4

West German Elites: Cartel of Anxiety, Power Elite, or Responsive Representatives?

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The character of its elites is a crucial part of a society's structure. Many social theories ascribe a specific and important role to elites, particularly in terms of the functioning of liberal and democratic institutions (Field and Higley, 1980).[1] It is therefore not surprising that German elites have become a favored subject of social science analyses searching for clues that would further our understanding of Germany's uneven path toward democracy. More studies have been devoted to German elites than to those of other societies. Over the last twenty-five years, the small number of historical studies on German elites has been considerably enlarged by new historical-sociological analyses (Zapf, 1965; Nagle, 1977; Fischer, 1979; Baum, 1981; Herf, 1984; Best, 1988). Moreover, several comprehensive surveys of West German elites after 1945 provide a wealth of empirical material unparalleled in other nations (Deutsch and Edinger, 1959; Deutsch et al., 1967; Wildenmann, 1968; von Beyme, 1971; Herzog, 1975; Hoffmann-Lange et al., 1980; Wildenmann et al., 1982).

The abundance of material on (West) German elites invites attempts to trace changes in the elites over the last hundred years. Thus far, however, Ralf Dahrendorf has been the only scholar to attempt a comprehensive analysis of the historical role of German elites. He devoted a full five chapters of his book *Society and Democracy in Germany* (1967) to a discussion of the special character of German

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elites and their contribution to the historical failure of democracy in Germany. His analysis covers the period from 1871 to 1959. Systematic empirical data were but one source of evidence used by Dahrendorf, a source that he complemented with other material and general elite theoretical considerations. This is the reason why his analysis has long been considered the authoritative statement on the character of German elites.

However, after more than twenty years since the first German edition of Dahrendorf's book appeared, it seems time to review his theses. This is all the more necessary because he argued that there was a notable persistence of traditional structures in West Germany. Given the fact that his evidence on West German elites is from the late 1950s, when the Federal Republic had existed for only ten years, we should ask which of his conclusions still hold true and which were time-bound and must be modified. Nevertheless, Dahrendorf's analysis provides an excellent starting point for a study of West German elites in the 1980s. The following review will both update some of the results on which Dahrendorf's analysis was based and provide a critique of some of his theoretical assumptions that do not hold up to either more recent empirical evidence or theoretical developments.

In order to discuss the relationship between the character of German elites and democratic stability in more detail, we need a theoretical as well as an operational definition of who belongs to the elites. There is considerable consensus in the social sciences for defining elites as persons with power to influence strategic decisions in a society on a regular basis (Hoffmann-Lange, 1989; Higley et al., 1979: 3; Scheuch, 1973: 1028). Because modern societies are complex and include a large number of important organizations, it is necessary to consider in elite studies the leaders of a broad variety of sectors and organizations. It would be insufficient to include political leaders as defined in a narrow sense only, i.e., leading politicians. Dahrendorf offers a broad definition of national elites. He defines them as "persons in positions where they can make laws" (1967: 208) and operationalizes this by including in his analysis not only politicians but also administrative and judicial elites, as well as pressure group and media elites.

The data on which the following analysis is based are taken from a comprehensive elite survey carried out in 1981.[2] The study began by defining 3,580 top leadership positions in a variety of political, economic, and social sectors. Within each sector, the most important organizations were included, and within each organization, the incumbents of the highest positions were asked for a personal interview. Table 4.1 includes the number of positions and respondents in each sector. The number of position-holders is somewhat smaller than the number

TABLE 4.1 Sector Composition and Response Rates in the West German Elite Study, 1981

	Positions		Position-holders		Respondents		Response Rate
Sector	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	%
Politics	539	15.1	452	14.3	274	15.7	60.6
Civil service	479	13.4	471	14.9	296	17.0	62.8
Business	837	23.4	688	21.7	285	16.3	41.4
Business associations	394	11.0	296	9.4	174	10.0	58.8
Trade unions	155	4.3	155	4.9	87	5.0	56.1
Mass media	376	10.5	354	11.2	222	12.7	62.7
Academic	209	5.8	179	5.7	130	7.5	72.6
Military	172	4.8	172	5.4	43	2.5	25.0
Cultural	188	5.3	180	5.7	104	6.0	57.8
Other[a]	231	6.5	218	6.9	129	7.4	59.2
Total	3,580	100.1	3,165	100.1	1,744	100.1	55.1

[a]Professional associations; consumers' associations; the judiciary; churches; mayors and administrative heads of the 15 biggest cities; additionally, a number of persons who lost their elite positions during the fieldwork stage.

of positions because some individuals held several elite positions at the same time.

Dahrendorf's Theory of Elites

The elite concept plays an important role in the context of two different theoretical paradigms, both of which focus on fundamental problems of societal integration and democracy: the radical democratic paradigm and the pluralist paradigm. Proponents of the radical democratic paradigm conceive of societies as divided along a line that separates elites from nonelites. According to this paradigm, the basic problem of societal integration lies in the tendency of elites to develop interests of their own and to escape popular control. That means that this paradigm assumes a low degree of vertical integration in society. Marxist class theory as well as power elite theories are examples of this paradigm (Mills, 1956; Domhoff, 1983; Miliband, 1969).

Proponents of the pluralist paradigm, on the other hand, do not believe vertical integration to be a major problem. Although they do not deny that power differentials exist in modern societies, they see these societies as stratified, rather than split into two classes separated by a sharp divide. In their view, a much more significant characteristic of modern societies is their high degree of differentiation, i.e., the existence of a large number of more or less autonomous organizations. In such a paradigm, social differentiation has created novel problems of horizontal integration because the number of groups is by definition

large. Pluralists have therefore raised the question of how elite integration takes place or how it is even possible in such societies (Dahl, 1958; Keller, 1963).

Modern organizations set their own rules for personnel recruitment and promotion. This process results in the creation of national elites that are "abstract" in the sense that the incumbents of leadership positions in the various organizations are elites in the first instance by virtue of their power in these organizations but often lack commonality beyond that. That is, they do not automatically form a social group. It is obvious that a lack of elite integration creates potential problems for the functioning of modern societies. After all, the elites of different organizations must be able to cooperate with one another to arrive at collective decisions for the community as a whole. Moreover, any society needs at least some coordination of decisionmaking that bridges the conflicts of interest between the different powerful organizations in society.

I have started with these two paradigms because Dahrendorf's elite theory tries to integrate the two. For Dahrendorf, neither vertical nor horizontal integration can be taken for granted, and both are needed for a liberal and democratic society. This implies that a liberal democratic elite possesses two characteristics: (1) It is characterized by a high degree of social cohesion, and (2) it is politically multiform, i.e., it reflects the "color and diversity of social interests." (1967: 29, 219–220)

Dahrendorf's theory involves a typology of elites derived from a cross-tabulation of two factors: the social type of an elite, which may be established or abstract, and the political outlook of an elite, which may be uniform or multiform (1967: 220):

	Political Outlook[3]	
Social Type	Uniform	Multiform
Established	Authoritarian elite	Liberal elite
Abstract	Totalitarian elite	?

Based on this typology, Dahrendorf analyzed the historical development of German elites (1967: ch. 14). Presenting an impressive array of evidence drawn from a broad variety of sources, he concluded that Imperial Germany had an authoritarian elite. This elite was dominated by the Prussian nobility, and its modern elements, the business elites, did not play a significant political role. With the transition to the Weimar Republic, new political groups came to power. This created a

more heterogeneous national elite that was multiform in its outlooks but remained abstract because its members lacked social cohesion, thereby creating problems of governance. This vacuum at the top was eventually filled by the totalitarian Nazi elite. Most of Dahrendorf's analysis deals with the character of the West German elite. Although it is beyond the scope of this chapter to discuss Dahrendorf's historical analysis, his conclusions regarding West German elites will be analyzed in more detail, starting with the first theoretical question raised above: the question of the vertical integration of West German society.

The Social Background of West German Elites

Radical social scientists tend to devote much attention to the degree of openness of elite recruitment. This is normally measured by comparing the demographic characteristics of elites to those of a cross section of the population, i.e., by studying the social representativeness of the elites. If they are predominantly recruited from a narrow social stratum (mostly from the upper or upper middle class), this is widely interpreted as showing that individuals from lower-class backgrounds are deliberately excluded from the power positions in a society.

All available empirical evidence indicates that in virtually all societies elites are disproportionately recruited from privileged social backgrounds (Putnam, 1976: ch. 2). Table 4.2 shows that this is also true for West German elites with respect to four factors: gender, social class origin, religious denomination, and education. The table includes two different reference groups: the working population over 40 years of age and the more inclusive group of all West German adults.[4] The reason for including both reference groups is that practically all elites belong to the first subgroup, which itself is not representative of the population at large because it excludes a considerable part of the West German adult population: students, housewives, the unemployed, and the retired. A comparison of the working population over 40 years of age to the universe of all adults thus already explains a good deal, especially about the underrepresentation of females within the elite population.

Dahrendorf, a long-time advocate of equality of opportunities, explicitly criticized the narrow social basis from which the West German elites—with the exception of the politicians—have traditionally been drawn (1967: 238–250). However, this has changed considerably in recent years. Although West German elites still come disproportionately from the upper middle class, the percentage of elites from blue-collar families rose to 13 percent by 1981, with another 13 percent coming from lower white-collar families (see Table 4.2).

TABLE 4.2 Demographic Characteristics of Elites and the General Population (column percentages, missing values excluded)

	Elites	*Work Force 40 Years of Age and Over*	*Total Population, 18 Years of Age and Over*
Total n	1,744	3,815	18,984
Gender			
Male	97.2	76.6	45.1
Female	2.8	23.4	54.9
Social class origin			
Large employer[a]	8.6	1.8	1.6
Small employer[b]	11.1	11.1	9.8
Self-employed, no employees	8.5	16.6	14.4
Higher white-collar	45.1	10.6	11.8
Lower white-collar	13.4	15.9	16.8
Higher blue-collar	5.2	7.8	7.4
Lower blue-collar	8.2	36.2	38.1
Religion			
Protestant	52.3	52.1	51.3
Roman Catholic	29.9	39.9	41.5
None	17.7	8.0	7.2
Education			
Primary (9 years or less)	5.1	65.4	66.6
Secondary (10 years)	9.8	23.7	24.2
High school graduation (13 years)	85.1	10.9	9.2

[a]10 or more employees.
[b]2–9 employees.

Sources: Figures for the elites are from Rudolf Wildermann et al., *Führungsschicht in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland 1981* (Mannheim: Universität Mannheim, 1982); data for the general population are from author's secondary analyses of a pooled data-set of several representative surveys carried out between 1976 and 1979 by ZUMA (Zentrum für Umfragen, Methoden, and Analysen), Mannheim.

Before we can draw any conclusions from these data concerning the openness of elite recruitment in West Germany, however, we must provide at least a tentative answer to one fundamental normative question involved: With respect to what factors do we expect elites to be representative? Although the underrepresentation of persons from working-class backgrounds has usually been considered as problematic because it indicates unequal opportunities for upward social mobility, most observers would probably not blame the elites for overwhelmingly holding university degrees. However, educational opportunities are to a considerable degree determined by social class origin. Children from

TABLE 4.3 Comparison of Social Class Origin of Elites and the General Population in West Germany and in the United States (column percentages, missing values excluded)

	West Germany[a]		*United States*[b]	
	Population	*Elites*	*Population*	*Elites*
Large employers	1.8	8.6	1.6	21.3
Small employers and self-employed[c]	27.7	19.6	10.1	27.3
White-collar and blue-collar with supervisory function[d]	18.4	50.3	37.4	35.4
Lower white-collar and lower blue-collar[e]	52.1	21.6	49.2	16.0

[a]Population data for work force, 40 years of age and over. *Source:* Figures for the elites are from Rudolf Wildenmann et al., *Führungsschicht in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland 1981* (Mannheim: Universität Mannheim, 1982); data for the general population are from author's secondary analyses of a pooled data-set of several representative surveys carried out between 1976 and 1979 by ZUMA (Zentrum für Umfragen, Methoden, und Analysen), Mannheim.

[b]*Source:* Gwen Moore and Richard D. Alba, "Class and Prestige Origins in the American Elite," in Peter V. Marsden and Nan Lin (eds.), *Social Structure and Network Analysis* (Beverly Hills, California: Sage, 1982), pp. 39–60.

[c]Employers and self-employed with up to 10 employees.

[d]Fourth and sixth categories under "Social class origin" in Table 4.2.

[e]Fifth and seventh categories under "Social class origin" in Table 4.2.

higher-class backgrounds have a disproportionate chance to receive a higher education. In effect, educational status is largely inherited.

If we want to find out whether working-class background as such is a disadvantage for a professional or political career, therefore, we must control statistically for this relationship between class background and education. Such a control shows that in West Germany social class background has no direct effect on the ascent into the elites. Among all well-educated West Germans, the share of persons from working-class backgrounds is not higher or lower than among the elites. It can thus be concluded that the underrepresentation of persons from working-class backgrounds among the elites is almost entirely due to limited educational opportunities, not to any systematic discrimination beyond that. Although there are no systematic studies comparing the opportunities for social mobility in West Germany to those in other Western democracies, the elite data in Table 4.3 show that West German elites are, if anything, certainly not less representative regarding their class backgrounds than are their U.S. counterparts. In comparison to other countries, another result is more remarkable. This is that 37.5 percent of the West German elites' fathers were employed in the civil service.

Even though it is safe to assume that the German civil service has changed a lot and should not be considered solely as a haven of conservatism,[5] it does seem to nurture elite career aspirations more than other social background environments.

Although educational opportunities are sufficient to explain the underrepresentation in the elite of persons from working-class backgrounds, they are not sufficient to explain the underrepresentation of women and Catholics. Neither group differs much from the national average in terms of educational credentials. Other factors need to be taken into account. However, these causes cannot be adequately studied by comparing elites to the general public. Instead, only comprehensive studies of social mobility could answer that question because the social composition of the elite is the result of social mobility processes that may have little to do with the elite role as such.

Representation in West Germany

The lack of socioeconomic representativeness among elites has frequently been considered as indicating the existence of serious deficiencies in democratic representation. Conventional wisdom customarily assumes that the prevailing barriers to social mobility also constitute effective barriers to the representation of working-class interests among the elite. This could imply an assumption that social class background determines political interests. However, there is abundant empirical evidence that family background is at best indirectly related to the political attitudes of elite members. That is, it determines which career a young person is likely to choose (Edinger and Searing, 1967; Schleth, 1971), but political preferences, on the other hand, are to a much larger extent determined by the organizational environment in which a person actually works.

It seems perfectly plausible that family background should be a much less relevant indicator of policy preferences than a person's present social status. In electoral studies, only the latter is normally considered as an important determinant of voting behavior, and the effect of the former is rarely discussed. The importance of this distinction is often concealed because of the high intercorrelation of family background and present social status. For elite research, this distinction is important because it implies that we must consider the question of elite *representativeness* (in social background terms) as separate from the question of *how well the elites represent* the political beliefs and wishes of the citizens.

Similarly, the professional training and early professional experience of elites have frequently been studied on the assumption that they

influence not only the professional but also the political outlooks of elites. A prime illustration of this kind of research is Dahrendorf's discussion of the dominance of lawyers in the West German elite (1967: ch. 15). Lawyers do indeed still make up the single largest professional group (29.7 percent) among West German elites in 1981, even though their share has declined considerably. In a previous elite study in 1972, the proportion of lawyers was still nearly 10 percent higher, and Dahrendorf estimated that lawyers made up about half of the elite at the time he wrote his book (1967: 222).

However, any conclusions from these data are based on the assumption that the study of law produces a homogeneity of outlooks that transcends later career experiences. This is what Dahrendorf's thesis is all about (1967: 231). He argues that German law as statutory law "is governed by an unbounded nostalgia for certainty" and lacks "confidence in discussion and criticism" (1967: 229). He thus presumes that West German lawyers are predominantly conservative and dogmatic. This conclusion is no longer warranted, however, because the law faculties in West Germany have changed considerably in the aftermath of the educational reforms of the 1970s and also in response to Dahrendorf's unfavorable judgment. Younger West German lawyers are therefore not necessarily more conservative than university graduates in other fields (Hoffmann-Lange, 1985: 69–70).

Moreover, even if the course of studies should indeed foster a common mentality among the graduates of law faculties, this obviously does not influence the attitude that is most relevant for policymaking: party preference. In our 1981 elite survey, the party preferences of respondents with a law degree did not differ significantly from those of respondents with other professional training. And, because party preference is the single most important predictor of political issue attitudes, the lawyers in the elites are certainly not more homogeneous in their policy preferences.

The same pattern is probably true for other professional groups as well. Unless professional training and later career are intimately related—as, for instance, in the military or in the media and cultural sectors—we cannot expect the former to have any significant effect on the political outlooks of the elites.

The pronounced effect of the present positional environment on the political preferences of the elites can instead be clearly seen in the upper half of Table 4.4 that shows the party preferences of elites from different sectors. Business elites and military elites predominantly favor the Christian Democratic parties, and most labor leaders show a strong preference for the Social Democrats. In the other elite groups, a somewhat more balanced distribution of party preferences can be found.

TABLE 4.4 Party Preference of Nonpolitical Elites and the General Population (row percentages, missing values excluded)

	SPD	*CDU/CSU*	*FDP*
ELITES			
Civil service	35.4	43.4	21.3
Business	10.0	75.7	14.2
Business associations	2.6	79.6	17.8
Trade unions	85.4	13.4	1.2
Mass media	21.3	55.2	23.6
Academic	21.7	54.3	23.9
Military	3.0	84.8	12.1
Cultural elites	45.6	25.0	29.4
Other	38.0	51.9	10.2
Total	26.5	55.7	17.8
WORK FORCE, 40 YEARS OF AGE AND OVER BY OCCUPATIONAL STATUS			
Large employers	7.4	88.9	3.7
Small employers	9.6	84.6	5.9
Self-employed, no employees	22.0	61.6	16.4
Higher white-collar	37.5	51.6	10.9
Lower white-collar	38.2	50.6	11.2
Higher blue-collar	54.2	41.9	3.9
Lower blue-collar	58.3	36.0	5.7
Total	41.6	49.5	8.9

Sources: Figures for the elites are from Rudolf Wildenmann et al., *Führungsschicht in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland 1981* (Mannheim: Universität Mannheim, 1982); data for the general population are from author's secondary analyses of a pooled data-set of several representative surveys carried out between 1976 and 1979 by ZUMA (Zentrum für Umfragen, Methoden, und Analysen), Mannheim.

This latter pattern may be the result of two entirely different processes. It may indicate that in some sectors political affiliation is not a relevant criterion for recruitment and careers. In sectors where political affiliation counts, however, counteracting political pressures may cancel each other out. The latter is, for instance, true for civil service and media elites in West Germany (Hoffmann-Lange, 1986).[6]

The implication of the overall distribution of party preferences among the elites is rather obvious. It shows clearly that the major governing party in 1981, the SPD, had to operate in a social environment dominated by other elites who would have preferred a national government led by the Christian Democrats. Moreover, this underrepresentation of the Social Democrats among the elites—compared to the population at large—was at best partly a result of a poor Social Democratic performance in government. More likely, it is a relatively persistent charac-

TABLE 4.5 Score Differences Between CDU/CSU and SPD for the Four Most Controversial Political Issues[a]

	Political Elites	*Other Elites*	*Population*
Private broadcasting stations should be admitted as competition to public stations	3.9	2.7	0.3
The comprehensive school should become a regular school in addition to others	3.8	2.7	1.0
The decree denying access of radicals to the civil service should be abolished	3.5	2.3	0.8
The 1976 law on codetermination is insufficient and should be extended	2.9	2.6	0.7

[a]Political elites by party; other elites and population by party preference. Maximum scale difference: 5.

Sources: Figures for elites are from Rudolf Wildenmann et al., *Führungsschicht in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland 1981* (Mannheim: Universität Mannheim, 1982), and a general population survey of 1982 that included a set of identical attitude questions (see Note 7 at end of chapter).

teristic of West German elites. The percentages of elite respondents favoring the Social Democratic party over other political parties were only slightly higher in two earlier elite surveys done in 1968 and 1972 (33.9 percent and 31.1 percent).

The party preference of an individual not only indicates his or her basic political commitment, it also closely relates to the political issue attitudes of that individual. A comparison of the issue attitudes of elites and the general population[7] shows elite attitudes to be considerably more polarized along party lines. This can be seen by comparing the differences of attitude scores between Social Democrats and Christian Democrats[8] on a set of political issue statements that were rated according to the degree to which the respondents agreed with them. The rating scale ranged from 1 to 6, meaning that the maximum difference was 5. The average score difference for eleven issue items is 2.2 for the political elites, 1.6 for the other elites, and 0.5 for the general population. It must be noted, though, that the differences in all three groups are consistent, that is, they go into the same direction. The four most controversial issues produced the results shown in Table 4.5.

From similar results in the United States, Herbert McClosky et al. (1960) have concluded that it would be more appropriate to reverse the question of representation. Instead of asking how well the elites represent the issue attitudes of their followers, we should ask how respon-

sive citizens are to the issue conflicts that exist among the elites. Recent time-series analyses have empirically confirmed the presumption that political issue conflicts normally arise first at the elite level and affect the attitudes of ordinary citizens only after a political dispute at the elite level has been going on for some time (Carmines and Stimson, 1986).

In addition to this result of a greater polarization of political attitudes at the elite level, which turns the question of representation upside down, persistent differences exist between the policy preferences of elites and citizens that are not related to party preference at all. They derive from the different political role definitions of elites and citizens. Citizens are consumers of policies; elites are policymakers. As consumers, citizens assign high salience to policy goals they consider relevant to their lives, and whether these goals are compatible is not their primary concern. This means that they may attribute a similarly high priority to incompatible goals. A frequently cited example of this tendency is the fact that citizens may simultaneously advocate lower taxes and higher welfare benefits. But elites cannot ignore the incompatibility of different policies because they are the ones who must make priority decisions. The elites, therefore, tend to emphasize the inverse relationship between tax reductions and welfare benefits, some recent counterexamples notwithstanding.

This difference in role definitions is evident in the political attitudes of elites and citizens. Table 4.6 shows the policy preferences of both groups on two different attitude questions. The upper part of the table provides the results for two issues that had to be rated independently. Although more than half of the respondents in the population rated these two goals as equally important, nearly 80 percent of the elites assigned a clear priority to only one of the two.

The lower half of the table shows what happens when the respondents are explicitly asked to assign a priority to two conflicting policy goals. The respondents in the population are divided into two equally strong groups, with only slight differences between the supporters of the different parties. Among the political elites, we can instead detect the same clear-cut partisan pattern that was already present in the independent ratings. I do not want to assert that the citizens answered randomly, but it is apparent from these results that citizen priorities are not consistently related to party preferences; therefore, they dc not give any clear indication to the parties as to what policies to pursue. Instead, they impart a good deal of discretion to the elites. These results contradict the thesis of a government overload in Western democracies resulting from an "inflation of demands" on the political system by ordinary citizens.

TABLE 4.6 Political Priorities of Political Elites and the General Population (column percentages, missing values excluded)

	Political Elites				*Population*[a]			
	SPD	*CDU/CSU*	*FDP*	*Total*	*SPD*	*CDU/CSU*	*FDP*	*Total*
1. RELATIVE IMPORTANCE OF "REDUCTION OF THE PUBLIC DEBT" AND "FULL EMPLOYMENT"								
Reduction of public debt more important	0.8	43.1	2.0	24.8	16.9	20.1	15.1	18.5
Both equally important	9.8	33.3	12.0	20.7	50.4	61.4	54.2	54.4
Full employment more important	89.3	23.6	36.0	54.4	32.7	18.5	30.7	27.1
2. "GIVEN THE PRESENT SIZE OF THE PUBLIC DEBT, A REDUCTION OF SOCIAL WELFARE PROGRAMS SHOULD BE CONSIDERED"								
Approve	17.9	79.0	76.0	51.1	46.9	58.1	47.4	50.0
Disapprove	82.1	21.0	24.0	48.9	53.1	41.9	52.6	50.0

[a]Total population, 16 years and over.

Sources: Figures for elites are from Rudolf Wildenmann et al., *Führungsschicht in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland 1981* (Mannheim: Universität Mannheim, 1982), and a general population survey of 1982 that included a set of identical attitude questions (see Note 7 at end of chapter).

I have argued (1) that the political attitudes of the elites are not related to their social class background, and (2) that they differ systematically from those of ordinary citizens. This justifies the conclusion that elite roles automatically lead to a certain independence of elite political attitudes from social structural determination. In this vein, Robert Putnam has argued that even elites selected at random would develop policy preferences distinct from those of the citizens (1976: 142).

It is equally important to note, however, that these differences have a certain social bias. That is, they are not independent of the social position of the elites. We have already seen that the party preferences of the elites are closely related to their attitudes toward specific policies. These party preferences are in turn highly skewed in favor of the middle-class parties—the CDU/CSU and FDP. Because voting behavior in West Germany is still to a large extent determined by social structural factors, we can conceive of the party preferences of voter groups as a kind of generalized mandate given to a party for pursuing policies on behalf of the interests of that social group. Thus, the SPD is expected to pursue working-class interests, and the CDU/CSU and FDP are generally considered as favoring middle-class and business interests. This means that working-class interests are seriously underrepresented

among the elites because the trade union elite is the only group in which the Social Democrats enjoy majority support.

This political bias is presumably due to the fact that the career elites constitute the top stratum of the middle class, having risen to their present positions through long careers in organizations representing middle-class values and interests. Such a conclusion is confirmed by the figures in the bottom half of Table 4.4, which show that among West German voters the SPD share declines with rising occupational status. Radical critics thus make a valid point in claiming that elites primarily represent the interests of the upper strata in society. This is counteracted by the public's electoral power, though, which can and does bring parties representing lower-class interests into positions of political power.

Summing up the evidence favoring the radical paradigm, we can conclude that the radical critics have drawn attention to the problem of elite responsiveness and popular control of elites. The empirical results show that there may not be much to respond to after all because ordinary citizens do not have the kind of well-developed policy preferences that characterize elite respondents. On the other hand, the results also show that elites differ in their social composition, as well as in their party preferences, from the population at large. Both results can only partly be explained by their elite status; rather, they are related to the social position of the elites, i.e., they reflect the elites' high social status. Furthermore, the results do not confirm another fundamental assertion of radical social scientists, which is that a dichotomy exists between elites and nonelites. Elites differ only in degree from other upper-middle-class members of society.

Although I do not have comparative data to test whether this conclusion holds true for modern democracies in general, it seems rather likely that it would. In all modern societies, we find unequal opportunities for social mobility and therefore a skewed distribution in the social backgrounds of elites. Similarly, in all democracies occupational status is a major determinant of voting behavior. We can thus expect elites as the top stratum of the upper middle class to have more conservative party preferences than the population at large.

Elite Integration in West Germany

Having analyzed the results that contribute to answering the question of vertical integration in West German society, it is appropriate to direct attention to the aspect of horizontal integration as well. This is the aspect that both pluralists and Dahrendorf have considered as crucial to modern democracies.

Dahrendorf's theory of elites rests on the assumption that social cohesion is a necessary precondition of elite integration. In his opinion, this facilitates the existence of an elite that is liberal and effective at the same time. But how should this social cohesion be measured? One indicator would be that the elites are drawn from a small stratum in society and thus have similar social backgrounds. We have seen that this is not true for the West German elites and probably does not hold true for any industrialized society.

Because Dahrendorf acknowledges the incompatibility of liberal democracy with the monopoly of a socially homogeneous elite and advocates equality of opportunities, he looks for other factors that could foster elite integration. Drawing on the Anglo-Saxon experience, he argues that the institutions of elite socialization may provide a good basis for this. For example, the existence of a small number of institutions of higher education in which future elites would be socialized into a common value system and develop an esprit de corps would enable them to cooperate easily in later years. In Dahrendorf's view, a system of exclusive private schools and elite universities therefore provides an ideal breeding ground for future elites. West Germany, where such institutions do not exist, thus lacks the structure for such focused socialization.

Dahrendorf also discusses another means of elite integration that could compensate for a lack of homogeneous preadult socialization of elites. This is a professional socialization, which requires future elites to acquire broad occupational experiences. The underlying assumption is that such experiences foster the development of general managerial skills among elites as opposed to specialized knowledge that characterizes the subelites. Such a variegated career pattern gives future elites firsthand experience in a variety of organizational contexts and at the same time enhances elite integration by bringing them into contact with one another. It must be noted, though, that in contrast to Dahrendorf, who views such a pattern as beneficial, C. Wright Mills focuses on its inherent dangers. In Mills's opinion, it contributes to a homogeneity of interests among the elites that distinguishes them in disadvantageous ways from the rest of society (1956: 287–288).

The dominant U.S. career pattern of free and frequent movement between sectors can thus be considered as conducive to elite integration. West German elites, in contrast, normally pursue much more specialized careers than is true for their U.S. counterparts. Except in the political sphere, elite careers are built predominantly within one sector (see Hoffmann-Lange, 1985: 70–74). Both Dahrendorf and Erwin Scheuch (1966) have considered this emphasis on expertise (as opposed to broad professional experience) to be problematic. They have claimed that it

contributes to an overreliance on seemingly "objective" solutions rather than admitting open contests between conflicting interests. It creates respected "spheres of influence" for the different groups of experts who protect exclusive decisionmaking power in their own field while at the same time refraining from mingling in other decisionmaking arenas.

On the basis of this evidence of heterogeneous social backgrounds and specialized career patterns, Dahrendorf concluded that West German elites form a "cartel of anxiety" rather than a self-confident, liberal elite. This conclusion clearly contradicts the presumption of radical sociologists that power elites dominate decisionmaking in Western democracies. Power elitists argue instead that the common interest of elites in preserving their privileged status is the only relevant factor governing elite behavior. "Elites are power elites because they wield the power to assert their point of view and not because they carve meat the same way, read the same books, and applaud to the same theater performances." (Jaeggi, 1969: 24) In this view, elite integration results from the requirements of elite positions and develops automatically, thus rendering a common elite culture expendable.

As so often happens, the truth may lie somewhere between these two opposing positions. Although, by virtue of their position, elites must interact with one another to protect the interests of their organizations, personal acquaintance and well-established informal norms governing interorganizational bargaining are certainly instrumental for a smooth functioning of the decisionmaking process. Dahrendorf tends to overlook, however, the fact that homogeneity of socialization, broad professional experience, and long-term personal acquaintance are not the only ways to achieve this. Instead, we can safely assume that norms of interaction with representatives of other organizations belong to the repertory of skills customarily learned on the job and that they are sufficient to produce good working relations among elites of different organizations and sectors. This is true even where socialization is specialized and does not involve personal working experience in other sectors.

Moreover, the mechanisms Dahrendorf cherishes so much may even be dysfunctional because they may produce a collusion of personal interests among the representatives of different organizations. That, in turn, may interfere with the requirements of their positions, which are designed to protect the interests of their organizations. It is not by chance that critical sociologists have based their contention that modern democracies are governed by power elites on precisely these mechanisms, which in their eyes undermine the loyalty of the elites to their own organizations.

TABLE 4.7 Sector Composition of Central Elite Circles in West Germany, the United States, and Australia (column percentages)

	West Germany	*United States*	*Australia*
Politics	37.6	50.2	27.2
Civil service	9.4	5.7	18.4
Business[a]	25.3	16.3	20.8
Trade unions	9.7	7.0	8.9
Mass media	10.0	7.5	8.1
Academic	5.6	7.5	9.8
Other	2.4	5.7	6.7
Total (n)	340	227	418

[a] Business and business associations combined.

Sources: Figures for West Germany are from Rudolf Wildenmann et al., *Führungsschicht in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland 1981* (Mannheim: Universität Mannheim, 1982); figures for the United States and Australia are from John Higley and Gwen Moore, "Elite Integration in the United States and Australia," *American Political Science Review* 75 (1981), pp. 581–597.

Our data provide evidence that the degree of elite integration in West Germany in the early 1980s was not lower than that found in Western democracies with a much longer democratic tradition. A comparative study of elite networks in the United States, Australia, and West Germany shows similar degrees of elite integration in all three of these countries, indicating that Dahrendorf's concerns were largely unfounded. Even though a formal position of power is the most important precondition for achieving prominent status in an elite network, this network is based on informal contacts with other decisionmakers. We can therefore conclude that although formal rules provide the underlying structure in which elite interactions take place, they are everywhere complemented by informal rules of the game that are a precondition for effective decisionmaking and that develop automatically in a stable environment.

The results of analyses of elite networks in the three countries are presented in Table 4.7. The analyses were based on nominations that elite respondents made of interaction partners during the interview. In all three studies, respondents were first asked to indicate the one national issue on which they had been most active during the recent months. They were subsequently encouraged to name their most important interaction partners for that issue. Within the larger network of elite interactions based on these nominations, the analysis program then searched for elite circles characterized by relatively high cohesion, i.e., linked by short paths that involved only few intermediaries. In each country, the analysis revealed the existence of a fairly compact elite

circle made up of a few hundred political influentials.[9] The results in Table 4.7 clearly show the importance of the political-administrative sectors, indicating that these sectors perform a crucial function in elite integration.

More extensive analyses of the U.S. elite network showed the contacts among the elites to be based on instrumental considerations rather than social closeness. Persons with similar social backgrounds did not interact more frequently (Moore and Alba, 1982). This is another indication that Dahrendorf's elite theory may be based on the false assumption that social cohesion is a universal requirement for elite integration.

Anthony Giddens (1979: 147) has instead treated these two variables as independent and developed an elite typology that differs from Dahrendorf's. His is based on a cross-classification of the two factors "openness of elite recruitment" and "elite integration." Elites with open recruitment yet a high degree of integration are designated as "solidary elites" or "power elites." It is important to note, however, that Giddens's definition of a power elite lacks the implications associated with this concept by C. Wright Mills. Giddens only assumes that a high degree of elite integration also implies a high degree of power concentration and thus leads to an oligarchic mode of decisionmaking.

To sum up the foregoing discussion with respect to the pluralist paradigm, the conclusion seems justified that the importance of social homogeneity and broad professional socialization for elite integration has often been overrated. Social cohesion can also develop among socially heterogeneous and specialized elites. My results support the conclusion that the West German elite today can be characterized as an "established" elite in Dahrendorf's sense.

Nevertheless, Dahrendorf was probably not so far from the truth with his contention that the West German elite in the 1950s could rightfully be characterized as a "cartel of anxiety." He attributed this to the lack of social homogeneity of the elites, but instead it seems more plausible to assume that it was due to the lack of experience with democratic institutions—a lack of informal rules governing elite interactions.

Both in the Weimar Republic and in the early years of the Federal Republic, German elites were suddenly confronted with a set of new political institutions. The new constitutions defined the formal rules of political decisionmaking. Such formal rules are not sufficient, however, to make a political system work smoothly. They provide only a framework that has to be filled with life. Therefore, the elite actors must develop informal rules of interaction to achieve that. In such a situation, two different reactions are conceivable. The actors may decide to assert

their interests in a conflictual way, trying to extract as much profit as possible from an unstructured situation, or they may act defensively, attempting to grant everyone his or her fair share of power.

This is precisely where the two German democracies differ. The conservative elites of the Weimar Republic chose the first path. They ruthlessly asserted their reactionary goals and tried to reestablish their traditional dominance. In the early years of the Federal Republic, on the other hand, all of the elites decided to follow the second strategy. The legitimacy as well as the effective power of the traditionally anti-democratic elites were now shattered, and the democratic elites felt morally justified to claim their share of power and also enjoyed the support of the Allied occupying forces. Given the complete failure of traditional German politics, all elite groups were eager to overcome the historical experience and to make the democratic institutions work this time. Defensive rather than assertive behavior became the predominant norm. Gordon Smith, who analyzed this behavior, concluded that West German elites long showed a tendency to cling rigidly to the newly found political consensus and to avoid open conflict. He argued that the pressures toward political conformity were considerable, which in turn led to a paradox: "the liberal state lacking in the liberal spirit" (1986: 229).

Finally, the striking similarity of Dahrendorf's "cartel of anxiety" to the concept of consociational democracy should be noted. Dahrendorf even explicitly refers to the similarity of the West German elite structure with the sociopolitical "pillarization" in the Netherlands, which is normally considered as one of the prime examples of consociationalism (1967: 262). Although other authors have claimed that consociationalism is the only method to achieve democratic stability in fragmented societies, Dahrendorf emphasizes instead the negative aspects of the consociational model of power-sharing: stagnation and a lack of innovation. His ideal type of democracy is the more conflictual Westminster model (cf. Lijphart, 1984). When we conceive of these two models as the endpoints of a continuum ranging from consensual to conflictual politics, West Germany is normally located in the middle. But it is entirely plausible to assume that the degree of consensual politics was much higher in the early years of the Federal Republic and that only later did a development similar to that in the Netherlands take place, where consociationalism gradually gave way to competitive politics (Steiner, 1986: 204). It can be assumed that only the high degree of stability achieved by the 1960s made such a change possible (cf. Smith, 1986: 232–235).

Conclusion

The empirical evidence on West German elites in the 1980s shows them to be fairly similar to those of other Western democracies. The prevailing recruitment patterns for elite positions in all of these countries tend to favor persons from privileged backgrounds. This is not due to any elite conspiracy, however, that would deliberately bar the offspring of the working class from rising to the top. Rather, it is the result of a persistent association between social class background and educational opportunities; at the same time, higher education is an essential precondition for professional advancement. Socially, the elites therefore constitute the top stratum of the upper middle class, something that is also apparent in their predominantly conservative political party preferences. Thus, radical social scientists have rightfully concluded that elites represent middle-class interests rather than working-class interests.

On the other hand, comparisons of the issue attitudes of elites and citizens do not support the notion that elite preferences systematically misrepresent the preferences of the populace. Instead, elite attitudes tend to span a broader spectrum of opinions and reflect a higher degree of attitudinal consistency, which stems partly from their higher educational level and partly from the elite role that forces them to pay close attention to political issues and the contingencies among them.

Lastly, the data indicate that the degree of elite integration in West Germany is not lower than that in other Western democracies that can look back to a much longer and uninterrupted democratic history, such as, the United States and Australia. Although it is quite conceivable that elite integration was relatively low in the early years of the Federal Republic, Dahrendorf was wrong in attributing this to the lack of institutions of elite socialization and specialized career patterns in West Germany. Rather, German society up to 1945 and also West Germany until the 1960s lacked an elite culture supportive of a competitive democracy, that is, a political culture combining conflict over issues with a consensus on the democratic rules of the game and a mutual acceptance of the legitimacy among a broad spectrum of political and socioeconomic actors. My study is but one piece of evidence for the profound changes that have taken place in West Germany since the 1950s. It is consistent with studies on other aspects of West German society confirming that the fundamental rupture of 1945 provided the basis for a democratic development in West Germany that took some time to take root. Elites that started out defensively and primarily tried to protect the interests of their own organizations have increasingly learned to cooperate with one another in ways that today combine

fairly high levels of conflict with a basic commitment to the protection of the existing democratic structures.

Notes

1. Elites also play an important role in the theory of consociational democracy, which attempts to explain how democratic institutions can function in subculturally segmented, "plural" societies. "Plural societies may enjoy stable democratic government if the political leaders engage in coalescent rather than adversarial decision-making." (Lijphart, 1977: 100). The political culture of the Weimar Republic has customarily been characterized as fragmented (Lijphart, 1977: 117), thereby implying that the breakdown of democracy in Germany was at least partly caused by a failure of the German (political) elites to engage in coalescent decisionmaking.

2. This elite survey was the core part of a research project on "Elites in the Federal Republic of Germany 1981" conducted at the University of Mannheim in the early 1980s. It included personal interviews with 1,744 incumbents of leadership positions in the Federal Republic of Germany. The project was made possible by a grant from the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft. Principal investigators were Rudolf Wildenmann, Max Kaase, and the author. For further information on this study, see Hoffmann-Lange, 1987.

3. Dahrendorf himself uses the term "political attitude."

4. All data are interview data, and the figures are therefore not as reliable as census data. Nevertheless, the population data do not deviate too much from the actual distribution of the four variables in the West German population. They come from a pooled data set of nine general population surveys carried out between 1976 and 1979 by the Zentrum für Umfragen Methoden und Analysen (ZUMA), Mannheim. The pooling of different surveys has the advantage of providing a much larger number of respondents. This is particularly relevant when the research focus is on specific subgroups that in standard cross-sectional surveys are only represented by a very small number of cases, e.g., college graduates.

5. For the civil service elite, see Steinkemper, 1974.

6. It is well known that the political parties compete for political influence on the recruitment of leadership personnel in the civil service and in the public broadcasting media. This may lead to a quota that allows each of the established parties to recruit a certain number of leaders from its own followers (*Porporz*), which is the pattern typically found in public broadcasting. In the civil service, on the other hand, the governing party/parties have the exclusive right to appoint and dismiss personnel of the highest ranks (the so-called "political civil servants"), and they will usually only appoint their own loyalists. However, because the political parties have their political strongholds in different parts of the country, the state administrations are controlled by different parties, thus leading to an overall balanced distribution of party preferences in the civil service elite. Finally, in the private print media newspapers and periodicals

with different political outlooks recruit their own personnel according to the political preferences of their owners.

7. The population data in Table 4.5 come from a general population survey of early 1982 that included identical attitude questions. This was part of the research project on "Elites in the Federal Republic of Germany 1981" and was supported by an additional grant from the Fritz Thyssen Stiftung.

8. This includes party members in the political elites. In the other elites and in the general population, party preference was taken instead.

9. More detailed reports on these studies can be found in Higley et al., 1979; Higley and Moore, 1981; Hoffmann-Lange, 1989.

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