crisis that hit Germany and Europe over the past half decade. This crisis is associated, among European Union citizens, with the degree of support for European integration: those who are skeptical about the Euro and the debt crises in parts of the Eurozone tend also to be skeptical about European integration more generally. Their main question in this chapter is whether the pledges of political parties (as issued in their election manifestos) can add to our understanding of electoral choices in Germany. Relating German election results to the German data provided by the Comparative Manifesto Project MRG/CMP/MARPOR research tradition, Weldon and Schmitt argue that political parties' European pledges have been irrelevant for the vote over half a century. Yet, now that the European Union is rapidly moving in its postfunctional phase, the election of 2013 is expected to mark a turning point in that regard.

Next, Wade Jacoby offers a corrective to the notion that German ordoliberal ideology is the key to understanding German policy behavior during the Eurocrisis and, by extension, to the contours of the electoral debate in fall 2013. First, the chapter shows that ordoliberal thought underdetermines policy choices. That is, different actors clearly influenced by ordoliberal thinking and often stressing different aspects of the broader ordoliberal cannon are arguing for more or less diametrically opposed policy solutions. Second, Jacoby provides evidence that this deep divide inside the ordoliberal policy community has contributed additional incentives to the tentative and inconclusive policy choices of the government throughout much of the Eurocrisis. Third, the chapter extends the analysis of this very cautious policymaking into the campaign phase and the subsequent coalition agreement. It explains why the two major German parties—including an SPD with a much thinner attachment than the CDU to ordoliberalism—sought to play down the Eurocrisis in their campaigns and

in their subsequent coalition agreement. One implication is the low probability of German policy change despite ideological differences.

The final substantive chapter is Jackson Janes's assessment of German foreign policy. Angela Merkel remains arguably the most powerful politician in Europe, now in her third term as chancellor. While she enjoys popularity at home, seen as pragmatic and reliable, she faces numerous outward expectations and pressures that challenge Germany's foreign policy of restraint. Some argue that Germany does not pull its weight in foreign policy, particularly militarily, or at least is reluctant to do so. This view is not only held abroad, but is also shared by many of Germany's leaders—both Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier and President Joachim Gauck, among others, have expressed their desire for an increased German role in the world. Many politicians, however, do not see an advantage to focusing on foreign issues in their export-heavy economy. Other challenges, including disillusionment among Germans regarding their tenuous relationship with Russia and damaged trust between the U.S. and Germany as a result of the NSA scandal, will force Merkel to set an agenda that balances domestic concerns with her allies' expectations. The volume concludes with an epilogue by Jeffrey Anderson in which he places the 2013 election result in the larger context of German and European politics.

Looking Forward

Overall, the 2013 Bundestag election campaign took place during an exceptional period of relative prosperity, domestic tranquility, and the perception of success. This was truly Angela Merkel's *Herbstmärchen* (autumn fairy tale), a counterpart and even continuation of the country's *Sommermärchen* during the hosting of the World Cup of soccer in 2006.³ But then, autumn is not summer—or spring, for that matter. It connotes ending and completion and the expectation of a period of cold, rest, and death to follow. Is winter approaching for the Merkel Republic?

There is certainly a hefty backlog of issues that will need to be addressed sooner as opposed to later—the destabilizing export surplus, which has garnered criticism not just from European partners, but also from the European Commission and the U.S. government;³⁹ the lack of infrastructural investment, especially in the west, the needs of which have been relatively neglected since unification and the necessary rebuilding of eastern Germany;⁴⁰ stagnant domestic wages and demand; and the festering problems of the peripheral Eurozone economies. Apocalyptic scenarios could still

transpire—if all of Germany’s financial promises to various bailout packages are actually called upon. After a relatively placid period, possible deflation (prompting quantitative easing from the European Central Bank), a weakening exchange rate (although this helps the German export sector), and renewed uncertainty in Greece after the January 2015 election in which the left-populist Syriza party won convincingly on an anti-austerity program has caused instability to return to the Eurozone in early 2015. Although many think that a “Grexit” would be less apocalyptic than in 2011, the consequences could still be devastating.

Moreover, international crises—most recently concerning Ukraine and Russia beginning in early 2014—can have a marked impact on an exposed trading state like Germany. Over 300,000 German jobs are said to be dependent on trade with Russia and over 35 percent of Germany’s natural gas and crude oil supplies come from that country.⁴¹ Thus, if the increasingly onerous economic sanctions that the West imposed on Putin’s regime throughout 2014 persist or intensify—or if the Russian president retaliates even more, for example, by restricting the westward flow of natural gas—the detrimental effects on the German economy could be pronounced. Indeed, by 2015, the sanctions, coupled with plummeting oil prices, led to a major economic downturn in Russia. As predicted, the German economy was also impacted, shrinking 0.1 percent in the second quarter of 2014, partially due to the domestic effects of the sanctions. Finally, instability in the Middle East and elsewhere led to over 200,000 refugees fleeing to Germany in 2014—the most in the developed world—causing some tensions.⁴²

More deeply, I cannot rid myself of the sneaking suspicion that perhaps Germany’s much vaunted economic strengths are illusory. The current economic *Boomchen* (boomlet), with the attendant resurgence of respect for *Modell Deutschland* and its social market economy, so evident since Merkel came to power, may simply be masking temporarily the inevitable death of the German system: high-value added manufacturing, export dependence, the apprentice system, the vestiges of patient capital, and generous redistribution to keep the social peace—even consensus politics. Indeed, Germany as “sick man of Europe”—the narrative not that long ago—may be coming back even more strongly than ever. The markets to which Germany has exported its precision products are becoming saturated and are starting to manufacture these very products themselves. Services have never been a particular strength, but may be the only way forward. The looming aging and shrinking of the population has barely been addressed, and, although there have not recently been race riots and successful xenophobic parties as in many other European countries, Ger-

many is hardly a paragon of multicultural functionality. Merkel's policies of small steps or superficial measures have done very little to address many of these structural challenges.

Indeed, a series of Islamophobic and xenophobic protests in late 2014 and early 2015 have raised concerns—above all the Pegida protests in Dresden and their copycats (Legida in Leipzig, Bãrgida in Berlin). These protests gained substantial media attention inside and outside of the country, but it should be mentioned that counter-demonstrators have typically outnumbered the protestors,⁴³ and the German political elite, including Merkel, have forcefully defended minorities, tolerance, and multiculturalism.⁴⁴ Thus, Merkel's Märchen—her electoral triumph and dominance of German and European politics—might actually be best deemed not her *Herbstmärchen*, but her *Nachsommermärchen* (Indian Summer fairy tale)—temporary, illusory, and certainly not to be generalized.

More specific challenges also loom. Who comes after Merkel? She has intimated that this is her last term—that there will be a new chancellor in 2017. The center-right bench is seemingly shallow, especially after Merkel successfully eliminated so many rivals over the past fifteen years—Friedrich Merz, Edmund Stoiber, Roland Koch—to name just a few. Others have fallen thanks to self-inflicted wounds—plagiarism or corruption scandals—Theodor zu Guttenberg, Christian Wulff, and Annette Schavan. Current or former minister-presidents are lackluster—the once promising David McAllister lost a very close election in Lower Saxony in early 2013 and is currently doing time at the European Parliament. Horst Seehofer, despite a degree of rehabilitation in recent years, has some personal flaws⁴⁵ and is probably too right wing or Bavarian for a national electorate. The heir apparent appears to be current Minister of Defense Ursula von der Leyen, who, in my opinion, just does not seem to have that leadership “je ne sais quoi” necessary for success.⁴⁶

On the SPD side, besides the obvious federal ministers—Sigmar Gabriel, Frank-Walter Steinmeier—my money is on Hanelore Kraft, the current minister president of the largest Land, North Rhine-Westphalia, although she will have to face a difficult re-election campaign early in 2017 in light of the fact that her party is down about 5 percent from their 2012 result. Buzz has also surrounded Hamburg's Olaf Scholz, who was handily re-elected in February 2015.⁴⁷ My dream 2017 campaign would pit Merkel against Kraft as *Spitzenkandidaten*. There are indeed rumors that Merkel is fully aware of her popularity and her party's personnel weaknesses and will in all likelihood run again in 2017. The succession issue will thus be pushed into the future, but will have to be addressed at one point.

In any case, from one perspective this was one of the most conservative election results in recent times. Not only did an austerity-preaching, conservative party get re-elected, but many of the old verities of the Federal Republic re-asserted themselves: the dominance of the two elephants, the fatuousness of a new media political universe, and the importance of classical campaign organization and tactics. The polls barely moved in the six months before and in the eighteen months after the election. Thus, it seems fitting to end this introduction with an aphorism from Germany's most special partner, the French: "plus ça change, plus c'est la meme chose"—at least as long as Merkel can continue to ride the momentum from her magical *Herbstmärchen*. But then, winter always follows autumn. One can only hope that Merkel does not preside over the development of a *Wintermärchen* à la Heine because Germany has currently become Europe's indispensable nation.⁴⁸

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Notes

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42. http://www.nytimes.com/2014/12/01/world/straining-to-make-room-for-refugees-as-the-war-in-syria-floods-the-world.html?_r=0; <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-24636868>; accessed 24 January 2015.
43. On 12 January 2015, Pegida peaked with 25,000 participants—a counter-demonstration on 10 January had 35,000. See <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/germany/11341355/Anti-Islam-march-draws-big-crowds-in-Germany.html>; accessed 24 January 2015.
44. <http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/01/15/us-germany-islam-idUSKBN0KO17W20150115>; accessed 24 January 2015.
45. I am referring to the "second family" scandal. See <http://www.taz.de/!35977/>; accessed 12 February 2014.
46. <http://www.welt.de/politik/article3713210/Ursula-von-der-Leyen-verhasst-und-erfolgreich.html>; accessed 12 February 2014.
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48. <http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/b753cb42-19b3-11e1-ba5d-00144feabdc0.html#axzz3PmHA5mcM>; accessed 24 January 2015.