

DIFFICULT DECISIONS

The GAL and “Schwarz-Grün” in Hamburg

Alice Cooper

Political Science, University of Mississippi

ABSTRACT

In 2008 the first state-level CDU-Green coalition was formed in Hamburg. Drawing on the literature on party goals (vote-, office-, policy, internal cohesion- and democracy-seeking), this article examines the GAL's decisions to join and to end the coalition. It examines the trade-offs between party goals as they evolved in different phases of “schwarz-grün,” with particular reference to the Greens' education reform agenda. While policy- and vote-seeking complemented each other during the election campaign, vote-, office- and party unity-seeking conflicted with each other in the Greens' decision to enter a coalition with the CDU. Later, policy- and democracy-seeking conflicted with each other when a referendum organized by a citizens' initiative defeated the Greens' education reform, a defeat that contributed significantly to the premature end of the CDU-Green coalition. New elections led to defeats for vote-, office-, and policy-seeking when the SPD achieved an absolute majority.

KEYWORDS

Christian Democratic Union (CDU); coalitions; education reform; Greens; Hamburg political parties

Introduction

In 2008, a Christian Democratic Union (CDU)-Green coalition was formed in Hamburg, an historic first for each party and for Land-level coalitions. The coalition, however, ended prematurely following a major defeat on education reform, which the Hamburg Greens (Green Alternative List, Grüne Alternative Liste, GAL) had championed as a signature policy agenda. Ironically, the kiss of death for education reform came via a referendum



organized by its (mostly conservative) opponents. Thus, defeat of the Greens' policy agenda came by way of grassroots mobilization of a sort long championed by the Greens, but this time directed at their own policy. The referendum defeat set in motion the resignation of Ole von Beust as mayor (Erster Bürgermeister) and the GAL's subsequent withdrawal from the coalition under his successor Christoph Ahlhaus. The coalition's end in turn led to early elections, an absolute majority for the Social Democratic Party (SPD), and the GAL's return to the opposition.

This article examines the GAL's decisions both to join and to end the CDU-Green coalition. It does so from the perspective of the literature on party goals. A major strand in the rational choice literature on party behavior identifies three objectives pursued by most parties: vote-seeking, office-seeking and policy-seeking. That is, parties develop strategies designed to maximize their vote share, their hold on executive office, and their influence on policy. Vote-seeking involves positioning the party in relation to other parties in the party space, via platforms and issue stances. In a multi-party parliamentary setting, office-seeking, in turn, includes deciding which parties are acceptable partners in a government coalition. Coalition choices are central to vote-seeking and policy-seeking.¹

Some scholars view maintenance of party unity or cohesion as an additional goal.² Still others note that for some parties "democracy-seeking" is a prominent goal, i.e., maximization of intraparty democracy as reflected in internal party organization and decision-making procedures.³ Historically, this has been true for Green parties in Germany and elsewhere. I would argue that the goal of "democracy-seeking" can also refer to opportunities for political participation in society at large, for example, through establishment of referendum procedures.⁴

As the literature notes, parties do not necessarily emphasize these goals equally. Instead, they may prioritize certain goals over others. Angelo Panebianco argues that the conditions facing a party at the time of its founding continue to influence its goals for decades to come.⁵ According to Robert Harmel and Kenneth Janda, each party has a "primary" goal. Moreover, the primary goal varies by party and even within parties over time. Parties most often make fundamental changes to their organizational structure, strategy and/or policy positions when serious external shocks coincide with internal shifts in the top leadership and/or dominant faction.⁶ Although he does not maintain that parties have a single dominant goal, Kaare Strom argues that the institutional configuration of the political system influences the relative weight parties assign to vote-, office- and policy-seeking. Applying his criteria to Germany, high levels of electoral competi-

tion, low electoral system distortion, and multiple spatial dimensions encourage vote-seeking. On the other hand, party system fragmentation encourages office- and policy-seeking. Moreover, according to Strom, a party's organizational characteristics can also influence the relative weights assigned to the three goals. For example, in "labor-intensive" parties such as the Greens, the efforts of party activists are central to the effectiveness of electoral campaigns. This has contributed from the beginning to decentralization of policy making within the party and leadership accountability to lower levels of the party, both of which reinforce policy-seeking.⁷

Where do these considerations leave the Greens? Taken together, the Greens' origins, the party's organizational characteristics, and certain institutional features of the German system encourage a strong policy-seeking orientation, with vote-seeking and office-seeking somewhat subordinate. Indeed, the Greens have long been known as a *Programmpartei* or policy-oriented "programmatic party." The Greens must also pay some heed to a fourth dimension to party objectives—maintenance of party unity, membership levels, and activist commitment.⁸ Finally, given their origins in the social movements of the 1970s and their rejection of the political and economic structures that limited popular participation and self-determination, for the Greens there is even a fifth dimension to party goals—encouragement of grassroots political participation both within the party and in politics more broadly. Like policy-seeking, the Greens regard this goal as intrinsically valuable. So, while the Greens view vote- and office-seeking as primarily of instrumental importance, whereas policy-seeking and democracy-seeking are intrinsically valuable, this does not mean that they underrate the former's importance. As the Greens matured as a party, they came to see the worth of a "healthy" vote share and opportunities for office as means to promote their preferred policies, if nothing else.

While a party's goals are sometimes compatible with each other, the literature notes that these goals often conflict in the rough and tumble of political life, presenting the party with uncomfortable tradeoffs and possible hard decisions.⁹ I adopt this perspective. As we will see, in Hamburg GAL leaders were acutely aware of conflicts between goals in "real time" politics. Moreover, I argue that the specific interplay and/or tradeoffs between these goals may evolve and shift across the different phases of a political cycle: from the election campaign, to coalition formation, to policy making while in government, to coalition termination. For the GAL in Hamburg this played itself out in, first, the stage of drafting the electoral platform for the 2008 election. In this phase, there was relative harmony between policy- and vote-seeking. Making education reform the signature campaign issue in

its platform reflected the GAL's identity as a policy-oriented party. Although education was not traditionally a top GAL/Green priority, their reform proposals fit the party's egalitarian values and allowed it to branch out beyond its "typical" policy concerns. In addition, education reform also made sense from a vote-seeking perspective. In the GAL's competition with the Left Party for "left-libertarian" votes, education reform had the potential to attract votes from the "enlightened bourgeoisie" from which both parties drew to varying extents.

In 2008, the GAL hoped for a "normal" coalition with the SPD. In stage two of the story, however, surveys prior to the election indicated dwindling chances for a SPD-GAL coalition but increasing feasibility of a CDU-GAL coalition. The specter of an acute trade-off between party goals loomed large. Whereas the GAL's policy goals could only be attained through office-seeking, a black (the color associated with the Christian Democrats)-green coalition endangered vote-seeking and party cohesion in the run-up to the election. Nonetheless, the GAL decided to enter the coalition when it proved the only alternative to continued opposition.

In phase three, once the GAL was in office with the CDU and education reform had passed, other tradeoffs between party goals arose. In particular, (external) "democracy-seeking" came into conflict with policy-seeking when a citizens' initiative organized a successful referendum against the GAL's reform. In the final phase, the developments outlined here led to failures of office-seeking as well as policy-seeking, when the black-green coalition collapsed and new elections resulted in an absolute majority for the SPD.

The Greens in the German Party System and Expanded Coalition Options

Pursuit of party objectives occurs in a concrete setting defined by in part by the party system. The German party system has undergone gradual but dramatic change, including erosion of the two major parties and decline of electoral turnout, which has opened up new structural opportunities for the smaller parties. Oskar Niedermayer argues that Germany's party system has changed from a "two-party dominant" system into a "pluralistic" one.¹⁰ With the CDU and SPD competing mostly in the middle, the smaller parties have positioned themselves in various (sometimes substantial) niches. The FDP (Free Democratic Party) and Left have staked out the market-liberal and the state-intervention poles on the economic policy axis, while the Greens and the populist right have claimed the libertarian and authoritarian

ends of the cultural values axis.¹¹ The Pirates and Alternative für Deutschland (Alternative for Germany) have also entered the mix in the last few years and carved out their own niches.

Throughout their history the Greens have done disproportionately well among the cohorts that came of age in the 1960s through the 1980s, women, the highly educated and non-churchgoers. In terms of social structure, the sources of Green voters have evolved to some extent. In recent years the Greens have succeeded in drawing disproportionately on private sector employees, certain public sector employees (*Beamte*), and the self-employed (a traditional FDP stronghold), and thus among the higher income levels. In Bremen, the Greens have evolved into a party of the “new bourgeoisie,” and in some prosperous areas they compete directly with the CDU. In urban areas, the Green electorate overlaps most with FDP voters in social structural terms. In the 2009 federal election the Greens surpassed the FDP (compared to their overall vote share) among the highly educated, *Beamte*, employees, and high earners. Half of all Green members with jobs (37 percent of total membership) are employed in the public sector, a higher proportion than in any other party. Along with its “graying” as the Greens’ earliest voters age, the party has also become socially established, as they and their successors went from unemployed university-educated youth to highly paid professionals.¹² Thus, in social structural terms, the Greens are now a party of the “center” of society, and Green voters outdo CDU and FDP voters in their income and education. Peter Lösche refers to the Greens as a party of the “enlightened bourgeois center” while Lothar Probst calls them a party of the “new bourgeoisie.”¹³

On the other hand, despite these similarities in social structural location, Green voters differ from other bourgeois voters in their attitudes and values. In the Berlin election of 2006, in which the Greens got 13.1 percent of the vote, the most decisive issues for Green voters were the environment (58 percent), social justice (33 percent), education (32 percent), and integration of migrants (20 percent). Similarly, in the 2009 federal election, the environment was the most important issue for 66 percent of Green voters, and social justice stood in second place at 38 percent. According to Melanie Haas and Richard Stöss, the Greens draw votes from two sections of the bourgeoisie; along with its customary “left-libertarian bourgeoisie” coming out of the traditional Green milieu, the Greens also appeal to the “new’ libertarian bourgeoisie” oriented to education, success, and quality of life, as well as to some extent hedonism and even neoliberal economic policy. They both differ from FDP and CDU voters in their preferences for healthy lifestyles, environmental protection, self-determination, and multiculturalism.

They also differ from each other in their attitudes toward social and economic policy and in their orientation to parliamentary politics.¹⁴

The combination of the Greens' social structural location and their typical attitudinal profile help explain their placement in relation to the other parties and the party's strategies since the rise of the Left. According to Christoph Egle, on economic and social policy the Greens overlap almost entirely with the SPD and to some extent with the CDU, while they overlap significantly, though not fully, with the PDS and FDP on *Gesellschaftspolitik* ("societal" issues such as gender or immigration).¹⁵

Since the 2005 election, the Greens have combined two different strategies. On the one hand, the SPD's weakness has convinced the Greens to become more open to possible coalitions with the CDU. Correspondingly, the Bundestag parliamentary group (Fraktion) has developed centrist initiatives in family, economic and migrant integration policy oriented to a *Mitte-Strategie* (center strategy) of being available and suitable for coalitions with either the SPD or CDU. At the same time, the party leadership has worked on environmental and social policies characterized by a more leftist stamp.¹⁶ In part, this reflects the new reality of Green competition with the Left, which has provided a home for "fundamentalists" and other leftist voters who abandoned the Greens when they moderated their course in the 1990s or during the SPD-Green federal government. Green party members find the Left Party strong on issues of work and social justice. One-third of Green party members found the formation of the Left Party a good thing and would support a red-red-green coalition. Indeed, Green party members felt more liking for the Left Party than did SPD members.¹⁷ This is an important factor behind the Green concern that the Left Party could successfully woo some of its voters under certain conditions.

Coalition strategy comes into play in conjunction with both vote-seeking and office-seeking. Since 2005, the five-party system has brought about new coalition options. With the rise of the Left party, the relative weakness of the CDU and SPD, and the absence of the FDP in many Land-level parliaments, sometimes neither a CDU-FDP nor an SPD-Green coalition representing one of the usual "camps" is possible. For the Greens, the SPD's ongoing electoral weakness represents an "external shock" in that the Green's preferred "red-green" coalition now often falls short of a majority. Unwillingness of the SPD or Greens to form coalitions with the Left in the western German states has paved the way for novel coalitions, including CDU-Green in Hamburg and CDU -Green-FDP in the Saarland. The Greens have become more flexible about coalitions with the CDU and the FDP, explicitly opening up these options in a party conference (*Bundesdelegiertenkonferenz*)

resolution after the 2005 election,¹⁸ although various leaders of all three parties have downplayed their desirability. The *Mitte-Strategie* mentioned above maximizes chances of participation in government by not relying on “red-green” majorities, given the SPD’s ongoing weakness.¹⁹

The GAL and Schwarz-Grün 2008-2011

The Hamburg Context

The developments that are the subject of this article took place in the specific context of Hamburg in the 2000s. In the imperial period prior to World War I, Hamburg’s social structure and party system was dominated overwhelmingly by two camps (*Lager*): the industrial working class associated with the SPD and the (Protestant) bourgeoisie associated with liberal parties, with political control safely in the hands of the upper bourgeoisie (*Grossbürgertum*). During the Weimar Republic the conservative DNVP (German National People’s Party/Deutschnationale Volkspartei) gained a footing, as did eventually the Nazis. The splintering of the left spectrum and the strength and radical character of the communist KPD hindered formation of a governing coalition with the reformist SPD. The SPD, however, was strong enough that no government could be formed without it up to 1933, and the SPD participated in many coalitions with the liberal DDP (German Democratic Party/Deutsche Demokratische Partei) and the more conservative DVP (German People’s Party/Deutsche Volkspartei).²⁰

In the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s, Hamburg’s party system mirrored the national level party system in its stability and concentration, with only the SPD, FDP, and CDU represented in Hamburg’s parliament, the *Bürgerschaft*. The SPD achieved hegemonic status in Hamburg during this period. From the 1950s through the 1980s (except 1953-1957), the SPD governed together with the FDP. During this period, Hamburg’s economy was transformed from a concentration on industry and trade into one based on the service sector (public and private) along with trade. Indeed, by 2003, 81 percent of Hamburg’s workforce were employees (*Angestellte*), in the civil service (*Beamte*), or self-employed, accompanied by a corresponding rise in levels of formal education.²¹

This was the context for the entry of the GAL into the Hamburg parliament in 1982, where it has displaced the FDP as the third largest party ever since. Since 1982, the GAL has received between 6.8 and 13.9 percent of the vote in Hamburg’s elections, noticeably outperforming the Greens at the federal level. In the 1980s, the GAL was dominated by “left-fundamental-

ists,” but in the course of the 1990s the *Fundis* (the “fundamentalist” wing) broke away from the party and the *Realos* (the more pragmatic “realist” wing) gained the upper hand. After the 1993 election, the GAL openly aspired to participation in government for the first time, but the SPD extended that honor to the *Statt Partei* instead. From 1997-2001, the GAL finally did participate in a governing coalition with the SPD, which however was replaced by CDU-dominated governments from 2001 to 2008 (2004-2008 with an absolute majority).²²

The 2008 Hamburg Election Campaign and Proposals for Education Reform

In its 2008 electoral platform, the GAL focused on five key areas: climate protection; childcare, schools and universities; poverty and inequality; binding referenda (*Volksentscheide*); and promotion of creativity- and knowledge-based economic sectors. Many policy stances reflected “classic Green” environmental concerns, such as opposition to deepening the shipping channel in the Elbe River and to a proposed coal-fired power plant in Hamburg-Moorburg.²³ The demand to amend the Hamburg constitution to establish procedures for binding referenda reflected the Greens’ emphasis on direct democracy going back to the party’s origins.

Two of the five areas concerned social justice. To combat growing poverty and social exclusion, the GAL proposed massive investments in poor neighborhoods (dubbed *Stadtteolförderung* or district promotion).²⁴ Second, the GAL believed that improving equality in educational opportunity was a way to address both social justice and economic development. This included better childcare (*Kitas*) and vocational training, as well as abolishing university tuition/fees.

Absolutely central and most controversial were GAL proposals to reform Hamburg’s schools. The broad issue was social injustice. The OECD’s PISA study had documented that children’s success in school was more closely linked to their social background in Germany than in any other industrialized country. Elites reproduced themselves and educational disadvantage was likewise “inherited.” Moreover, many children left school unfit for further training or work. The GAL attributed these problems to Germany’s traditional division of schools into three tiers (Gymnasium, Realschule and Hauptschule) and to the assignment of children to their respective tier at a very early age. Although the incumbent CDU government had recently introduced a “two-pillar” approach that consolidated Realschulen and Hauptschulen into *Stadtteilschulen* (district schools), the fundamental problem remained. Segregation of children into either elite Gymnasium or “lesser” *Stadtteilschulen*, after only four years in school, meant that children

were assessed too early to determine their true talent levels and were often selected for the Gymnasium based on social background rather than performance or potential.²⁵

The Greens therefore proposed to keep all children in the same schools (“Schule für alle”) through the first nine years rather than four—calling it “neun macht klug” (nine [years] make [children] clever) or “längeres gemeinsames Lernen” (learning together longer).²⁶ Only at that point would children be sent on to the Gymnasium and *Abitur* (university entrance examination) or into professional/vocational training. The GAL’s emphasis on social justice and education echoed a similar Green emphasis at the national level. Party resolutions such as the “Aufbruch zu neuer Gerechtigkeit!” (sally forth to new justice) of 2007 also called for nine years of common schooling.²⁷

At one level, education reform represented policy-seeking for its own sake. It was consistent with fundamental Green values of self-determination, overcoming hierarchies and inequality, and the integration of migrants (who were underrepresented in the elite Gymnasium). Moreover, education was the signature issue for one very prominent GAL leader—Christa Goetsch, a teacher in a Hamburg Hauptschule (as was her husband).

GAL/Green proposals for education reform also reflected a broader vote-seeking strategy. A convincing educational reform policy would provide an attractive flanking competency consistent with the issues for which the Greens were traditionally best known. Such a policy would help the Greens expand their issue ownership into a new policy realm.²⁸ Education provided a policy field in which the Greens/GAL could argue for concrete, “positive” change, rather than “merely” opposing industrial or infrastructure projects. With proposals addressing elite self-reproduction and social inequality, the GAL could meet Left Party competition, a very real threat specifically in Hamburg. Earlier in the decade, the GAL had already lost significant vote share to a left-socialist split-off, the Wählervereinigung Regenbogen (Rainbow Voter Association). The Wählervereinigung Regenbogen won 1.7 percent of the votes in the 2001 election and 1.1 percent in 2004.²⁹ Many of these voters went over to the Left in due course.³⁰ In 2008, the Left Party threatened to (and indeed did) draw votes away from the GAL.³¹ As noted in more detail below, in 2008, the GAL suffered net losses to both the SPD and to the Left, with their total vote falling by almost three percentage points compared to 2004.³² Although the Greens were unlikely to woo many recipients of Hartz IV or the unemployed from the Left,³³ the GAL could hope to win back more prosperous, educated, and left-leaning voters who shifted from the GAL to the Left for ideological reasons, assuming that the school reform appealed to their concern for social inequality.

Coalition Considerations during the Hamburg Election Campaign

Coalition preferences affect at least four of the party objectives discussed above. From a policy-seeking perspective, they entail “best fit,” i.e., the party with which policy preferences overlap the most. Coalition preferences are also a vital component of vote-seeking strategies, as the parties must consider the impact of each coalition option on competition in the party space. Setting coalition preferences can also be quite divisive for parties and affect their internal cohesion. Office-seeking for its own sake can also shape coalition preferences, though this has never been typical of the Greens. Coalition decisions essentially address the question “at what price office” and the extent to which office-seeking conflicts with the other objectives.

Prospects for realizing almost any of the GAL’s policy goals would be enhanced by participating in a government coalition, but office-seeking came into conflict with vote-seeking as the 2008 campaign unfolded. The particular circumstances of the 2008 Hamburg election complicated coalition strategies for several parties. Most surveys showed the SPD and Greens falling below the vote share required for the red-green coalition they both preferred.³⁴ They also showed that the FDP might fall below the 5 percent hurdle, whereas the Left Party would probably surpass it. Thus, GAL leaders faced three suboptimal alternatives: a red-red-green coalition with the SPD and Left, a black-green coalition with the CDU, or yet another period of opposition (under a grand coalition this time). All three entailed serious disadvantages.

Policy- and office-seeking conflicted with vote-seeking and threatened intra-party cohesion. A coalition with the SPD was the least controversial option within the party, but it maximized policy preferences only in comparison to coalitions with the CDU and FDP. With regard to policy fit, the GAL was closest to the Left on issues ranging from social policy to crime and from school reform to deepening the Elbe.³⁵ In contrast, although the GAL and CDU were reasonably close on economic issues, there were a number of *Knackpunkte* or issues on which they explicitly diverged. School reform, deepening the Elbe, and the power plant in Hamburg-Moorburg were the most obvious.

Despite good policy fit with the Left, the GAL leadership ruled out a red-red-green coalition, as did the SPD. Such a coalition would have risked massive loss of centrist voters for the GAL and would have endangered the *Mitte* strategy of openness to coalitions with the CDU. Moreover, the GAL did not consider the Left a reliable partner for a governing coalition. These considerations were put to the test about seven weeks before the election. Departing from its usual fundamental opposition, the Left party declared that it would tolerate a red-green coalition under certain policy conditions, but the SPD and

GAL leadership rejected this option and cited concerns about the Left Party's reliability. The GAL leadership maintained that every vote for the Left helped keep the CDU in power, by reducing the chances of a majority for an SPD-GAL coalition. For its part, the CDU used the Left's offer as campaign ammunition, warning against "Albtraum Volksfront" (Popular Front nightmare).³⁶ Rejecting a red-red-green coalition, however, was also controversial within the GAL and posed some danger to party unity. Since from a policy-seeking perspective the Left overlapped considerably with the SPD and GAL, some GAL sympathizers questioned rejecting any and all alliances with the Left.³⁷

The only other credible option was a coalition with the CDU, but this office- and policy-seeking strategy put vote-seeking and to a lesser extent party unity at risk. Since the CDU's preferred coalition with the FDP would not be possible, Ole von Beust (reigning mayor and CDU lead candidate) actively courted the GAL,³⁸ although he laid down preconditions including deepening the Elbe, building the Moorburg power plant, and no "sozialistische Einheitsschule" (socialist unified school). Commentators noted that a potential black-green coalition could push CDU voters towards the FDP and Green voters toward the SPD or Left.³⁹ In the end, the GAL did in fact suffer net losses of 10,000 votes to the SPD (1.97 percent of their total 507,977 votes in 2008) and 6,000 votes to the Left (1.18 percent of their 2008 total), with their vote share falling to 9.6 percent compared to 12.3 percent in 2004.⁴⁰ The option of a black-green coalition cost the CDU some votes too, but it also helped reduce the GAL vote share and the likelihood of a red-green coalition, while creating a new option for the CDU.

The GAL leadership reacted diffidently to von Beust's overtures, as this path to office-seeking conflicted directly with vote-seeking. As surveys showed GAL falling from 13 percent to 10 percent, Christa Goetsch declared black-green unthinkable because of unbridgeable differences on education,⁴¹ and the GAL Landesvorstand passed a resolution against schwarz-grün in order to stem speculation that a vote for the GAL meant indirectly a vote for the CDU.⁴² On the other hand, Krista Sager advised against ruling out a black-green coalition, in order to prevent an "automatic" grand coalition should red-green fail.⁴³

Entertaining the option of a coalition with the CDU had the potential to threaten the GAL's internal cohesion, but as it turned out the damage was relatively minor. Few party members and activists were enthusiastic about black-green but most saw an "Aufbruch in die bürgerliche Mitte" (sally forth into the bourgeois center) as the only alternative to four more years of opposition.⁴⁴ In addition, the cultural divisions between the two parties had declined to some extent over the years. According to some observers, GAL

leaders had become so “bourgeois” in behavior and style that they fit well with the CDU.⁴⁵ As far as the rest of the party is concerned, in income levels and professional/occupational profile Green voters had typically achieved par with and even surpassed CDU voters over the previous three decades or so.⁴⁶ Despite remaining differences on many policy issues, Green voters and members have most likely become more similar to CDU voters in everyday cultural and lifestyle behaviors than they were in the 1970s and 1980s, given the more pragmatic tone of the Green since the early 1990s and the considerable social change even in the conservative spectrum in the last few decades.

Moreover, in two borough councils (*Bezirksversammlungen*), Hamburg-Harburg and Hamburg-Altona, the CDU and GAL already governed together quite smoothly (starting in 2004 in the case of Altona). Known for his cosmopolitan attitudes and pragmatism, von Beust was popular even with Green voters. Party moderates argued that the Greens should be open to new constellations in order to participate in government and to avoid political insignificance. Surveys showed that about 40 percent of the nationwide populace wanted to see closer CDU-Green cooperation, including 45 percent of CDU voters and 59 percent of Green voters.⁴⁷ Thus, at a party member assembly in October 2007, GAL members rejected ruling out a coalition with the CDU. Instead, a counterproposal to enter coalition discussions with the CDU, absent a red-green majority, got one-third of the votes.⁴⁸

Formation of the CDU-Green Coalition

As widely foreseen, the election did not provide a majority for either CDU-FDP, SPD-GAL, or even SPD-FDP-GAL, and the SPD ruled out a SPD-GAL-Left coalition. Like the GAL, von Beust and the CDU faced suboptimal choices: a coalition with the relatively small GAL would be less challenging than with the SPD, but there was more policy overlap with the SPD.⁴⁹ In the end, von Beust chose the office-seeking rather than the policy-seeking alternative and thus the black-green coalition.

In the coalition negotiations the GAL received the ministry for education, and the coalition agreement represented a compromise on school reform. On the one hand the Gymnasium was retained as a separate type of school, as von Beust had promised his supporters. On the other hand, children would “learn together” for six years instead of the traditional four, before being assigned to a Gymnasium or *Stadtteilschule*. The CDU also agreed to amend the Land constitution to include procedures for binding referenda.⁵⁰ All in all, the coalition agreement was regarded as “remarkably green.”⁵¹

Once the coalition agreement was concluded, the suspense was whether the membership would agree to black-green. Just as before the election,

much of the party base had strong misgivings. A group of GAL activists even circulated a petition against the coalition within the party during the coalition negotiations and some had already written their letters of resignation from the party in case it came to pass. In the end, however, a GAL party conference ratified the agreement with a majority of almost 90 percent, in recognition that the coalition agreement contained a strong “green imprint” due to CDU concessions and that policy-seeking required participation in government.⁵² Thus, the commitment to policy-seeking substantially reduced the threat to party unity posed by this novel and suboptimal coalition.

Education Reform and the Conflict between Policy- and Democracy-seeking

The CDU/GAL coalition functioned quite smoothly in terms of its internal workings, both symbolized and spearheaded by the partnership between von Beust and Goetsch.⁵³ Both sides made significant compromises: the GAL accepted deepening of the Elbe and even oversaw approval of the Moorburg power plant by the environmental ministry it headed. For his part, von Beust became an enthusiastic convert to Goetsch’s plans to restructure the school system. While this could not be taken for granted there was a precedent from his previous administration, when the CDU consolidated six school types into two: the traditional Gymnasium and the new Stadtteilschule.⁵⁴ Goetsch’s proposal passed the Hamburg parliament easily and was scheduled to go into effect in 2010.

In the end, however, education reform became a millstone around the coalition’s neck. Led by Walter Scheurl, a citizens’ initiative against the reform called “Wir wollen lernen” (we want to learn) was launched, motivated by several issues. First was the desire to protect the traditional Gymnasium from seeing its standards lowered or its offerings reduced, thereby (to critics of the Gymnasium) keeping it a bastion of elitism serving gifted students from middle and upper income households. According to some, this issue spawned a “culture war” similar to nuclear power in the 1980s.⁵⁵ Second was apprehension concerning “chaos” during implementation of the reform, confusion among parents about what it would mean for their children specifically, and exhaustion of popular willingness to adjust to yet another reform of the school system.⁵⁶ Third was resentment at the elimination of parental choice as to what type of school their children would attend after primary school.⁵⁷

“Wir wollen lernen” organized several major demonstrations and many smaller “information meetings” to mobilize against the reform. Its main tactic was to collect signatures for a *Volksbegehren* (a type of official petition that is a preliminary stage toward a referendum), and it got three times as many

signatures as the required minimum.⁵⁸ The successful *Volksbegehren* forced the government to hold a referendum (*Volksentscheid*), the results of which would now be binding given the GAL's success at negotiating the inclusion of this point into the coalition agreement.

Resistance to school reform was particularly strong among the *Bildungsbürgertum* (highly educated cultural elites, often professionals), prosperous CDU voters, and parents of school-age children.⁵⁹ In general, enthusiasm for the GAL's school reform waned over time. Whereas 52 percent of survey respondents had supported extending primary school from four to six years (a core component of the school reform measure) as of May 2008, by early December 2009 only 11 percent supported school reform without reservation, whereas 20 percent were against it and 50 percent felt it needed serious revisions.⁶⁰ A poll at the end of December 2009 showed that 51 percent of CDU voters were against the reform, as were 48 percent of SPD voters, and even 25 percent of GAL voters.⁶¹ In early July, about ten days before the referendum, 51 percent of CDU supporters were still against the reform, although opposition among SPD supporters had dropped to 34 percent.⁶² Surveys indicated that opponents of school reform held a slight advantage over supporters, though the ultimate outcome would also depend on voter turnout.⁶³

Heading into the referendum, education reform enjoyed support from all four parties represented in the Hamburg parliament, as the SPD and Left Party announced their support along the way.⁶⁴ In an unusual constellation, both governing and opposition parties supported the reform, but the political establishment faced a growing groundswell of opposition to the reform as the referendum date neared.⁶⁵ In the CDU's case, although von Beust still publically supported the reform, other CDU Fraktion members were worried, as surveys in both December 2009 and July 2010 showed the party down around 7 percent from their 2008 election total of 42 percent despite von Beust's ongoing personal popularity.⁶⁶

In the end, the referendum resulted in 276, 304 votes (56 percent) against lengthening the *Grundschule* to six years, compared to 218, 065 votes (44 percent) in favor of "longer learning together."⁶⁷ Von Beust resigned as mayor of Hamburg later in the same day of his government's defeat in the referendum.

Ending Schwarz-Grün: (Dashed) Hopes to Optimize Policy-, Office-, and Vote-seeking

Some four months after von Beust's resignation, on 28 November 2010, the GAL resigned from the coalition with the CDU and ended Germany's first "black-green" experiment. Succeeding von Beust in office, Christoph

Ahlhaus was known as a relatively conservative hardliner compared to his much more liberal predecessor. At first, the two parties tried to make a go of continuing the CDU-GAL coalition. In particular, the GAL's leadership pressed the party to continue it.⁶⁸ Some speculated that neither the GAL nor the CDU had an interest in new elections in 2010, because neither party had a record of policy successes to offer the voters. For the GAL, school reform had failed and the Moorburg coal-fired power plant had been approved on their watch. Given this record, the GAL now pressed for an accelerated timetable for modernizing the streetcar system (called the *Stadtbahn* in Hamburg), while Ahlhaus wanted to complete the deepening of the Elbe's shipping channel, consolidate Hamburg's budget, and generally prove himself acceptable as mayor.⁶⁹ In addition, prematurely ending the coalition could (and did) lead to accusations that the GAL was "unreliable" and had "abandoned its responsibility."⁷⁰ Finally, coalitions in Germany tend to be relatively durable, so continuing with it fell within the norm.

When it finally happened, the GAL's publicly stated rationale for ending the coalition was the lack of common policy objectives in the post-Beust coalition, "mismanagement" by Ahlhaus and CDU cabinet officials, and the CDU's violation of agreements between the two parties.⁷¹ Despite the possible downsides for the GAL of new elections discussed just above, it could also be argued that ending the coalition and risking new elections could serve strategic objectives after all. Surveys suggested that new elections might bring improvements from vote-, office-, and policy-seeking perspectives. In terms of vote-seeking, national level surveys showed the Greens enjoying record voter favor,⁷² which might enhance the GAL's prospects in Hamburg too. In terms of office-seeking, surveys from July 2010 on showed a comfortable SPD-GAL majority (as high as 60 percent) while the CDU's electoral appeal had dropped dramatically since 2008.⁷³ An SPD-GAL coalition would enhance the prospects for the GAL's policy-seeking objectives as well. As Claudia Roth emphasized, the GAL was significantly closer to the SPD than the CDU in Hamburg.⁷⁴

As it turned out, however, Hamburg's election on February 20, 2011, proved disappointing for the GAL. Education was the most decisive issue in the election. In the campaign, the CDU had reversed course on education policy by opposing the school reform von Beust had so recently championed, along with a general strategy of trying to consolidate its core constituency through a "CDU pure" approach of taking a hard conservative line on issues such as budget consolidation and approaches to crime. But Ahlhaus, who hailed originally from southern Germany, failed to convince Hamburg voters of his suitability as mayor, who in surveys overwhelmingly

preferred the SPD's Olaf Scholz. Moreover, after the CDU-Green coalition's failed education reform, voters viewed the SPD as more competent on education policy than the CDU and GAL combined.⁷⁵ Thus, the election's main result was an absolute majority of seats for the SPD (from 34.1 percent of the vote in 2008 to 49.8 percent in 2008), a devastating defeat for the CDU (from 42.6 percent in 2008 to 20.8 percent in 2011), and a return to the opposition benches for the GAL despite its respectable gain in votes (from 9.6 percent in 2008 to 11.0 percent in 2011).⁷⁶ Thus the 2011 election went poorly for the GAL from both an office- and policy-seeking perspective. Rather than return the GAL to office after policy defeats and collapse of the coalition with the CDU, the voters preferred "dann schon lieber ein absoluter Olaf" (rather an absolute Olaf).⁷⁷

Conclusion

In the short term, the black-green coalition did not end well for the GAL. Not only did they fail to advance many of their policy goals, but also their most significant reform project was defeated through a binding referendum process, which the GAL had championed. Democracy-seeking triumphed, but at the cost of policy-seeking for the GAL. The impact of the coalition with the CDU on vote-seeking was perhaps neutral. While the Hamburg Greens were not punished per se in the 2011 elections, they only somewhat increased their vote share at a time when the popularity of the national Greens had never been higher. Of course, ending the CDU-GAL coalition proved a disaster in terms of office-seeking for both parties.

On the other hand, participating in the CDU-GAL coalition was probably a better choice than not having done so. Some GAL members viewed the black-green coalition as the priority of office-seeking (*Macht*) over policy-seeking (*Inhalte*). Indeed, the black-green coalition was a new twist on the Green's long-standing dilemma over whether office holding facilitates or sacrifices policy-seeking for a party which understands itself as an above all policy-seeking *Programmpartei* and not a *Funktionspartei* (a party whose appeal and image rests substantially on the function it plays, such as enabling a larger party to attain a parliamentary majority). By participating in the black-green coalition, the GAL had a chance to implement policy goals but also risked being forced to accept unpopular policies and thus further loss of votes to the Left. The only other alternative would have been to choose opposition under a grand coalition. Possibly opposition would have allowed the GAL to shine, had the hypothetical grand coalition pursued

unpopular policies. On the other hand, it might also have left the GAL fairly invisible and in competition with the Left for profile as an opposition party. Thus, accepting the CDU's coalition offer was a plausible choice for the GAL, particularly under the assumption that von Beust would serve out his full term as mayor and head of the coalition.

Not taking up the opportunity for a coalition with the CDU would also have eliminated the chance to "test" a black-green coalition in a Land context as a possible precursor for such a coalition in other German states or at the federal level. On the one hand, neither party indulged in much explicit public discussion of a possible future CDU-Green coalition. On the other hand, much of the CDU's leadership, including Angela Merkel, saw benefits from the Hamburg experiment. As for the Greens, at the time of the coalition's formation the federal party's top two leaders went in somewhat different directions. Jürgen Trittin expressed ambivalence about schwarz-grün in Hamburg, whereas Renate Künast crowed that black-green in Hamburg had implications "beyond Hamburg's borders."⁷⁸

The experience in Hamburg suggests that such a coalition is difficult but not impossible. As a coalition, it worked well as long as the leadership of both parties was reasonably similar in terms of goals and political style—in other words, a coalition of moderate Greens such as Goetsch and left-liberal CDU politicians such as von Beust. With the FDP in chronic crisis, the Left holding its own in many states and the federal level, and the Pirates (at the time) and, more recently, the Alternative für Deutschland fragmenting the party system yet further, both the CDU and Greens may need to keep their coalition options as open as possible. The Greens as a party of the established left-liberal bourgeoisie face ongoing challenges to define its place in a crowded party space.

ALICE COOPER is Professor of Political Science at the University of Mississippi. Her work on German peace movements included *Paradoxes of Peace: German Peace Movements since 1945* (Ann Arbor, 1996) and articles in *Comparative Political Studies* (1996) and the *European Journal of Political Research* (2002). With Paulette Kurzer, she has worked on public health in the European Union context, including an article on German tobacco control (*German Politics and Society*, 2003), three articles on genetically modified foods (*Comparative Political Studies*, 2007; *Journal of Public Policy*, 2007; and *German Politics*, 2009) and two articles on EU obesity policy (*Journal of European Social Policy*, 2011 and *Journal of European Public Policy*, 2012). She would like to thank the two anonymous reviewers for their very helpful suggestions.

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