

DEMOCRATIC AUDIT

AMS in Germany – and in Britain?

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The Additional Member System (AMS) currently used for *Bundestag* (lower-house) elections in Germany has been operating in something like its present form since 1949, when that country's post-war constitution was drawn up. For most of this period West Germany was the only major democracy with such electoral arrangements. However, in the past decade or so, what was known as the "German system" has been exported to many democracies around the world, and German AMS is just one case of what have become known as "mixed-member" electoral systems.

This report begins with the origins of German AMS and an outline sketch of the system, filling in certain details that are crucial to understanding its operation. The main body of the report assesses the impact of AMS on German parties and governments, and explores the behaviour of voters and legislators under the system. The concluding section summarises German experience with AMS, and speculates on what the key features imply for the UK, were it to switch to that system.

Introduction to German AMS

The flourishing of mixed-member electoral systems around the world reflects their claim to offer the "best of both worlds": a direct line of accountability between voters and their local representatives, and proportionality in order to represent a full range of party preferences. That such a compromise solution was forged in post-war Germany reflects the different goals and outlooks of those negotiating over the form of the new electoral system. The western powers advocated a majoritarian system that, like their own, featured direct MP-constituent links. Yet *Länder* [regional] governments, charged with drafting their own electoral laws, were unanimous in favouring proportional systems, largely on grounds of fairness.¹

Meanwhile, the regrouping parties were divided along the same lines: the largest party, the Christian Democratic Union/Christian Social Union (hereafter CDU), favoured the majoritarian system that would benefit it most; while the Social Democrats (SPD) and smaller parties were committed to a proportional (PR) system that would safeguard their representation. These rival interests are reflected not only in the basic structure of German AMS, but also in the modifications and details of the system.

The German system is a mixed-member proportional (MMP) system with a fixed four-year term. It is a mixed-member system because there are two types of seat in the *Bundestag*: half the MPs are directly elected in single-member constituencies; the other half are indirectly elected from party lists.² In parallel, voters have two votes: the first (*Erststimme*) for a constituency candidate, the second (*Zweitstimme*) for a *Land*-level party list.³ It is a proportional system because the list seats are allocated so as to generate an overall outcome that is proportional to the second votes.

¹ This may be surprising, given the political instability of the Weimar Republic, but in fact the problems of that era were attributed more to the impersonal list system than to its pure proportionality (Jesse 2000).

² In the first (1949) federal election, at the behest of the Allied powers, the ratio of constituency seats to list seats was 60:40. It was changed in time for the 1953 election, and has remained at 50:50 since.

³ This, too, was different in 1949, when voters had just one (constituency MP) vote.

The number of seats allocated to party lists is calculated according to the Hare-Niemeyer largest-remainders method in a single nationwide constituency of 598 seats.⁴ Then each party's quota of seats is allocated (again according to Hare-Niemeyer) among its *Land* lists. Having thus calculated the number of seats in a *Land* to which a party is entitled, the next stage is to subtract from this the number of constituencies won by the party in that *Land*. The remaining seats are filled by list candidates. Thus, the two components of the system are connected: the list component serves to counteract the disproportionality inherent in the constituency component.

A single national constituency allows for highly proportional allocation. But there are two constraints on the proportionality of German AMS. The first, and most important, is the threshold. Parties receive their allocation of list seats only if they win 5% or more of second votes *or* if they win three or more constituency seats (the "alternative threshold"). Since parties winning such a small proportion of the vote are unlikely to win constituency seats – unless their support is highly geographically concentrated – 5% is typically regarded as the effective threshold. The purpose of this barrier is to stabilise the party system, and to avoid the fragmentation characteristic of many pure PR systems (like the Weimar Republic). To this end, a degree of proportionality is sacrificed.

The second constraint arises from the possibility that a party's tally of constituency seats in a *Land* could exceed the total number of seats that it would be entitled to given its share of second votes.⁵ In such cases, the constituency results stand and the party keeps these surplus seats (*Überhangmandate*). As a result, the total number of seats in the *Bundestag* is not fixed. The phenomenon of surplus seats is a manifestation of the primacy of "first votes": proportionality is again sacrificed, in order that the results of the constituency elections may stand.

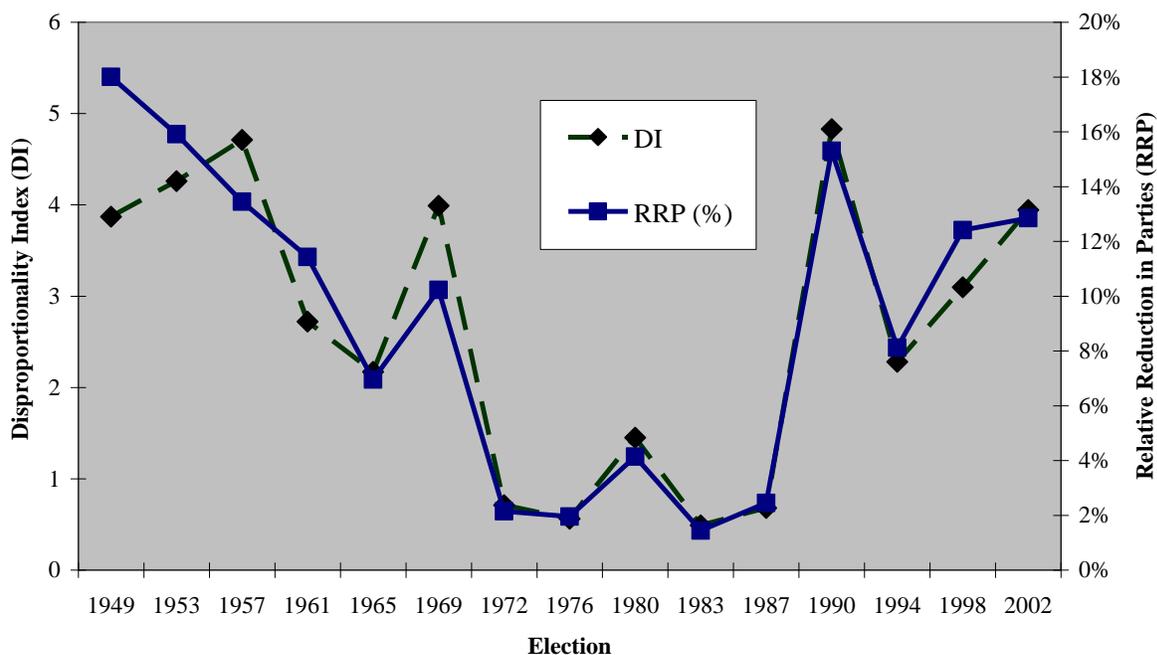
AMS and proportionality

Under the broader heading of proportionality, electoral systems can be judged by two (related) yardsticks: their distortive effect – the divergence of seat shares from vote shares; and their reductive effect – the number of parties that win votes but are excluded by the system from the allocation of seats. Gallagher's (1991) Disproportionality Index (DI) is designed to gauge the former, and Taagepera and Shugart's (1989) Relative Reduction in Parties (RRP) measures the latter. These statistics, calculated for each *Bundestag* election since 1949, are reported in the table in the Appendix. The data are charted in the figure below, giving a picture of the performance of German AMS over time.

⁴ The D'Hondt electoral formula was used up until 1987. Shifting to Hare-Niemeyer was intended to increase the proportionality of the system; it did so, but to a very limited extent (Scarow 2003).

⁵ For example, in 1998, the SPD won every constituency seat in Brandenburg. Only had it won 50% or more of second votes – which it did not – would the party have been entitled to all of these seats.

Disproportionality and Relative Reduction in Parties, Germany 1949-2002



The DI and RRP have different metrics, so the chart has two vertical axes. These are aligned in order to show just how closely the two series track one another. From the inception of the AMS system, both the DI and RRP fall steadily until 1969. Then, following an upward blip in that year,⁶ both distortion and reduction are minimal until the reunification election of 1990. The downward trend during the 1950s and 1960s reflects the adjustment of voters and parties alike to the new system, and specifically to the impact of the threshold. Various small parties, with no prospect either of winning constituency seats or crossing the threshold, ceased to put up candidates. And those that continued to run were increasingly ignored by electors keen to avoid wasting their votes.

So, by the 1970s, the impact of the electoral system was negligible: aside from the three parties that invariably crossed the threshold, most of those competing in elections were so small that they would not have won a seat even in the absence of the 5% barrier. This changed in 1990. The unification election saw a change in the rules, with a separate 5% threshold for West and East Germany and introduced a new electorate that had yet to adjust to the operation of the system and its threshold. A third reason is that surplus seats, irrelevant for most of the post-war period, became a significant feature of the results in 1990 and subsequent elections. Yet the main cause of increased distortion and reduction following 1990 is that more parties competed in elections and have continued to do so, despite a relatively high threshold.

Thus the 5% threshold is the key source of potential deviation from proportionality in German AMS.⁷ The impact of this threshold is in practice difficult to assess, however,

⁶ This upturn is due to the sudden emergence of the National Democratic Party (NPD), which took 4.3% of the vote but of course therefore failed to cross the threshold.

⁷ This also makes sense in a comparative perspective. The DI in Germany is typically higher than in countries like Denmark and the Netherlands; all three allocate seats in one nationwide constituency, but neither of the latter two has a demanding threshold.

because changes in the party system can also account for shifts in the DI and RRP indices. These indices may have been so low in the 1970s because parties and voters were subject to the psychological impact of the threshold, dissuading them from wasting effort and votes respectively. Yet it may be that the party system had simplified independently of the electoral system, rendering the threshold less relevant. To clarify the impact of AMS it is necessary to consider the party system in more detail.

AMS and the German party system

Before and since the introduction of AMS, German politics have been dominated by two parties: the CDU and the SPD. It is on the periphery of this two-party system that significant changes have taken place. A number of small parties left the scene during the 1950s, leaving just the Free Democrats (FDP) alongside the big two, and between 1961 and 1980 those were the only three groupings in the *Bundestag*. In the 1980s, the Greens began to poll strongly and entered Parliament; then, following unification, the former communist PDS – though largely confined to the East – has done likewise. Germany has therefore been described first as a “two-and-a-half”, then a “two-and-two-halves”, and now even as a “two-and-three-halves” party system. How has the electoral system influenced this evolution?

As noted above, the swift de-fragmentation of the 1950s can plausibly be attributed to the 5% threshold. Yet political trends can be called on to explain the same result: federalism reduced the salience of centre-periphery conflict and eliminated regional parties; extreme parties on both right and left were banned; and both major parties worked hard to present themselves as catch-all groupings able to monopolise their side of the spectrum. So the threshold may have accelerated the simplification of Germany’s party system, but did not necessarily cause it (Capoccia 2002: 193-5). As for the emergence of the Greens and later of the PDS, neither development was much impeded by the electoral system. The Greens quickly surmounted the threshold, and have remained in the *Bundestag* since 1983. The PDS took until 1998 to overcome the 5% hurdle nationwide, but had won representation in 1990 by crossing the temporary East German threshold, and in 1994 by winning four constituency seats.

In short: the electoral system could be argued to have had relatively little influence on the German party system. Where political factors pointed to a party’s demise, then the threshold at most hastened it. Where – as with the Greens and the PDS – an important new constituency of voters emerged in support of a party, then the threshold has not stood in that party’s way. This is not to say that smaller parties can ignore the electoral system; indeed, the need to meet the 5% requirement dominates their thinking at election time. Nonetheless, the German experience clearly confounds any mechanistic view of the party system as determined by the electoral system. Indeed, for most of the AMS period, the German party system has closely resembled those predicted to emerge from majoritarian electoral competition.

AMS, coalitions, and governments

The choice of electoral system has been much more influential over the formation of governments. Under majoritarian rules, a system with two dominant parties as in Germany would routinely deliver single-party government.⁸ Yet, because neither major party has achieved 50% of the second votes since 1957, under AMS a majority has required a coalition. And German governments have been two-party coalitions since that year.

⁸ This is clear from the fact that the CDU or SPD between them won every constituency seat in every election between 1969 and 1987.

Aside from one "grand coalition" between 1965 and 1969, the pre-unification pattern of coalition formation was very predictable: one of the major parties would call on support from the FDP to pass the 50% barrier. The simplicity of coalition building can also be attributed partly to the electoral system, since for a long time the threshold left the CDU and SPD with no other small party to turn to. The FDP was chronically pivotal, and this rendered election results somewhat irrelevant. Provided that a major party and the FDP could agree to work together, then they could only be dislodged by the other major party winning a majority, which, as noted, did not happen. Hence, since the inception of AMS, the only changes in government coalition occurred between, and not at, elections.

The fact that incumbent coalitions were persistently left intact after elections is highly distinctive of the German system, setting it apart not only from the clear alternance of majoritarian systems but also from more fragmented PR systems – like Belgium and the Netherlands – where the starting-point for post-election coalition negotiations tends to be the relative electoral fortunes of the larger parties.

These latter examples emphasise that PR does not necessarily emasculate elections. The question then arises: is the German experience attributable to specific features of AMS – like the threshold – or is it instead due to other characteristics of German politics over the period? There are grounds for suspecting the latter. First, vote shares – especially between 1961 and 1990 – have been exceptionally stable. So there was no reason to expect – or even want – frequent changes of coalition. Second, the FDP's shifts of coalition partner tended to anticipate electoral swings, and so alternance in government was not wholly independent of public opinion. Third, the so-called "Chancellor bonus" means that elections are less likely to dislodge governments anyway.

Fourth, and most tellingly, recently the party system shows signs of settling into bipolar opposition, with the CDU and the FDP versus the SPD and the Greens (with the PDS on the margins). Now that no small party is chronically pivotal, election-driven alternance is a realistic prospect. Thus, 1998 saw an SPD/Green coalition replace the CDU/FDP government, and the reverse shift is widely predicted for 2006.

There is a complex relationship between electoral system, party system, and government formation. German AMS looks to have been a *necessary* condition of the peculiar 1969-1987 period of German politics. With a majoritarian system, elections would have determined which of the larger parties governed alone. Or, under PR but with a lower threshold, other smaller parties might have emerged to dislodge the FDP from its pivotal position. However, German AMS was clearly not a *sufficient* condition for such a tranquil era: under the same electoral rules, the evolution of the party system has empowered elections again.

A final point concerns the stability of German governments in the post-war era. Evidently, the electoral system – particularly the threshold – has played a part. However, it is equally clear that stability in voting behaviour and the party system have been more important. Moreover, other institutional features of the German polity, such as the need for a constructive vote of confidence to dislodge governments, have also been crucial. Germany's post-war constitution was geared – indeed, Germany's post-war political culture has been geared – towards ensuring stability. The electoral system plays only a minor role in this; perhaps the most that can be said is that German experience refutes any notion that PR systems are inevitably prone to instability.

AMS and accountability

For over almost 50 years no German election brought about a change in government. As far as voters are concerned, it is important to ask two questions about this: first, do voters perceive a failure of electoral accountability? second, do they blame this on the electoral system? There is little direct evidence on either question, but there are reasons to suppose that the answer to both is "no".

First, German elections have shown consistently high turnout, typically over 80%. The electorate does not seem to be frustrated at its apparent impotence. Moreover, turnout fell in 2002, with voters fresh from their first experience of changing the government. Second, Germans' orientations to their political system are relatively positive, and grew more so over the 1960s and 1970s, when governments changed seldom. Third, there has been nothing even close to public clamour for electoral reform. That issue has been very low on the political agenda since the 1960s; even then, pressures for reform came largely from elites (Jesse 2000: 129-30).

There is space here only to mention two of the many possible explanations for why German voters have been so sanguine about the lack of direct electoral accountability. The most plausible is the point made above: changes of coalition tended to foreshadow electoral shifts, and so voters already had the governments they wanted. In other words, the FDP did the job of "kicking the rascals out" for voters. The second is that many voters may simply have been unaware of the fact stated at the beginning of this section; had it been more widely publicised, opinions of the German polity – particularly the electoral system – may well have soured. This leads to another question: namely, how well do Germans understand the operation of AMS?

Do voters understand AMS?

The basic structure of German AMS is more complicated than pure PR or majoritarian systems. Add in technicalities such as surplus seats and the alternative threshold, and the process by which inputs (votes) are converted into outputs (coalitions) at election time becomes positively arcane. It is easy to understand why individual voters might find the voting task tricky in itself. Jesse (1987, 1988) proposes electoral reform on these grounds. Again, there is little direct evidence on how troubled voters are in practice by the complexities of AMS. However, studies of "strategic voting" in German elections generate considerable indirect evidence on whether voters recognise and respond to the incentive structures inherent in a mixed system like AMS.

At the heart of the strategic voting debate is the phenomenon of "ticket-splitting": casting one's first and second votes for different parties. The first thing to note about ticket-splitting is that it could reflect misunderstanding of the operation of AMS (Bawn 1999). Voters may view their two votes as an opportunity to boost the seat shares of two parties. They would be wrong: only second votes determine overall seat shares, and casting a first vote for a candidate does not help that candidate's party.⁹ This constrains the potential for strategic voting. However, there remain various sources of such potential, with both first and second votes.

In the PR component of the system, the threshold is the key to voting strategy. Voters may desert their most preferred party if they deem it incapable of clearing the 5% barrier. Meanwhile, voters preferring one of the major parties may cast a second vote for a smaller party if two conditions obtain: first, that it is the most appropriate (or only conceivable) coalition partner for their favoured party; second, that it is in danger of

⁹ Except where it helps the party to take surplus seats in that *Land*.

failing to achieve 5%. This demonstrates that effective strategic voting often depends on voters knowing the parties' coalition preferences, which in turn requires the parties to make these clear before the election. Now that the party system is rather more complex, pre-election coalition declarations are fewer and vaguer.¹⁰

In the constituency component, the overriding motivation is to avoid a wasted vote. Hence the gap between large and small parties is wider among first votes than second votes. And this is especially true where the constituency race is hotly contested, and the opportunity cost of a wasted vote is that much higher. Still, the fact remains that, in choosing between two major party candidates, voters cannot influence the respective seat shares of the two parties.

Ticket-splitting is on the increase, more than quadrupling between 1961 (4.4% of voters) and 1998 (20.0%) (Klingemann and Wessels 2003: 288). This increase presumably reflects the fact that electors are gradually learning about the opportunities for strategic behaviour offered by their system. While one in five may still seem a small proportion, note that stalwart supporters of the two major parties have no clear incentive to split their tickets, and so to use the entire electorate as the denominator is misleading. Nonetheless, plenty of supporters of small parties do not desert them in the constituency votes: a lot of potential ticket-splitters ignore the opportunity. Besides, a large proportion – perhaps a majority – of ticket-splitters vote in a manner that is not obviously rational: giving their second vote to a party well below the threshold, or voting for two parties unwilling to form a coalition, or by giving the first vote to a small party and the second vote to a large party (Schoen 1999; Thurner and Pappi 1998).

Some of these “irrational” voters probably misunderstand the system. In-depth interviews with voters suggest as much (Schmitt-Beck 1993). Others may consciously vote on expressive grounds, heedless of rationality. But other electors may simply be doing what the system was designed to encourage: that is, casting a personal vote. As Bawn states: “...Since only the second vote affects seat shares, a [rational] voter who casts a split ticket must care about the identity of her district representative...” (1999: 493). The next section assesses evidence of such personal voting, as part of a general examination of the value added to the German system by its constituency component.

Constituency votes and constituency MPs

Constituency MPs can provide various benefits to voters. They can act as a conduit for voters' attitudes and preferences to be reflected in the *Bundestag*. They can use experience and contacts to address voters' complaints. They may be able to negotiate in government or committees to deliver “pork-barrel” benefits to their constituency. And, at elections, individual MPs can be rewarded or punished according to how effectively they are fulfilling these roles. This begs two questions: does direct accountability lead constituency MPs to behave differently from list MPs? and do voters reward good and punish poor constituency MP performance?

Evidence is more plentiful on these questions. A group of candidates for election was surveyed about the perceived importance of various characteristics. Constituency nominees prioritised their performance in constituency service far above their political position in the party; for would-be list MPs, the reverse was the case (Klingemann and Wessels 2003: 289). One type of such service is to obtain funds and initiate projects in the constituency; according to another survey, constituency MPs were more likely to

¹⁰ On polling day in 2002, the SPD had ruled out only the PDS as a coalition partner, and so four SPD-led coalitions were conceivable: SPD-Greens; SPD-FDP; SPD-FDP-Greens; and a grand coalition.

regard such pork-barrel activity as important for their re-election (Lancaster and Patterson 1990). Study of *Bundestag* committee membership shows that constituency MPs work mainly on committees distributing benefits to geographic areas, with a view to serving their constituencies (Stratmann and Baur 2002).¹¹ The MP-constituent link also strengthens representation in terms of policy priorities: a 2002 candidate survey showed that the voters' priorities were shared more by constituency MPs than by list MPs, who were more closely aligned with their party's agenda (Wüst and Schmitt 2004).¹² This tallies with the finding that constituency MPs are much more likely than list MPs to express the desire to represent *all* voters in the constituency (irrespective of party). Finally, and most basically, virtually all constituency MPs (98.5%, according to a 1996 survey) have at least weekly direct contact with constituents, usually in the form of regular "office hours" (Klingemann and Wessels 2003: 292).

Plainly, the constituency component of AMS generates some "added value" for German voters. But there are constraints on the services that constituency MPs can offer, and these can be roughly summarised in one word: party. Constituency MPs owe their position not only to local electorates but also to party "selectorates". Most constituency candidates have a long history within their party, and have been socialised into its attitudes and norms. Safe seats are often kept for prominent party figures, to reward them for long service and loyalty. All this leaves constituency MPs looking little different from list MPs in terms of background, and indeed sometimes they look identical: roughly half of candidates run both in a constituency and on a list. There are exceptions, namely those dubbed by Patzelt (2000) the "constituency princes": MPs, usually long-serving, whose popularity and power-base is established in their localities, and who are therefore more willing to rebel against the party in order to further constituents' interests.

For the most part, though, it is unrealistic to expect constituency MPs to act or to vote on behalf of their constituents where this involves crossing party lines. Germany is a paradigm case of the "responsible party" model of representation, which limits such advocacy. And the centrality of party has penetrated to voters, too, many of whom are more likely to seek help and advice from list MPs of their own party rather than a constituency MP from a different party.¹³ To this end, parties assign list MPs to service in constituencies – even if they lost there – such that 84% of list MPs also have at least weekly contact with citizens (Klingemann and Wessels 2003: 291-2). This reinforces the central message: the dominance of party.

It is therefore unsurprising that party labels are the primary determinant of first votes. In a 1987 survey, 60% of German voters cited a party attachment as a reason for their vote, with only 13% mentioning a candidate (Conradt 2001: 150). And plenty of electors cast first votes for parties whose candidates have no hope of winning. That said, there is considerable evidence that at least some voters pay attention to candidate characteristics other than party when casting first votes. First, over 40% of German voters in 1998 knew the name of at least one candidate in their constituency; this proportion was considerably higher than in countries with pure list PR (Klingemann and Wessels 2003: 293). And voters do not just know candidates' names: various surveys confirm that first votes go disproportionately to candidates who are incumbents, and who are likely to be in government (Bawn 1999). Incumbency and participation in government can be regarded

¹¹ List MPs tend to prioritise the service of non-geographic party constituencies, e.g. farmers, young people, environmentalists.

¹² There is a caveat here: in safe seats, constituency MPs were significantly less likely to match their voters' agenda.

¹³ Voters also have recourse to non-partisan bodies: several *Länder* have ombudsmen, and the *Bundestag* operates a Parliamentary Petitions Committee to fulfil a similar role at the national level.

as proxy measures of a candidate's capacity to represent voters' attitudes, to respond to their complaints, and to deliver pork-barrel benefits. A more direct measure is available from a 1998 survey, asking voters to rate candidates' constituency performance. The impact on electoral behaviour is clear: the average difference in vote share between "very weak" and "very strong" performers was 17.5 percentage points (Klingemann and Wessels 2003: 293-5).

Overall, this is a system marked by heterogeneity. Among MPs, constituency MPs are a diverse group: some – the "princes" – build personal appeal while others assiduously toe the party line and resemble list candidates. This diversity reduces the likelihood of persistent imbalance or tension between constituency and list MPs. Among voters, some pay close attention to their MP's constituency performance, and vote to pass judgment on it; others prefer to be guided by party labels. This heterogeneity is the natural result of a mixed system like AMS, and highlights its benefits: the constituency component serves those who want to vote for and to be represented by a person; while the lists serve those who support and want to be represented by a party.

Summary and implications for the UK

As the initial description of German AMS made clear, the system is not just an MMP system; it is an MMP system with regional seat allocation, a vote share threshold, an alternative constituency-based threshold, and the possibility of surplus seats. All of these details and modifications have had at least some impact on German electoral politics. The impact in the UK of a switch to AMS cannot therefore be estimated independently of such additional features. In what follows, it is assumed unless otherwise stated that the UK adopts the same AMS rules as operate in Germany.¹⁴

German AMS has delivered seat shares closely proportional to vote shares. The main deviation from proportionality is due to the threshold. In UK general elections, few parties other than the big three have come anywhere close to 5%, suggesting that the threshold would exert little distortive impact. In fact, judging by these elections, the UK party system is not dissimilar from the pre-unification German party system, except that – perhaps paradoxically – the third party is much larger.¹⁵ Hence introducing AMS would dramatically improve proportionality in the UK by correcting the under-representation of the Liberal Democrats and the over-representation of the larger parties (especially the winners).

However, in PR elections – for the European Parliament – minor parties have polled much better: in 2004, the UKIP pushed the Lib Dems into fourth place, the Greens beat the 5% mark, and the BNP fell only fractionally short. A proportional system like AMS therefore has at least the potential to generate significant fragmentation, and to provide footholds for some minor (and possibly extreme) minorities. Whether it does so depends on the psychological impact of the threshold. Would-be Green and BNP voters must decide whether to risk choosing a party that may fall short of 5%.¹⁶ German experience suggests

¹⁴ This begs the question of which geographical divisions would serve as equivalents of the *Länder*. The most likely candidates are the Euro-election PR districts. Since several of these – particularly the North-East and South-East of England – have one predominant party, which could win most of the constituency seats, the likelihood is that surplus seats would be a regular feature of British AMS.

¹⁵ To stretch the point, there are similarities with the post-unification German system as well, since the UK Liberal Democrats share features in common with both the FDP and the Greens in Germany.

¹⁶ The case of a party like the UKIP, which emerges showing every sign of being able to achieve 5% or more, is rather different: AMS could help their cause greatly. Yet success for such parties has typically proved transient. This may simply be due to the nature of such (more or less) single-issue parties, in which case AMS will not preserve them. However, if parliamentary representation would allow them to cement their place in the party system, then AMS would be the making of these parties.

that a threshold can smooth over these footholds. Meanwhile, regional parties like Plaid Cymru and the SNP, though they would never meet the 5% mark, could well win three constituency seats. To be included in nationwide seat allocation would improve these parties' representation in Westminster.

As in Germany, no single party in the UK has won 50% of the vote since the 1950s, and so as in Germany introducing AMS would make coalition governments inevitable. This would bring an abrupt end to a long convention of single-party government in the UK. Coalitions have been rare, and tend to be regarded with suspicion and associated with instability. Ironically, given the nature of the UK's party system, AMS could usher in a period of hyper-stability. Neither of the two largest parties could form a 50%+ coalition without the Liberal Democrats, who would therefore become pivotal like the FDP in Germany. And, owing to their size, the Lib Dems could remain the only possible coalition partners even if other smaller parties manage to cross the threshold.

Hence there is the prospect that, as in pre-1990 Germany, changes in government will be triggered not by elections but by occasional switches by the pivotal party. Furthermore, the UK parties are currently positioned such that the Lib Dems are much more inclined to work with Labour than the Conservatives, which raises the prospect that changes in government may not be triggered at all.¹⁷ Things change, of course, and the Lib Dems may follow the FDP's example with periodic switches of coalition partner. Nonetheless, UK voters, long accustomed to changing their governments (if desired) at election time, are liable to resent a system that seems to place this power in the hands of (Lib Dem) politicians. In combination with the UK party system, AMS does not look like a recipe for electoral accountability.

German voters do not appear greatly to mind this accountability deficit. A more common focus of disenchantment is the complexity of the system. And this after 50 years (for West Germans at least) of practice. For UK voters, suddenly confronted with AMS, confusion seems likely. Taken individually, neither of the two votes should prove difficult: choosing between party lists is simple enough, and UK voters are accustomed to constituency seats. Paradoxically, though, this experience with constituency votes may blind voters to the interaction between the two. An increasing proportion of the UK electorate has learnt to vote strategically in constituencies, and these voters will probably be enthusiastic ticket-splitters. Keen to flex their tactical muscle, such voters – like many Germans, judging by their behaviour – could be slow to grasp that first votes are irrelevant for seat shares.

At the inception of AMS, Germany had no recent history of constituency-based representation. Over the decades, a tradition has been built up, such that constituency MPs regard serving their constituents as an important part of their job, and constituency voters tend overall to reward good and to punish bad service. Constituency representation is long established in the UK – hence the choice of AMS for elections to the new Scottish and Welsh parliaments. Party list representation is new, and some might fear that, as in Germany, the party component may come to dominate the personal component as well. At the level of voters, little will change: most already vote on the basis of parties (and their leaders or policies) rather than local representation.

¹⁷ In the Scottish Parliament, the Liberal Democrats and Labour show this mutual preference for working together, and they look like a coalition that will be difficult to unseat, even in the presence of a strong fourth force.

For MPs, the change may have more impact. Admittedly, most parliamentary behaviour even under the current system follows responsible-party rather than trustee or delegate lines. But list MPs would be new to Westminster, and not necessarily a popular innovation. Where the tradition is of constituency elections, those with personal mandates from voters may resent the presence of those who owe their election to parties. In Scotland, some constituency MSPs have openly questioned the status of their list colleagues; scepticism is deepened because, like in Germany, many of those appointed from lists were losers in constituencies. Assuming that Westminster elections under AMS would also involve dual candidacies, similar tensions look likely.

That said, German experience suggests that such tensions need not persist, and that the two classes of MP can co-exist peacefully. (And lists do carry other advantages. For example, in Germany the list system has enabled parties quickly to increase the proportion of women MPs in the *Bundestag*. Attempts to do the same in the UK have met resistance because local parties and voters object to having all-women shortlists imposed on them. AMS allows for improved descriptive representation, without constraining local autonomy.)

The bulk of this report focuses on German experience of AMS. This final section, drawing implications for the UK of this experience, is necessarily speculative. The impact of electoral system changes is highly uncertain, because system operation is so heavily context-dependent. Nevertheless, key points highlighted above – the big gain in proportionality, the inevitability of coalitions, the diffusion of accountability, and the status of the constituency link – are certain to recur in discussions over whether the UK should opt for AMS.

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Appendix: Disproportionality and Reductive Effect under German AMS

Election	DI ^a	RRP ^b
1949 ^c	3.9	18.0
1953	4.3	15.9
1957	4.7	13.5
1961	2.7	11.4
1965	2.2	7.0
1969	4.0	10.2
1972	0.7	2.1
1976	0.6	2.0
1980	1.5	4.1
1983	0.5	1.4
1987	0.7	2.5
1990 ^d	4.8	15.3
1994	2.3	8.1
1998	3.1	12.4
2002	3.9	12.8

^a Gallagher's disproportionality index, calculated by the formula

$$\sqrt{\frac{\sum (v_i - s_i)^2}{2}}$$

where v_i refers to a party's vote percentage and s_i to its seat percentage

^b Taagepera and Shugart's (1989) relative reduction in parties measure, calculated by the formula

$$\frac{1/\left(\sum v_i^2\right) - 1/\left(\sum s_i^2\right)}{1/\left(\sum v_i^2\right)}$$

^c For this and all subsequent elections, the CDU and CSU alliance is counted as one party in calculations

^d The West and East German Greens are counted as one party in the calculations

Source: calculations based on data from <http://www.wahlrecht.de/ergebnisse/bundestag.htm> and <http://psephos.adam-carr.net/germany/bundestag.txt>