FEMALE REPRESENTATION IN GERMAN PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEES: 1972-2009

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates committee membership of female Members of Parliament (MPs) in the German Bundestag between 1972 and 2009. In line with theories on traditional gender hierarchies and division of labour, we find that female MPs are more likely to be represented on committees handling typical female issues such as family, education and welfare than on committees handling male issues such as finance, foreign policy and economics. In contrast to what we had expected based on societal modernisation and critical mass theories, we do not find a decrease in the overrepresentation of female MPs on committees handling female issues over time and as the number of female MPs increases. Lastly, our analysis reveals the same pattern of an overrepresentation of women on committees handling female issues for the different parties. The major exception seems to be the female MPs of the Green party who are – contrary to what we had anticipated based on the focus on gender equality within the party’s ideology and organisation – more likely to be overrepresented on committees handling female issues than female MPs of the SPD, CDU/CSU and FDP.

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WORK IN PROGRESS
INTRODUCTION

While women have made substantive progress in their representation in politics, they are still well underrepresented in political life in most nations. Extensive research has been conducted to describe and explain female representation in politics (e.g. Lovenduksi 2001; Grey 2002; Lovenduski 2005; Stokes 2005; Sawer, Tremblay and Trimble 2006; Wängnerud 2009). Most of this research has, however, focused on female representation in Parliament in general, leaving questions about the representation of women in specific parliamentary roles and bodies such as committees aside. Yet, much of the real deliberation and work on new legislation takes place in parliamentary committees (Mattson and Ström 1995), in particular in so-called working Parliaments (Steffani 1979). Hence, committees are major and influential political bodies, making it highly relevant to study women’s presence in them in greater detail, also because it is well-known that women and men approach politics and policy making differently (Norris 1996; Lovenduski 2005). This gender diversity supports the argument that women and men should be equally represented in all committees for the committees to reflect both men and women’s interests, perspectives and priorities. This argument becomes even more compelling if, in addition, women would be found to be overrepresented in less prestigious or influential committees.

Previous research (e.g. Skjeie 1991; Wängnerud 2000; Stokes 2005; Stevens 2007; Wängnerud 2009) has observed a gender bias in Parliament along traditional gender lines. Women have been found to be more likely to focus their parliamentary work on ‘nurturing’ issues such as family, education and welfare and issues related to (gender) equality compared with men. Male Members of Parliament (MPs), in their turn, generally tend to engage more in issues like business, finance, foreign policy, and economics (Thomas 1994). Following these gender divisions, which relate to traditional norms about women’s role and social position, issues related to family, health, welfare and social policy are generally referred to as ‘female issues’. Economics, finance, defence and foreign policy, on the other hand, are presented as typical ‘male issues’ (Skjeie 1991; Heath, Schwindt-Bayer and Taylor-Robinson 2005; Celis 2009; Wängnerud 2009; Bolzendahl 2012).

The main goal of this study is to describe the extent to which these gender differences in policy priorities and interests are also reflected in the membership of parliamentary committees. In particular, we aim at studying to what extent women greater represented on committees handling so-called female issues than on committees handling so-called male issues? Next to describing female MPs’ membership in committees, we will also investigate changes over time and differences between parties in women’s committee membership.

Taking insights from theories and studies on traditional gender hierarchies and gender division of labour, we expect women to be better represented in committees that are concerned
with traditional female issues than in committees handling typical male issues (Skjeie 1991; Thomas 1994; Heath, Schwindt-Bayer and Taylor-Robinson 2005; Bolzendahl 2012). The societal modernisation theory, however, suggest a trend towards more gender equal attitudes and norms in Western democracies (Inglehart and Norris 2003). We assume that this trend will also be reflected in Parliament and that we will thus observe a decreasing trend of the overrepresentation of female MPs on committees handling female issues over time. Furthermore, the critical mass theory (Dahlerup 1988; see also Kanter 1977) suggests that an increase of female MPs may lead to a change of the dominant masculine culture. A male dominated Parliament follows traditional gender hierarchies where women are assigned to typical female committees, leaving more “prestigious” committees that are traditionally concerned with male issue areas to men (Crawford and Pini 2011; Heath, Schwindt-Bayer and Taylor-Robinson 2005; Bolzendahl 2012). Once a critical mass of female MPs is formed, they can challenge this dominant masculine culture and make Parliament more women friendly and less gender biased (Grey 2002; 2006). Hence, and also because a higher number of female MPs has the practical consequence that women can mathematically be represented on more committees, we expect the gender bias in representation on committees to be smaller as the presence of female MPs increases. Similarly, we expect parties with a higher number of female MPs to assign their female MPs more equally to the diverse committees than parties with fewer female MPs. Furthermore, since left-wing parties are generally more concerned about egalitarianism and gender equality in particular, we anticipate a more equal gender balance in committee membership among left-wing parties than among conservative parties.

To answer our research question, we collected membership data of 21 permanent committees in the German Parliament (Bundestag) in 11 legislations, from 1972 until 2009. The German Parliament is a typical example of a so-called working parliament, meaning that the work on legislations takes place in the committees. Details of legislative proposals are prepared and discussed in the respective committee rather than in the debates in the plenary sessions (Steffani 1979). Furthermore, the representation of women has steadily increased during the last few decades, from 5.8 percent in 1972 to 32.8 percent in 2009. Hence, Germany offers an interesting case to investigate to what extent this increase in female MPs has resulted in a less gender-biased presence of female MPs in committees, in particular also because the critical mass theory suggests a threshold of at least 30 percent women in Parliament to make a significant change (Lovenduski 2001). Hence, as there are now more than 30 percent women in the German Parliament, it is the right time to look at their representation and possible alterations of the dominant masculine culture.
Before turning to the introduction of our data, we first review the relevant literature, present our hypotheses and briefly describe the presence of female MPs in the German Parliament and parties.

THEORY
While a large body of studies exist on female representation in Parliament, research looking at gender divisions in parliamentary committees is more limited. Thomas (1994) analyses gender and the assignments to committees of state legislators among 12 U.S. states in 1998. Her analysis demonstrates major differences in the proportional representation of women in different committees. In particular, women were overrepresented in committees related to health and welfare whereas they were underrepresented in committees concerned with business and economics. Studies looking at female representation in committees in the Belgian, Swedish, Norwegian, Australian, and Latin American Parliaments (Towns 2003; Heath, Schwindt-Bayer and Taylor-Robinson 2005; Mateo Diaz 2005; Wängnerud 2009; Crawford and Pini 2011) come to similar conclusions. Lastly, Bolzendahl’s (2012) recent study which analyses committee memberships in Germany, Sweden, and US finds evidence for women being overrepresented in social committees, though cross-national differences in women’s membership in committees exist, with Sweden being more egalitarian compared with Germany and the U.S.

Gender differences in interests, traditional gender roles as well as the public/private dichotomy (Boyd 1996) have served as explanations for the association between women and committees handling female issues and men with committees handling male issues. Mainly as a result of gender socialisation, women are concerned with and interested in different issues than men, which is argued to be reflected in a gender bias in committee membership. Indeed, because of their different interests, women and men tend to prefer membership in different committees. Yet, instead of a preference, women’s overrepresentation on committees handling female issues may also result from gender stereotypes and related assignment, rather than a preference of MPs themselves. In particular, women are associated with the private, domestic sphere because they are said to be best equipped for that given they are seen as more caring and nurturing than men (Moller Okin 1998; Crawford and Pini 2011). Men, in contrast, are allocated to the public, political sphere. This public/private dichotomy served as a justification for the exclusion of women from politics for a long time (Boyd 1996), and may still influence women’s allocation to certain policy areas in parliamentary committees.

A further and related explanation for the gender bias in committee membership is provided by theories on gendered institutions and by understanding Parliament as a gendered political
institution. Crawford and Pini (2011) look at the Australian Parliament through the lenses of gender and organisational theory and argue that the existence of a hegemonic masculinity explains why women are marginalised into ‘low’ politics and why men work on the more prestigious issue areas. Since there are more men in Parliament and because they dominate politics, they claim the portfolios with the highest status, prestige and power for themselves (Heath, Schwindt-Bayer and Taylor-Robinson 2005). These ‘high politics’ issues generally include issues that “convey power and mastery” such as defence, foreign affairs and budget (Bolzendahl 2012: 8; see also Andersen and Woyke 2003; Stevens 2007; Crawford and Pini 2011). As suggested by Rodríguez’ (2003) study of the Mexican Chamber of Deputies, women are, in their turn, relegated to less prestigious committees handling so-called ‘low politics’ areas such as health, education and family. In summary, as a result of gender differences in political interest, gender hierarchy and Parliaments being gendered institutions, our first hypothesis reads: *Female MPs will be better represented on committees handling female issues than on committees handling male issues.*

**Changes over Time**

While Parliament has traditionally been a masculine institution, this notion has been challenged as women started to enter Parliament in greater numbers. The critical mass theory suggests that once an adequate number of women is represented in Parliament, they may alter the dominant masculine culture (Grey 2006). Celis and Childs (2008: 420) note that as soon as “women constitute a particular proportion of Parliament, ‘political behaviour, institutions, and public policy’ will be transformed.” Studies from the 1970s show that a small increase in the number of women (two to five percent) did not bring essential change to policies and the political culture in Parliaments (Stokes 2005). In order to have a noticeable effect, a critical mass needs to be reached. Once a critical mass is reached, female MPs can form a “bloc of influence” (Stokes 2005: 24), allowing female MPs to turn the culture in Parliament into a more women-friendly one and one open towards gender equality. The literature provides no clear-cut answer about the necessary number or proportion of female MPs necessary to be able to form a critical mass, but there seems to be some consensus around 30 percent as a critical turning point (Stokes 2005).

An increase of the number of women in Parliament also has a practical effect on the representation of women on committees. If there are more women in Parliament, they can simply be allocated to more committees and thus also more equally represented on different committees.

Taking insights from the critical mass theory, our second hypothesis is: *The overrepresentation of female MPs on committees handling female issues will decline as the number of female MPs increases.*
Apart from an effect of an increase of the number of female MPs, we also expect to observe a change over time as a result of a more general cultural change in society towards more gender equal roles in post-industrialised Western societies, including Germany (Inglehart and Norris 2003). The societal modernisation theory (Inglehart and Norris 2003) suggest that as countries’ levels of socioeconomic development (defined by a country’s degree of industrialisation, urbanisation, economic development, and literacy) develop, the level of societal gender equality increases, which can be seen by women’s higher levels of labour force participation and educational attainment, among others. Germany has followed this trend towards more gender equality. For example, the number of women in the work force grew with almost 10 percent in the last decade (Statistisches Bundesamt 2012). With 72 percent of the women participating in the labour market, Germany stands on place five regarding female labour force participation among the 27 European Union countries (Statistisches Bundesamt 2012).\(^1\)

We expect such general social change in attitudes to be reflected in political institutions and their members. In particular similar towards the social trend, it is expected that both male and female MPs have become more favourable towards gender equal roles and these attitudes are anticipated to result in a decrease of the overrepresentation of women on traditional female committees, irrespective of the number of women in Parliament. In other words, the observed general trend in society over time toward less traditional gender roles is expected to lead to a more gender equal attitudes among MPs and consequently a committee membership which is less based on traditional gender norms. Hence, our third hypothesis is: \textbf{The overrepresentation of female MPs on committees handling female issues will decline over time.}

\textbf{Party Differences}

The critical mass theory discussed above is also relevant when looking at party differences. When a party has more women among its MPs, it can assign women (mathematically) to more committees. For example, a party with only three female MPs can at best have a female MP in three different committees. By contrast, a party with more than 20 MPs can have at least one female MP in 20 committees. Hence, a higher number of female MPs allows parties to have female MPs in more committees which enables parties to develop a more gender equal balance in committee representation. Furthermore, the higher the number and proportion of women in a party, the more likely they are to be able to form an alliance and act as a coherent force to challenge the dominant

\[^1\] Despite this trend of growing gender equality and the development of a strong set of formalised legal rules to strengthen gender equality, however, the male breadwinner model still dominates the German welfare state (van Wahl 2006). Lange (2009) also argues that even though legal rules have been developed, they are undermined by weak informal norms within institutions and society.
masculine culture typically present in political parties. Once a party has a sufficient number of women, female MPs may form a bloc of influence and turn the masculine hegemony into a more women friendly and gender equal culture which challenges traditional gender hierarchies. As a consequence of a less gender hierarchical culture, and thus a gender bias in committee membership. Therefore, our fourth hypothesis is: The overrepresentation of female MPs on committees handling female issues will be smaller among parties with a high number of female MPs compared with parties with a small number of female MPs.

Promoting equality is in line with left-wing parties’ idea of social equality and their ideology of egalitarianism (Krook 2009). Left-wing oriented parties tend to be more supportive of women-friendly policies and policies encouraging social gender equality (Caul 1999; Wängnerud 2009; Kittilson 2011; Lilliefeldt 2012). By contrast, conservative, right-wing parties have a more traditional view of the role of women in society and are thus less supportive of such policies than left-wing parties (Kittilson 2011). This difference in attitudes towards women’s social roles is also reflected within their own parties. Left-wing tend to have a higher proportion of female MPs, are more open to the promotion of women to prominent political positions, and are more likely to introduce gender quotas within their parties compared with right-wing parties (Reynolds 1999; Kittilson 2011; Franceschet, Krook and Piscopo 2012; O’Brien 2012). Green parties, including the German Greens, also entered politics with an explicit commitment to participatory politics and “equal access to party posts and parliamentary seats for men and women” (Kolinsky 1993: 131).

Given the higher number of female MPs within left-wing parties, left-wing female MPs have also more possibility to form an alliance and as such be more likely to successfully further challenge possible gender biases within their party.

Following a more egalitarian ideology, left-wing parties are expected to assign their female MPs not only to committees typically handling female policy areas. By contrast, the more traditional view of women’s roles in society among conservative parties is anticipated to be reflected in a greater likelihood of women being represented on committees handling female issues than on committees handling male issues. Hence, our fifth hypothesis reads as follows: The overrepresentation of female MPs on committees handling female issues will be smaller among left-wing parties compared with conservative, right-wing parties.

FEMALE REPRESENTATION IN GERMAN PARLIAMENT AND PARTIES

Women in Germany gained the right to join parties in 1908. Ten years later they were granted the right to vote and stand for elections (Kolinsky 1993). As can be seen from Figure 1, female
representation in the Bundestag (Parliament) increased over time from only 6.8 percent in 1949 to 32.8 percent in 2009.

Figure 1 also indicates a substantial rise of the number of female MPs at the end of the 1980s. This increase can be explained by the introduction of women quotas within the Bündnis 90/Die Grünen (Green party) and the SPD (Social Democratic Party) in the late 1980s. Bündnis 90/Die Grünen, which was elected into the Bundestag for the first time in 1983, was the first party to introduce a women quota in 1986. The 50 percent quota is applied for party lists, working groups and the executive board (Phillips 1998; Grüne Jugend 2006). The SPD, which has been constantly represented in Parliament since the first elections after the Second World War, introduced a 40 percent quota for election lists, working groups and the executive board in 1988 after a decade of extensive activism by women and encouraged by the decision of the Greens to introduce gender quota (Kolinsky 1993; Stokes 2005).

After the German unification, the PDS (the Party of Democratic Socialism) won seats in the Bundestag but only forms an official party group since 2005. The party merged with the WASG (Arbeit und Soziale Gerechtigkeit-Die Wahlalternative; Labour and Social Justice-The Electoral Alternative) in 2007 and is now called Die Linke, The Left (Coffé and Plassa 2010). The PDS already had a 50 percent quota and the rule was continued by The Left (Stokes 2005; Die Linke 2012). The Christian Democratic Party (CDU) is represented in Parliament since the first election after the second World War and forms a party group in the Bundestag with its Bavarian sister party, the CSU (Christian Social Union). The party has no women quota, but agreed on a 1/3 women quorum in 1996 (Stokes 2005; CDU 2001). Lastly, the mainstream right-wing party FDP (Free Democratic Party) has so far not taken any initiative to increase the representation of women within its party (Stokes 2005).

Figure 2 demonstrates for each party the percentage of female MPs, while Table 1 gives the absolute number of female MPs for the period considered in this study (1972-2009). As can be seen from Figure 2, the left-wing parties (Bündnis 90/Die Grünen, PDS/Die Linke and SPD) have the highest percentage of female MPs. These are also the parties which introduced gender quotas. Although the percentage of female MPs within the FDP and CDU/CSU also increases over time, it is overall lower within these parties compared to with the left-wing parties.
DATA AND MEASUREMENTS

To test our hypotheses, we collected membership data of 21 permanent standing parliamentary committees of the German Bundestag between 1972 and 2009. Our data sources were the *Amtliches Handbuch des Deutschen Bundestages* for the legislations 7 (1972) to 13 (1994) and the Parliament’s website (www.bundestag.de) for the legislations 14 (1998) to 17 (2009).

The broad span of time, 1972-2009, covers a period with a substantial increase of female representatives: from 5.8 percent in 1972 to 32.8 percent in 2009. Hence, it offers us the possibility to study the effect of an increase of the number of female MPs on the overrepresentation of women on committees handling female issues. Particularly relevant is also that the percentage of female representatives reached more than 30 percent in 1998, a percentage which is often suggested as a turning point in the literature on the critical mass. As illustrated above, the number of female MPs also differs substantially between the parties in this period. This enables us to study potential differences between parties in the gender bias in committee membership as a result of differences between parties in female representation. A detailed overview of the data sources used to measure the distribution of MPs among the committees is provided in Appendix, Table A.

Table 2 provides an overview of the committees. Taking insights from previous research (Skjeie 1991; Heath, Schwindt-Bayer and Taylor-Robinson 2005; Bolzendahl 2012), the committees are divided into male and female issue areas.

The majority of the committees are easily assigned to either male or female topics. Foreign policy, defence, finance, economics, legal and internal affairs are typically viewed as hard politics and related to male characteristics (Skjeie 1991; Thomas 1994; Heath, Schwindt-Bayer and Taylor-Robinson 2005; Wängnerud 2009; Crawford and Pini 2011; Bolzendahl 2012). By contrast, policy areas concerning culture, health, education, family, environment, social policy and gender equality are said to be typical of women’s interest (Skjeie 1991; Heath, Schwindt-Bayer and Taylor-Robinson 2005; Bolzendahl 2012). We consider tourism as a male issue as it relates to foreign affairs and cooperation with third countries. Human Rights and Humanitarian Aid are defined as female topics as women are said to be more caring and sensitive, and studies showed that women are interested in disarmament compared with men (Phillips 1998). Human rights issues also include issues related to gender equality, confirming the classification of human rights as a female topic. Table B in the Appendix provides an overview of the percentage of women holding seats in each committee for the 10 legislations included in this study.

Before moving to our analyses, it is important to note that within all major German parties, it is the chair of the party group in Parliament who assigns the MPs to the committees. Thus, while MPs
can indicate a preference about which committees they would like to be member of, the final decision is made by the leaders of the parliamentary groups. Furthermore, the membership of select committees is roughly equal to the party balance in Parliament.

**ANALYSES**

**Descriptive Analyses**

We start with presenting a figure for each party showing the percentage of women holding seats in committees in general, in committees handling female issues, and in committees handling male committees for each legislation since 1972 (or since when the parties had seats in parliamentary committees). If women would be equally represented on committees handling male issues and on committees handling female issues, the percentage of women’s presence in these committees would be similar to the percentage of women holding committee seats in general.

Figure 3 shows a clear, overall pattern. Among all parties and legislations, women are overrepresented on committees handling female issues. Indeed, the percentage of women’s membership in these committees is overall higher than the percentage of their membership in committees in general and in committees handling male issues. Hence, our data confirm our first hypothesis.

At first sight, this pattern also does not seem decrease over time. On the contrary, in particular since legislation 11 (1987-1990) when the number of female MPs increased substantially (from 9.8 percent in 1983 to 15.4 percent in 1987), there tends to be widening gap between the percentage of female MPs on committees handling female issues and committees handling male issues, indicating an overall growth of women’s representation on committees handling female issues relative to committees handling male issues. Yet, a declining trend can be observed in the most recent legislation(s), in particular among female MPs of the FDP (since the 14th legislation), CDU/CSU (since the 15th legislation), and Bündnis 90/Die Grünen (in the 17th legislative period).

To summarise, our data do not seem to confirm our expectation of a trend towards a more equal presence of women on committees handling male and female issues over time and with an increase of female MPs. Furthermore, it is not obvious from the figures that women would be more equally represented in different committees in left-leaning parties compared to right-leaning parties.

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2 Since MPs may hold more than one committee seat, we present the percentage of committee seats held by women rather than the percentage of female MPs. The correlation between the percentage of committee seats held by women and the percentage of female MPs is very high: .96. In a few cases, our data sources did not specify the name of the MP holding a certain seat. As we did not know that gender of the MP, we excluded the seat in our calculations.
In contrast, in particular among the Greens, which also has the highest percentage of female MPs, gender inequality in committee membership seems to be substantial.

**Multivariate Analysis**

Having described overall patterns in female representation in committees handling male and female issues over time and among the different parties, we now move on to a multivariate analysis investigating patterns of female representation on parliamentary committees in greater detail. The aim of this analysis is to simultaneously test the effect of time (legislation), party, and number of female MPs in each party on the representation of women in committees handling female issues compared with committees handling male issues. The multivariate approach allows us to know the influence of each characteristic, irrespective of the others.

The dependent variable in the Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) analysis is the difference between the percentage of seats in committees handling female issues held by female MPs and the percentage of seats in committees handling male issues held by female MPs.$^3$ Hence, the higher the value, the greater the difference in women’s representation on committees handling female issues compared with committees handling male issues. Put differently, a higher score refers to a greater overrepresentation of female MPs on committees handling female issues. The independent variables in the analysis are the different political parties (with SPD as the reference category), the legislation, and the number of female MPs in each party and legislation.$^4$ The legislation and number of female MPs are introduced in the model as continuous variables.$^5$ The model was examined for multicollinearity using Variance Inflation Factors (VIF) tests. It did not indicate problematic collinearity. The total number of cases is 46. That is the sum of the legislations for each party with representatives on parliamentary committees.$^6$

As can be seen from the analysis presented in Table 3, the Green Party differs significantly from SPD. Compared with SPD female MPs, Green female MPs are noticeably more likely to have overrepresented on committees handling female issues. Additional analyses with other parties as reference category revealed that the overrepresentation of female MPs in committees handling

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$^3$ An analysis confirmed that the dependent variable has a relatively normal distribution, allowing us to confirm an OLS regression.

$^4$ We also ran analyses including a lagged value of the dependent variable as a control. These analyses revealed similar results to those presented in the text.

$^5$ We also ran the model with the different legislations as dummy variables (with the most recent legislation as reference category). None of the legislations had a significant (p<.05) effect and the conclusions of this analysis were similar to those presented in the text.

$^6$ Since the PDS/Die Linke did not have representatives on parliamentary committees during the 15th legislation, that legislation is not included for the PDS/Die Linke in our analysis.
female issues relative to committees handling male issues is larger among the Green MPs than among CDU/CSU and FDP MPs. This contradicts somewhat our general expectation (Hypothesis 5) that women of left-wing parties would be more equally represented on committees handling female and male issues compared with their colleagues from right-wing parties. It is particularly surprising because Green parties, including the German Greens, explicitly claim to ensure gender equal access to party posts and parliamentary seats (Kolinsky 1993).

The number of female MPs does not significantly affect the overrepresentation of women in committees handling female issues, ceteris paribus. Hence, our analysis does not confirm Hypothesis 2 which suggested an increase in the number of female MPs to have a negative effect on the overrepresentation of female MPs on committees handling female issues. Once controlling for the number of female MPs and parties, the pattern of an overrepresentation of female MPs on committees handling female issues does not seem to have changed over time (measured by legislation), rejecting our third hypothesis. An additional analysis only including legislation as the independent variable, however, revealed a significant (p=.04) positive effect of legislation on the overrepresentation of women in committees handling female issues. This indicates that the overrepresentation has slightly increased over time when party differences and the number of female MPs in the different parties are not taken into account. This contradicts the expectation of a trend towards a more equal representation of women on committees handling female and committees handling male issues over time considering the overall societal trend towards more gender equality.

We also explored potential interactions between the different independent variables. Although conclusions have to be taken with some caution given the low number of observations for PDS/Die Linke (N=5), it looks like the overrepresentation of female MPs of PDS/Die Linke in committees handling female issues grows slightly more strongly (p=.06) over time than the overrepresentation of female MPs of the SPD changes over time. Furthermore, while our analysis did not reveal a significant effect of the number of female MPs on the overrepresentation of women on committees handling female issues, it has a significantly (p=.02) more positive effect among Linke MPs and a slightly (p=.09) less positive effect among FDP MPs compared with FDP MPs.

**CONCLUSION**

The main goal of this study was to investigate the extent to which female MPs are more likely to be represented on committees handling female issues compared with committees handling male issues and to explore changes over time and differences between parties therein. Following theories of traditional gender hierarchies and division of labour, we expected to find an overrepresentation of
female MPs on committees handling typical female issues. Our analysis, looking at German parliamentary committees, confirms this hypothesis. Women are substantially more likely to be member of committees handling so-called female issues such as family, health, labour and social policy than of committees handling typical male issues such as economics, finance, defence and foreign affairs. Hence, when it comes to committee membership of MPs, the German Parliament seems to be a political institution in which traditional gender roles and hierarchies persist.

Taking insights from the critical mass theory, we expected to find that female MPs are more equally represented among the different committees as their number increases. Our analysis however does not conform this hypothesis. Although there are significantly more female MPs in the German Parliament over time, in particular since the introduction of quotas, female MPs remain overrepresented in committees handling traditional female issues. Furthermore, in contrast to what we had anticipated considering the societal trend towards more equal gender roles, we do not find an overall trend over time towards a more equal representation of women on different parliamentary committees once the increase of the number of female MPS and differences between parties are taken into account. Differences between parties are also limited. The main exception seems to be Bündnis 90/ Die Grünen. Green female MPs are more likely to be member of committees handling female issues than of committees handling male issues than female MPs of the other parties, in particular of the two major parties SPD and CDU/CSU. This finding contradicts our hypothesis and is somewhat unexpected given the focus of Green parties on gender equality, both in their policies and party organisation. Indeed, the Bündnis 90/Die Grünen was the first party to introduce quota and introduced as such an example for other parties, in particular SPD (Kolinsky 1993). Despite this active engagement in gender equality, a bias in committee membership based on traditional gender norms seems to persist, and more strongly so than in the other parties.

In sum, our study shows that up until today, not much has changed in the German Parliament when it comes to traditional gender stereotypes and committee membership. Despite the increase in the number of female MPs and an overall societal trend towards more equal gender roles as indicated among other by an increased participation of women in the labour force, female MPs are still substantially more likely to be represented on committees handling female issues compared with committees handling typical male issues such as finance, budget and economics. Since the latter committees are generally seen as the most prestigious and important ones, women’s underrepresentation on these committees indicates a substantive inequality. The gender bias in committee membership also undermines the democratic legitimacy of Parliament which is expected to include the diverse perspectives of society in all its policies. This is particularly important given the power German parliamentary committees have (Conradt 2009).
Whereas the aim of our study was to portray women’s representation on committees and changes therein over time and between parties, further research can explore explanations for the pattern we revealed. In particular, do women prefer to be represented in committees handling female issues or is it rather the result of Parliament being a gendered institution in which male MPs tend to protect their power by keeping their seats in committees seen as the most prestigious ones?

It would also be valuable to continue investigating changes in the pattern of committee membership over time. Even though the number of female MPs started to increase substantially since the 1980s in German Parliament and the often considered crucial 30 percent threshold of female MPs was reached in 1998, it is possible that their presence will only start to have a significant impact on committee membership after a longer time. In addition, whereas we only investigated the effect of an increase in descriptive representation (the number of female MPs), some scholars have argued that such increase is not sufficient for women to have a significant influence. Female MPs also need to be present in influential, major positions if they want to bring qualitative change (Caul 2001). Hence, future research could look into the effect of women’s presence in crucial party positions on the representation of women in parliamentary committees.

Finally, future research could usefully compare different countries and investigate to what extent the lack of changes over time and the somewhat surprising result of the Green female MPs being substantially more likely to be represented on committees handling female issues compared with other MPS, is an overall pattern or particular to the German case. While belonging to the same (international) party family, Green parties in different countries have a different structure, history, culture and operate in a different context, which may influence the allocation of their male and female MPs to committees and the gender bias therein.

REFERENCES


### Table 1: Number of female MPs for each party in each legislation (L)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Legislation</th>
<th>SPD</th>
<th>CDU/CSU</th>
<th>FDP</th>
<th>Bündnis 90/ Die Grünen</th>
<th>PDS/ Die Linke</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>L7 (1972-76)</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L8 (1976-80)</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>L9 (1980-83)</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>L10 (1983-87)</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L11 (1987-90)</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>25</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L12 (1990-94)</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L13 (1994-98)</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L14 (1998-02)</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L15 (2002-05)</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L16 (2005-09)</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L17 (since 09)</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Datenhandbuch des Deutschen Bundestages 1949-2003 for legislations 7 to 13 (see Table A); [http://www.bundestag.de/dokumente/datenhandbuch/03/03_06/03_06_02.html](http://www.bundestag.de/dokumente/datenhandbuch/03/03_06/03_06_02.html) for legislations 14-17.*

### Table 2: Classification of Committees

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Committees Handling Male Issues</th>
<th>Committees Handling Female Issues</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Affairs of the EU</td>
<td>Cultural, Media Affairs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defence</td>
<td>Education, Research, Technology Assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic Cooperation, Development</td>
<td>Environment, Nature Conservation, Nuclear Safety</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economics and Technology</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finance</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign Affairs</td>
<td>Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women, Youth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internal Affairs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legal Affairs</td>
<td>Food, Agriculture, Consumer Protection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research and Technology</td>
<td>Health</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spatial Planning, Building, Urban Development¹</td>
<td>Human Rights and Humanitarian Aid Labour and Social Affairs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sports</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transport, Building and Urban Development</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tourism</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Notes:*

¹ This committee only existed until the 12th legislation.

² This committee is together with the Committee on Transport since the 14th legislation.
Table 3: OLS Regression Analysis Representation of Female MPs on Committees Handling Female Issues Compared with Committees Handling Male Issues (N=46)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party (ref. SPD)</th>
<th>Coeff.</th>
<th>Sign.</th>
<th>St. Error</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CDU/CSU</td>
<td>2.70</td>
<td>4.53</td>
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<tr>
<td>FDP</td>
<td>9.78</td>
<td>6.10</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bündnis 90/Die Grünen</td>
<td>19.25</td>
<td>**</td>
<td>5.84</td>
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<tr>
<td>PDS/Die Linke</td>
<td>11.29</td>
<td>6.88</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legislation</td>
<td>.18</td>
<td>.68</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number Female MPs</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>1.81</td>
<td>6.41</td>
<td>.25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

***p<.001, **p<.01, *p<.05, -p<.10 (two-tailed)

Figure 1: Percentage of Female MPs in German Parliament 1949-2009

Source: Datenhandbuch des Deutschen Bundestages 1949-2003 for legislations 7 to 13; http://www.bundestag.de/dokumente/datenhandbuch/03/03_06/03_06_01.html for legislations 14-17.
**Figure 2:** Percentage of Female MPs in the Different Parties 1972-2009

**Figure 3:** Percentage of Seats in Committees Held by Women for Each Party
Note: Since Die Linke had only two MPs in the 15th legislation, it did not have any committee seats during that legislation. To have representatives in a parliamentary committee, German parties need to form a group or a fraction. Fractions have to consist of at least 5 percent of the MPs of the Bundestag. If a party has not enough MPs to form a fraction, they can apply for group status. Die Linke was, however, not granted group status during the 15th legislation.
## Appendix

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Legislation</th>
<th>Data Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>15 (2002-2005)</td>
<td><a href="http://webarchiv.bundestag.de/cgi/show.php?fileToLoad=159&amp;id=1040">http://webarchiv.bundestag.de/cgi/show.php?fileToLoad=159&amp;id=1040</a> (consulted on 20 August 2013)</td>
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<tr>
<td>16 (2005-2009)</td>
<td><a href="http://webarchiv.bundestag.de/cgi/show.php?fileToLoad=1373&amp;id=1136">http://webarchiv.bundestag.de/cgi/show.php?fileToLoad=1373&amp;id=1136</a> (consulted on 20 August 2013)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17 (since 2009)</td>
<td><a href="http://www.bundestag.de/bundestag/ausschuesse17/index.html">http://www.bundestag.de/bundestag/ausschuesse17/index.html</a> (consulted on 20 August 2013)</td>
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</table>
Table B: Percentage of Female MPs in Each Committees During Each Legislation (L)

<table>
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<tr>
<th></th>
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<th></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>% of female MPs in Parliament</td>
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<td>8.5</td>
<td>9.8</td>
<td>15.4</td>
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<td>30.9</td>
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<td>35.3</td>
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<tr>
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<td>9.1</td>
<td>18.8</td>
<td>42.9</td>
<td>43.3</td>
<td>45.2</td>
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</table>

Note: \(^a\) Research, Technology; \(^b\) Spatial Planning, Building, Urban Development; \(^c\) Education, Research, Technology Assessment; \(^d\) Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women, Youth; \(^e\) Food, Agriculture, Consumer Protection Health.
Table B Continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Human Rights, Humanitarian Aid</th>
<th>13.3</th>
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<th>47.1</th>
<th>31.3</th>
<th>33.3</th>
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<td>9.1</td>
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<td>20.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes:

a: This committee is part of the Committee of Education since the 13th legislation.
b: Together with the Committee on Transport from the 14th legislation onwards.
c: Research and Technology was added to the Committee of education in the 13th legislation (see also note a). Research and Technology Assessment remained part of the Committee of Education. However, Technology is part of the Committee of Economics from the 14th legislation onwards.
d: During the 12th legislation, the committee was only concerned with family and senior citizens. During the 12th legislation, a separate Committee on Women and Youth existed.
e: This committee was part of the Committee on Family Issues before the 12th legislation.
f: This committee was a subcommittee of the Committee on Foreign Affairs in the 12th legislation. It did not exist as a standing committee in the 13th legislation.
g: This committee did not exist in the 15th legislation. Labour was part of the Economics Committee while social affairs was part of the Health Committee.