

Interpreting Partisan Dealignment in Germany

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Partisan ties in Germany have been weakening over the past three decades, which is changing the landscape of electoral politics. In contrast to a recent article by Dassonneville et al. in this journal, this article argues that a generational decline in partisanship is contributing to this dealignment trend, and virtually all of the new independents are more sophisticated apartisans who are politically engaged even though they lack party ties. These findings are based on the 1972–2009 time series of surveys by the Forschungsgruppe Wahlen. The results point to a more sophisticated German electorate that will inject more fluidity into electoral politics and empower more Germans to make reasonable electoral choices.

Most electoral researchers agree that the most important attitude for understanding the public's voting choices and electoral behaviour is their sense of party identification. The creators of this concept argued that early-socialised, affective party ties are important because they can structure a person's view of the political world, provide cues for judging political phenomena, influence patterns of political participation, and promote stability in individual voting behaviour.¹ For instance, the vast majority of partisans routinely turn out to support their preferred party at election time, and then again at the next election. Thus, the concept of party identification has proven to be one of the most valuable elements in understanding the political behaviour of contemporary publics. After reviewing four decades of electoral research on partisanship, Herbert Weisberg and Steve Greene concluded that 'Party identification is the linchpin of our modern understanding of electoral democracy, and it is likely to retain that crucial theoretical position'.²

The concept of party identification has also been important in the development of German democracy. The consolidation of the party system during the 1950s and 1960s strengthened popular attachments to the political parties.³ Analysts viewed this development as a positive sign of Germans' growing attachment to the democratic institutions and procedures of the Federal Republic. In the late 1970s, however, this trend toward partisanship slowed, and then followed the same downward course as other affluent democracies.⁴ If the growth of partisanship was considered beneficial to German democracy, then a decline of partisanship raises the spectre of a dealigned public that lacks a reference standard for understanding and participating in the electoral process.

It is in this context that a debate has developed on the causes and consequences of dealignment. Dassonneville, Hooghe and Vanhoutte have recently marshalled

evidence that challenges some of the previous findings and interpretations of dealignment trends.⁵ Their statistical analyses are elegant, their data are novel, and their conclusions are provocative. The purpose of this essay is to step back and review a wider range of evidence that leads to contrasting conclusions. I do not question the value of the research by Dassonneville et al., but I think that in focusing on the statistical trees they missed the larger forest of dealignment patterns in Germany.

THE EVIDENCE OF PARTISAN DEALIGNMENT

The concept of partisanship implies that an individual has a long-term affective tie to a political party as a political identity. Even if there is a defection from this party in a specific Land or Bundestag election, there is a ‘homing tendency’ to return to one’s own party at the next election. After a period of questionnaire experimentation, researchers generally agreed on a common question to tap these long-term affective ties in the German context:⁶

Many people in the Federal Republic lean toward a particular party for a long time, although they may occasionally vote for a different party. How about you: Do you in general lean toward a particular party? Which one?

This question was first asked in 1972 and has been repeated until the present. I base the analyses on time series from the Forschungsgruppe Wahlen (FGW) election studies and Politbarometers conducted regularly for the ZDF network and academic researchers.⁷ As with other studies, [Table 1](#) shows that a growing proportion of Germans is not attached to any political party. In 1972 only 20 per cent of citizens in the West lacked a party attachment and this declined to 16 per cent in 1976. The percentage of non-

TABLE 1
THE STRENGTH OF PARTISANSHIP

	West										
	1972	1976	1980	1983	1987	1990	1994	1998	2002	2005	2009
Very strong	17	12	13	10	10	11	12	9	12	10	8
Strong	38	35	33	29	31	29	24	22	25	28	24
Weak	20	35	29	35	31	31	31	31	27	27	26
No party; don’t know	20	16	19	22	25	27	31	36	32	34	38
Refused; NA	5	3	6	4	3	2	2	2	3	2	4
Total	100	101	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
	East										
						1991	1994	1998	2002	2005	2009
Very strong						4	6	7	7	7	7
Strong						22	19	17	21	24	23
Weak						35	34	30	26	26	24
No party; don’t know						37	40	44	45	40	43
Refused; NA						3	1	2	2	2	3
Total						101	100	100	101	101	100

Source: Data from German election studies collected by the Forschungsgruppe Wahlen; several pre-election and a post-election survey are included for most timepoints.

partisans grew by nearly half during the 1980s and then accelerated in the 1990s. As of the 2009 election, about twice as many Westerners lack party ties compared to the 1970s. The strength of attachments among partisans displays a similar erosion. A full 55 per cent of Westerners described themselves as having strong or very strong party bonds in 1972; by 2009 this had dropped to 32 per cent. A number of other articles have also described these broad dealignment trends over time.⁸

Both this article and the Dassonneville et al. article use the same party identification question, which should maximise the comparability of our empirical findings. Both the data from their 1992–2009 SOEP panel and from the Forschungsgruppe Wahlen cross-sectional surveys show a weakening of party bonds among Westerners (compare [Table 1](#) to their [Figure 2](#)).⁹

Similarly, these two data sources agree on the longitudinal patterns for East Germans. Regular measurement of partisan attachments in the East only began in early 1991. By then, most voters had participated in two national elections (the March 1990 Volkskammer and December Bundestag elections) as well as regional and local contests. Still, in 1991 two-fifths lacked a party tie. Instead of strengthening partisanship as people gained experience with the parties,¹⁰ eastern partisanship remains weak. In 2009 there are slightly more non-partisans than in 1991. In short, two decades of democratic experience with the Federal Republic's party system have not strengthened partisan ties in the East.

I focus on the long-term partisan trends in the West in the rest of this essay. This is not to diminish the importance of partisanship patterns in the East. Rather, the Western trends are the core of the research debate on dealignment, and the major difference between my findings and those of Dassonneville and her colleagues.

GENERATIONS AND PARTISANSHIP

Partisanship may rise or fall in a short-term reaction to the events of the day, an election campaign, political scandals, or other events. This is evident to a degree in the time series from the FGW and the SOEP. Our central concern, however, is the long-term downward trend in partisanship that extends across elections and governments.

One of Dassonneville, Hooghe and Vanhoutte's major conclusions challenges the previous claims that many young people are failing to develop party ties and this is a major contributor to the dealignment trend. Their first conclusion states: 'First, birth cohorts do not seem to play a significant role in the on-going decline of party identification. Basically, we find the same patterns for all cohorts . . . so generational replacement apparently is not the main cause for the decline of party identification.'¹¹ They further argue that younger generations are following the same life-cycle patterns of increasing partisanship with age. If these conclusions are correct, it would suggest that period effects are producing dealignment, and thus generational replacement will not continue (or accelerate) dealignment.

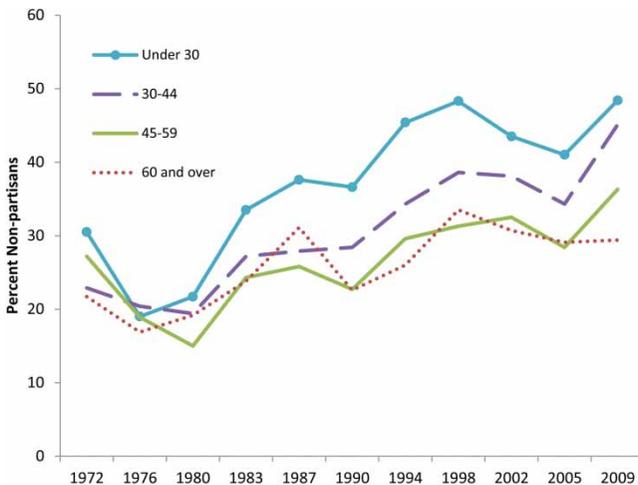
Their conclusions are primarily based on sophisticated multilevel logit analysis (their [Table 2](#)). While this model provides interesting results, the basic question is much simpler: has the decline in party identification been disproportionately concentrated among the young. The answer to this question can be addressed in a more direct way. For each election year since 1972 I combined several surveys from the German

Election Studies or Politbarometers; I focus on elections because this avoids the ebb and flow of election/non-election attention to party politics. At each election the sample was categorised into four groups: under age 30, 30–44, 45–59, and age 60 and over.¹² If we compared these age groups over the full 37 years of FGW data, a generational hypothesis would predict a disproportionate increase in independence among the youngest cohort. That is, are young people today less partisan than their parents' age cohort at a similar life stage? If dealignment is unrelated to generation, then all four age groups should become less partisan over time at about the same rate.

Figure 1 provides clear evidence of a generational shift in non-partisanship. In 1972 and 1976 there were negligible age differences in non-partisanship, which I attribute to the restricted partisanship of older citizens who grew up as Germany democratised and institutionalised its party system. As non-partisans grow starting in the 1980s, the increase is disproportionately among the young. For example, in 1976 about 20 per cent of the under 30s are non-partisans (similar to other age groups); by 2009 nearly 50 per cent of the youngest cohort lack party ties. In contrast, the oldest age group in Figure 1 increases to only about 30 per cent non-partisans in 2009. Measured by regression trends for each cohort, or the age relationship across time, there is clearly a widening age gap.¹³ In short, generations of less-partisan youth are entering the electorate at the end of the series, compared to the 1970s.

Furthermore, the same patterns appear in the SOEP surveys. Martin Kroh, one of the principal investigators of the SOEP, has analysed partisanship trends and concludes:

FIGURE 1
THE GROWTH OF NON-PARTISANS BY AGE GROUP



Sources: 1972 German Election Study (S0635); 1976 German Election Study (S0823); 1980 German Election Study (S1053); Politbarometer surveys.

Note: For the Politbarometers I typically pooled three surveys spanning the pre-election to post-election period to increase the reliability of age group estimates.

With every new cohort born after 1920, the likelihood of party identification declines. This process accelerates further in cohorts born after 1950. The relative ratio of reporting a party identification in the most recent birth cohort of 1990 is only half the respective ratio for the reference cohort born in 1950.¹⁴

Similarly, Dassonneville and her colleagues report nearly 70 per cent non-partisans among the youngest age group in the recent SOEP surveys.¹⁵

We also see some evidence of a secular dealignment trend in [Figure 1](#), since the lines for all age groups trend toward more independents with the passage of time. The slopes are increasing partially because we are comparing age groups over time, which differ in their generational composition. The group of 50-year-olds in 2009 is presumably less partisan than 50-year-olds in 1980 or 1990, partly because the former cohort started with weaker party ties when they were young. If one compares people of the same age versus people of the same generation over time, the impact of generational effects is clearly apparent.¹⁶ Consequently, as older citizens with their generally strong party ties leave the electorate and are replaced by young people with weaker party ties, this should further the process of dealignment. In summary, generational turnover has been a significant source of dealignment in the Federal Republic and in most other affluent democracies.

What explains the contrast between these findings and those of Dassonneville et al.? There are several possibilities. First, the SOEP is a sophisticated project, but it is based on reinterviews of a panel with ‘refreshment’ survey supplements to lessen panel bias.¹⁷ Reinterviewing may sensitise respondents or panel mortality may distort the age patterns. However, research on the SOEP by Martin Kroh and his colleagues finds generational patterns that are broadly consistent with the FGW results.¹⁸

Therefore, I think a more likely explanation is Dassonneville et al.’s reliance on an extensive multivariate model to examine age and generational patterns. The model controls for other attitudes and social characteristics that might explain the generational differences, such as declining membership in the parties’ social milieu, changes in political interest, and controls for education. For instance, Arzheimer previously showed how the erosion of class and religious milieu may contribute to weakening partisanship (variables in the Dassonneville et al. model), and these effects are presumably stronger among the young. Their logit model also pools respondents from West and East, when theory would suggest different causal processes are at work among both publics. In short, the multilevel logit model intermixes evidence on whether generational change is occurring with evidence on why generations differ and why regions differ. Our statistical evidence is much simpler, but it is also a more direct test of whether generations differ: they do.¹⁹

THE TRAITS OF THE NEW INDEPENDENTS

The evidence of a generational increase in non-partisans leads to a second major disagreement with Dassonneville et al. over the characteristics of the new independents. The traditional image of independents is that they are uninterested in politics and possess limited political skills. Independents are consequently less likely to follow

the content of election campaigns and less likely to vote. If the increase in independents follows this same pattern, it would be a negative influence on democracy in Germany and other established democracies.²⁰ Dassonneville and her colleagues offer a pessimistic answer to this question: ‘we do not observe the rise of a new generation of critical, independent and knowledgeable citizens, but rather a gradual alienation of a large part of the population from the party system’.²¹

In research on Germany, the United States and other established democracies, I have shown that the characteristics of independents have changed as their numbers have expanded.²² Some independents still fit the negative stereotypes of the past. However, more Germans now possess the political resources and skills that prepare them to deal with the complexities of politics with less need for habitual party loyalties. In addition, a rise of self-expressive values and deepening scepticism of political institutions may lessen the likelihood that cognitively mobilised individuals will develop strong affective bonds to a political party as typically happened in the past. It is important that the joint presence of both factors – the development of cognitive mobilisation and values inimical to affective party identities – contribute to dealignment.²³ In short, a process of social modernisation is producing a significant number of new independents: non-aligned but also politically engaged.

A brief theoretical clarification is needed before considering the evidence. My previous research focused on asking *who are the new non-partisans who have entered the electorate in the several decades*. In a previous article on German partisanship I stated:

Because party mobilization and cognitive mobilization are generally positively correlated ($r = 0.06$ in 1976), the growth of cognitive mobilization over time should have strengthened partisan ties if the initial relationship was constant . . . But partisanship has obviously weakened, and thus correlational analyses miss the dramatic changes in the distribution of cognitive mobilization over time, and how this interacts with partisan mobilization. The central question is whether the new independents are located primarily among the apoliticals as the traditional partisanship model would predict, or among [cognitively mobilised] apoliticals.²⁴

Dassonneville et al. attribute a different position to me: that political sophistication is negatively related to partisanship and a positive relationship would invalidate the cognitive mobilisation thesis.²⁵ However, as the quotation above shows, I also noted the positive correlation between these variables, which has persisted or even increased in some nations. When they also find a positive correlation between party attachments and cognitive mobilisation, they treat it as disconfirmation of my conclusions. Instead, my position is more complex and focuses on changes in the characteristics of partisans and independents from the baseline model of the past. So by presenting the research question in different ways, we might find different answers.

My standard approach is to describe the distribution of the public in terms of a two-by-two table of party identification (identifier or not) and cognitive mobilisation (high or low).²⁶ This typology yields four ideal groups that represent distinct mobilisation patterns and define the basis of our analyses:

- *Apolitical independents* lack both party cues and cognitive skills.
- *Ritual partisans* have a party identity but also score low on cognitive mobilisation.

- *Cognitive partisans* have both a party identity and high cognitive mobilisation.
- *Apartisans* lack party ties but score high on the cognitive mobilisation dimensions.

Table 2 summarises the distribution of these four mobilisation types over time for residents of the western Lander. When the series begins in 1976, partisanship is at its highpoint. Among independents, most are the traditional apoliticals who lack both party cues and cognitive skills. Various analyses demonstrate that these apoliticals are less interested about politics, less informed about politics, and less likely to actually vote. These are the traditional independents as described in early electoral research. In contrast, the proportion of sophisticated apartisans is barely a trace element in the 1976 electorate – the smallest of these four groups. In these terms, the traditional description of independents was generally accurate at the beginning of this time series (even more so if we extrapolate back to earlier elections).

Ritual partisans constituted two-thirds of the German public in the 1970s. Because of their limited cognitive mobilisation, these citizens necessarily depend on party heuristics to manage the complex world of politics. In contrast, cognitive partisans comprise about a sixth of the public in 1976. They are committed to a political party, but this commitment is typically accompanied by knowledge about contemporary politics.

Over the next three decades this picture changes substantially. The number of apolitical independents varies only slightly over time except for a slight bump up in the 2009 election.²⁷ In contrast, apartisans grow more than fourfold by 2009. In other words, *virtually all of the growth of non-partisans from 1976 to 2009 comes from cognitively mobilised apartisans*. And as I would expect, apartisans are over-represented among younger Germans.²⁸

Higher levels of cognitive mobilisation also mean that the percentage of ritual partisans decreases to a small share of the public (to 22.8 per cent). Thus, there are far fewer citizens today whose electoral behaviour now depends on habitual party cues with limited political content. Another effect of greater cognitive mobilisation is to increase the number of cognitive partisans to become the largest share of the public.

Dassonneville et al.'s multivariate logit analyses show that all non-partisans (apolitical independents and apartisans combined) are generally lower in cognitive mobilisation than all partisans. But correlations do not demonstrate how the characteristics of partisans and non-partisans have changed over time. As noted above, the initial

TABLE 2
THE DISTRIBUTION OF MOBILISATION TYPES OVER TIME, 1976–2009

Mobilisation type	1976	1980	1983	1987	1994	1998	2002	2005	2009
Ritual partisan	64.5	67.3	58.0	55.6	42.2	34.7	31.3	28.7	20.4
Cognitive partisan	16.5	14.0	15.5	17.0	24.2	27.6	35.8	38.9	38.9
Apartisan	3.9	2.9	4.3	5.1	10.8	12.5	13.5	14.7	17.9
Apolitical independent	15.1	15.8	22.2	22.4	22.8	25.2	19.6	17.7	22.8
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
(N)	1995	2856	1621	1870	2065	1290	4040	3109	4193

Source: 1976 German Election Study; Politbarometers 1980–2009.

positive relationship between cognitive mobilisation and partisanship for early elections would predict that a growth of cognitive mobilisation would increase partisanship over time – but this has not occurred. Instead, young cognitively mobilised citizens have turned into apartisans at a higher rate than in the past. If one simply examines those who score high on the cognitive mobilisation index, the percentage of apartisans increases over time. Apartisans were only 19.1 per cent of the cognitively mobilised in 1976, and were 31.5 per cent in 2009. Moreover, since the proportion of the public that scores high in cognitive mobilisation has more than doubled over this period, this magnifies the electoral impact of this changing ratio.

Multivariate analyses are appropriate for answering many theoretical questions. However, the comparison of partial coefficients across many predictors does not directly answer the question of how the composition of the public and the composition of independents are changing. This question is more directly answered by the trends in [Table 2](#).

In summary, the contemporary electorate is significantly different from that of the 1970s (and even more so to the 1960s) – they are less partisan and more likely to possess the cognitive skills and resources to manage the complexities of politics. Growing sophistication has expanded the pool of apartisans as well as cognitive partisans. Equally important, the proportion of voters who approach each election based on ritual dependence on party cues has decreased dramatically. These results largely parallel findings from the United States and other established democracies.²⁹ Cognitive mobilisation might not be sufficient to produce this new type of partisan citizen, but it is a necessary element in this process of change.

REFLECTIONS ON A DEALIGNMENT

Dassonneville, Hooghe, and Vanhoutte share my concern for the changing composition of the German public. We both see that levels of partisanship are decreasing, and a growing share of the public now approaches elections without a standing partisan predisposition. Where we differ is in the empirical explanation of this trend and thus the implications for German democracy.

We agree that party attachments will decrease as a predictor of citizen behaviour because of the dealignment trend. About three-fifths of the public still retain party ties, and their loyalties will heavily determine their voting choices and predict the stability of the vote across elections. However, a growing number of non-partisans means that partisan loyalties will have a diminishing impact on voting choices and turnout should decline. Other factors will come into play for the two-fifths of the public who are non-partisans.

Dassonneville and her colleagues stress the increasing stratification between partisans and non-partisans. I agree, but I see significant differences in the patterns of stratification. This article has demonstrated that generational change is eroding partisanship and current age differences are not just a continuation of life-cycle patterns of the past. This means the non-partisan segment of the electorate is likely to grow in the future, tied to the entry of young non-partisans into the electorate.

The crucial issue is the ability of these new independents to manage the complexity of politics and be politically engaged. Dassonneville et al. argue that ‘the loss of party

identity is concentrated among those without political interest and low education skills'.³⁰ Our more direct evidence shows it is just the opposite – the growth of independents in Germany over the past three decades comes almost exclusively from better-educated and politically interested citizens who nevertheless do not adopt a partisan identity.

This contrast leads to fundamentally different conclusions about the impact of dealignment on German politics. These new apartisans more closely fit the classic model of the rational (or at least reasonable) voter who is widely discussed in democratic theory but was seldom found in empirical research. For instance, based on the 2009 German Longitudinal Election Study, apartisans turn out at nearly the same rate as party identifiers, while the majority of apolitical independents said they did not vote.³¹ And since most partisans enter each campaign already committed to their party, less than a fifth changed their votes between elections – but more than half of apartisans said they switched votes between 2005 and 2009. Nearly half of apartisans also said they split their *Erststimme* and *Zweitstimme* in 2009, compared to about a quarter of partisans. Moreover, apartisans place more weight on issues and candidates in making their voting decisions, rather than voting out of habitual party loyalties. In summary, apartisans are more likely to judge the parties on the events of the campaign, and change their votes when conditions change during the campaign or between elections. They are a major source of the increasing fluidity and volatility in German electoral politics.³²

Furthermore, because these independents are such a large group, parties have to be more attuned to their interests – and thus the preferences of the public at large. A recent study of parties and voters in Europe thus demonstrates how independents have become a key factor in how parties must be responsive to citizens beyond their core *Stammwähler*.³³

In the end, the unifying conclusion is that the research on dealignment arises from the recognition that electoral politics is changing in fundamental ways. The old models of the past are less applicable to elections and electorates today. Change could be a bane or a curse for a well-functioning democracy. And there will be challenges as parties and politicians adjust to this new reality. Based on the results presented here, however, I am more sanguine that the potential benefits of dealignment outweigh the potential negative effects.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I want to thank Martin Kroh, Tony McGann, Robert Rohrschneider, Martin Wattenberg and Steve Weldon for their assistance and comments on this research.

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NOTES

1. Angus Campbell, Philip Converse, Warren Miller and Donald Stokes, *The American Voter* (New York: Wiley, 1960).
2. Herbert Weisberg and Steve Greene, 'The Political Psychology of Party Identification', in Michael MacKuen and George Rabinowitz (eds), *Electoral Democracy* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003), p.115.
3. Kendall Baker, Russell Dalton and Kai Hildebrandt, *Germany Transformed: Political Culture and the New Politics* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981); Helmut Norpoth, 'Party Identification in West Germany', *Comparative Political Studies* 1 (1978), pp.36–61.
4. Russell Dalton and Martin Wattenberg (eds), *Parties without Partisans* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), ch.3; Kai Arzheimer, 'Dead Men Walking? Party Identification in Germany, 1977–2002', *Electoral Studies* 25 (2006), pp.791–807.
5. Ruth Dassonneville, Marc Hooghe and Bram Vanhoute, 'Age, Period and Cohort Effects in the Decline of Party Identification in Germany', *German Politics* 21 (2012), pp.209–27.
6. The question was designed by Manfred Berger of the Forschungsgruppe Wahlen, 'Parteienidentifikation in der Bundesrepublik', *Politische Vierteljahresschrift* 14 (1978), pp.214–25.
7. All of the data in this article were provided by GESIS and the Zentralarchiv für empirische Sozialforschung in Cologne. The analyses and conclusions are my own responsibility.
8. Arzheimer, 'Dead Men Walking?'; Dieter Ohr, Hermann Dülmer and Markus Quandt, 'Kognitive Mobilisierung oder nicht-kognitive De-Mobilisierung? Eine längsschnittliche Analyse der deutschen Wählerschaft für die Jahre 1976 bis 2004', in Oscar Gabriel, Bernhard Wessels and Jürgen Falter (eds), *Wahlen und Wähler: Analysen aus Anlass der Bundestagswahl 2005* (Wiesbaden: Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2009).
9. For additional analyses of partisanship in the SOEP surveys see Alan Zuckerman and Martin Kroh, 'The Social Logic of Bounded Partisanship in Germany', *Comparative European Politics* 4 (2006), 65–93; Martin Kroh and Peter Selb, 'Inheritance and the Dynamics of Party Identification', *Political Behavior* 31 (2009), 559–574; Arzheimer, 'Dead Men Walking?', provides more extensive trend data for the Forschungsgruppe Wahlen surveys.
10. See the social learning model of partisanship for new democracies in Philip Converse, 'Of Time and Partisan Stability', *Comparative Politics* 2 (1969), pp.139–71; Russell Dalton and Steven Weldon, 'Partisanship and Party System Institutionalization', *Party Politics* 13 (March 2007), pp.179–96.
11. Dassonneville et al., 'Age, Period and Cohort Effects', p.223.
12. I used the 1972 German Election Study (S0635), the 1976 German Election Study (S0823), the 1980 German Election Study (S1053) and the Politbarometer surveys for other elections. For the Politbarometers I typically pooled three surveys spanning the pre-election to post-election period to increase the reliability of age group estimates.
13. For example, plotting a trend line for the age cohorts in Figure 2, the per annum growth in nonpartisans is twice as large among those under 30 as among those over 60: Under 30 ($b = 0.690$), 30–44 years (0.623), 45–59 (0.380), and aged 60 and over (0.338).
14. Martin Kroh, 'Growth Trajectories in Partisanship Strength', *Electoral Studies* 33 (March 2014) (special issue, Anja Neundorf and Richard Niemi [eds]), 'Beyond Political Socialization: New Approaches to Age, Period, Cohort Analysis'.
15. Kroh and Selb's analysis of partisan learning in Germany suggests that because of their less-partisan formative years, younger generations will not develop their elders' stronger political ties as they age. Martin Kroh and Peter Selb, 'Individual and Contextual Origins of Durable Partisanship', in John Bartle and Paolo Bellucci (eds.), *Political Parties and Partisanship* (London: Routledge, 2009).

16. The cumulative Politbarometer data file has collapsed age categories instead of exact age, so I can only compare age groups and not birth generations across surveys. I can do a partial generational comparison from 1980 to 2005 because the 1980 survey coded exact age. These comparisons show that among those aged 18–44 in 1980, their partisanship was slightly lower when they were 40–69 in 2005 (about 10 per cent lower). By comparison, the percentage of partisans among 18–44 year olds in 2005 was about 17 per cent lower than the same age group in 1980 (see [Figure 1](#)).
17. See Martin Kroh, 'Documentation of Sample Sizes and Panel Attrition in the German Socio Economic Panel (SOEP) (1984 until 2009)', *DWI Data Documentation 50*, 2010, available from <http://www.diw.de>.
18. Kroh and Selb, 'Individual and Contextual Origins of Durable Partisanship'; Martin Kroh and Peter Selb, 'Inheritance and the Dynamics of Party Identification', *Political Behavior* 31 (1999), pp.559–574; Zuckerman and Kroh, 'The Social Logic of Bounded Partisanship in Germany'; Kroh, 'Growth Trajectories in Partisanship Strength'.
19. Christopher Achen has cautioned that too many control variables without theoretical consideration of the implications can distort the results from multivariate models rather than provide clarity: Christopher Achen, 'Toward a New Political Methodology', *Annual Review of Political Science* 5 (2002), pp.203–34; Christopher Achen, 'Let's Put Garbage-Can Regressions and Garbage-Can Probits Where They Belong', *Conflict Management and Peace Science* 22 (2005), pp.327–39.
20. Ohr et al., 'Kognitive Mobilisierung oder nicht-kognitive De-Mobilisierung?'; Jeremy Albright, 'Does Political Knowledge Erode Party Attachments? A Review of the Cognitive Mobilization Thesis', *Electoral Studies* 28 (2009), pp.248–60; Arzheimer, 'Dead Men Walking?'
21. Dassonneville et al., 'Age, Period and Cohort Effects', p.224.
22. Russell Dalton, *The Apartisan American* (Washington, DC: CQ Press, 2012); Russell Dalton, 'Apartisans and the Changing German Electorate', *Electoral Studies* 31 (2012), pp.35–45.
23. Both elements have been present in my writing, but my recent work more clearly discusses the combination of both factors as important. See Dalton, *The Apartisan American*, pp.46–8; Dalton, 'Apartisans and the Changing German Electorate'.
24. Dalton, 'Apartisans and the Changing German Electorate', p.39; virtually the identical point is made in Russell Dalton, 'Partisan Mobilization, Cognitive Mobilization and the Changing American Electorate', *Electoral Studies* 26 (2007), pp.274–86.
25. Dassonneville et al. state: 'According to Dalton's cognitive mobilization theory, we expect that citizens with high levels of political sophistication are less likely to be party identifiers'. Dassonneville et al., 'Age, Period and Cohort Effects', p.214. 'In contrast to Dalton's argument, party identification is clearly higher among the classically privileged social groups: older citizens, men and the highly educated', *ibid.*, p.220.
26. Cognitive mobilisation is measured as the combination of political interest and educational level. For additional explanation see Dalton, 'Apartisans and the Changing German Electorate'. A comparable interest question was not available in the 1972 election survey, so the time series begins in 1976.
27. The increase in 2009 is primarily due to a drop in strong interest in politics. This, so far, seems a unique pattern in this election perhaps as a reaction to the limited sense of political efficacy felt after the Grand Coalition of CDU/CSU and SPD. The 2009 results deviate from the trend over the ten previous elections.
28. Dalton, 'Apartisans and the Changing German Electorate', pp.40–41.
29. Dalton, *The Apartisan American*, ch.9; Inglehart, *Culture Shift in Advanced Industrial Societies*, ch.11.
30. Dassonneville et al., 'Age, Period and Cohort Effects', p.224; also see Ohr et al., 'Kognitive Mobilisierung oder nicht-kognitive De-Mobilisierung?'
31. Dalton, 'Apartisans and the Changing German Electorate', pp.41–4.
32. Bernhard Wessels, 'Re-mobilisierung, Floating or Adwanderung? Wechselwähler 2002 und 2005 im Vergleich', In Frank Brettschneider, Oscar Niedermayer, and Bernhard Wessels (eds.), *Die Bundestag 2005* (Wiesbaden: Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2009).
33. Robert Rohrschneider and Steven Whitefield, *The Strain of Representation: How Parties Represent Diverse Voters in Western and Eastern Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).