RESEARCH

Simona Bevern

Party Communication in Routine Times of Politics

Issue Dynamics, Party Competition, Agenda-Setting, and Representation in Germany

Springer VS

Party Communication in Routine Times of Politics

Simona Bevern

Party Communication in Routine Times of Politics

Issue Dynamics, Party Competition, Agenda-Setting, and Representation in Germany

Springer VS

Simona Bevern
Mannheim, Germany

Dissertation at the Graduate School of Economic and Social Sciences at the University of Mannheim, 2013

ISBN 978-3-658-09204-7 ISBN 978-3-658-09205-4 (eBook)
DOI 10.1007/978-3-658-09205-4

Library of Congress Control Number: 2015933182

Springer VS
© Springer Fachmedien Wiesbaden 2015
This work is subject to copyright. All rights are reserved by the Publisher, whether the whole or part of the material is concerned, specifically the rights of translation, reprinting, reuse of illustrations, recitation, broadcasting, reproduction on microfilms or in any other physical way, and transmission or information storage and retrieval, electronic adaptation, computer software, or by similar or dissimilar methodology now known or hereafter developed.
The use of general descriptive names, registered names, trademarks, service marks, etc. in this publication does not imply, even in the absence of a specific statement, that such names are exempt from the relevant protective laws and regulations and therefore free for general use. The publisher, the authors and the editors are safe to assume that the advice and information in this book are believed to be true and accurate at the date of publication. Neither the publisher nor the authors or the editors give a warranty, express or implied, with respect to the material contained herein or for any errors or omissions that may have been made.

Printed on acid-free paper

Springer VS is a brand of Springer Fachmedien Wiesbaden
Springer Fachmedien Wiesbaden is part of Springer Science+Business Media (www.springer.com)

To my best friend,
Ulrike

Acknowledments

In summer 2013, I submitted the present study as a doctoral thesis to the Graduate School of Economic and Social Sciences at Mannheim University. During my time at the Mannheim Centre for European Social Research (MZES) and the Center for Doctoral Studies in Social and Behavioral Sciences (CDSS) from 2009 to 2012, I benefited from the support, expertise and encouragement of many wonderful people.

First of all, I would like to thank my supervisor Berthold Rittberger, who pushed me through the ups and downs of a nascent thesis, giving me guidance and freedom that allowed for the growth of an independent mind. The same applies to my co-supervisor, Catherine de Vries, who is an inspiration and role model of an intelligent, successful, life-loving, modern woman full of wit and kindness. Her Dutch pragmatism and constructive support helped me to successfully finish the doctoral marathon.

Nathalie Giger and Arndt Wonka provided constant intellectual support, friendship and ghost-supervision. At my Alma Mater, special thanks go to Professor Jan W. van Deth as chair of my dissertation committee, Professor Marc Debus who kindly acted as third reviewer on the committee, and Anja Durovic, the best student assistant I ever had the pleasure to work with. At the MZES and the School of Social Sciences, a supreme infrastructure and the people behind it, especially Constanze Nickel, Uschi Horn, Marlene Alle, and Philipp Heldmann, made my life as a researcher very pleasant. Likewise, I wish to thank the staff at the Bremen International Graduate School of Social Sciences (BIGSSS) who made several stays as a visiting fellow possible. For financial support through scholarships and project funding, I am deeply indebted to the MZES, the CDSS, the DAAD and the DFG.

Needless to say that I am very grateful for the wonderful colleagues that accompanied me on the journey, notably Christian Arnold, Doreen Allerkamp, Tanja Dannwolf, Gema García Albacete, Iris Glockner, Gesine und Stefan Götze, Heike Klüver, Laura Konzelmann, Mona Krewel, Lars Mäder, Thomas Meyer, Susanne Michalik, Bernhard Miller, Julia Partheymüller, Thomas Plischke, Jana Pötzschke, Ellen Schneider, Michael Stoffel, Bettina Trüb, Anne Welzel, and all fellow graduate students at the CDSS.

Yet, this book would have never come into being without the people beyond the ivory tower. A special thanks to my beloved parents and family, who were always kind of skeptical about that ‘political-science-thing-you-do’, but who never doubted my ability to succeed in whatever I chose to do. I am also

truly grateful for the ‘Bremen connection’ that has made my life so happy ever since I took that summer class in Ljubljana. One could not think of a better friend “durch dick und dünn” than Alexa Meyer-Hamme. And not only did I make new friends in the North, I also fell in love with the most incredible, creative, and inspiring companion, Björn Fleischer. With him, life is the adventure I have always dreamed of.

Last and most important of all, I wish to thank my best friend, Ulrike Mast, for always being by my side since I started the endeavor of becoming ‘Frau Doktor’. The past five years have been a rollercoaster ride for both of us – fortunately, telephone flat rates and numerous travels to Stuttgart, Mannheim, Munich, Bayreuth and Berlin made hours and hours of invaluable conversation possible. Your indestructible strength, optimism and love carried me all along the way. And, as you must certainly know, this is only one in a million of reasons, my dear Uli, why I dedicate this book to you.

Simona Bevern *Berlin, December 2014*

Content

List of Tables xiii
List of Figures xvii
List of Abbreviations xix

1 Introduction 1

1.1 Party communication in routine times of politics 1
1.2 The multi-level context of party communication 10
1.3 Case selection and research design 11
1.4 Plan of the book 13

2 Theoretical Framework 15

2.1 Overview 15
2.2 Inside Parliament: Inter-party competition and parliamentary activities 17
2.2.1 Parties in Competition: Positions, salience and the dynamics of party communication 17
2.2.2 Top-down or Bottom-up? The party-parliament linkage 24
2.3 Outside Parliament: Citizens and the multi-level context 30
2.3.1 Top-down or Bottom-up? The party-public linkage 30
2.3.2 Beyond the domestic system: Party communication in the EU multi-level context 37
2.4 Summary: Main hypotheses 42

3 Research Design 45

3.1 Case selection 45
3.2 Data and measurement 47
3.2.1 The main variable of interest: party communication 48
3.2.2 Explanatory variables 58
3.2.3 Inter- and intracoder reliability tests 76
3.3 Methods of analysis: time series and multi-level regression models 81
3.3.1 Vector autoregression models 81
3.3.2 Multi-level models 87

4 Party communication: static and dynamic descriptions 89

4.1 Party communication from 2005 to 2009 89
4.1.1 The overall amount of party communication 89
4.1.2 Topics and issue portfolios in parties' communication 90
4.1.3 The amount of party communication over time 97
4.1.4 Dynamics in issue-specific party communication 100
4.2 Tests for stationarity of party communication time series 103

5 Dynamic patterns of inter-party competition 107

5.1 Party communication and issue ownership 107
5.2 Adversarial and accommodative communication strategies 113
5.2.1 Specification and estimation of the inter-party competition VAR model 116
5.2.2 Interpreting the VAR coefficients: Granger causality analysis 121
5.2.3 Visualizing inter-party communication effects: impulse response functions 125
5.2.4 Discussion: the dynamics of inter-party competition – adversarial or accommodative communication strategies? 132

6 Parliamentary activities and party communication 141

6.1 Descriptive information on parliamentary activities 141
6.2 Setting up the party-parliament VAR models 147
6.3 Dynamics between parliamentary activities and overall party communication 150
6.3.1 Granger causality analysis and robustness checks 150
6.3.2 Impulse response analysis 151
6.3.3 Discussion of overall party-parliament link 154
6.4 Government versus opposition parties and the parliamentary agenda 156
6.5 The link between individual party communication and parliamentary activities 158

7 Public Opinion and Party Communication 161

7.1 Descriptive information on public opinion 161
7.2 Setting up the party-opinion VAR models 165
7.3 Dynamics between public opinion and overall party communication 167
7.3.1 Granger causality analysis 167
7.3.2 Impulse response analysis 169
7.3.3 Discussion of the overall party-public link 175
7.4 Partisan opinion and individual party communication 177

8 Beyond the domestic system: Party communication and the EU 183

8.1 The Europeanization of party communication, from 2005 to 2009 183
8.1.1 The three measures of Europeanization compared 183
8.1.2 Horizontal Europeanization 184
8.1.3 Individual parties and the Europeanization of their communication 186
8.1.4 Europeanization of policy fields 188
8.1.5 Europeanization over time 192
8.2 Multivariate analysis: results from multi-level logistic regressions 194
8.3 Discussion of Europeanized party communication 199

9 Conclusion 203

9.1 Summary and discussion 203
9.1.1 Party communication and inter-party competition 204
9.1.2 Party communication and parliamentary activities 206
9.1.3 Party communication and public opinion 207
9.1.4 The Europeanization of party communication 209
9.2 Avenues for future research 210

References 215

List of Tables

Table 1:	Top-down and bottom-up relationships of party communication	8
Table 2:	Overview of main hypotheses from theoretical framework	42
Table 3:	Common assumptions and relative costs of different text categorization methods	51
Table 4:	Issue coding scheme adapted from the Comparative Policy Agendas Project	55
Table 5:	Percentage shares of policy areas according to CAP coding scheme in 2005 party manifestos	60
Table 6:	Matching of CMP codes to CAP coding scheme (positions and salience)	63
Table 7:	Policy-domain specific party positions from party manifestos 2005 (adversarial positions)	66
Table 8:	Policy-domain specific party positions from party manifestos 2005 (close positions: left)	66
Table 9:	Policy-domain specific party positions from party manifestos 2005 (close positions: right)	67
Table 10:	Rank correlations between CMP and CAP codings of policy areas in party manifestos	67
Table 11:	Examples of plenary agenda taken from plenary minute 16/88	70
Table 12:	Matching MIP categories with the CAP coding scheme	72
Table 13:	Matching of policy areas for party communication and German legislation	75
Table 14:	Results from inter-coder reliability test for issues in party communication	78
Table 15:	Summary of inter-coder reliability results	81
Table 16:	Number of press releases per party weighted by seat share	90
Table 17:	Salience classification of policy issues in party communication	92
Table 18:	Augmented Dickey-Fuller tests for unit roots in weekly issue-specific time series (in percent)	106
Table 19:	Claimed issue ownership in party manifestos and issue ownership in party communication	110
Table 20:	Rank correlations between salience of policy areas in party manifestos and communication	112
Table 21:	Accommodative and adversarial party positions by policy area	114

Table 22:	Example for lag length test (policy area: macroeconomics)	119
Table 23:	Example for Lagrange-multiplier test (policy area: macroeconomics)	120
Table 24:	Results of Granger causality tests on daily inter-party competition by policy field	123
Table 25:	Main results of daily inter-party competition (based on Mo-Fr % communication)	133
Table 26:	Overall Parliamentary Activity by Government and Opposition, 2005-2009	142
Table 27:	Salience classification of policy areas in parliamentary activities	144
Table 28:	Rank correlations between salience of policy areas in parliamentary activities and party communication	145
Table 29:	Results from Granger causality tests on weekly parliamentary activities and party communication (in percent)	150
Table 30:	Main results: overall party communication and parliamentary activities	154
Table 31:	Main results: government versus opposition communication and parliamentary activities	157
Table 32:	Main results: individual party communication and party activity in parliament	159
Table 33:	Salience classification of policy areas in public opinion	161
Table 34:	Rank correlation between salience of policy areas in public opinion and party communication	162
Table 35:	Results from Granger causality tests on weekly public opinion (first-differenced) and party communication (in percent)	168
Table 36:	Main results: overall party communication and public opinion	176
Table 37:	Direction of effects between party communication and partisan opinion by party	181
Table 38:	Direction of effects between party communication and partisan opinion by policy field	182
Table 39:	Three types of Europeanization of party communication, 2005-2009	183
Table 40:	EU member states in horizontally Europeanized party communication	185
Table 41:	The Europeanization of legislation and party communication compared	191

Table 42: Multi-level logistic regression models of Europeanized party communication 195
Table 43: Pairwise comparison of margins for CDU and SPD 199
Table 44: Dynamic interactions between party competitors, parliamentary activities and public opinion by policy field 211

List of Figures

Figure 1:	Party communication in the German context: inter-party competition, parliamentary activities, public opinion, and the EU	15
Figure 2:	Number of press releases by party groups in the Bundestag 2005-2009	89
Figure 3:	Percentages of party communication by party and policy area	92
Figure 4:	Total number of press releases per week	97
Figure 5:	Volume of party communication by parties (8-weeks moving averages)	98
Figure 6:	Cross-correlograms of parties' communication volume (based on 8-weeks moving averages)	100
Figure 7:	Representation of 8-weeks moving average of individual parties' communication in the 26 policy fields (issue attention in percent)	102
Figure 8:	Ranking of issues in the 2005 party manifestos, per party (% of words)	108
Figure 9:	Orthogonalized IRF: how the Linke affects the FDP in the policy field of macroeconomics	128
Figure 10:	Orthogonalized IRF: an example of effect versus no-effect	129
Figure 11:	Orthogonalized IRF: how the SPD and the Grüne affect the CDU in the policy field of macroeconomics	130
Figure 12:	Orthogonalized IRF: Feedback mechanism for CDU and Linke in the policy field of civil rights, minority issues and immigration	131
Figure 13:	Orthogonalized IRF: Education as an example for a mixed strategy pattern in communication	134
Figure 14:	Frequency of accommodative and adversarial strategies by party	136
Figure 15:	Relationships between salience of issues in party communication and strategy	137
Figure 16:	Relationships between salience of issues in party manifestos and strategy	138
Figure 17:	Parliamentary activities and party communication per policy field over time	146
Figure 18:	Orthogonalized IRF: Parliamentary activities and party communication on the Economy	152

Figure 19: Orthogonalized IRF: Parliamentary activities and party communication on agriculture 153
Figure 20: Public opinion and party communication per policy field over time 163
Figure 21: Orthogonalized IRF: positive effect of party communication on public opinion 170
Figure 22: Orthogonalized IRF: Positive and negative effect of party communication on public opinion 171
Figure 23: Orthogonalized IRF: negative effect of party communication on public opinion 172
Figure 24: Orthogonalized IRF: positive and negative effect of public opinion on party communication 173
Figure 25: Orthogonalized IRF: no feedback mechanism in the policy field of environment 174
Figure 26: Orthogonalized IRF: feedback mechanism between party communication and public opinion 175
Figure 27: The overall relationships between individual party communication and partisan opinion 179
Figure 28: The direction of effects between party communication and partisan opinion 180
Figure 29: The degree of vertical Europeanization per party 187
Figure 30: Party positions, salience and party unity on the issue of European integration 187
Figure 31: Policy fields in party communication, Europeanized and non-Europeanized shares 189
Figure 32: The degree of Europeanization per policy field (in percent) 190
Figure 33: Party communication and Europeanization over time 192
Figure 34: Difference in means in degree of Europeanization by European events 193
Figure 35: Major European events and the share of Europeanized party communication 194
Figure 36: Conditional margins of Europeanized communication for CDU by level of shared competence 198

List of Abbreviations

ADF	Augmented Dickey Fuller test
ADL	autoregressive distributed lag model
AIC	Akaike information criterion
BIC	Schwarz Bayesian information criterion
BLUE	best linear unbiased estimator
BTW	Bundestagswahlen (German national elections)
CAP	Comparative Policy Agendas project
CCF	cross-correlation function
CDU	Christlich Demokratische Union (Christian Democratic Union)
CHES	Chapel Hill Expert Survey
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CMP	Comparative Manifesto Project
CSU	Christlich Soziale Union (Christian Social Union)
d	deviation
df	degrees of freedom
DIP	Dokumentations- und Informationssystem für Parlamentarische Vorgänge (Parliamentary Material Information System)
e. V.	eingetragener Verein (registered association)
ECM	error correction model
ECOFIN	Economic and Financial Affairs Council of the EU
EU	European Union
EuGH	Europäischer Gerichtshof (European Court of Justice)
EUROPUB	The Transformation of Political Mobilisation and Communication in European Public Spheres project
EZB	Europäische Zentralbank (European Central Bank)
FA	Foreign affairs
FAZ	Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung
FDP	Freie Demokratische Partei (Free Democratic party)
FT	Foreign trade
GAL-TAN	green-alternative-libertarian/ traditional-authoritarian-nationalist
Grüne	Bündnis90/Die Grünen (Green party)
Hartz IV	colloquial: long-term unemployment benefits

HQIC	Hannan-Quinn information criterion
ID	identification number
IRF	impulse-response functions
Linke	Partei DIE LINKE (Left party)
LR	likelihood ratio test
max	maximum
min	minimum
MIP	most important problem
ML	multi-level
MP	Member of Parliament
MRG	Manifesto Research Group
NPD	Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands (National Democratic Party of Germany)
O.-W.	Ost-West (East-West)
OLS	Ordinary least squares
PaO	partisan opinion
Parl	parliamentary activities
PC	party communication
PCG	party communication of government
PCO	party communication of opposition
PDF	portable data format
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
PO	public opinion
PP	party position
PR	press releases
Prob	probability
r	Pearson's correlation coefficient
RILE	left-right position
S	salience
saldiss	salience-dissent
sd	standard deviation
se	standard error
SEQ	structural equation model
SFB	Sonderforschungsbereich (Collaborative Research Center)
SPD	Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands (Social Democratic Party)

SZ	Süddeutsche Zeitung
TEURO	colloquial: the expensive Euro
UK	United Kingdom
US	United States of America
v	volume
VAR	vector autoregression
var	variance
ver	vertical
ZACAT	social science data portal provided by GESIS (Leibniz Institute for Social Sciences)
ZDF	Zweites Deutsches Fernsehen (Second German television network)

UK	United Kingdom
US	United States of America
v	volume
VAR	vector autoregression
var	variance
ver	vertical
ZACAT	social science data portal provided by GESIS (Leibniz Institute for Social Sciences)

1 Introduction

1.1 Party communication in routine times of politics

"Parties can best be conceived as means of communication"
(Sartori 1976, 24)

In Germany, as well as in other European democracies, we empirically observe that political parties put considerable effort into their daily communication during routine times of politics – which is the time period between two national elections. They send out virtually hundreds of press releases every month, stage press conferences on a weekly basis, give public speeches and regular interviews to the mass media. While the scholarly debate on party communication, and party behavior more generally speaking, mostly centers on election times, it seems fit to ask "[…] what is the purpose of this continual bombardment of information, views, opinions and debates?" (Lilleker 2008, 10) when there is no election upcoming in which it makes intuitive sense that parties use their communication campaigns to get out the vote and win the election.

Although elections are key institutions in modern democracies, if nothing happened in between elections, "[…] this could also be described as a dictatorship with a finite term" (Lilleker 2008, 1). There are a number of political scientists who reason that it is notably during routine times of politics that "[…] the real business of governance takes place" (Martin and Vanberg 2008, 502). In parliament, parties deliberate over policies, some policy issues gaining more importance than others. Government parties back their government (or rebel against it) in the passing of new legislation; opposition parties monitor and critically assess the actions of government, at the same time trying to push their own policy issues on the parliamentary agenda. The public constantly watches and evaluates the political elite on their actions as well as non-actions, their responsiveness to citizens' issues, needs and preferences, and their quality of governance – only a few examples for what happens in routine times of politics that should be of great interest to political scientists. All these activities in routine times of politics are intimately linked with communication.

Allegedly, communication provides the link between the state and the citizens. Many communication scholars stress that the distinction between policy-making and interest mediation is merely analytical. Communication is an integral part of politics and policy-making being the primary mechanism linking formulation and implementation of collectively binding decisions (Jarren and

S. Bevern, *Party Communication in Routine Times of Politics,*
DOI 10.1007/978-3-658-09205-4_1, © Springer Fachmedien Wiesbaden 2015

Donges 2006, 38). In other words, communication is not a subdomain or dimension of politics, but its central *modus operandi* (Marcinkowski 2001, 238). In its basic meaning, communication is defined as a process in which information is transferred from one entity to another (McNair 2007). While this definition is a good starting point, it lacks a major attribute marking the world of politics, namely purpose. Purposeful communication implies that the senders of messages aim at influencing their environment. This is why scholars of *political* communication usually define their object of study as the "[…] construction, sending, receiving, and processing of messages that potentially have a significant direct or indirect impact on politics" (Graber and Smith 2005, 479). In a nutshell, political actors use communication as a resource to promote and enforce their interests.

In this study, I focus on political parties and their communication during routine times of politics. Given that political parties are central actors in parliamentary democracies, I argue that it is essential to study their communication behavior, theoretically as well as empirically, to gain a deeper understanding of parties, politics and the role of communication outside the electoral game. To understand and explain parties' communication behavior during routine times of politics – in other words, what they communicate and why – we have to engage more closely with the functions and goals of political parties as well as with the notion of communication itself. Communication is often said to be key in any political system. Despite this ascribed centrality of communication in routine times of politics, political scientists and communication scholars have only devoted little attention to its role and effects.[1]

Most theories of communication, and especially the literature on political communication, build on the seminal work of Harold Lasswell who asked a seemingly simple question defining the essence of communication: *who* says *what* to *whom* with what *effects* via which *channels* (Lasswell 1927)? This famous question translated into the classic model of communication, encompassing a source (*who*), a message (*what*), a receiver (*whom*), an effect and a channel. Thus, in order to understand communication, we have to learn more about the sources, the messages, the receivers, the effects and the channels. The tricky thing about political communication is that it seldom takes place in a vacuum and that it is recursive, meaning that it usually flows in at least two directions: a source sends out a message to a receiver, but the receiver might also send a message back to the source, hence becoming itself a source and the source becoming a receiver. To make things even more complicated, time plays a crucial role: communication between actors may happen simultaneously or the process of communication between the actors unfolds sequentially over time or even both. When studying communication, its dynamics over time should be taken into account.

[1] Notable exceptions in recent years have been scholars of coalition politics (Martin and Vanberg 2008; Sagarzazu 2011; Sagarzazu and Klüver 2012).

Starting from the general assumption that parties' communication behavior is not random but displays certain regular patterns, I seize upon different strands of literature to conceptualize the content of party communication and to derive hypotheses about the messages that mutually influence political parties and their communication. As Aldrich puts it, parties are unusually 'endogenous' institutions shaped by the same political actors that at the same time shape legislation and other political outcomes (Aldrich 2008, 557). Thus, to answer the main research questions, namely why and what parties communicate during routine times of politics and how their communication is related to the senders and receivers of their messages, in the following paragraphs I analytically dissect the individual components of Lasswell's communication model to present what I intend to study when speaking of party communication. Starting with the source, we have to ask: *who* are political parties and what are the goals and motivations underlying their communication output in routine times of politics? Answers to these questions lead us to *whom* (i. e., the receivers) and *what* parties might want to communicate (i. e., the messages). Narrowing down the content and the audiences of parties' communication help us to formulate expectations about the *effects* of their communication – as senders of political messages and receivers of other actors' communication at the same time.

The main theoretical contribution of this study is to build a bridge between theories of communication, party competition (Downs 1957; Meguid 2005; Petrocik 1996; Robertson 1976), agenda-setting (Baumgartner et al. 2008; Green-Pedersen and Mortensen 2010b; Soroka 2002a), and representation (Hobolt and Klemmensen 2008; Soroka and Wlezien 2010; Stimson et al. 1995), and to explicitly spell out expectations about parties' communication behavior and interactions with other actors and institutions such as citizens and parliament. The proposed hypotheses take up the recursive nature of communication aiming at different audiences at a time, resulting in partly conflicting and seldom mutually exclusive expectations. Theoretically as well as empirically, I offer a systematic analysis of party communication in routine times of politics. In the following paragraphs, I sketch out the role of communication for political parties that is closely related to the functions they (should) perform and the goals they pursue, whom they seek to communicate with, which also gives an idea why communication matters in routine times of politics. After this concise introduction to the theoretical framework guiding the empirical analyses, I briefly present the research design, spell out why German political parties make for an interesting case, and provide a plan of the book that already includes some of the most important findings of this study.

Why parties communicate

In the enormous scholarly literature on political parties, it is rather undisputed that parties play a crucial role in the functioning of modern democracies. Studies

of political parties focus on how political systems operate and concentrate on how democratic principles are deployed in a core domain of actual democratic practice. While in the 21st century, new challenges like the decreasing importance of long-established societal cleavages resulting in declining party identification, less socio-structural voting and higher electoral volatility (Dalton and Wattenberg 2000) have arisen that question the continuing importance of political parties as the central intermediary institutions linking citizens and the state, "[…] parties have come to be seen as necessary for democracy, even amidst increasing concern that their actual functioning is inadequate for a healthy performance of democracy" (van Biezen and Saward 2008, 24).

Basically, there are two main lines of research on political parties, building on different views: functionalist versus rationalist. These general frameworks provide distinct answers to the question why parties communicate. While I ultimately cannot solve these inherently conflicting conceptualizations of political parties, they may well serve as a starting point to derive expectations about parties' communication behavior. For communication scholars, there is no doubt that communication is always multi-faceted and serves multiple purposes. Hence, "[…] when we study political communication we have to consider all the intended functions across all the different audiences that will receive the message" (Lilleker 2008, 12). This is exactly what I do in the present study.

According to the first view on political parties, these serve to fulfill different functions. Although the definition of "[…] what a political party is and what functions it should assume is hardly an objective task. Rather, it is a normative one" (White 2006, 6), party theorists in this line of research aim at the identification of common attributes and functions played by parties in all political systems irrespective of their institutional, social, or cultural diversity (for an overview, see Gunther et al. 2002). One of their basic functions is to provide the *link between citizens and government* (Sartori 1976). They fulfill the task of *interest aggregation* and *mediation*, they contribute to *opinion formation* by *informing* the public – which is sometimes also called *political socialization* - and they *facilitate* and *encourage citizens' participation* in the political process (Karp and Banducci 2007, 217; see also Mair 1994). Next to representation, which "[…] also takes place in the legislative arena, following the election, when bills are drafted and deliberated upon" (Gunther and Diamond 2001, 8), their essential function is the *organization of government*. Political parties in government *propose policies* that become collectively binding decisions once they have passed parliament. The main task of parties in parliament is to *monitor* and *control government*. While government parties in parliament usually back their governments and thus contribute to the smooth implementation of policies, opposition parties have to resort to other strategies to influence policy, such as the *mobilization of public support* (Schattschneider 1960). In their struggle over policies, parties also *structure the choices and alternatives* along different issue dimensions (Gunther and Diamond 2001). This list of party functions is not exhaustive, but it becomes clear that all of these functions require communica-

tion –with citizens, but also with each other and within a party itself (Norris 2005; Sellers 2010).

According to the second view on political parties, these are rational actors seeking to maximize their utility. Political parties pursue particular goals and invest their resources efficiently to attain these goals. Rationalist party scholars have identified three main goals that parties pursue, namely *policy*, *office*, and *votes* (Strøm 1990, 25; see also Fenno 1973; Mayhew 1974). These goals are closely related to each other and encompass the more general motivations of *power* and *influence* underlying parties' behavior. While the struggle for office and votes most clearly takes place during election times, there is room for maneuver when it comes to policy-making during routine times of politics – at least when we assume a world of post-election politics in which the electoral promises of political parties are not binding or too vague to matter (Laver 2008; Persson and Tabellini 2000, 1-14). In most parliamentary democracies, especially with multi-party settings, coalition or minority governments, this is usually the case. Hence, political parties continue to compete with each other over policies in routine times of politics. For this purpose, they make use of their communication.

Scholars of political communication share the notion that communication is all about winning over others. This may suggest a rather cynical view on politics where communication is used as propaganda or a means of persuasion, mainly concerned with the acquisition of power. But this is not at least a strange proposition for rational party scholars: communication should serve the attainment of a goal – if not, parties would not engage in it. With the 'others' to be won over, I now turn to the audiences of party communication.

To whom parties communicate – and to whom they respond

Apart from influencing policy-making that starts with the battle about who sets the issues on the *parliamentary agenda*, parties may also use their communication to build or maintain a reputation of competence among *citizens* and their potential *voters* (Fombrun and Shanley 1990; Lipinski 2004; Walgrave and De Swert 2007). Parties are always objects "[…] about which beliefs and loyalties, preferences and assessments are formed and used" (Aldrich 2008, 564). They may also want to mobilize the *public* or *other political actors* such as interest groups or social movement organizations for a certain policy (Schattschneider 1960) or signal responsiveness to their *voters* in order to be re-elected after the end of the legislative term (Hobolt and Klemmensen 2008; Stimson et al. 1995). Certainly, this is only an incomplete list of the goals that parties strive for during routine times of politics, but it points to the most important receivers of their messages: *other political parties* with whom they compete for policy attention, positions, and solutions, *governments* and *parliaments* who set the legislative agenda, not only at the national, but also at the local, regional and supranational

levels, and last but not least, the *citizen public* who observes the parties in office, government as well as opposition, learning about politics and critically assessing the actions and achievements of their elected representatives. Interestingly, the same audiences can be identified when looking at party communication from a functionalist view: interest aggregation, mediation, opinion formation, mobilization involve the public; policy-making and deliberation take place in *parliament*, political decisions have to be communicated, views are exchanged, alternatives and choices are put forth by political parties in the parliamentary arena. It also becomes obvious that the *public* and *parliament* are not only addressees of party communication, but their actions also shape parties' behavior and communication.

Of course, parties' communication is also intended for wider distribution by the *mass media*, and although political parties are known to put considerable effort to foster their success in attracting media attention by adapting their communication to media-specific requirements (Blumler and Kavanagh 1999; Maurer 2008; Mazzoleni and Schulz 1999), the media are not per se the primary target audience parties aim at. The link between political parties, or political actors more generally speaking, and the mass media is an important one, but has only gained sparse empirical attention by scholars of political communication (Lang and Lang 1981; Shoemaker and Reese 1996), mainly due to methodological reasons – which I similarly cannot not solve here. Hence, in this study I only focus on the links between parties' communication and *their direct party competitors*, the *parliamentary agenda*, the *public* and an additional layer of governance, namely the *European Union*, due to the multi-level context in which German and other European parties operate.

What parties communicate

Political messages are complex constructs that may transmit information about certain policy issues, actions and achievements, more concretely about preferences, political positions, values, judgments, and calls for action, change or resistance. The universe of potential messages, usually consisting of a *subject*, an *object* and an *intention* or *action* (Sellers 2010, 10-11), is virtually infinite. Mainly due to time and other resource constraints, political parties have to select from this universe of potential issues when crafting their messages. At the highest level of abstraction, the object of a message revolves around an *issue* that belongs to a particular policy field. Theories of party competition and agenda-setting share a central focus on issues. In its basic meaning, an issue is an important topic or problem in a debate or discussion. An issue is "[…] a conflict between two or more groups over procedural or substantive matters relating to the distribution of positions or resources" (Cobb and Elder 1972, 32) or, in more general terms, an issue is whatever is in contention (Lang and Lang 1981). While all the information included in any political message by political parties