

Surveying national elites in the Federal Republic of Germany

URSULA HOFFMANN-LANGE

Universities of Mannheim and Texas at Austin

2.1 Introduction: The West German Elite Study, 1981

Studies of national elites are concerned with the most powerful persons in a society, i.e. persons with considerable influence on collective decisions of central importance. This preliminary definition of national elites will be elaborated in a subsequent paragraph: before doing this, however, an overview of the theoretical approaches of elite research, as well as a short description of the research strategy used in the West German elite study of 1981, will be given.

In addition to providing essential descriptive information on the elites of a certain society, empirical studies of national elites can also be used to test theoretical assumptions about the relations between elites and society. Theories of elite recruitment and elite circulation constitute the oldest tradition in elite theory. They assume a relationship between the character of a society, the prevailing mode of elite recruitment and of the social characteristics of elites (Bottomore, 1966). Changes in the criteria of elite recruitment and, hence, in the social characteristics of elites, are taken as indicators of social change, and vice versa. In this vein, it is often assumed that the transition from traditional to modern industrial society has affected elite recruitment by substituting achievement criteria for the formerly prevailing ascriptive criteria.

Theories of conflict and consensus among elites assume, instead, a certain degree of independence of elites from societal restraints. They claim that elites can reach a consensus on procedural norms, the rules of the game, which allow peaceful conflict regulation even in societies with deep socio-cultural cleavages (Lijphart, 1977; Field and Higley, 1980).

The nature of the linkages between elites and non-elites (Putnam, 1976, ch. 6; Welsh, 1979, ch. 7; Stokes and Miller, 1962; Miller and Stokes, 1963; Barnes, 1977) in a society is a third major thread of theoretical thinking about elites. It is concerned with the responsiveness of elites to the demands of the general population, i.e. the representation of interests in elite decision-making. This can be studied by comparing values and issue attitudes of elites to those of the population at large. The degree of congruence among different elite and population subgroups is then used to test the adequacy of different models of interest representation, e.g. pluralist, ruling class, consociational, power elite, or corporatist models.

The survey approach in empirical elite research has to be distinguished from another use of elite interviewing in which elites serve as informants/experts about a specific field of investigation, e.g. Raab's study reported in Chapter 6. The two different uses of elite interviews imply differences in sampling and research design. While for expert interviews a qualitative approach seems most appropriate, quantitative methods are needed in order to gather reliable information on backgrounds, attitudes, and activities of elites. Critics have often maintained that it is impossible to use such a quantitative approach in elite research. They have argued that elites are reluctant to be interviewed by methods appropriate only for 'mass' surveys. The fact, however, that many quantitative surveys of national elites have been carried out successfully has proved them wrong.

The quantitative approach has a number of advantages as well as disadvantages. The use of a highly standardized questionnaire for a broad stratum of respondents working in rather different settings limits the depth of the information that can be collected about career patterns, role behaviour and decision-making activities. Similarly, the questions concerning perceptions of political problems and political ideologies have to be limited to a set of forced-choice questions.¹

What is lost in detail, however, can be gained in broadness. The inclusion of different elite sectors each represented by a sufficient number of respondents, and the imposition of a common frame of reference by using forced-choice questions, allows study of the patterns of dissent and consensus among different elite and population subgroups, i.e. the structure of political cleavages in a country. Similarly, by asking respondents for their regular interaction partners, the overall structure of the elite network can be analysed, even when detailed information concerning the content, direction, and frequency of these interactions is lacking.

The West German elite study of 1981² was designed as a quantitative, cross-sectional national elite survey. Respondents were holders of elite positions in various sectors, i.e. political, civil service, business, trade union, mass media, academic, military, and cultural elites. The study is comparative in a threefold sense.

First, it allows the study of changes in the elites over time by comparing the results to those of two previous elite surveys in West Germany of 1968 and 1972 for which a similar design had been used (Hoffmann-Lange *et al.*, 1980).

Secondly, an internationally comparative approach is ensured by the use of a number of questions on elite networks which had previously been asked in the United States and Australia (Barton, 1985; Higley *et al.*, 1979).

Thirdly, some of the questions, mainly concerning value orientations and issue attitudes, have also been used in a general population survey in early 1982, thus allowing for comparisons between elites and the population at large.

2.2 The Sampling Procedure: Methods and Theoretical Approaches

Each sampling procedure presupposes a theoretical as well as an operational definition of the population about which assertions are to be made. On the other hand, most definitions of elites are rather imprecise and give only a little guidance as to the adequate sampling method to apply. Agreement among them is normally limited to a common focus on the macro level of societies, institutionalized power, and influence on collective decisions. But a definition of national elites as 'persons with power individually, regularly, and seriously to affect political outcomes at the macro level of organized societies' (Higley *et al.*, 1979, p. 17), still leaves a wide range of choices to the discretion of the researcher in sampling an elite population. It allows for different forms of power wielding and different power resources: direct participation in decision-making within large-scale private and public organizations, influence on the definition of social problems and/or influence on public opinion. Each of them can be legitimately considered as qualifying a person as a member of the national elite.

In the reputational approach, experts are asked to indicate the most powerful persons in a social system. The usefulness of this approach is, however, limited to less complex social systems such as small or medium-sized communities where decision-making power

is concentrated among a readily identifiable elite group. Decision-making on the national level of modern societies is instead much too complex to allow for the identification of all members of an elite by asking only a small number of experts. Reliable, though always subjective, knowledge about who the powerful are is usually limited to a few decision-making arenas and to elite members themselves since they are the ones with the most direct access to decision-making processes. The opinions of experts without such a direct access to the relevant processes are instead biased even more by subjective preconceptions about the power structure.

The decisional approach defines power as direct participation in political decisions. This approach has the advantage of using a behaviourally derived measure of power, but the necessarily small range of issues that can be studied empirically in order to identify decision-makers makes it difficult to generalize the findings to the entire power structure.

In determining national elite samples in complex, industrial societies, the positional approach has been the one most widely used. It is the easiest to apply in practice since it neither presupposes, judges nor requires lengthy decisional studies. Starting out from a list of elite sectors, the researcher then proceeds to select the most important organizations within each sector. In a third step, the top positions within each organization have to be determined. The current incumbents of these positions are then finally considered as members of the elite.

The three approaches of elite identification can be classified according to the degree to which they allow for two dimensions of power:

- (1) formal vs informal power;
- (2) direct participation in political decision-making vs indirect influence on political decisions.

The codified rules of political decision-making will be included in this classification, too. Figure 2.1 shows that these latter rules use the most restricted concept of power which the decisional as well as the positional approach each extend on one of the two dimensions but not on the other. Finally, the reputational approach measures power in the broadest sense, allowing for formal and informal power as well as for direct and indirect influence on political decisions.

Regardless of the approach used, each operational definition of elites has to solve an additional problem, namely to specify the

boundaries of the elite universe, i.e. the size of the elite to be studied. Should it be limited to the very top stratum of powerful persons with broad influence over a relatively wide range of decision-making matters or should we go further down in the organizational hierarchy? In this latter case one would also include persons with a much more restricted range of decision-making power who, however, participate more intensively in individual decisions and thus may sometimes be even more important than those in the top stratum in shaping these decisions.

Figure 2.1 *Classification of the approaches of elite identification*

Power resources	Participation in political decision-making	
	Direct participation	Direct participation <i>and</i> indirect influence
Formal power	Codified rules of political decision-making	Positional approach
Formal <i>and</i> informal power	Decisional approach	Reputational approach

In the West German elite study, 1981, the positional approach was used to define the elite universe. The positional approach was, however, supplemented by the reputational approach: respondents were asked to name other persons who were important for decision-making in their own sphere of activity. The empirical relationships between these two approaches will be analysed in a later section.

Starting out from a rather broad definition of positional elites, altogether 3,580 positions in nine major elite sectors as well as a couple of minor sectors³ were determined as belonging to the positional sample. The criteria used for the incorporation of positions into the sample depended on general assumptions about the national power structure and power within and among sectors. They were, therefore, inevitably somewhat arbitrary, and other scholars would have come up with a partly different sample.

Experience shows, however, that disagreement concerning the adequacy of such criteria is particularly pronounced with regard to the sector composition and the lower boundaries of the elite sample. The broad definition used in the West German elite ensures that at least no important positions have been omitted. Moreover, it allows

the study of the effects of the inclusion of certain sectors and lower hierarchical levels on the survey results. Table 2.1 shows the sector composition of the sample of elite positions. Due to multiple position-holding and transitory vacancies, the number of position-holders ('target persons') was lower than that and amounted to a total of 3,164.

Table 2.1 Sector composition of the West German elite study, 1981

Sector ^a	Positions		Position-holders		Respondents	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Politics	539	15.1	452	14.3	274	15.7
Civil Service	479	13.4	471	14.9	296	17.0
Business	837	23.4	688	21.7	285	16.3
Business Associations	394	11.0	295	9.3	174	10.0
Trade Unions	155	4.3	155	4.9	87	5.0
Mass Media	376	10.5	354	11.2	222	12.7
Academic	209	5.8	179	5.7	130	7.5
Military	172	4.8	172	5.4	43	2.5
Cultural	188	5.3	180	5.7	104	6.0
Other	231	6.4	218	6.9	129	7.4
Total	3580	100.0	3164	100.0	1744	100.1

Note: ^a See Appendix to this chapter for detailed list of organizations and positions

2.3 Field work: Organization, Access and Problems of Data Protection

Given the considerable size of the target population, the survey could only be carried out in co-operation with an opinion research institute. GETAS of Bremen, one of the major West German polling institutes with sufficient experience in social research, was entrusted with this task. It provided the technical infrastructure, i.e. its pool of qualified interviewers, printing services, the handling of interviewer payments, and the processing of the interviewer records.

The organization of the field work was divided between the research team and GETAS by a margin of one-third to two-thirds. The sample was, however, divided into two 'fields' or strata. Field I included the most senior position-holders for whom we expected greater difficulties of access, e.g. cabinet members, secretaries of state, presidents of business corporations, business associations and trade unions, editors-in-chief of the major newspapers, etc. Field II comprised the less senior position-holders in these areas.

The two fields were then organized separately in that we used two separate interviewer staffs: 85 interviewers in field II and 24

especially qualified interviewers in the top field. Members of the research team belonged to the latter staff. An intensive programme of interviewer training was also deemed necessary. This was supplemented by a written guide containing lengthy comments about the research goals and the intentions behind the individual questions.

At the beginning of March 1981, a personal and individually signed letter was sent to every position-holder in the sample, requesting an interview. The letters were posted in Mannheim in order to document that the study was university based and not a commercial survey. A reply postcard on which the respondents could indicate possible interview dates accompanied each letter. In April, a second letter (call back) was sent to those who had not responded to the first one.

The field organization did not differ substantially between the fields. All replies were registered by the field directors in charge. The dates offered were checked, and appointments were confirmed either by letter or by telephone. Refusals were mostly so definite that a second attempt seemed unwarranted. On the other hand, the frequent inquiries concerning the research goals and the sampling criteria were treated with special care in order to ensure the highest response rate possible.

Table 2.2 *Response rates for successive waves of the field work*

	<i>Refusals</i>		<i>Completed interviews</i>		<i>Total</i>	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Reaction to first letter	n 752	35.8	1350	64.2	2102	100.0
	% 52.9		77.4		66.4	
First callback	n 178	60.5	116	39.5	294	100.0
	% 12.5		6.7		9.3	
Second callback	n 367	70.3	155	29.7	522	100.0
	% 25.8		8.9		16.5	
Position reshuffle ^a	n 123	50.0	123	50.0	246	100.0
	% 8.7		7.1		7.8	
Total	n 1420	44.9	1744	55.1	3164	100.0
	% 100.0		100.0		100.0	

Note:^a Position reshuffles had to be treated separately because they invariably led to a peculiar contact pattern

By mid-May, the number of replies declined sharply. Since at that time about one-third of the selected position-holders had not yet reacted to either of the letters, a third wave to contact these persons was necessary. This was done by telephone. Table 2.2 contains the

distribution of response rates for the three waves of the field work. It shows that the second and third waves were successful with regard to the absolute numbers of interviews they enabled us to conduct, even when the response rates were much lower than for the first wave.

All contacts with target persons and their personal staff were registered. The number of contacts required to obtain a result, either an interview appointment or a definite refusal, is a relevant indicator of the expenditures that are necessary to carry out a study like this. Only those contacts were counted, however, that occurred between the position-holders or their staff and the field directors until either a refusal or a first interview appointment was reached. Date and address were then handed over to the interviewer. The rather frequent postponements of appointments directly arranged among interviewer and respondents were not registered as separate contacts.

The minimum number of contacts necessary to establish a definite outcome was two for refusals and three for completed interviews. Table 2.3 shows that the number of contacts increased sharply for those persons who did not react to the letters of the first and second waves. Among this group (the 'second callback'), the expenditure for a refusal was nearly as high as that for a completed interview.

Table 2.3 *Average number of contacts required to obtain a definite refusal or an interview*

	<i>Average number of contacts</i>		
	<i>Total</i>	<i>Refusals</i>	<i>Completed interviews</i>
Reaction to first letter	4.1	2.9	4.7
First callback	4.1	3.3	5.3
Second callback	4.9	4.7	5.5
Position reshuffle	4.1	3.1	5.2
Total	4.2	3.4	4.9

The field directors passed only those addresses to the interviewers for which they had obtained the consent of the respondent to be interviewed. The interviewers were asked to confirm appointment dates and also to check the correct interview address.

The interviewer reports on the interview situation (Table 2.4) reveal that most of the interviews were conducted under rather favourable circumstances. Only a few disturbances occurred during the interviews. The average interview length was 88 minutes and, hence, somewhat shorter than the length of 90 minutes we had announced in the letters. Differences between sectors can largely be

attributed to the familiarity of the respondents with being interviewed and with the topics raised in the questionnaire which were mostly political questions.

Table 2.4 *Interviewer reports on interview situation*

	<i>n</i>	%
1. Evaluation of the interview situation		
Largely without interruptions	1404	80.5
Some interruptions which, however, had no influence on the interview situation	283	16.2
Frequent or prolonged interruptions with negative effects on the interview situation	40	2.3
Missing	17	1.0
2. Evaluation of co-operativeness of respondents		
Good	1459	83.7
Fairly good	157	9.0
Not good	36	2.1
At first good, then declining	23	1.3
At first bad, then improving	37	2.1
Missing	32	1.8
3. Number of interruptions		
None	975	55.9
One to three	663	38.0
More than three	84	4.8
Missing	22	1.3
4. Average length of interruptions		
No interruptions	975	55.9
1-5 minutes	456	26.1
6-10 minutes	150	8.6
11-20 minutes	93	5.3
More than 20 minutes	37	2.1
Missing	33	1.9

Politicians and journalists achieved the shortest averages whereas respondents in the business, voluntary associations, and academic sectors were less experienced and needed more time to answer the questions (see Table 2.5).

Due to legal regulations passed in recent years, the handling of data protection represented a specific problem. In general population surveys, anonymity of individual respondents in data files is usually accomplished by separate storage of the respondents' addresses and the survey data. Moreover, address files are normally erased immediately after the completion of the field work. The anonymity of the survey data is ensured by the rule that no variables are stored

Table 2.5 *Response and average length of interviews*

<i>Sector</i>	<i>Respondents</i>		<i>Response rates</i>	<i>Average length of interviews</i>
	<i>n</i>	<i>% of sample total</i>		
Politics	274	15.7	60.6	86.5
Civil Service	296	17.0	62.8	84.3
Business	285	16.3	41.4	90.4
Business associations	174	10.0	59.0	91.5
Trade unions	87	5.0	56.1	92.5
Mass media	222	12.7	62.7	83.5
Academic	130	7.5	72.6	90.9
Military	43	2.5	25.0	85.5
Cultural	104	6.0	57.8	84.5
Other	129	7.4	59.2	97.2
Total	1744	100.1	55.1	88.1

that allow for identification of individual respondents either alone or in combination with other variables, e.g. locus of residence, full address, employer, etc. In the case of elite respondents, however, such protection of the survey data is not possible because meaningful analyses of the survey data presuppose additional information about positional characteristics of the respondents.

The legal regulations of data protection permit the storage and analysis of personal data of this kind only under the condition that the respondents declare their explicit consent in written form. Respondents were therefore asked at the outset of the interview to sign a special form designed for this purpose. The form also contained information about the precautions taken to ensure confidential handling of the survey data at the University of Mannheim. This procedure which had been tested in the pretest of the study did not produce difficulties throughout the field period.

2.4 Response Rates and Implications of the Sampling Design for Analysis

The field period lasted from late March until the end of July, 1981. The overall response rate was nearly the same in both fields. At 55.1 per cent it is somewhat lower than the one obtained in the 1972 elite study and corresponds exactly to that of the 1968 elite study. However, the analysis problems which were created by extending the field period would have been greater than the advantages of a slightly

higher response rate since the evaluation of political questions may be influenced by political events during the field period.

Table 2.5 contains the response rates for the different sectors. Compared to those of the two previous surveys they, too, show a remarkable continuity over time. Only the response rates in the sectors for military and trade unions have declined by more than 10 per cent since 1972. In the case of the trade unions, this is presumably due to the fact that a number of unions were involved in wage negotiations during the field work period. In the military sector, the main reason lay with the Federal Ministry of Defence which had been asked for a special permit for the military leaders to participate in the study long before the beginning of the field work. The permit was granted, however, only after more than one month of field work had already elapsed.

Altogether, 1,420 of the target persons could not be interviewed. Of the latter, 110 had expressed their general agreement to be interviewed but appointments could not be made due to the difficulties of finding a free date at which the interview could take place. Reference to an overcommitted time budget was the single most frequently mentioned reason. However, that claim could also have been legitimately used by any of the position-holders contacted. A tiny minority mentioned general reservations about survey research, and some expressed doubts concerning the confidentiality of the data.

Scholars have frequently suspected that the refusal rate in elite surveys increases as higher levels in the hierarchy are reached but that this fact is usually concealed because the relevant response rates are not reported. In order to test this assumption the elite sample was subdivided by seniority of position and separate response rates for these two elite strata were calculated. This was done by using similar classification criteria as in the assignment to the two interview fields. Table 2.6 indicates that the response rate shows no linear and simple relation to seniority of position. The suspected effect exists only in the sectors for politics and business associations. In the civil service, business, and trade union elites, response rates were instead somewhat higher in the top stratum.

The experience of the field work did not convey any testable suggestions concerning the factors determining individual reluctance or willingness to be interviewed for the study. A thorough analysis revealed no serious distortions of the sample of respondents as compared to the original sample. This means that the results can be viewed as giving a fairly true portrait of the entire West German elite sample with regard to the social characteristics of this group.

Table 2.6 *Response rate and seniority of position*

<i>Sector^a</i>	<i>Position-holders</i> <i>n</i>	<i>Completed interviews</i> <i>n</i>	<i>Response rate</i> <i>%</i>
Politics I ^b	246	133	54.1
Politics II	206	141	68.4
Civil service I ^c	163	114	69.9
Civil service II	308	182	59.1
Business I	242	116	47.9
Business II	446	169	37.9
Business associations I	61	29	47.5
Business associations II	235	145	61.7
Trade unions I	33	19	57.6
Trade unions II	122	68	55.7
Mass media I	88	57	64.8
Mass media II	266	165	62.0

Notes:

^a For the academic and cultural elites which do not display a comparably clear organizational hierarchy, no such subdivision was tested

^b In this group, the especially low response rate among the members of the Federal Government is compensated by a rather satisfactory one among those of state governments

^c Deviating from the classification for the field work, all Secretaries of State in Federal and State Ministries were counted as belonging to the top stratum

Moreover, given the predominantly conservative political preferences of the respondents, the danger that they represent only the more liberal part of the West German elite can be ruled out.

Elite sampling inevitably produces weighting problems due to power differences within an elite. Unlike voting where each vote counts the same, unequal influence has to be assumed in collective decision-making. The results of unweighted analyses are instead affected by the sample composition chosen by the researcher with regard to the inclusion of sectors, organizations, and positions. Predictions of decision-making outputs on the basis of an unweighted analysis of elite attitudes can thus be highly misleading, particularly when differences of opinion exist within an elite, e.g. between sectors or competing parties. It is necessary to keep different subgroups apart and to avoid unwarranted aggregations. Inferences about 'the elite' should be made with care and only after having analysed subgroups separately. Table 2.7 shows how much the results for a number of key variables differ between sectors. Furthermore, the subdivision of the main sectors according to positional subgroups shows to what extent the inclusion of second level position-holders affects the results for

the selected variables. Though this effect is not very pronounced for many variables, it should nevertheless not be considered as negligible.

2.5 A New Approach for Locating National Elites

Sole reliance on the positional approach yields a sample of elite position-holders and allows the study of formal power. Although most scholars agree that formal competence derived from incumbency of leadership positions plays a much more crucial role in modern societies than in simpler systems, an identity in the structuring of formal and informal influence cannot be assumed. This means that power is never perfectly correlated with position (Putnam, 1976, p. 16; Scheuch, 1973, p. 1005 ff.). If we are interested in making inferences not only about the sample of position-holders but also about the group of persons actually most influential in national decision-making, a weight for the actual influence of different persons has to be found. This will solve two fundamental and interrelated problems of the positional approach simultaneously, namely differences in influence and the boundary problem.

Differences in influence can be caused by differences in formal competence as well as by the varying degrees to which formal competence is being transformed into actual influence by a person (cf. Mokken and Stokman, 1976, p. 52 f.). The boundary problem is likewise a twofold one: the positional approach does not provide a single criterion for determining the boundaries in different sectors and subgroups. The sector composition of a positionally defined elite sample reflects instead *a priori* resources, e.g. political decision-making authority, economic power, influence on public opinion, etc. In order to compare the influence or power of different persons or subgroups and to determine the overall boundaries of an elite population, an empirical measure of influence and a uniform boundary criterion are needed.

Since the late 1960s, various sociometric methods have been proposed that allow the empirical study of influence relations among elites (e.g. Kadushin, 1968; Laumann and Pappi, 1976; Moore, 1979; Higley and Moore, 1981). This is generally done by asking a positionally defined sample of elite respondents for interaction partners. Such an approach was also used in the West German elite study of 1981. The procedure chosen followed closely Kadushin's theoretical concept of social circles and its operationalization in two

Sector ^b	Mean age	% Upper and upper middle class origin	% Academic degree	Mean years in position	% Party members	CDU/CSU	SPD	FDP	Left-right scale (mean)
Total (n = 1744)	52.7	35.7	68.5	6.4	52.3	51.3	28.9	17.8	5.5
<i>Politics</i> (n = 274)	49.4	24.7	64.9	4.2	100.0	47.5	41.9	10.2	5.0
A Cabinet members (Federal and State Governments) (n = 82)	50.5	33.8	76.5	3.9	100.0	48.1	44.4	7.4	5.2
B Other politicians (n = 192)	49.0	20.9	60.0	4.3	100.0	47.3	40.8	11.4	5.0
<i>Civil Service</i> (n = 296)	53.1	37.8	93.9	5.2	67.7	40.4	36.5	22.7	5.4
A Secretaries of State and Dept. Heads									
Federal Ministries (politically appointed) (n = 65)	53.7	44.3	92.2	4.7	64.6	26.2	49.2	24.6	5.2
B Secretaries of State Ministries (n = 100)	51.0	43.8	94.9	4.9	87.9	42.4	43.4	14.1	5.3
C Other (permanent subdept. heads in Fed. Ministries; heads of EC, Federal and State Agencies (n = 131)	54.4	30.0	93.9	5.6	53.8	45.9	24.6	28.7	5.5
<i>Business</i> (n = 459)	54.8	43.8	72.3	7.4	31.8	74.4	7.2	17.7	6.5
A Chairmen of boards in business enterprises and business associations (n = 184)	55.7	48.0	75.0	7.2	32.4	74.0	6.8	19.2	6.5
B Other members of boards in business and business associations (n = 238)	53.8	44.7	72.3	7.1	28.3	75.0	7.8	16.4	6.6

C Agricultural associations (n = 37)	56.4	17.1	59.5	9.5	51.4	73.0	5.4	18.9	6.5
<i>Trade Unions</i> (n = 87)	54.0	7.8	8.0	8.7	98.9	12.9	83.5	2.4	4.1
A Chairmen and vice-chairmen (n = 27)	55.1	8.7	11.1	8.5	96.3	11.5	84.6	3.8	4.0
B Other members of boards, heads of districts (n = 60)	53.4	7.4	6.7	8.8	100.0	13.6	83.1	1.7	4.2
<i>Mass Media</i> (n = 222)	51.9	30.7	47.3	8.0	33.5	49.5	23.8	23.8	5.3
A Chief editors of major newspapers, directors of broadcasting stations (n = 72)	54.6	43.8	59.7	9.1	29.2	55.9	19.1	25.0	5.6
B Other leading journalists in the press and in broadcasting (n = 150)	50.6	24.6	41.3	7.5	35.6	46.6	26.0	23.3	5.2
<i>Science</i> (n = 130)	51.3	39.1	96.2	5.9	18.6	50.0	23.7	25.4	5.5
<i>Military</i> (n = 43)	55.0	53.7	32.6	2.1	14.6	74.4	7.7	15.4	6.7
<i>Judiciary</i> (n = 38)	59.4	37.8	100.0	5.3	65.8	52.9	26.5	17.6	5.2
<i>Cultural elite</i> (n = 104)	48.2	48.4	61.5	7.7	21.4	20.0	41.0	27.0	4.3
<i>Other</i> (n = 91)	54.4	28.9	59.3	7.1	57.8	47.2	39.3	6.7	5.2

Notes:

^a Results for subsectors deviating for a response category by more than 10 percentage points from the percentage of the whole sector (for percentage-based indicators), or by more than two units from the sector mean (for indicators expressed as means), are printed in *italic*.

^b The assignment of respondents to the subgroups in the analysis deviates slightly from the classification used in previous tables.

previous studies of national elites in the United States (1971/72) and Australia (1975). Respondents were first asked to indicate the one national issue on which they had been most active during the last year. After having described the nature of this issue in some detail, they were further asked to name their most important interaction partners in the context of this issue.

This question can be regarded as measuring instrumental reputation for political influence. Since the focus was on issues of more than intra-organizational relevance, most respondents named political issues. The instrumental aspect was measured by asking for interaction partners, i.e. for persons who can be assumed to have tried to influence the respondent, or whom the respondent himself had tried to influence. Reputation was measured in so far as respondents were asked to name only the most important of their interaction partners. The number of designated persons was therefore presumably much smaller than the actual number of interaction partners.

With respect to the traditional approaches of elite identification, the nominations can be classified as a variety of the decisional approach based on reputational nominations. The instrumental as well as the reputational nature of these nominations ensures that they are not restricted solely to persons with formal power but that they also cover informal influence relations. The approach allows, in other words, supplementation of the original positional sample by persons with informal power. At the same time, persons holding only formal but no real decision-making power can be detected.

Network analytic procedures were then used to analyse these sociometric data.⁴ They allow the specification of the boundaries of elite circles which are defined as aggregations of highly overlapping, 'face-to-face' cliques. Additionally, centrality measures can be calculated for each member of the elite sample that are based on the number and type of persons to which the sample member is linked. They can, in turn, be used as a weight for the political influence of a person.

The analysis revealed in all three countries the existence of a relatively broad central circle that included members as well as non-members of the positional elite sample from all sectors and active on different issues. Its sector composition differed considerably from that of the original positional sample.

Table 2.8 allows comparison of the sector composition of the West German positional elite sample with that of the elite network and the central circle. The network includes all respondents who nominated

Table 2.8 Sector composition of sample, network, and central circle

Sector	Sample		Network		Sample members in network		Other persons in network		Central circle		Sample members in central circle		Other persons in central circle	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Politics SPD	199	6.3	172	14.0	143	14.6	29	11.6	90	16.1	83	16.8	7	10.9
CDU/CSU	208	6.6	168	13.7	137	14.0	31	12.4	84	15.0	73	14.7	11	17.2
FDP	45	1.4	59	4.8	43	4.4	16	6.4	34	6.1	29	5.9	5	7.8
Politics total ^a	452	14.3	403	32.8	323	33.0	80	31.9	209	37.4	185	37.4	24	37.5
Civil service	471	14.9	209	17.0	173	17.7	36	14.3	76	13.6	68	13.7	8	12.5
Business	688	21.7	138	11.2	126	12.9	12	4.8	66	11.8	64	12.9	2	3.1
Business associations	295	9.3	98	8.0	78	8.0	20	8.0	41	7.3	38	7.7	3	4.7
Trade unions	155	4.9	88	7.2	69	7.0	19	7.6	44	7.9	38	7.7	6	9.4
Mass media	354	11.2	107	8.7	80	8.2	27	10.8	46	8.2	39	7.9	7	10.9
Academic	179	5.7	96	7.8	64	6.5	32	12.7	46	8.2	37	7.5	9	14.1
Military	172	5.4	6	0.5	5	0.5	1	0.4	1	0.2	1	0.2	0	0.0
Culture	180	5.7	12	1.0	11	1.1	1	0.4	3	0.5	3	0.6	0	0.0
Other ^b	218	6.9	73	5.9	50	5.1	23	9.2	27	4.8	22	4.4	5	7.8
Total	3164	100.0	1230	100.1	979	100.0	251	100.1	559	99.9	495	100.0	64	100.0

Notes:

^a Including non-sample politicians with other party affiliation or whose party affiliation could not be ascertained

^b Including foreigners nominated

other persons and were themselves nominated by at least one other respondent. Non-respondents were included if they had received at least two nominations.

The results show that only about one-third of the members of the original positional elite sample belong to the network and only 15.6 per cent to the central circle. At the same time, however, only 251 persons who were not holders of elite positions entered the elite network, and even fewer of these, the central circle. Positional power and political influence as measured by the sociometric approach have therefore to be conceived as different though related concepts.

2.6 Conclusion

Compared to a general population survey, the collection of survey data on national elites poses a number of additional problems. The organization of the field work requires more effort with regard to getting interview appointments, adequate training of interviewers, and data protection. As a number of national elite surveys – not only in West Germany but also in other countries – have shown, the use of a highly structured questionnaire presents no obstacle and does not lead to insufficient response rates. The decision to use a structured interview guide has to depend solely on considerations of the research goal and not on imputed reservations of respondents to forced choice questions.

The validity of the results depends to a large extent on the sampling design. The positional approach is widely used for reasons of practicability. In most cases, however, the researcher does not just want to study a sample of position-holders in different sectors, but also wants to generalize the results to 'the elite', i.e. the group of the most influential persons in a society.

The positional approach precludes such inferences for several reasons. The first is that political influence and position are only imperfectly correlated. Secondly, due to the multidimensionality of power resources, power is not comparable across sectors. A uniform boundary criterion is needed in order to make cross-sectoral comparisons. The same is true for determining the overall size of an elite. Normally, the composition of the positional elite sample in terms of sectors, organizations, and positions, is used as a weight for the importance of the different subgroups. Varying degrees of power concentration and multiple position-holding, however, may preclude the realization of this intention and varying response rates may additionally distort the intended numerical relations. Finally,

unequal power within the elite precludes inferences from distributions of attitudes within the sample of respondents to future decision-making outputs.

In order to identify the politically influential among the members of a positional elite sample as well as among persons not holding top positions, we need, therefore, an additional empirical indicator of political influence. This should allow the determination of the boundaries of an elite and should at the same time provide a quantitative measure that can be used as a weight for individual respondents.

The design used in the United States, Australian and West German elite studies tries to make up for the above-mentioned shortcomings of the positional approach. Starting out from a positional sample, respondents were asked to name other persons relevant to decision-making in their own field of activity. A network analysis of these nominations allows the detection of the network of interactions among elites and the central circle of this network. It also provides a measure of the centrality of persons in the network of relevant decision-makers, a measure that can be conceived as a weight of political influence. This approach, therefore, enlarges substantially the evidence that can be obtained from national elite surveys.

Appendix: The sample of the West German elite study, 1981: sectors, organizations, and positions

1 Politics

- Federal government: chancellor, ministers, and junior ministers;
- State governments: prime ministers, ministers, and junior ministers;
- Federal legislature ('Bundestag'): president, vice-presidents, chairmen and deputy chairmen of the standing committees; leaders of the parliamentary parties;
- State legislatures: leaders of the parliamentary parties;
- Political parties: members of the national committees; chairmen and deputy chairmen of the state committees.

2 Civil Service

- Federal ministries: secretaries of state, department heads (political civil servants)^a; subdepartment heads (permanent civil servants);
- State ministries: secretaries of state (political civil servants);
- Federal and state agencies: directors, deputy directors.

3 Business

- Industrial, trade, and service corporations according to size of sales: chief executives, chairmen and deputy chairmen of the supervisory boards;
- Financial corporations (banks, insurances) according to size of sales:

- chief executives, chairmen and deputy chairmen of the supervisory boards;
- Federal bank: members of the executive board ('Zentralbankrat').
- 4 Business Associations
- Peak associations of industry and employers: boards of directors, chief executives;
 - Agricultural associations: presidents, vice-presidents, chief executives.
- 5 Trade Unions
- German trade union federation (Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund, DGB) and its member unions: members of executive boards, district heads;
 - Union of employees (Deutsche Angestelltengewerkschaft, DAG): members of executive board, department heads.
- 6 Mass Media
- Press (dailies, weeklies, and magazines) according to number of circulation: executive managers, chief editors, chief editorial staff of political and economic sections;
 - Broadcasting networks: executive managers, program directors, chief editorial staff of political and economic sections.
- 7 Academic
- Universities: presidents;
 - Non-commercial research institutes: presidents, department heads;
 - Research departments of large industrial corporations: department heads;
 - Public and private research foundations: presidents and chief executives;
 - Economic advisory committee to the federal government: all members.
- 8 Military
- West German armed forces ('Bundeswehr'): all generals and admirals including those in the NATO staff.
- 9 Cultural
- Press and broadcasting networks: chief editorial staff of cultural and entertainment sections;
 - Publishing companies: directors, chief executives, and editors.
- 10 Other
- Judiciary: presidents and chairmen ('Senatsvorsitzende') of all federal courts including the federal constitutional court;
 - Local elites: mayors and administrative heads of the biggest cities;
 - Churches: protestant and catholic bishops;
 - Professional associations: presidents and managing directors of the associations of the medical, legal, and cultural professions as well as the civil servants' association (Deutscher Beamtenbund);
 - Consumers' associations ('Arbeitsgemeinschaft der Verbraucher'): presidents, vice-presidents, managing directors.

Note:

^a Political civil servants can be removed from their positions and sent into temporary retirement without further explanation.

Notes

- 1 We have tried to make up for this shortcoming by including some open-ended questions on the most important problems which the Federal Republic is facing today.
- 2 The study was carried out by a research team at the University of Mannheim. Principal investigators were Rudolf Wildenmann, Max Kaase and the author. It was supported by a grant of the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG). The major part of the field work was organized by GETAS, Bremen. ZUMA, Mannheim, provided assistance during all stages of the project and particularly in the preparation of the data sets. The Zentralarchiv für empirische Sozialforschung, Cologne, produced a machine-readable code-book containing the marginal distributions of the answers for the different elite subgroups (sectors): authors were Rudolf Wildenmann, Max Kaase, Ursula Hoffmann-Lange, Albrecht Kutteroff, Gunter Wolf, *Führungsschicht in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland 1981*. Mannheim: Universität Mannheim, 1982.
- 3 See Appendix for a list of the sectors and positions included in the study.
- 4 The programs SOCK and COMPLT developed by Richard D. Alba were used for this purpose.