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Claudia C. Gatzka

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Preparing the stages for popular deliberation. Political parties, voters and extra-parliamentary communication in West Germany and Europe, 1940s–70s

Claudia C. Gatzka

University of Freiburg, Freiburg, Germany

ABSTRACT

What constituted appropriate rules of political conduct and debate was a fairly essential question for the liberal democracies of post-war Europe which had witnessed the refusal of deliberation as a political principle and practice under Fascism. Old and new political elites needed to re-define the prerequisites of what was to be seen as serious political negotiation, especially in public meetings. In doing so, agents of party democracy also decided who should gain access to the political arena and what manners were perceived as appropriate for political communication. As a result, however, democratic principles were routinely challenged. This article investigates how rules of good debate set by agents of party democracy shaped political communication with ‘the people’ and excluded a good part of the voters from speaking and acting on the public stages after 1945. Comparing direct political communication in the Federal Republic and other West European democracies into the 1970s, it reconstructs how the breaking of those rules by extra-parliamentary activists, along with other factors, could open up the stages for ordinary voters. The article eventually discusses why the rise of popular deliberation in political communication around 1970 seemed to be a peculiarity of the post-Nazi setting of West Germany.

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In the wake of 1968, candidates for the German *Bundestag* as well as journalists and partisans in various cities of the Federal Republic were bedazzled. Never before had their fellow citizens been so actively engaged in political communication. At the beginning of the campaign for the general elections of 1969, the popular demand for political information, ‘especially on concrete factual issues’, seemed enormous, as local newspapers and party organizations eagerly reported.¹ But even more striking was the popular enthusiasm about an institution that bound the election campaign in times of television to direct interaction and mini-publics on the local level: the discussion. A local newspaper in Ulm reported on an 18-year-old local woman: ‘Although she is not yet allowed to vote,

CONTACT Claudia C. Gatzka  claudia.gatzka@geschichte.uni-freiburg.de  Historisches Seminar, Professur für Neuere und Neueste Geschichte Westeuropas, Albert-Ludwigs-Universität Freiburg, Freiburg 79085, Germany

¹Freiherr von Ostmann to the SPD executive, Advertising Department, 9 December 1969, in Archiv der sozialen Demokratie, Bonn [hereafter AdsD], SPD-Parteivorstand Neuer Bestand, Abt. Öffentlichkeitsarbeit–Werbetechnik [hereafter SPD-PV NB, ÖW], box 1792.

This article has been corrected with minor changes. These changes do not impact the academic content of the article.

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she has been eagerly discussing political issues for weeks'. The same article quoted a 65-year-old male voter: 'I simply call the candidates and discuss things with them'.² After two decades of difficult relations between parliament and the public in post-Nazi Germany, the personnel and the policies of parliamentary democracy had virtually overnight become a principle matter of 'the people'.

The increasing popular involvement in electoral politics had already been discernable during the campaigns for the regional elections of 1967 and 1968 and was partly caused by the rising radical-nationalist *Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands* (NPD). Since November 1966 the nationalists had been challenging the parliamentary triad of Christian Democrats, Social Democrats and Liberals with success, achieving election to various State Parliaments. The 1969 campaign for the general elections witnessed the third-time candidate and Foreign Minister Willy Brandt from the Social Democratic Party (*Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands*, SPD) facing the ex-Nazi and fairly popular chancellor Hans Georg Kiesinger of the Christian Democratic Union (*Christlich-Demokratische Union Deutschlands*, CDU). In the previous years, economic upset and political upheaval had stirred up the country and caused uncertainty and discontent with the political establishment, as West Germany's affluent society had witnessed its first recession in history, and the so-called grand coalition of CDU and SPD had passed the controversial legislation for the state of emergency. Analogies were drawn between the late Weimar Republic or even the Nazi State and the Federal Republic.³ By the end of the 1960s, the dictatorial past seemed to backfire on the German body politic and its political self-understanding. Against this backdrop, a loose activist organization named 'extra-parliamentary opposition' (*Außerparlamentarische Opposition*, APO), connected with the student movement and other left-wing groupings, promulgated a discourse of democratization, accusing the Federal Republic of being only a formal democracy.

In common with neighbouring Western European states, signs were thus pointing to election campaigns compromised by protest that could even spill over into violence, as happened during the 1968 general election campaigns in France and Italy. In fact, also in West Germany the 1969 elections were overshadowed by gunshots of nationalists directed towards young left-wing protesters, street battles, and bomb explosions. More frequent than this 'little violence' on the streets, however, were the heavy disturbances of election rallies organized by the APO, which targeted leading representatives of parliamentary democracy inside and outside the meeting halls. Yet, what characterized the overall discourse on political communication and the state of democracy it represented, was the heavy, but peaceful, involvement of the voters and their willingness to discuss with their representatives the central policy issues at stake in an era of looming reform.⁴ In a sense, between about 1968 and 1976, the post-Nazi state seemed to bear traits of a direct democracy that was deeply rooted in local communicative settings.

²'Wenig Papier – Direkte Kontakte gefragt', *Südwest Presse* [hereafter SWP], 27 August 1969.

³J. Requate, "'Weimar' als Argument in der Debatte um die Notstandsgesetze", in C. Gusy (ed.), *Weimars lange Schatten: 'Weimar' als Argument nach 1945* (Baden-Baden, 2003), pp. 311–34; B. Spornol, *Notstand der Demokratie: Der Protest gegen die Notstandsgesetze und die Frage der NS-Vergangenheit* (Essen, 2008); T. Schanetzky, *Die große Ernüchterung: Wirtschaftspolitik, Expertise und Gesellschaft in der Bundesrepublik 1966 bis 1982* (Berlin, 2007).

⁴B. Faulenbach, *Das sozialdemokratische Jahrzehnt: Von der Reform euphorie zur neuen Unübersichtlichkeit: Die SPD 1969–1982* (Bonn, 2011).

The popular access to the stages of political communication marked a noteworthy extension – not a contestation – of parliamentary democracy in post-war Western Europe. It therefore came with transformations of the rules of the game, which political parties and Western military forces in Germany had set in a peculiar post-Nazi setting. This article dissects the mechanisms of popular participation by deliberation as well as its related problems and challenges, with special focus on urban environments. Looking at how rules of political debate produced by party democracy were set, contested, and reset in the course of post-war Western Germany, the article sets out to unveil the contingent circumstances, the underlying traditions and the practical transformation of the rules of the game that could enable (or restrict) popular access to the arenas of representative democracy.

Occasions like these are widely neglected in the histories of the post-war democratic model, which Martin Conway has rightly termed a rather liberal, non-participatory order, and its supersession by the era of protest and various crises since 1968.⁵ Historical research on democracy and political protest after 1945 usually differentiates between institutional democracy, on the one hand, politics from below, on the other. Under these premises, participatory claims and calls for direct democracy are generally located outside the political institutions and namely within social movements.⁶ The synergies of extra-parliamentary protest and institutional politics have received little scholarly attention to date, as is true for the interrelations of parliamentary and extra-parliamentary communication.⁷ By the same token, the elaborate historical research on parliamentary communication and deliberation usually excludes communicative settings outside political institutions.⁸ This article thus enters rather unknown territory by examining how parliamentary democracy – symbolized by party democracy –, the culture of debate commonly attributed to professional politicians in the plenary hall, and popular participation overlapped in the wake of election campaigns.

In order to do this, it is indispensable to locate political communication in concrete physical settings, and therefore to resort to the methodology of historians that are more concerned with nineteenth-century popular politics. It is telling that overarching histories of political cultures and practices which include non-professional politicians tend to emphasize and scrutinize face-to-face interactions and participatory politics in micro-publics with eagerness as far as earlier periods are concerned, but tend to leave

⁵M. Conway, 'Democracy in Postwar Western Europe: The Triumph of a Political Model', *European History Quarterly* 32, (2002), pp. 59–84.

⁶See for instance M. Conway, *Western Europe's Democratic Age, 1945–1968* (Princeton, 2020), pp. 289–92; K. Fahlenbrach, M. Klimke, J. Scharloth and L. Wong (eds), *The Establishment Responds: Power, Politics, and Protest since 1945* (Basingstoke, 2012); I. Gilcher-Holtey (ed.), „1968“ – Eine Wahrnehmungsrevolution? *Horizont-Verschiebungen des Politischen in den 1960er und 1970er Jahren* (Munich, 2013).

⁷Exceptions are A. Schulz, 'Politische Parallelwelten – Öffentliche Gesprächsarenen und parlamentarische Demokratie in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland, 1949–1980', in M.-L. Recker and A. Schulz (eds), *Parlamentarismuskritik und Antiparlamentarismus in Europa* (Düsseldorf, 2018), pp. 185–219; D. Süß, 'Die neue Lust am Streit – "Demokratie wagen" in der sozialdemokratischen Erfahrungswelt der Ära Brandt', in A. Schildt and W. Schmidt (eds), *"Wir wollen mehr Demokratie wagen": Antriebskräfte, Realität und Mythos eines Versprechens* (Bonn, 2019), pp. 125–41; P. Gassert, 'Mehr partizipatorische Demokratie wagen? Demokratisierung, Modernisierung und Protest im transatlantischen Vergleich', in Schildt and Schmidt (eds), *„Demokratie“*, pp. 185–202; J. Hansen, *Abschied vom Kalten Krieg? Die Sozialdemokraten und der Nachrüstungsstreit (1977–1987)* (Berlin, 2016).

⁸See for instance K. Palonen, *From oratory to debate: Parliamentarisation of deliberative rhetoric in Westminster* (Baden-Baden, 2016); A. Schulz and A. Wirsching (eds), *Das Parlament als Kommunikationsraum: Parlamentarische Kulturen in Europa* (Berlin, 2012); T. Mergel, *Parlamentarische Kultur in der Weimarer Republik: Politische Kommunikation, symbolische Politik und Öffentlichkeit im Reichstag* (Düsseldorf, 2002).

them out, when it comes to twentieth-century politics. In Malcolm Crook's history of French voting culture, for instance, we learn a lot about electoral and popular assemblies and deliberation during the era of the French Revolution, but virtually nothing in his book informs us about any kind of meetings, assemblies or rallies in the realm of modern mass democracy.⁹ Associating the twentieth century with the enduring mediatization of politics and society, historians tend to neglect sensual communication and face-to-face interaction. What remains underrated is the fact that popular politics in a mediatized age was not restricted to virtual spaces, parasocial communication and mass audiences, but also involved 'mini-publics', to borrow a term from political sciences, at physical places.¹⁰ Of course, such micro-communication was deeply affected and influenced by mediatization. The shapes and changes of popular political face-to-face interaction and the concrete repercussions of radio, television, mass press on political participation and communication on the spot remain, however, widely unexplored,¹¹ whereas within recent research concerned with the present and future of 'deliberative' and 'participatory democracy', it is taken for granted that face-to-face interaction and mini-publics count.¹² Regrettably, most post-war histories of political communication which expressly aim at considering public participation focus on central party files and the mass media, and hence miss out the local level of political communication.

This article, in contrast, builds on material from local party federations, federal state and police files as well as local newspapers from different towns in Baden-Wuerttemberg and the biggest city of West Germany, Hamburg. Comparative glances shall help us to figure out the reasons for the peculiar rise of public participation on the local level in West Germany's electoral communication, including potential interrelations between the Nazi past, more precisely the necessity of coping with it, and (resulting) deliberative open-mindedness. The participatory culture I seek to grasp in the following pages was neither 'popular politics' in terms of the rough and tumble, nor was it controlled and mediated by the mass media, as happened to be the case in the television and radio studios. It rather implied the reasonable exchange of arguments among equals within mini-publics, grounded in what scholars call a 'deliberative stance' – or at least the display of it. This stance entails mutual respect, open-mindedness towards the political views of others and a shared sense of the common good, which could imply the change of one's own judgements through persuasion by the better argument of others.¹³ Hence, the participatory communication scrutinized in this piece can be best described as a staging of 'deliberative democracy' with its inclination to the reasonable

⁹M. Crook, *How the French Learned to Vote: A History of Electoral Practice in France* (Oxford, 2021), pp. 7, 10, 27–9, 46–7, 50–1, 71–9, 108–11, 125–7, 131–5, 150–9, 199–208.

¹⁰L. Jerram, *Streetlife: The Untold History of Europe's Twentieth Century* (Oxford, 2011); M. Reiss (ed.), *The Street as Stage: Protest Marches and Public Rallies since the Nineteenth Century* (Oxford, 2007).

¹¹First studies include F. Bösch, 'Zeitungsberichte im Alltagsgespräch: Mediennutzung, Medienwirkung und Kommunikation im Kaiserreich', *Publizistik* 49, (2004), pp. 319–36; M. Vogel, *Unruhe im Fernsehen: Protestbewegung und öffentlich-rechtliche Berichterstattung in den 1960er Jahren* (Göttingen, 2010).

¹²See, for instance, Min Reuchamps, Julien Vrydagh and Yanina Welp (eds), *De Gruyter Handbook of Citizens' Assemblies* (Berlin, 2023).

¹³D. Owen and G. Smith, 'Survey Article: Deliberation, Democracy, and the Systematic Turn', *Journal of Political Philosophy* 23, (2015), pp. 213–34, see p. 228; A. Bächtiger and J. Parkinson, *Mapping and Measuring Deliberation: Towards a New Deliberative Quality* (Oxford, 2019), p. 22. On popular deliberation see D. Bello Hutt, 'Measuring Popular and Judicial Deliberation: A Critical Comparison', *International Journal of Constitutional Law* 16, (2018), pp. 1121–47.

exchange of arguments. As such, it became object of new attempts to control the scene by the agents of party democracy.

Engaging with voters: comparative perspectives

The participatory turn in electoral culture of the Federal Republic was, at first glance, anything but unique in an era when social movements and grassroots politics put pressure on the institutions of parliamentary democracy. It seems to have been not even pathbreaking, for the strategy of engaging with ordinary citizens and integrating voices of ‘the people’ into political communication had been applied since the late 1950s in the Netherlands and Great Britain, after a rather distanced self-presentation of politicians in the early post-war years.¹⁴ However, this early shift towards ‘popular politics’ and the interest in the views of ordinary voters in political communication did not apply to Western Europe as a whole, as historians sometimes tend to assume with insufficient differentiation.¹⁵ Certainly, the interest in public opinion and the tendency to govern with reference to polls rose in many Western democracies along with the rise of social sciences since the 1950s. Yet, programmes like the *voxpops* in the Netherlands, with journalists interviewing ordinary people in order to display different views of popular opinion, or *The Last Debate*, which was broadcast in the campaign for the British general elections of 1959 and, in the words of Jon Lawrence, ‘took audience participation to new levels’, had no equivalent in West Germany until the late 1960s.¹⁶ In Italy, to name another, often-neglected example, such public participation was completely absent from public television and radio: In the famous and frequently broadcast programme *Tribuna elettorale*, the right to ask questions was reserved for journalists, whereas ordinary citizens were reduced to the role of spectators.

Without question, speaking for Western Europe as a whole, a change in the culture and the selling of political representation took place during the first two post-war decades: After the stabilization of the post-war states, making visible ‘the people’ became a prerequisite for political legitimacy of representative democracy.¹⁷ Nevertheless, this rediscovery of the people since the mid of the 1950s must not be overestimated. As Martin Conway has underlined, the ‘fundamental question [...] as to how the sovereign will of the people should be respected and implemented’, was rarely posed by politicians of the post-war period until 1968.¹⁸ In effect, programmes like *The Last Debate* in Britain were short-lived, because letting ordinary citizens having their say in front of politicians required confidence in their good conduct. The fact that the audience ‘interrupted and heckled on such a scale that at times the speakers were shouting to try to make themselves heard’ did surely entertain the watchers, but also threatened the success of selling political representatives to a

¹⁴H.G.J. Kaal and V.W. van de Griend, ‘Postwar Popular Politics: Integrating the Voice of the People in Postwar Political History’, in H.G.J. Kaal and D. Slootjes (eds), *New Perspectives on Power and Political Representation from Ancient History to the Present Day. Repertoires of Representation* (Leiden, 2019), pp. 124–43, see p. 128.

¹⁵Kaal and van de Griend, ‘Postwar Popular Politics’, p. 128.

¹⁶J. Lawrence, *Electing our Masters: The Hustings in British Politics from Hogarth to Blair* (Oxford, 2009), p. 168; Kaal and van de Griend, ‘Postwar Popular Politics’, p. 130.

¹⁷H. Kaal, ‘The Voice of the People: Communicative Practices of Popular Political Engagement in the Netherlands, 1950s–1960s’, *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte* 58, (2018), pp. 183–200; T. Mergel, *Propaganda nach Hitler: Eine Kulturgeschichte des Wahlkampfes in der Bundesrepublik 1949–1990* (Göttingen, 2010).

¹⁸Conway, *Democratic Age*, p. 162.

national audience,¹⁹ which was a different story from the older local campaigns of candidates in their constituents, where humiliation by the crowds had been part of the game, but were restricted to the very moment of interaction and press reporting.²⁰

In contrast, the imponderables of public participation were hard to reconcile with huge audiences watching their national leaders, for this situation produced a greater need for controllable professional proceedings among TV producers as well as politicians. For this reason, public participation in TV shows did not become a persistent feature of post-war parliamentary democracy and was even banned in Britain during the 1960s.²¹ In West Germany, the late 1960s marked a real turning point here. And yet, formats of public participation on radio or television tended to be scripted, in order to control the proceedings. What is more, they normally did not enact the idea of participation in decision-making. Voters rather should evaluate the politician's performance and, most commonly, ask questions.²² Hence, public participation on television featured plebiscitary rather than participatory practices within parliamentary democracy.

What distinguished the German situation, analysed in further detail in the following sections, was that public participation was not only a feature of the mass media. Rather, it emerged from local communication settings and grew bottom-up, revolving around mini-publics and meetings, whose simultaneous decline in mediatized Britain has been studied comprehensively by Jon Lawrence.²³ In the Federal Republic, by contrast, precisely during the age of television, there developed a culture of 'modern' local electioneering which was adjusted to the everyday practices of an ever more prosperous consumer society. Herein lay a decisive prerequisite for the opening up of the stages for voters in the constituencies at the end of the decade.²⁴

The other distinguishing feature of participatory electoral politics in West Germany lay in the fact that its dynamics went beyond the practices of letting the voters having their say in the sense of asking questions or commenting on political decisions. Rather, politicians suggested that 'the people' and its representatives were on the same level, by actively engaging in practices of deliberation with their constituents. At this point, other national cultures of political communication drew back.²⁵ In Switzerland or Italy, for instance, the extra-parliamentary longing of the youth for debate and political autonomy affected the culture of political meetings, for parties sought to strengthen their discursive character (and, in doing so, make them less boring) and labelled them as 'debates' or introduced 'discussions'. However, the spotlights were still turned on politicians or 'experts' who now discussed issues from different political angles, whereas the audience was not allowed access to the speakers' stages. Monologues of politicians should be abolished, yet 'discussions' were intended as opportunity for voters to ask questions, not to debate.²⁶ During the 1970s, the

¹⁹Lawrence, *Electing Our Masters*, pp. 168–9, 235–6.

²⁰Lawrence, *Electing Our Masters*, pp. 73–8.

²¹Lawrence, *Electing Our Masters*, p. 169.

²²Lawrence, *Electing Our Masters*, pp. 236–46; Kaal and van de Griend, 'Postwar Popular Politics', pp. 129–30.

²³Lawrence, *Electing Our Masters*, p. 146–69.

²⁴C.C. Gatzka, *Die Demokratie der Wähler: Stadtgesellschaft und politische Kommunikation in Italien und der Bundesrepublik, 1944–1979* (Düsseldorf, 2019), pp. 366–85.

²⁵For comparative reflections on historical cultures of political communication see T. Mergel, 'Americanization, European Styles or National Codes? The Culture of Election Campaigning in Western Europe, 1945–1990', *East Central Europe* 36, (2009), pp. 254–80.

²⁶Z. Kergomard, *Wahlen ohne Kampf? Schweizer Parteien auf Stimmenfang, 1947–1983* (Basel 2020), pp. 353, 356–7; Gatzka, *Demokratie der Wähler*, pp. 497–9.

Italian Communist Party (*Partito Comunista Italiano*, PCI) in the red region of Emilia-Romagna organized public meetings on the piazza called ‘Citizens ask, Communists respond’, a format that at that time was also wide-spread among German local candidates. Allusions to popular deliberation were present in the 1976 PCI campaign, whose town squares now gave place to ‘discussion meetings’ [*incontri-dibattiti*] to debate the Communist proposals for a ‘government of democratic solidarity’. With this ‘mass dialogue’, based on the strong civil society traditions in Emilia-Romagna, the party marketed itself as a participation channel. In doing so, it wanted to explicitly distinguish itself from the Christian Democratic campaign by appealing to the ‘reason’ of the voters. The actual goal of this political communication, however, was not the discussion of factual issues, but the presentation of an allegedly ‘genuine’ perspective on the problematic realities of Italy as well as the mood and sentiments of ‘the people’.²⁷ The Communist strategy in Italy best resembled what was discernable in West Germany, but its participatory approach was primarily a function of the Party’s marginalization in the mass media and State bureaucracy. Christian Democrats and other parties, on the other hand, did not highlight public participation and deliberation – not least because in Italy they represented Communist practices.

In West Germany, the participatory discourse of the ‘long 1968s’ was similarly politicized. Typically, however, not only the left, but also Liberals and Conservatives were involved, attended and encouraged by an independent local press which could not be more enthusiastic about popular participation and deliberation. One explanation for that can be found in the ways the post-Nazi society of West Germany had been forced to deal with its own deficiencies. With the objective of moulding Germans into democrats driven by the ability to govern themselves without submitting to authorities, the democratization paradigm of the US Military Government in Germany primarily targeted participatory and deliberative skills.²⁸ In the realm of ‘re-education’, the American military government organized local ‘public forums’, where citizens should be enabled to ask questions to municipal officials and to negotiate their political decisions. Institutions of US cultural diplomacy and adult education, local associations and public intellectual circles and not least the popular television programme *Internationaler Frühschoppen* promoted and popularized the practice of discussion.²⁹ The biggest effort was probably produced by the grammar schools, where training in discussion and the idealization of criticism as a civic virtue were part of civic education since the 1950s – although with regional disparities.³⁰ Thus, in the second half of the 1960s, the ‘discussion fever’ promulgated by the protagonists of 1968 was already rooted in broader circles of West German

²⁷Gatzka, *Demokratie der Wähler*, pp. 503–4.

²⁸M. Wüstemeyer, ‘Re-education – die Verlierer lernen Demokratie’, in H. Afflerbach and C. Cornelißen (eds), *Sieger und Besiegte: Materielle und ideelle Neuorientierungen nach 1945* (Tübingen, 1997), pp. 219–47, see p. 228, 236; R. Lammersdorf, ‘“Das Volk ist streng demokratisch”: Amerikanische Sorgen über das autoritäre Bewusstsein der Deutschen in der Besatzungszeit und frühen Bundesrepublik’, in A. Bauerkämper, K.H. Jarausch and M. M. Payk (eds), *Demokratiewunder: Transatlantische Mittler und die kulturelle Öffnung Westdeutschlands 1945–1970* (Göttingen, 2005), pp. 85–103.

²⁹N. Verheyen, *Diskussionslust: Eine Kulturgeschichte des ‘besseren Arguments’ in Westdeutschland* (Göttingen 2010), pp. 76–206.

³⁰S. Levsen, *Autorität und Demokratie: Eine Kulturgeschichte des Erziehungswandels in Westdeutschland und Frankreich, 1945–1975* (Göttingen 2019), pp. 112–20, 236–47; N. Verheyen, ‘Eifrige Diskutanten: Die Stilisierung des “freien” Meinungsaustauschs zu einer demokratischen Kulturtechnik in der westdeutschen Gesellschaft der fünfziger Jahre’, in D. Fulda, D. Herzog, S.-L. Hoffmann and T. van Rahden (eds), *Demokratie im Schatten der Gewalt: Geschichten des Privaten im deutschen Nachkrieg* (Göttingen, 2010), pp. 99–121; N. Verheyen, *Diskussionslust*, pp. 207–233; Schulz, ‘Politische Parallelwelten’.

society, with the Protestant churches and finally the political parties taking part in what can be called a participatory discourse driven by the virtues of speaking up to politicians and criticizing the authorities.³¹ This was, however, anything but predictable.

Ruling the election assembly after Nazism, 1940s–60s

Testimony to an increasing divergence between civil society and the political sphere in the newly built Federal Republic, the propagation of open discussion as a democratic technique was not reflected in the interaction between voters and the new agents of party democracy. In fact, a tensed political atmosphere and the uncertainty of whether the democratic order could be maintained by the security forces of a yet not fully sovereign state did not favour a tolerant attitude regarding the rules of political communication. This was particularly true from the viewpoint of party functionaries who looked back onto political persecution in a regime that had been supported by a good deal of the population that now formed the potential audience of political meetings. And it was true from the standpoint of Conservatives who were not easily convinced by participatory approaches that aimed at widening the political arena. As in other countries, the threat from the extremes seemed serious, for radical-nationalist organizations were flourishing again and the Communist menace seemed not to be vanquished despite stagnant voter support. Social Democratic federations and other left-wing associations faced infiltration by Communists who served as agents of the ruling *Sozialistische Einheitspartei* (SED) in the Soviet Zone.

Even more specifically, many Germans associated democracy itself and its culture of popular assemblies less with discussions than with fierce political conflicts and the violence which had paved the way to Nazi power. Indeed, violence sporadically burst out again at political meetings and election rallies during the post-war years. Much more frequent, however, were verbal attacks and emotional confrontations between party speakers and their adversaries among the crowd. In the first general election campaign of the Federal Republic in 1949, there had been so many disruptions of events that immediately after its constitution, the first Bundestag began debating a new assembly law [*Versammlungsgesetz*] that would allow for the future feasibility of electoral assemblies.

Against this backdrop, the agents of the newly established parliamentary democracy longed for protection, not only against what used to be called the ‘enemies’ of the Constitution, both from the radical left and from the extreme right.³² They also sought freedom and independence from popular emotions, and more precisely, from performances of ‘the people’ in general, as they were associated with irrationality and with a false, if any, understanding of politics. This attitude was widespread among political parties, politicians and campaigners in the post-war era, which Jon Lawrence has fittingly coined as a ‘sober’ era of electoral politics.³³ What reinforced this obviously European style of sober politics in Germany after the defeat of Fascism was the simple fact that

³¹Verheyen, *Diskussionslust*, pp. 244–98; T. Großbölting, ‘Als Laien und Genossen das Fragen lernten: Neue Formen institutioneller Öffentlichkeit im Katholizismus und in der Arbeiterbewegung der sechziger Jahre’, in M. Frese, J. Paulus and K. Teppe (eds), *Demokratisierung und gesellschaftlicher Aufbruch: Die sechziger Jahre als Wendezeit der Bundesrepublik* (Paderborn, 2005), pp. 147–79.

³²D. Rigoll, *Staatsschutz in Westdeutschland: Von der Entnazifizierung zur Extremistenabwehr* (Göttingen 2013).

³³Lawrence, *Electing Our Masters*, pp. 11, 132, 137, 142.

here, millions of fellow travellers of the Nazi regime as well as former members of the Nazi Party were still alive and kicking. After the de-facto amnesties during the long process of de-Nazification, they were even re-gaining the vote. Especially the Social Democrats (and the Communists) had thus good reasons to distrust their audiences at political meetings.

Against this backdrop, election meetings in urban environments were not occasions of intense interaction between parties, candidates and the represented. They rather show how the access to the arenas of democracy was strictly controlled by the agents of party democracy. Harking back to traditions of the nineteenth century which were quite different from the platform in British electoral politics, the German political meeting favoured rational exchange between informed politicians or party members, while the audience should simply listen and learn. This restricted conception of who was allowed to speak was reinforced at electoral meetings after 1945. The post-war campaigns gave preference to smaller 'electoral assemblies' [*Wahlversammlungen*] instead of the grand rallies with hundreds or, in unusual cases, thousands of listeners, but the provided 'discussions' [*Aussprachen*] practically did not prove to be open to all participants. The reasons for that are to be found in the performative interests of political parties as well as in the experiences with early post-war audiences.

Election meetings usually entailed words of greeting from a local functionary or deputy of the organizing party, a talk by a speaker who did not necessarily belong to the constituency, but stood for a certain expertise in a policy field or for closeness to national politics, and finally the discussion. Part of the organizational efforts of the local party federation was the packing of meetings with party activists in order to make sure that the atmosphere would be in favour of the speaker. Ideally, from the parties' point of view, the speaker should feel comfortable by being constantly applauded for his talk on theoretical or practical issues concerning the State, which could easily last longer than an hour and a half. In the 1950s, meeting reports of the Christian Democratic party in Hamburg praised the tenor of discussions as 'objective' when objections to the speaker's statements had been absent.³⁴

Indeed, discussions were so challenging for the agents of party democracy – at least in the cities –, because activists of the opposing parties were well prepared to make use of them for their own purposes. At best, they managed to conquer the election meeting of an adversary party by means of argumentation – when statements of the speaker were falsified – or by general criticism of the opponent's moral or political conduct, thereby diverting arbitrarily from the subject of the talk. Adversary activists were also expected to heckle the speaker. This script of electoral assemblies could produce a good deal of information and entertainment for the audience, but in practice, parties learned to control the discussion through the training of fellow members to become discussants at their own meetings. When the resources of the local party districts allowed it, discussions were dominated by activists applauding the speaker and posing pleasing questions.³⁵ As a result, the confrontational nature of German political meetings had largely vanished by 1960. This fostered a demand for new formats of political debate

³⁴See the meeting reports of the CDU Hamburg-Nord, 1 and 9 September 1961, in Archiv für Christlich-Demokratische Politik, Sankt Augustin [hereafter ACDP] 02-155-006/3.

³⁵Board meeting of the CDU Hamburg-Nord with the campaign managers and candidates of the constituencies 18 and 22, 5 June 1961, in ACDP 02-155-006/3.

that were to be found in the panel discussion of the constituency's candidates for the Bundestag, moderated by a local journalist, which was introduced in 1961 and became popular because of the possibility for voters to witness a real discussion of different political arguments.

In any case, the participation of ordinary voters in the discussion seemed inappropriate. Since the very beginning of political communication after Nazi rule, the eagerness of the party conveners to demonstrate their strength at the political meeting let the question of who was speaking become a question of the proceedings itself. Those who requested to speak at the discussion usually first stated what political party they belonged to. If they did not belong to any party, they introduced themselves as 'apolitical' or 'independent', sometimes adding positive self-descriptions such as 'Christian' or 'worker'. The party functionaries usually classified their contributions as rather useless. Internal reports for the SPD in Hamburg degraded such voters to 'involuntary comedians', even if they had been able to put forward sound arguments. Lacking a formal political affiliation, they seemed to speak 'without any discernible direction'.³⁶ The fact that ordinary voters failed to give statements identifiable with clear-cut political lines discouraged Social Democrats from taking them seriously as political interlocutors.

Apart from political arrogance, distrust towards outsiders and the will to protect their own 'freedom of speech' restricted the circle of who was allowed to speak. In 1949, Social Democrats as well as Christian Democrats experienced harsh verbal attacks and personal accusations during their assemblies, which induced many federations to abolish discussions altogether. Even if the proceedings of the meeting were not disturbed, the discussion could be read as a tool for adversaries, including many from the political extremes, to occupy the stages and propagate their own ideas in front of a formidable audience.³⁷ The widespread strategy of disrupting a meeting through violent or non-violent disturbances, however, led to lengthy negotiations on the legislation concerning political meetings, which finally passed the Bundestag in 1953. It stipulated that the local conveners, instead of the police, were given the householder's rights during the event, with a chairperson of the local party federation functioning as head of the meeting. Consequently, political parties could now legally expel from the hall anyone creating a disturbance and were authorized to provide stewards from their own rank and file who should maintain order. The *Versammlungsgesetz* was welcomed by all parliamentary forces (except the Communists), as it provided them the means to control their own meetings and impose the rules. Yet, it did not provide normative guidelines on what was to be seen as legitimate rules of conduct during political meetings.³⁸

While the authorization of party democracy to control their own public meetings instead of the police would prove important for the transformation of rules in the late 1960s, the actual practice of the proceedings on the basis of the new law did not signal any interest in interaction with ordinary voters. Harking back to experiences with extremists from the far right and far left who usually presented themselves as

³⁶Note on a CDU rally on 14 November 1948 at Winterhuder Fährhaus, Hamburg, 16 November [1948], in AdsD, SPD-Landesorganisation Hamburg [hereafter SPD-LO HH], box 367; Jens Jacobsen to the Political Department of the SPD Hamburg, 24 January 1957. AdsD, SPD-LO HH, box 369.

³⁷Circular No. 32/49 of the SPD Party Executive to the secretaries of the federations, 28 June 1949, in AdsD, SPD-LO HH, box 106.

³⁸'Ordnung im Wahlkampf', Hamburger Abendblatt [hereafter HA], 5 August 1953.

ordinary voters at the discussions, this reluctance to open the stages was still palpable at the beginning of the 1960s. In Hamburg, West Germany's biggest city and stronghold of the SPD, both Social Democrats and Christian Democrats had decided to limit the access to discussions at electoral assemblies to members of the three Bundestag parties. Reaffirmed in 1961, this regulation underlined a communicative configuration that materially did not allow ordinary German voters to act in the role of active citizens.³⁹ It was the activists of the APO who reclaimed this role on their behalf by challenging the rules.

Challenging the rules: the 'extra-parliamentary opposition' gaining access, 1965–69

Rallies had been attracting great attention from the very beginning of West German electioneering and they did so into the 1960s. Here, no discussion was provided, even if sometimes attendants publicly demanded it. Grand rallies served as perfect opportunities for popular politicians to demonstrate their rhetorical skills and to explain their policies. It was not members of parliament, but ministers and chancellors who could count on a mass audience who listened eagerly and enjoyed watching and applauding the most powerful representatives of the State. In the second half of the 1960s, this scenario changed dramatically. With the advent of the student movement and corresponding militant activism from the youth organization of the NPD, every rally ran the risk of being disturbed, most frequently from the left-wing APO. At times, disturbances became so severe that the speaker could not finish his talk. Some speakers, like the popular party intellectual Carlo Schmid (SPD), now agreed to appear at rallies only under the condition that the local party federation would provide 'security against political rowdies', as the protesters from the left were usually described. In the run-up to the general elections of 1969, the Social Democrats in Hamburg even thought about doing away with this event format completely.⁴⁰ Hence, despite their self-presentation as promoters of democratization in West Germany under Willy Brandt,⁴¹ with the rules of the rally being threatened, some Social Democrats preferred to abolish direct communication instead of confronting a challenging audience.

Finally, however, party headquarters decided in favour of adjustment. This was tantamount to the tightening of rules, and to a de-facto restriction of eligibility to attend the election rallies of 1969, which lived on during the 1970s. In a manual devoted to the 'dealing with the so-called extra-parliamentary opposition', the Christian Democrats became more detailed than they had ever before with regard to the preparation of political meetings. Given their role as the highest authority on site, the selection of the chairpersons was now deemed a matter of greatest importance and, above all, of physical constitution, as they should possess good nerves and a loud voice. More

³⁹Brockhagen to the chairpersons of the CDU federations in Hamburg-Nord, 27 August 1957, in ACDP 02-155-012/1; Note of the SPD Party Executive Hamburg on the execution of hosted electoral assemblies, s.d. [1961], in AdsD, SPD-LO HH, box 132.

⁴⁰Willi Berkhan, Member of the Bundestag, to Heinz Scholz, 14 November 1968, in AdsD, SPD-LO HH, box 1038; Helmut Schmidt to the SPD Party Executive Hamburg, 27 June 1969, in AdsD, SPD-LO HH, box 1038.

⁴¹J. Angster, 'Der neue Stil: Die Amerikanisierung des Wahlkampfes und der Wandel im Politikverständnis bei CDU und SPD in den 1960er Jahren', in M. Frese, J. Paulus and K. Teppe (eds), *Demokratisierung*, pp. 181–204; Schildt and Schmidt (eds), *„Demokratie“*.

decisive than the choice of speaker and subject now seemed the sufficient provision of stewards, who were likely to be involved in scuffles. Christian Democrats, who were the main targets of extra-parliamentary attacks, deployed up to 800 stewards per rally when provocative politicians like Franz-Josef Strauß, at that time Minister of Finance, were speaking. The stewards did not hesitate to drag disturbers out of the hall by pulling their hair, namely when they had insulted the speaker with Nazi accusations. To avoid such scenes, fellow party members and friendly notables of the city ought to fill the rows of the meeting hall, which now became accessible only on invitation. Nonetheless, APO activists frequently managed to gain access, perhaps because they usually answered with a counter-demonstration in front of the hall when they were denied access to the rally, which then had to be dissolved by the police. Therefore, lower party ranks had to appear early enough in order to manage the entry gate and to occupy the front rows and strategic positions in the hall, making sure that APO activists could not destroy cables, gather in groups or storm the stage. It was recommended to schedule the rallies according to the daily routines of adult workers, allowing them to attend in greater numbers instead of crowds of students that allegedly had plenty of free time.⁴²

This practice of warding off attacks from protesting rule-breakers did not relate to reflections about a certain ‘democratic’ or ‘civil’ conduct. Instead, the parties and the press legitimized their handling of the APO as a defence of democracy as such, which most often simply implied the State of the Federal Republic. Ironically, their tightening of rules became so strict that federal State institutions were prompted to remind the parties of the fact that at political meetings there customarily existed legitimate forms of expressing dissonance which ought not be suppressed. In the middle of the 1969 campaign, Hamburg’s Department of the Interior clarified that ‘heckling and expressions of displeasure that are within the framework of the usual “rules of the game of public discussion”’ did not constitute a disturbance of order. Moreover, it warned the parties of what had been a nightmare for German observers of public politics since the very beginning of post-war democracy: the risk of practices that reminded the public of the ‘*Saalschutz*’ of Nazi SA and SS in the late Weimar Republic.⁴³ Notably, the parties of the Bundestag occasionally took this risk in order to assert the authority of their leaders at the microphones. By doing so, they approached a zero-tolerance policy which disallowed any dissonant reaction at their rallies, and which was in sharp contrast to the core values put forward by democratic citizenship education since 1945.⁴⁴

This strategy coexisted with a tolerant handling of extra-parliamentary rule-breakers and a tactical relaxing of the rules, which came to dominate the scene, at least according to the reporting press. Already in 1965, parties and political authorities had experienced what it could mean to offensively meet the challenge of extra-parliamentary rule-breakers through letting them gain access instead of suppressing them. At an election rally in his

⁴²CDU Brochure ‘Gestörte Versammlungen. Der Umgang mit der sogenannten außerparlamentarischen Opposition’, s.D. [about 1969], in AdsD, SPD-LO HH, box 1038.

⁴³Communication of the Freie und Hansestadt Hamburg, Department of the Interior, to the Hamburg offices of CDU, SPD and FDP, on the tasks and capacities of stewards at assemblies in closed rooms, 2 September 1969, in AdsD, SPD-LO HH, box 1038.

⁴⁴For comparable findings on the contemporary debates over terrorism see K. Hanshew, *Terror and Democracy in West Germany* (Cambridge, 2012).

constituency in Ulm, the popular chancellor Ludwig Erhard (CDU) had unceremoniously invited student hecklers to 'represent their cause openly in front of the microphone'. The newspaper praised the argumentative skills of the student who had come forward to explain his demands for university reforms. Erhard had thus proved able to show that he knew how to respond to the students' argumentation in an equally objective and quick-witted manner. The audience in Ulm rewarded the discussion with strong applause, 'which of course also applied to Erhard, because he had so willingly given up his place at the microphone to the unexpected competition'.⁴⁵ This public appreciation of the open discussion by the press as well as an apparently sympathetic audience formed the prerequisites for what would become a transformation of the rules that pointed to greater public participation at political meetings.

Indeed, from the audience's point of view, the extra-parliamentary disruptions and disturbances which challenged and insulted famous political authorities, soon became a source of entertainment. Local sources indicate that rumours about disturbances or verbal exchanges between speakers and protesters going on at a meeting stimulated the spontaneous attendance of by-passers.⁴⁶ And as is best known from the British hustings and platforms of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries,⁴⁷ also in West Germany, a challenged political leader could gain sympathy and demonstrate legitimacy by giving proof of his fine conduct, civility and calmness vis-à-vis clamorous crowds, even if the protesters hardly let the speaker get a word in. The daily press reported when politicians had been good at repartee. In the contemporary understanding, it seemed legitimate that Strauß, who had been confronted with 'Sieg heil!' shouts, compared the disruptors to SA and SS, whereas Brandt met them with the gesture of the thoughtful pacifist: 'What kind of young people are these who can't even listen when there is talk over peace. Hopefully, we can also help to ensure that your generation, too, will have a lasting peace. Do not stop, but listen, I say to these deluded young people'.⁴⁸ This is what the public could extract from the front pages of the daily press about the ability of their democratic leaders to parry, as well as to educate, crowds of political 'rowdies'. The *Versammlungsgesetz* was a prerequisite for such narratives, for it forced parties and political leaders to confront the 'rowdies' in the meeting halls by their own means, whereas in Italy, for instance, student disturbers at election rallies were immediately removed by police.

More and more, the parties in West Germany learned that they had to accept the challenge in order to convince the audience that they knew how to play by the rules and to defend them while at the same time not simply suppressing 'popular' voices from the outside. The mentioned manual of the Christian Democrats concerning the handling of the APO stressed that throwing them out and calling the police was not appreciated: Voters wished to watch politicians who could manage the situation. Speakers should practise keeping calm and reacting with humour, even when they felt deeply insulted.⁴⁹

⁴⁵'Erhard pocht auf die Leistungen der CDU', Schwäbische Donauzeitung, 13 September 1965.

⁴⁶'Nikolaus Jürgensen kam nicht zu Wort', Bergedorfer Zeitung, 21 November 1968. The article is to be found in AdSD, SPD-LO HH, box 1038.

⁴⁷Lawrence, *Electing Our Masters*, p. 9–10.

⁴⁸'Demonstrationen gegen Strauß und Brandt', HA, 1 September 1969; "'Hier kommen nur alte Frauen 'rein'", Hamburger Morgenpost [hereafter HM], 20 September 1969; 'APO-Lärm und Forderung nach wirksamer Verteidigung', in SWP, 18 September 1969.

⁴⁹CDU Brochure 'Gestörte Versammlungen. Der Umgang mit der sogenannten außerparlamentarischen Opposition', s.D. [about 1969], in AdSD, SPD-LO HH, box 1038.

Indeed, in the campaigns of the 1970s, the tolerant handling of extra-parliamentary contenders at the rallies had prevailed. This implied that the perspective of the audience and the legitimizing factor of warding off attacks by means of tolerance and good answers had outweighed the premise of the dignity of parliamentary democracy favoured by many of its active representatives and the associated strategy of zero-tolerance and barricading. Most important, however, was the fact that already in the course of the late 1960s, the transformation of rules in favour of greater participation had been embraced by ordinary voters as well, who were following in the steps of the young APO activists.

Staging ‘deliberative democracy’ in the constituency, 1969–76

According to contemporary observations, by 1969 the traditional election rally and the associated top-down approach to politics had vanished. Instead of applauding political celebrities, German voters were now longing for two things: concrete factual information, and an active say in order to deliberate appropriate solutions for a secure future. The ‘desire for discussion’, stated the CDU in her manual, seemed to dominate the rallies:

Today, even the bourgeois participants in election assemblies come to the meeting with questions they wish to put to the prominent or less prominent speakers. [...] Meetings without discussion are increasingly perceived by the public as mere indoctrination and are rejected; this is true even for the most prominent speakers, such as the Federal Chancellor of Germany.⁵⁰

In effect, leaders in West German politics had to be prepared for discussions after their rally speeches, often in front of over a thousand participants.⁵¹ If these occasions were cancelled ‘due to scheduling difficulties’, the attendants reacted angrily. In such cases, the chairman had to find soothing and explanatory words, while the local press relentlessly reported the displeasure of the participants when they were denied a discussion.⁵² Within a very short time, voters were imitating the practices of the activists.

Whereas the traditional discussion at the political meetings as well as the panel discussion, which had been introduced in the 1960s, was conceptualized as an agonal confrontation of party views, and whereas television and radio programmes of that time featured a format of questions (by voters) and answers (by politicians), the discussion aspired to on the local level was rather seen as an exchange of information and ideas about the pressing questions of the future. Criticizing and formulating their own considerations became part of the role description of the new, active voter-participant which grew out of the practice of electoral politics. Suitable occasions for that were witnessed in the election assemblies, which suddenly became popular, after they had been declared dead few years previously. In Ulm, a 66-year-old voter told reporters that he had attended all electoral assemblies in the city: ‘There is discussion and criticism!’⁵³

⁵⁰CDU Brochure ‘Gestörte Versammlungen. Der Umgang mit der sogenannten außerparlamentarischen Opposition’, s.D. [about 1969], in AdsD, SPD-LO HH, box 1038.

⁵¹Meermann to Wischniewski, 3 December 1969, in AdsD, SPD-Parteivorstand, Neuer Bestand, Abt. Öffentlichkeitsarbeit [hereafter SPD-PV NB, ÖA], box 1792.

⁵²‘Narjes und Erhard fahren schwere Geschütze auf: Warnung vor Kollektivismus und Sozialismus’, Schwäbische Zeitung [hereafter SZ], 2 November 1972; ‘Barzel füllt das Kornhaus’, Neu-Ulmer Zeitung, 16 November 1972.

⁵³‘Wenig Papier – Direkte Kontakte gefragt’, SWP, 27 August 1969.

What qualified their proceedings as forms of popular deliberation was not only the suggestion of speakers and audience as being political equals who gathered to exchange thoughts, condensed in the ubiquitous term of ‘criticism’ which was a direct adoption of left-wing theoretical criticism. The deliberative quality of the setting was also confirmed by the emphasis on information as a prerequisite for voters to refine their judgements by negotiation with professional politicians. Voters were particularly interested in the contemporary dispute over the revaluation of the D-Mark, on which they wished to conceive an opinion, as well as the dangers posed by the NPD. Parties and local reporters publicly praised the political ‘expertise’ of voters and saw it as the fruit of their own work over the past years and decades. Journalists in Freiburg could even hope that with informed voters, the competence of parliamentary politics would increase. For politicians, they claimed, instead of rhetoric and ‘elbows’, now the only guarantee to win elections was to demonstrate expertise.⁵⁴ On the grounds of such practical thinking, local journalists had no difficulties in imagining that voters’ deliberative skills could somehow discipline their representatives and advance the proceedings of parliamentary democracy itself.

In effect, the new demands of voters, actively promoted by the press, put pressure on the parties to objectify (*‘versachlichen’*) their mode of political communication. Instead of Cold War rhetoric, simple entertainment or self-assuring success stories that had made up the campaigns of the Christian Democrats for twenty years, in 1969 as well as 1972, political communication was adjusted to meet ‘the political interest and need for information of the population’, especially with ‘qualified information’.⁵⁵ In this vein, the parties turned their political meetings into ‘information events’, where expert politicians such as Ministers could meet and debate with informed citizens. This format symbolized the heyday of rational discourse in West Germany’s political meeting culture.

The quest for and the emphasis on information had the effect that, despite the voters’ participation, the parties still retained their political authority as agents of parliamentary democracy, for they were expected to deliver information. Although this required a good deal of resources, both cognitive and material, SPD and CDU managed to meet the high demands not only through meetings, but also through written material, which now was requested in countless letters to the party federations. Local candidates and members of the *Bundestag*, on their behalf, became the backbone of voter participation and popular deliberation. Those who could relate to the new mode of communication – and this was not the case for every deputy – caught the opportunity to present themselves as veritable representatives not only of the constituency and its interests, but even of the political will of the constituents. Interestingly, young politicians of the CDU were particularly engaged in suggesting their approachability and openness to the exchange of reasons with their constituents. In Ulm, the barely 30-year-old Christian Democrat candidate Herbert Werner was introduced in a brochure as loving ‘the open and tough, but fair and objective debate. He likes to subject his own opinions to critical scrutiny by his interlocutors’.⁵⁶ By emphasizing his will to change his judgements in direct deliberation with his constituents, he was presented as an ideal representative for a time when parliamentary

⁵⁴‘Die Parteien berichten uns’, *Badische Zeitung* [hereafter BZ], 17, 24 and 27–28 September 1969.

⁵⁵Dietrich Rollmann and Dirk Fischer to the school administrators in Hamburg, 25 August 1972, in ACDP 03-010-047/4; Klaus Wettig to the SPD Head of office, 27 November 1969, in AdsD, SPD-PV NB, ÖA, box 1792.

⁵⁶CDU Brochure ‘Unser Mann in Bonn: Herbert Werner’, s.d. [1972], in Staatsarchiv Ulm, G 6 I 2.2.1, folder ‘Bundestagswahlen vom 19.11.1972 CDU/CSU’.

democracy seemed to merge with direct democracy, with constituencies building a platform for the formation of opinions. He was elected and served as a deputy for the city of Ulm into the 1990s, promoting Conservative family policies at the Bundestag. Obviously, the participatory rhetoric was by no means limited to certain progressive policies. The young candidate and deputy for Hamburg Dietrich Rollmann (CDU) announced his home visits in 1972 in letters to his constituents by expressly underlining their purpose:

The Hamburg CDU is looking to debate with you. Because there is no better way than a personal conversation to inform, argue and discuss the goals and intentions of a party. [...] And if you don't like our party – then this conversation can still be a benefit for you. Because the next few weeks and months will require every citizen to be critically informed on all sides. So if you are a friend of fair political discussion – then please be kind enough to accept our offer to talk.⁵⁷

In this vein, Conservative agents of party democracy propagated participation and popularized the deliberative stance among their constituents.

The mini-publics which informed participatory political communication were created more and more outside the common places of political meetings, like schoolrooms, restaurants or civic halls. In 1972, SPD groups organized election meetings in private homes so that women could engage in discussions 'without having to think about the little ones'.⁵⁸ Local candidates made home visits and sometimes found themselves discussing issues with voters at the coffee table.⁵⁹ Yet, the cornerstone of 'deliberative democracy' was the street discussion, which was itself inspired by the practices of the student movement and became the symbol of the deliberative culture between 1969 and 1976. In the beginning, APO activists themselves had played their role as discussants on the streets, on market squares and in trams, where they had targeted voters primarily in order to inform them about the threat emanating from the rise of the NPD.⁶⁰ If only to avoid leaving the voters to the APO alone, party federations and local candidates imitated this practice. In 1969, the 'street discussion' [*Straßendiskussion*] was introduced and rapidly advanced to become the central format of voter contact in the 1970s. According to the local party federations, also at these entirely public occasions, voters proved themselves as having become 'more critical and more willing to discuss'.⁶¹ In 1972, the local press in Ulm reported that voters on the streets got wrapped up in discussions among themselves.⁶² Local candidates now were almost daily to be found at information desks at the corners of the streets and, more frequently, in the newly built pedestrian areas of West German towns, discussing with by-passers and sometimes magnified by a microphone. In Hamburg, the SPD promoted the appearances of the popular but controversial local hero Helmut Schmidt, the future chancellor, at market places already in 1969: 'Instead of propaganda, there's discussion by loudspeaker van'. Schmidt was in fact no promoter of open discussions with persons without party affiliation, as he declared publicly in a confrontation with the APO. However, he had to defer to a participatory

⁵⁷Dietrich Rollmann to the voters of his constituency in Hamburg, September 1972, in ACDP 03-010-047/4.

⁵⁸'CDU kündigt Höhepunkte an: Barzel, Filbinger. SPD: Frauen diskutieren und Männer hüten Kinder', SZ, 11 November 1972.

⁵⁹'Ab und zu eine Tasse Kaffee', HA, 16 November 1972.

⁶⁰'Störaktionen in Kiel und Bremen', HA, 16 September 1969.

⁶¹Report of the SPD Nürnberg, 27 September 1969, in AdsD, SPD-PV NB, ÖA, box 1792.

⁶²'CDU kündigt Höhepunkte an: Barzel, Filbinger. SPD: Frauen diskutieren und Männer hüten Kinder', SZ, 11 November 1972.

discourse that advertised popular deliberation, thereby reproducing and reinforcing it.⁶³ Like no other format, the street discussion demonstrated the openness of parliamentary democracy to practices of direct democracy on the constituency's level, and like no other format, it guaranteed an opportunity to meet and greet voters who were still undecided and open to persuasion. In Hamburg, the parties reckoned with fifty to sixty participants per street discussion, which involved a much larger attendance audience due to the loud-speaker broadcast.⁶⁴

The common enthusiasm for street discussions was rooted in the associated spontaneity and non-scriptedness as well as the space it left for ordinary voters to come into contact with their candidates and deputies and to have their active say, not seldomly one-on-one. What is more, they seemed to hold ready variation and improvisation, in contrast to what was called the 'uniformity of political meetings'.⁶⁵ In spite of this public appraisal, among party functionaries the objective of taking back control of the street discussion grew. Because they suspected that opposing party members would mingle with passers-by and take the microphone, and because they knew that local reporters would also be watching the hustle and bustle, the parties increasingly relied not only on stewards but also on the covert use of their own discussion speakers. Whereas previously the 'positive impression' of one's own party had been at risk, it was now the ideal of a balanced discussion that justified such precautions internally: 'We can't just leave it to our political opponents to constantly use the microphone to prevent a real discussion', warned members of the Hamburg CDU in 1972.⁶⁶ In this respect, the extra-parliamentary desire for participation and discussion by the 1970s had deeply penetrated the rhetoric and argumentation of a party democracy, that was still – and unsurprisingly – eager to control who could speak at their occasions.

Conclusion

The rules of political communication at the election meeting which the *Bundestag* parties set in the post-Nazi era should serve to defend parliamentary democracy against their enemies from the right as well as from the left. Facing fierce attacks and disruptions of their assemblies during the post-war election campaigns, Social Democrats and Christian Democrats early began to perceive themselves as agents of rational politics – at the expense of ordinary voters, whom they denied the right to participate in political discussions. The mistrust of 'the people' was a crucial element of post-Nazi electoral politics, resulting in a new assembly law which guaranteed the parties full control over order and proceedings. The European shift in political communication towards a more visible 'voice' of 'the people' was not reflected in election meetings, although they provided space for 'discussion'.

The advent of 'extra-parliamentary opposition' in the second half of the 1960s signified a dramatic shift. The active involvement of the APO in the election campaigns

⁶³'De will keen Appeln. Dat is Wahlpropaganda', HM, 10 September 1969.

⁶⁴Freie und Hansestadt Hamburg, Department of the Interior, Police Administration, to the SPD federation Hamburg-Altona, 9 December 1976, in AdSD, SPD-Kreisverband Hamburg-Altona, box 97.

⁶⁵'In Bayern krachten Bomben', BZ, 16 September 1969; 'Unsere Freiburger Kandidaten im Endsput', BZ, 22 September 1969.

⁶⁶See for instance Gerhard Weidmann and Paul Kuhn to the members of the CDU federation Hamburg-Langenhorn, 18 October 1972, in ACDP 03-010-016/4.

was tantamount to a challenging of the rules. Despite severe attacks and resolute defence strategies during the late 1960s, the presence of the protest movement helped in reconciling the virtue of rational politics with the participation of non-professionals by introducing a fair and sober, but also entertaining, style of discussion at the election meetings, which would be immediately imitated by ordinary voters. Party democracy then rapidly managed to adjust the rules of the game to the locally articulated participatory discourse of the time and let extra-parliamentary voices gain access to the stages of parliamentary democracy. Somewhat anachronistically in the era of television, this process put the constituency back at centre stage, serving as a forum of information and the exchange of arguments which involved political leaders, candidates, protesters and voters. Occasions like the street discussion symbolized a merging of parliamentary and participatory democracy, highlighting open deliberation as the appropriate tool to find solutions in an era of looming reform and threatening crises. Although the agents of party democracy soon managed to take back control again, by letting their members play the role of ordinary citizens, the period between 1969 and 1976 in West Germany was a rather peculiar heyday of participation in the realm of, and not in contrast to, parliamentary democracy.

Its roots lay not primarily in the experiences of politicization and extra-parliamentary protest during the 1960s and 1970s, which was transnational in scale, but restricted to younger social groupings that aimed to locate themselves within global political struggles. The process reflected in this article was rather a result of activists turning towards ‘formal’ electoral politics on the level of the constituency, where they sought to campaign against the growing presence of ex- or neo-Nazi politicians and activists, and, on the other hand, an atmosphere produced by post-Nazi political pedagogy since the occupation of West Germany, that now served as fertile ground for participatory and deliberative instances involving ordinary voters. The wish to mould democratic citizens who were able to speak up to authorities, and the corresponding idealization of criticism and discussion in schools and manifold branches of civil society, struck back into rather restricted arenas of parliamentary democracy in West Germany and urged the political parties and younger agents of parliamentary democracy to open up for voters’ voices and for their participation in the deliberation of what was politically at stake in a period of looming crises. This story, however, relied on the persistent vitality of local spaces as havens for participatory and deliberative practices despite mediatization and mass audiences. Perhaps, these spaces have been too easily swept aside by political communication research and by the historiography of democracy in the post-war era.

Notes on Contributor

Claudia C. Gatzka obtained her doctorate at Humboldt University and is Assistant Professor in Modern European History at the University of Freiburg as well as principal investigator of the project *Veiled voices of democracy. Political representations of the ‘people’ in the Federal Republic of Germany, 1945–2000*, funded by Gerda Henkel Foundation. Her research focuses on the history of democracy and political representation, mass politics, and tourism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in Western Europe and beyond. Her comparative study of the relationship between voters and their representatives in Italy and West Germany, titled *Die Demokratie der Wähler. Stadtgesellschaft und politische Kommunikation in Italien und der Bundesrepublik, 1944–1979*, was published in 2019 by Droste (Düsseldorf).