ABSTRACT

While serving as the Chancellor of West Germany, Konrad Adenauer put much emphasis on economic stability and good relations with Western powers. Adenauer, who had served as the Mayor of Cologne before the outbreak of World War II, entered the Chancellorship in 1949 at the age of 73, and, therefore, some of his allies in the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) and the Christian Social Union (CSU) assumed that his tenure would not last beyond his first term in office. However, Adenauer would defy the skeptics and serve as Chancellor until the age of 87. After he left office, he sat down to write his autobiographical work Memoirs 1945-1953, which, as the title suggests, focuses on his life during the early days of the new republic. This essay will provide examples from these memoirs and the way in which they help to explain the political success of the CDU/CSU in the 1949 elections. Firstly, the economic circumstances of the Western zones in the early post-war period will be considered in relation to how economics influenced the outcome of the elections. Secondly, German demographics in the period will be discussed and the way in which they contributed to Adenauer’s victory in 1949. Thirdly, the significance of foreign policy will be considered and the way in which Adenauer’s emphasis on Western cooperation would benefit him in the elections.
BIOGRAPHY

Baldur Arnarson graduated from a Bachelor of Journalism (BJ) from the University of Queensland in December 2005. While completing his final year of study, Mr. Arnarson conducted an unpublished survey into the effects of the Internet on newspapers in Queensland. He resides in his native town of Reykjavík, Iceland, where he works as a reporter in the foreign news division of the newspaper Morgunblaðið. He intends to return to UQ and to use the survey material towards an Honours thesis in journalism.
ADENAUER’S MEMOIRS AND THE POLITICAL SUCCESS OF THE CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATIC UNION IN POST-WAR WEST GERMANY

‘I have not tried to give a complete picture of Germany in those days: I am only writing down what I remember, and must therefore limit myself to recording a few facts that strike me as characteristic or worthy of note.’


When the first elections to the West German Bundestag took place in August 1949 most political analysts predicted that the Social Democratic Party (SPD) would emerge as the largest party in parliament. To the surprise and frustration of SPD leader Kurt Schumacher the contrary occurred, with the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) and its sister party the Christian Socialist Union (CSU) obtaining eight more seats than the SPD. The CDU leader and first Chancellor of West Germany (FRG), Konrad Adenauer, was instrumental in the party’s success in these elections, with the CDU/CSU campaign being much oriented towards his personality as an authoritarian yet caring leader. Late in his life Adenauer sat down to write his autobiographical work Memoirs 1945 – 1953, which, as the title suggests, focuses on his life during the early days of the new republic. Throughout this essay examples from these memoirs will be discussed and the way in which they help to explain the political success of the CDU/CSU in the 1949 elections. In the first part, particular attention will be paid to the economic circumstances in the Western zones during the early post-war period and the way in which Adenauer attributes CDU/CSU’s success in the elections to its social market economic policy. In the second part, particular attention will be devoted to changes in German demographics in the early post-war period and how they would contribute to the importance of religious affiliations for the outcome of the elections. In the final part, the role of foreign policy in the elections will be discussed in the context of Adenauer’s general argument that his party succeeded in convincing the electorate that international cooperation was the key to much needed economic revival.

The results of the 1949 elections were a ‘grievious shock’ to SPD leader Kurt Schumacher, who had expected the party to emerge as the victor from the elections. The outcome, however, was a very close contest between the CDU/CSU and the SPD, with the former obtaining 31.0 per cent of the vote cast and the latter 29.2 per cent. In total, the CDU/CSU polled 7.36 million votes against the 6.93 million votes cast in SPD’s favour, making the CDU/CSU the strongest force in the new Bundestag. Regarding these results, Adenauer writes that the ‘election campaign had been fought primarily on ideological questions but there was no doubt that economic questions had also played a decisive role’. The significance of the latter is underlined by his sombre recollections of arriving back to Cologne – the city in which he served as a Mayor before the war – to witness how more than half of the city’s houses and public buildings had been totally destroyed by allied bombing.

Before further discussing the importance of economic policies for the outcome of the 1949 elections, it is useful to briefly discuss the economic circumstances in the Western zones in the early post-war period. To begin with, Fulbrook has argued that the combined effects of the Marshall Plan and high demand for jobs during a period characterised by low wages and a stream of refugees from the GDR contributed to a national consensus towards rebuilding in the Federal Republic, as opposed to an inclination towards rocking “the economic boat” with radical measures. In addition, the absence of any armaments burden, singlemindedness of purpose towards rebuilding the war-torn nation and a general avoidance of conflicts between employers and trade unions aided the economic revival of the FRG in the post-war period.

Furthermore, investment in the FRG was very high compared with that in other countries in Europe at the time further stimulating economic growth. At the same time, the loss of poorer agricultural regions that had for a long period been an economic drain aided ‘the economy to concentrate on reconstruction and the conquest of foreign markets’. Direct foreign economic assistance was also a contributing factor in the economic revival of the FRG, with foreign aid to the Western zones in 1948 totalling US$1.088 billion, including US$142 million in the form of Marshall Plan economic assistance.
The cumulative economic benefit brought by these factors coincided with the effects of the 1948 currency reform, which Kirchheimer has argued to have been ‘socially discriminatory but marvelously effective in spurring reconstruction’. Regarding this measure, Adenauer argues that the economic upswing caused by the reform was ‘astounding’, providing the German population in the Bizone with a much needed reason for optimism. This analysis is, for example, supported by Nicholls’s discussion of how the reform triggered the so-called ‘shop-window miracle’ on Monday 20 June 1948, when ‘Germans went to their local stores and markets to find goods which had long since disappeared “under the counter” once again on open display’. Importantly, Adenauer associates the implementation of these reforms, which saw the old Reichsmark (RM) replaced by the new Deutsche Mark (DM), with the free market policies of the Economic Council in Frankfurt in the two Anglo-American zones. Similarly, the Chancellor argues that the CDU/CSU played a ‘leading role’ in the Bizonal Economic Council, thus ‘introducing a radical change from the economic policy followed up to that time and initiating the so-called “social market economy”’. Moreover, Adenauer puts forth the argument that the success of the implementation of the social market economic policy in the two Anglo-American zones was noticeable, while the socially planned economy of the French zone ‘did not experience anything remotely like the same recovery and the same economic upswing’. Generally speaking, this analysis is a part of Adenauer’s argument that the success of the CDU/CSU in the 1949 elections can to great extend be attributed to its advocacy of soziale Marktwirtschaft, or a social market economy.

I realised, I said, that since the electorate had voted as it had, the policy of the Frankfurt Economic Council simply must be continued. In the votes polled by the Social Democrats and the Communists about eight million votes had expressed themselves in favour of a socialist economy, while thirteen million (adding the votes of the FDP and of the other non-socialist parties to those of the CDU and CSU) chose the social market economy.

Regarding the definition of what constitutes a social market economy the Chancellor writes:

The ‘Social Market Economy’ produces the maximum economic benefit and social justice for all by letting free individuals make an efficient contribution to an order that embodies a social conscience.

One of the first decisive steps of the CDU/CSU towards a social market economy was the decision of its leadership to abandon the Ahlen Programme, which had ‘committed the CDU/CSU to public ownership of major enterprises and a form of planned economy’. This move was influenced by two factors in particular. Firstly, both the CDU/CSU and the SPD were forced to take into consideration that the ‘dominant view of the time was that a small clique of industrialists, military men, and landowners had, by their massive concentration of power, caused the collapse of the German economy and democracy and had finally carried Hitler to power’. As a result, the Catholics and the Protestants, who arguably formed the heartland of the CDU/CSU support base, denounced the materialism of the Nazi regime in an attempt to distance themselves from anything that had fostered the Nazis.

Advocating laissez-faire capitalism would, therefore, arguably have been counter-productive for the CDU/CSU campaign considering the national consensus against such economic policy. No doubt this explains why Adenauer’s finance minister Ludwig Erhard had tried to distance himself from laissez-faire economics in his public speeches. Also, the collective aspect of the social market policy appealed psychologically to voters in a period when reconstruction of housing and general infrastructure was the key issue on the agenda. This popular mood also explains why Erhard emphasised that he was ‘fully convinced that a market economy must develop for the good of society as a whole and not merely for the benefit of hardheaded and enterprising individuals’. Similarly, Adenauer argues in his memoirs that the social market economy appealed to Christians because its emphasis on freedom was a ‘basic affirmation of its belief in the liberty of the citizen’.

Adenauer’s attempt to credit the implementation of the social market economy is, however, arguably effected by his tendency to interpret the political history of the period in his own personal favour. For instance, Mierzejewski has discussed the tension between Adenauer and Erhard and how the former wanted the latter to resign from his post in the Economic Ministry early year 1951, in part on the grounds that he had failed to anticipate the coal shortage in the FRG at the time. Moreover,
Regarding the SPD’s response to the policy of social market economy, Adenauer argues that the social powers before and after the elections of 1949.

In a similar vein, Adenauer credits the implementation of the social market economy to the Bizonal Economic Council, thus arguably downplaying Erhard’s role in the process. More importantly, Adenauer does not devote space to discussion of how he regarded the “colorful speaker” Erhard to be a threat to his dominance within the CDU/CSU alliance during their campaigning in 1949. Furthermore, Adenauer does not discuss his decision to appoint Erhard as President “in order to bar him from the succession to the chancellorship” before deciding to become a President himself before again reversing the decision.

Similarly, Wighton argues that when choosing ministers Adenauer prevented the rise and appointment of “[a]ll party opponents who might provide an alternative leader”, in particular those who adhered to the left wing of the CDU/CSU. In short, the exclusion of this chapter in the relationship between two of the most influential leaders of the CDU/CSU alliance brings into question the motives behind the Chancellor’s memoirs, and the way in which he credits himself for having supported the free market philosophy behind the soziale Marktwirtschaft. Also of interest to this discussion, Wighton argues that ‘Adenauer’s uncompromising hostility to the Allied Powers, had prevented any positive steps being taken’ during his request for Allied security guarantee in the months before the start of the Korean War mid-year 1950. In brief, this aspect of his diplomatic relations sharply contradicts Adenauer’s discussion of what he regards to have been generally friendly relations with the western powers before and after the elections of 1949.

Regarding the SPD’s response to the policy of social market economy, Adenauer argues that the social democrats were generally opposed to economic liberalism, referring to Schumacher’s speech on 12 September 1948 in which the SPD leader denounced the liberal emphasis on individualism as anti-Christian. In general, Adenauer argues that Schumacher’s response reflected his failure to understand the mood of the German people. This critique is, for example, supported by Epstein’s argument that the SPD leader failed to notice that ‘Nazism and communism had discredited collective economic policy’. On the other hand, the above discussion of the policy of social market economy suggests that followers of both parties adhered to some sort of collectivism in the early post-war period. Moreover, the re-emergence of consumerism would weaken the ability of the SPD to appeal to class consciousness. For example, Hiscocks has argued that the material benefits experienced in the 1950s influenced the SPD supporters in particular as ‘German workers no longer thought of themselves as the proletariat and victims of class oppression.’

The Adenauer government’s success regarding the economic reconstruction of West Germany remains, however, a debated subject, with some historians suggesting that the reality of the economic situation did not fit with the rosy pictures painted by the Chancellor in his memoirs, and his overall argument that his party’s social market economy immediately proved superior to the social economic model advocated by Schumacher. For example, Bark and Gress have argued that if an election would have been held in West Germany in 1950 ‘it undoubtedly would have produced a large victory for the SPD’, on the grounds that direct unemployment of two million and economic uncertainty had made Adenauer’s government extremely unpopular. Apart from providing another example of political events that Adenauer avoids discussing in his memoirs, this comment is of particular interest to this discussion considering that Bark and Gress generally apply a relatively conservative approach to their history, exemplified by their rather one-sided praise of the role of CDU leader Helmut Kohl in the unification of Germany.

Furthermore, Hiscocks has discussed how a swing in favour of the Social Democrats during elections in two of the Länder in November 1950 ‘clearly reflected the opposition to rearmament’, also arguing that had ‘federal elections been held at about this time, the government might well have been defeated’. Moreover, Nicholls has argued that ‘Erhard’s free-market experiment lasted only a relatively short time’ and that the Korean War brought the economy of the FRG much needed revival. This analysis is supported by Bark’s and Gress’s general argument that the Korean War reversed the economic slowdown by increasing demands for some of West Germany’s key products.

Reference was made earlier to Adenauer’s claim that the social market economy policy had helped his party to appeal to Christian voters during the 1949 elections. Therefore, it is appropriate to devote the next section of this essay to the role of religion in the elections, and the way in which changes in demographics in the early post-war period would strengthen Catholic/Protestant CDU/CSU supporters
as a political force in West Germany. To begin with, Smith has discussed how the centralisation of the organisational structure of the CDU, which was previously divided between the three Western zones, would strengthen the party in the 1949 elections, thus concluding that an ‘all-German CDU would have been in a much weaker position’.\textsuperscript{xlv} Carr has put forth similar analysis, referring to the statistics that the number of Catholics in the FRG was 45 per cent of the population compared with 30 per cent of the population in pre-war and undivided Germany.\textsuperscript{xlvi}

Moreover, religious suppression during the Nazi period had brought Catholics and Protestants together.\textsuperscript{xlvii} In this regard Mitchell has argued that:

Though political cooperation with Protestants had been a consistent, if largely rhetorical, goal of German political Catholicism since the 1870s, Catholic and Protestant efforts to interconfessionalize the Catholic Center Party before 1933 had foundered on their mutual conviction that the two confessions grounded their politics in two substantially different worldviews.\textsuperscript{xlviii}

Similarly, Smith has argued that the cohesion of the Catholic vote was a legacy from the Center Party, also suggesting that the party’s religious affiliations enabled it to appeal to a wide spectrum of the electorate ‘[r]egardless of their class affiliations’.\textsuperscript{xlix} In Adenauer’s view, Christianity separated the CDU/CSU and the SPD supporters on a deeper level:

I explained that the election results showed quite unambiguously that the overwhelming majority of the German people did not want to have anything to do with socialism of any shade. The elections had produced an impressive affirmation of the basic ideas of the Christian and democratic view of the state and society.\textsuperscript{i}

Regarding the origins of the significance of Christianity for Adenauer’s political thought, Osterheld has argued that in his early teens the Chancellor was influenced by the Swiss lawyer and philosopher Hilty, who led the young Adenauer towards the path of ‘practical Christianity’.\textsuperscript{li} Unfortunately, Adenauer does not discuss Hilty’s influence on his religious affiliations, which would no doubt have provided some useful insight into his intellectual development. Further, Adenauer’s assertion that ‘only Christian precepts guarantee justice, order, and moderation’\textsuperscript{lii} provides an example of his vehement opposition to socialism, whose emphasis on collectivism he regarded to be ‘bowed to lead to a subordination of the rights of and dignity of the individual to the state’.\textsuperscript{liii} In general, this analysis helps to explain why Adenauer was strongly opposed to the idea that the CDU/CSU should pursue a formation of a grand coalition with the SPD after the 1949 elections on the grounds that it was impossible to reconcile their ideological differences:

If a coalition was made up of elements that diametrically disagreed in the most important respects, and especially if these elements were about equally strong, there was a danger that such a coalition government would be paralysed and remain sterile.\textsuperscript{liv}

Further evidence of the importance of the religious vote for the outcome of the 1949 elections can be found in Zuckerman’s and Lichbach’s research into the political and religious affiliations of the supporters of the SPD and the CDU/CSU in the early 1950s. Their results indicate that 43 per cent of the SPD supporters in the 1953 elections adhered to the ‘Traditional Left’, 27 per cent to ‘Mixed Attachment’, 20 per cent to the ‘Middle Class’ and only 11 per cent to ‘Roman Catholic’ (before plunging to only 3 per cent in the 1957 elections).\textsuperscript{lv} According to their figures, the contrast with the CDU/CSU supporters was striking, with 12 per cent adhering to the ‘Traditional Left’, 28 per cent to Mixed Attachment, 28 per cent to Middle Class and 35 per cent to Roman Catholic.\textsuperscript{lvi}

In short, these figures support Frye’s argument that the German middle class had grown in size since the Weimar period as a distinguishable social group with mixed party affiliations.\textsuperscript{lvi} On the other hand, the categorisation of these two parties’ supporters is somewhat misleading since it suggests that the West German population was actively engaged with the political process. The available evidence, however, points to the contrary. For instance, Kirchheimer has discussed how a representative sample from the 1950s found that 71 per cent of the sample had not attended a political meeting since 1945, while 48 per cent claimed that ‘they had never, in private discussions, even casually or occasionally alluded to political subjects’.\textsuperscript{lvii}

The political apathy of the West German electorate undoubtedly leaves room for interpretation when it comes to an analysis of their political affiliations. Perhaps most significantly the electorate’s lack of
interest in political affairs supports the general historical analysis that party affiliation was by and large shaped by class (SPD) and religion (CDU/CSU), suggesting that CDU/CSU’s relatively minor margin of victory in the 1949 elections can arguably be attributed to the ability of its leaders to appeal to voters whose political identity was not based on sectional interest. This analysis is supported by Adenauer’s claim that the CDU/CSU was a ‘people’s party counting members of all strata of the population among its voters’.\textsuperscript{lxv}

Economics and religion aside, Adenauer considers foreign policy to have been the third most important issue in the 1949 elections.\textsuperscript{lxv} Importantly, this analysis relates to his argument that the CDU/CSU succeeded in convincing the electorate that international cooperation was the key to economic growth,\textsuperscript{lxvi} therefore suggesting that a distinction between international collective interests and the Federal Republic’s national interests was obsolete and counterproductive. This he supports with various references and the general argument that good relations with neighbouring countries were essential for the future prosperity of the Federal Republic. For example, he argues that ‘[a]s a result of the occupation, the Ruhr Statute, the Marshall Plan and so forth, Germany was more closely connected with foreign countries than ever before’.\textsuperscript{lix} This analysis, however, ignores the above-mentioned tensions between the Chancellor and the Allied powers, thus somewhat arguably undermining the credibility of his discussion.

In brief, Adenauer’s ability to convince the electorate of the relationship between international cooperation and economic growth was a cunning political move which drew the attention away from SPD’s emphasis on German unification, with both Schumacher and his successor Erich Ollenhauer both opposing ‘German membership of the Coal and Steel Community, the European Economic Community and NATO on the grounds that such commitment diminished the changes of reunification’.\textsuperscript{lxx} The SPD leader’s beating of the nationalist drum in the 1949 elections,\textsuperscript{lxxi} however, failed to pay dividends among ‘the surprisingly pro-Western and non-nationalist German electorate’.\textsuperscript{lxxii} In sum, this analysis suggests that Schumacher may have failed to read the mood of the West German people and its longing for an international recognition in the European post-war landscape. On the other hand, the Chancellor avoids discussing the support of some sections of the West German population to unification, which he considers to have been neutralised by a fear of Soviet attack.

This points leads to the fact that the Chancellor also used ideological arguments to convince the electorate about the need for Western cooperation. This tactic was predominantly evident in his exploitation of the tensions of the early Cold War period. Fulbrook has discussed this tactic arguing that Adenauer succeeded in using the electorate’s fear of the ‘bolshevist threat’ to outweigh ‘the natural desire of most Germans to see their country unified’, therefore reducing the electoral impact of Schumacher’s nationalism.\textsuperscript{lxxiii} This fear was no doubt fueled by the overthrow of ‘Czech democracy by Stalin in February 1948, which, more than anything else, convinced public opinion that Stalin posed serious threats to Western countries’.\textsuperscript{lxxiv} Furthermore, Adenauer considers the blockade of Berlin on 24 June 1948 and the subsequent Western response to the blocking to have convinced the electorate that his warnings of a ‘bolshevist threat’ were well founded.\textsuperscript{lxxv}

After having considered the significance of the policy of social market economy, religion and foreign policy as contributing factors in the success of the CDU/CSU in the 1949 elections, it is perhaps appropriate to conclude this analysis with a brief discussion of how outside factors helped the CDU/CSU in the elections. To begin with, Adenauer makes a frequent reference to Schumacher’s policy mistakes, concluding that they contributed to his party’s defeat in the elections.\textsuperscript{lxxvi} Similarly, Hiscocks has discussed Schumacher’s lack of interest in the day-to-day running of the SPD, concluding that he ‘was like the commander of an army that already existed, but which had little power of attracting young recruits’.\textsuperscript{lxxvii} Further, Carr has argued that the party’s socialist insistence on public ownership and a planned economy frightened away voters concerned with preserving their material gains since 1948 ‘whilst its old-fashioned anti-clericalism alienated many Catholics, now a considerable force in the GFR’.\textsuperscript{lxxviii}

Furthermore, Heidenheimer and Prittie have both described Schumacher as impatient, with the former arguing that his aggressive claims towards the leadership of the party were the tactics ‘of the sick leader who feared that death might cheat him of his taste of power’.\textsuperscript{lxxix} Regarding Prittie’s analysis, it should be noted that he is generally uncritical of the Chancellor who he considers to have been instrumental in the success of the CDU/CSU in the 1949 elections, concluding that ‘[a]mong the post-war politicians of the future Federal Republic of Germany, Adenauer was a giant among pygmies’.\textsuperscript{lxxxi}
Finally, Adenauer’s critique of Schumacher’s political ambitions ironically draws the attention away from his own Machiavellian tendency to apply any means available to fulfill his political ambitions. For example, Seydoux has argued that the Chancellor’s taste for power increased with the years, therefore supporting Wighton’s general analysis that Adenauer exercised ‘dictatorial powers’ during his fourteen years reign as the Chancellor of the GFR.

As this essay has discussed, Adenauer attributes the success of the CDU/CSU in the 1949 elections to great extent to its policy of social market economy, which he considers to have appealed to Christian voters in particular. Moreover, Adenauer claims that the Christian roots of the CDU/CSU helped voters to express their choice against the secular and socialist SPD. The Chancellor also emphasises his success in convincing voters about the relationship between international cooperation and economic growth, thus undermining Schumacher’s nationalism and general emphasis on unification. Similarly, Adenauer argues that the CDU/CSU involvement in post-war economic reconstruction helped the party to convince voters of its credentials in economic affairs, such as through its work in the Bizonal Economic Council.

The success of Erhard’s economic policies in the period between the 1949 elections and the commencement of the Korean War in 1950 has, however, been questioned by some scholars, with the example of Bark and Gress, who have argued that the economic revival of the FRG in the first two years of its existence was not as continuous as Adenauer claims in his memoirs. Furthermore, Adenauer’s claim that the 1949 election results revealed the superiority of the social market economy over planned economy in the minds of the electorate is also arguably an oversimplification, considering that such analysis downplays the significance of other factors, such as anti-capitalist views formulated by the bitter experience of the Nazi period. Moreover, much evidence suggests that such analysis is incorrect considering the Chancellor’s aforementioned opposition to the arguments behind the economic philosophy of Erhard. Another fault in Adenauer’s memoirs is his general tendency to describe his relations with his party members as democratic and straightforward, thus excluding all evidence of what Wighton regards to have been the Chancellor’s dictatorial administration of his party.

Concerning the role of religion, the available literature on voters’ religious affiliations, and scholarly analysis of the general changes in the demographics of post-war Germany, strongly suggests that religion played a major role in the outcome of the 1949 elections, thus supporting Adenauer’s aforementioned argument that the Christian roots of the CDU/CSU were decisive in the campaign. On the other hand, his claim that the elections revealed the moral superiority of Christianity is impossible to objectively verify, therefore bringing such assertions into question. Regarding the political apathy of the West German population discussed by Kirchheimer, the public’s lack of interest in political discussion further supports Adenauer’s argument that religion and class affiliations played an important role in the elections. Finally, Adenauer is also correct in his analysis of how Schumacher’s intense personality may have contributed to the defeat of his party, with the example of Heidenheimer’s discussion of the SPD leader’s aggressiveness and impatience during the first election campaign of the Federal Republic.

REFERENCES


2 The abbreviation FRG stands for the Federal Republic of Germany, or West Germany, while GDR stands for German Democratic Republic, or East Germany, as indicated in this essay. For the sake of stylistic variety the FRG is also referred to as the Federal Republic or West Germany. Moreover, Adenauer is throughout the essay often referred to as the ‘Chancellor’ although strictly speaking he did not hold that post before the 1949 elections.

This essay does not discuss the initial Land elections in 1946, the fusion of the British and American zones in 1947, the effects of the Frankfurt Charter of 1948 or any other of the major events that contributed to the establishment of the Federal Republic in 1949. Rather, the focus is on several key issues in which there was a continuity from the pre-republic period and until the elections. Moreover, the term 'Bizone' refers to the two Anglo-American zones.

The GDR was defined as the Soviet zone of occupation until the GDR was formally founded on the 7th of October 1949.