

'Stroke of Genius' or 'Attack on Democracy'? The 2023 Reform of the German Electoral System

Florian Grotz and Robert Vehrkamp

ABSTRACT

Under the Traffic Light Coalition government formed in 2021 by the SPD, Alliance 90/The Greens and the FDP, the electoral system for the German Bundestag was changed in 2023 for the fourth time since 2011. This article analyses the process and the outcome of this electoral system reform. On the one hand, the reform proposed by the Traffic Light Coalition appears more convincing in conceptual and technical terms than the corresponding attempts made by previous federal governments. On the other hand, the emergence of 'vacant' constituencies also has significant side effects that undermine the reform's political acceptance. Given that the new federal government formed in 2025 and led by the CDU/CSU wants to reverse the 2023 reform, the institutional stability of the electoral system required for a representative democracy remains at risk.

ARTICLE HISTORY Received 3 December 2025; Accepted 1 May 2026

Introduction

In its coalition agreement, the Traffic Light Coalition government formed in 2021 by the Social Democratic Party (SPD), the Greens and the Free Democratic Party (FDP) set itself the goal of 'revising the electoral law within the first year in order to prevent the Bundestag from growing in size in the long term' (Koalitionsvertrag 2021, 10). On 17 March 2023, the three governing parties passed a corresponding legal amendment. Due to a ruling by the Federal Constitutional Court (FCC) on 30 July 2024, the new electoral law was modified once again and was applied for the first time in the early Bundestag election held on 23 February 2025.

This electoral reform provoked very different reactions. For example, the German Economic Institute assessed the permanent reduction in the size of the Bundestag as a 'positive signal to citizens', adding that it demonstrates the willingness of politicians to 'make savings themselves', which could 'strengthen satisfaction with democracy' (Kauder 2024). The parliamentary opposition, however, reacted to the new election law with vehement rejection

© 2026 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group

This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited. The terms on which this article has been published allow the posting of the Accepted Manuscript in a repository by the author(s) or with their consent.

and outrage. Immediately after the law was passed, Christian Social Union (CSU) leader Markus Söder spoke of an ‘attack on democracy’ (quoted from Focus Online 2025). After the 2025 Bundestag election, Friedrich Merz – the chancellor candidate of the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) and the CSU – reiterated that the reform by the Traffic Light Coalition absolutely had to be corrected, saying that ‘this kind of electoral law harms our democracy’ (Spiegel Online 2025). Accordingly, the new coalition government of the CDU/CSU and the SPD announced in its coalition agreement that it would ‘amend the existing federal electoral law’ (Koalitionsvertrag 2025, line 4511).

Following a 2008 ruling by the FCC, the 2023 election law is one of a series of reforms that the previous federal governments enacted in order to limit the increase in Bundestag seats (cf. Behnke 2025; Grotz and Schroeder 2025, 174–179). Despite these efforts, however, the Bundestag continued to grow larger with each successive election.

How does the reform by the Traffic Light Coalition look against this backdrop? Does it offer a viable solution to the functional problems of Germany’s electoral system, or is it just another step in a seemingly endless cycle of reforms? In what follows, we argue that the 2023 electoral reform appears more convincing in conceptual and technical terms than the corresponding reform attempts of previous governments. However, it also has major side effects in the form of ‘vacant’ constituencies, which may undermine its political acceptance.

The article is structured as follows. The next section provides a concise overview of the challenges involved in reforming Germany’s electoral system and the approaches taken in recent years. We then outline the process and outcome of the Traffic Light Coalition’s reform, followed by an analysis of its main impacts, including the FCC’s ruling of 30 July 2024 and the implications for the 2025 Bundestag election. The final section summarises the key findings and offers a brief outlook.

Challenges and Approaches to a ‘Minimally Invasive’ Reform of Germany’s Electoral System

In the Parliamentary Council of 1948/49, the electoral system for the future Bundestag was hotly contested (Grotz and Schroeder 2025, 174–179). The CDU and the CSU argued in favour of adopting a British-style plurality system, while the other parties favoured a system of proportional representation (Jesse 1985, 91–97). To avoid constraining future solutions, the Council refrained from anchoring the electoral system in the Basic Law. Unlike most other institutions in Germany’s system of government, it can therefore still be amended by a simple majority in the Bundestag.

The electoral system that eventually emerged reflected a political compromise between the Christian Democrats and the other parties, resulting in a novel institutional design. Each voter had a single vote that was counted twice: for a candidate in a single-member constituency (SMC) and for that candidate's nationwide party list. Half of the members of parliament (MPs) were to be elected in SMCs by plurality (direct seats), the other half via party lists according to the principle of proportional representation (list seats). Nevertheless, it was not a symmetrical combination of plurality rule and proportional representation, as a party's direct seats were offset against its list seats. Only if a party received more direct seats than list seats was it allowed to retain these 'surplus seats' (*Überhangmandate*) without the other parties receiving any compensatory seats. Before the electoral law came into force, the draft was amended by the state minister presidents and the Allied occupying powers. A threshold clause was introduced that required a party to win at least 5 per cent of the valid votes in at least one state (*Land*) in order to be eligible to be allocated seats in the Bundestag. However, the 'basic mandate clause' (*Grundmandatsklausel*) exempted parties that won at least one direct seat from having to meet this requirement. In addition, the share of direct seats in the total number of seats was slightly increased (from 50 per cent to 60 per cent) and the nationwide party lists were replaced by state lists.

This mixed-member proportional system (MMPS) – known in Germany as 'personalised proportional representation' – only underwent minor modifications in the following decades. Specifically, in 1953 the five-percent threshold was 'lifted' to the federal level, the single-vote system was replaced with a two-vote system and the number of direct seats was decreased to 50 per cent. In 1956, the basic mandate clause was increased from one to three direct seats, and the proportional allocation of total seats was shifted from the state to the federal level. In 1985, the d'Hondt method was replaced by the Hare-Niemeyer method. Finally, in the first post-unification elections held in 1990, the five-percent threshold was applied separately to the former East and West Germany (Nohlen 2023, 378–383).

From the early 1960s to the late 1980s, the MMPS produced almost 'ideal' effects, combining a high proportionality between votes and seats with a strongly concentrated party system. After 1990, however, it became apparent that these electoral outcomes were largely shaped by the specific political conditions of West Germany. The steadily increasing fragmentation of the party system was now reflected in a corresponding decline in the concentration of seats, which clearly highlighted the proportional-representation character of the system. At the same time, the most important concentration-promoting element of the electoral system – the five-percent

threshold – led to a relatively high proportion of ‘lost’ votes, which impaired the degree of proportionality.

There was also a marked change in the function of the surplus seats. Whereas they had only appeared sporadically before 1987, they now appeared in greater numbers. The main reason for this was the weakness of the second votes (i.e. those for a party’s state list) of the strongest party in each case (Weinmann and Grotz 2021). As a result, this party received fewer proportional seats overall, yet continued to win the plurality of first votes in many constituencies, thereby securing a disproportionate share of direct seats. This phenomenon first became particularly controversial in the 1994 Bundestag election, when the CDU won 16 surplus seats, thereby securing its extremely narrow majority together with the FDP. Since the CDU/CSU-FDP coalition government did not want to abolish the surplus seats, the opposition SPD took the matter to the FCC. In 1997, the court dismissed the complaint, albeit by a very narrow margin (BVerfGE 95, 335). When the SPD became the strongest party after the 1998 election and now benefited from surplus seats itself, it lost interest in pursuing reform. In terms of power politics, the problem now seemed to have been defused, as it was assumed that the party with the most votes would always benefit from the surplus seats and that the electoral system would therefore not produce one-sided advantages for any particular party.

Nevertheless, the issue of surplus seats remained a subject of critical debate in academia and civil society. A particularly problematic phenomenon was known as ‘negative voting weight’ (*negatives Stimmgewicht*). This arose from the interaction of SMCs and the proportionally allocated total seats, compounded by the state party lists, which were linked for calculation purposes. As a result of this phenomenon, a party with fewer second votes could end up receiving more surplus seats while an increase in second votes for a party could prevent it from receiving a surplus seat and thus effectively disadvantage it. When this paradox first manifested itself in a by-election held in Dresden in 2005, the publishers of the website ‘wahlrecht.de’ seized the opportunity to file a complaint with the FCC. In July 2008, the court upheld the complaint and gave the Bundestag until 30 June 2011 to eliminate the negative voting weight and thereby restore an electoral system consistent with the constitution (BVerfGE 121, 266–317).

The parties in the Bundestag delayed the reform until shortly before the deadline, meaning that the 2009 election was still held under the old – unconstitutional – electoral system.¹ The subsequent CDU/CSU-FDP government sought to eliminate the negative voting weight while retaining the surplus seats – a solution that would have heavily benefited the Christian Democrats (Grotz 2014, 124–125). Although the opposition parties unanimously rejected this ‘black-yellow’ electoral reform, it was passed by a simple majority of the governing parties in autumn 2011. The SPD,

Greens and the Left Party then appealed to the FCC, which declared the electoral law invalid in July 2012. In this ruling, the court also set a permissible maximum number of 15 'unbalanced' surplus seats (BVerfGE 131, 316–376). Shortly before the 2013 Bundestag election, the government and opposition finally agreed on an amendment to the electoral law, approved by all parliamentary groups except the Left Party. The central feature of this reform was a complete rebalancing of seats: if one party received 'too many' seats due to surplus seats based on its nationwide share of second votes, the other parliamentary parties would also receive additional compensatory seats, thereby restoring proportional representation within the Bundestag.

With the balancing of seats, the 2013 electoral system addressed the key requirements of the FCC, as it prevented the occurrence of uncompensated surplus seats, which had given negative voting weight its political significance. However, the reform also had serious drawbacks (Behnke et al. 2017). Beyond making the allocation of seats even more complex, the combination of (still occurring) surplus seats and corresponding compensatory seats allowed for a massive expansion of the Bundestag. While the increase in seats remained relatively modest after the 2013 Bundestag election – adding a total of 33 seats – the 2017 Bundestag election saw an increase of 111 seats, bringing the Bundestag to 709 members. Given the ongoing fragmentation of the party system, this was not the maximum size that could be expected. Surveys conducted between late 2017 and early 2020 suggested that a Bundestag with well over 800 – or even up to 1,000 – seats seemed entirely possible (Pukelsheim 2019; Weinmann and Grotz 2022).

In response, the governing CDU/CSU-SPD coalition agreed in autumn 2020 on another electoral reform to curb the excessive expansion of the Bundestag. Accordingly, up to three surplus seats would remain unbalanced, and surplus seats obtained by a party in one state (*Land*) would be partially offset by reducing its list seats in another state. Additionally, the number of SMCs was to be reduced from 299 to 280 effective from the Bundestag election after next (i.e. 2025). However, several problems also came along with this reform (Grotz and Pukelsheim 2020). First, the main goal of effectively reducing the number of seats was not achieved, as the 'damping effect' was very minor. In fact, Bundestag expanded further to 736 seats in the 2021 election. The allowance of unbalanced surplus seats also reintroduced an element of the system that had previously faced widespread criticism. As the three additional seats were expected to favour the Christian Democrats also in the foreseeable future, the opposition parties united in rejecting the reform. Nevertheless, they were unable to prevent its passage by the CDU/CSU-SPD government majority. This prompted the FDP, Greens and Left Party to take the matter to the FCC again in February 2021, which ultimately upheld the reform in November 2023 by a narrow five-to-three majority (BVerfGE 168, 71–169).

Overall, the politics of the German electoral system before the Traffic Light Coalition showed that even ‘minimally invasive’ reforms of the MMPS – which leave its basic structure unchanged – carry specific risks and side effects (Behnke et al. 2017; Weinmann and Grotz 2022). From a technical perspective, the simplest way to address the problem of negative voting weight is to prevent the occurrence of surplus seats. The most effective approach is to consistently apply the principle of proportional representation of second votes, which is fundamental to the allocation of seats in a MMPS. Accordingly, only direct seats that are covered by the proportional representation of their party’s second votes – so-called ‘second-vote coverage’ (*Zweitstimmendeckung*) – will be awarded, thereby eliminating surplus seats entirely. Several options exist to implement this principle, which played a particularly important role in the electoral reform of the Traffic Light Coalition (see next section).

One option is to simply ‘cap’ surplus seats, meaning that SMCs in which the candidates with the most first votes do not have second-vote coverage remain vacant (Meyer 1994). Another approach of second-vote coverage modifies the allocation of direct seats. One such variant is the ‘mixed majority rule’ (*verbundene Mehrheitsregel*), according to which SMC seats are allocated to the candidates who receive the most first votes and whose seats are covered by their party’s proportion of second votes (Vehrkamp 2022). Under all variants of second-vote coverage, the Bundestag retains its statutory standard size, and the nationwide proportional representation between the parliamentary parties is maintained. However, unlike the previous system, SMC candidates with the most first votes would no longer be automatically entitled to a direct seat. At the same time, ‘capping’ can create ‘orphaned’ constituencies, whereas the ‘mixed majority rule’ may result in the candidates who finished second or third according to first votes being awarded the seat.

The second approach to avoiding surplus seats targets the structure of the constituencies themselves (‘constituency reform’). For example, if the share of SMC seats in total seats were significantly reduced (e.g. from 50 per cent to 33 per cent), surplus seats would no longer arise in the vast majority of cases, though they could not be completely eliminated. Most importantly, however, implementing constituency reforms would require a lot of administrative and political work. Moreover, such reform would significantly reduce the personalisation component of the electoral system.

The negative voting weight could also be neutralised by offsetting accumulated surplus seats as effectively as possible. An obvious and technically simple option is the allocation of compensatory seats, as already described, until party proportional representation has been restored with ‘seat balancing’ (*Mandatsausgleich*). However, this can lead to a massive increase in the size of the Bundestag, as observed between 2013 and 2021. Alternatively,

a limited number of surplus seats could be left unbalanced ('tolerated'), reducing the number of compensatory seats required. However, according to an FCC ruling of 2012, this is only permissible up to a maximum of 15 surplus seats, and even then, it can significantly impair the proportionality among the parliamentary parties. Finally, the surplus seats awarded to a party in one state could be offset by reducing its list seats in another state ('internal compensation'). While this method preserves intra-parliamentary proportionality among parties, it does affect proportional representation within a party's state lists. Additionally, it leaves untouched the surplus seats of a party like the CSU, which only contests Bundestag elections in a single state (i.e. Bavaria).

Table 1 provides an overview of these most important approaches to a 'minimally invasive' reform of the Bundestag electoral system.² It shows that each of them has its own advantages and drawbacks. It also illustrates how the reforms between 2013 and 2023 employed various combinations of these approaches. Notably, the Traffic Light Coalition opted for a most effective variant of avoiding surplus seats, as will be detailed in the subsequent section.

The Traffic Light Coalition's Reform

The last federal government led by Angela Merkel (2018–2021) was clearly aware that the 2020 electoral reform would not be enough to curb the growth of the Bundestag in the long term. In addition to the changes to the electoral system that had already been decided, her government therefore also stipulated the establishment of a Reform Commission on matters relating to electoral law, including 'measures to effectively limit the expansion of the Bundestag beyond its standard size' (BT-Drucks. 19/28787, 1). However, the commission only met twice before the 2021 Bundestag election, and these meetings mainly dealt with organisational issues (BT-Drucks. 19/32638). In accordance with the principle of discontinuity (*Diskontinuitätsprinzip*), which applies to all committees of a newly elected Bundestag, the Reform Commission was re-established by the new Traffic Light Coalition on 15 March 2022 and then commenced its work (BT-Drucks. 20/1023).

The Reform Commission

The Reform Commission comprised 13 MPs – four from the SPD, three from the CDU/CSU, two each from the Greens and the FDP, and one each from the right-wing populist Alternative for Germany (AfD) party and the Left Party – as well as an equal number of experts nominated by the individual parliamentary groups. The reform process was thus more transparent and inclusive than those of previous electoral reforms, which

Table 1. Minimally invasive approaches to reforming the Bundestag electoral system.

Reform approach	Avoidance of surplus seats			Offsetting of surplus seats		
	Allocation	Second-vote coverage	Constituency reform	Mandate balancing	Toleration of surplus seats	Internal compensation
Key advantages	+ Intra-parliamentary proportionality + Set BT size + Easy to implement + No 'orphaned' SMCs	+ Intra-parliamentary proportionality + Set BT size + Easy to implement	+ Fewer SuS and CS	+ Intra-parliamentary proportionality + Easy to implement	+ Fewer CS + Easy to implement	+ Fewer CS + Intra-parliamentary proportionality + Easy to implement
Biggest disadvantages	- No seat guarantee for SMC candidates with the most first votes	- No seat guarantee for SMC candidates with the most first votes - 'Orphaned' SMCs	- Hard to implement - No set BT size - Reduced personalisation	- Unlimited BT size	- Intra-parliamentary proportionality - Effectively limited (max. 15 SuS)	- Intra-party proportional representation reduced - Effectively limited ('CSU problem')
2013 Reform	-	-	-	X	-	-
2020 Reform	-	-	[X]	X	X	X
2023 Reform	-	X	-	-	-	-

Source: Authors' compilation.

Abbreviations: CS = compensatory seats; BT = Bundestag; SMC = single-member constituency; SuS = surplus seats.

were largely prepared within the respective governing coalition. The commission's mandate was specified in relation to the issue of the size of the Bundestag, stating that proposals should be developed 'on the basis of the principles of personalised proportional representation' and that these proposals should 'effectively reduce the size of the Bundestag towards the statutory standard size and prevent the Bundestag from growing in the long term' (BT-Drucks. 20/1023: 2). The corresponding recommendations were already to be included in an interim report, which was to be presented by 31 August 2022, while the deadline for the final report on the other reform issues – gender parity, modernisation of parliamentary work, and lowering the voting age to 16³ – was set for 30 June 2023. All commission decisions were to be made by a simple majority of members, meaning that the Traffic Light Coalition with its parliamentarians and experts was able to determine on its own what the recommendations to the Bundestag would be.

On 18 May 2022, the spokespersons of the three governing parties on the commission jointly published their reform proposals in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (Hartmann, Kuhle, and Steffen 2022). The fact that this article appeared on the eve of the commission meeting at which the reduction in the Bundestag size was to be discussed for the first time sparked strong criticism from the opposition parties (Kommission 2022a, 14–15). Nevertheless, the proposals developed by the three spokespersons in close consultation with their respective experts were entirely constructive and intended as an initial 'offer of dialogue' for the work of the commission (Hartmann, Kuhle, and Steffen 2022).

In terms of content, the spokespersons' proposal solely focused on the reform approach of second-vote coverage, which would prevent the occurrence of surplus seats (see Table 1). In contrast, both the electoral reform proposed by the CDU/CSU-SPD government in 2020 and a counterproposal by the opposition parties at the time, i.e. the Greens, the FDP and the Left Party, envisaged different combinations of other reform approaches that merely mitigated the problem of surplus seats (Grotz and Pukelsheim 2020). Another noteworthy aspect of the spokespersons' proposal was that they did not recommend a 'capping' of surplus seats, which had long been discussed as the dominant option within the approach of second-vote coverage, but instead favoured two different allocation variants. The first variant was the 'mixed majority rule' (*verbundene Mehrheitsregel*), according to which the seat in the constituency goes to the candidate elected who has 'the most personal votes covered by list votes' (Hartmann, Kuhle, and Steffen 2022). In 'overhang constituencies', the direct seat would therefore be awarded not to the candidate with the most first votes *without* second-vote coverage, but to the candidate who received the most first votes from among those *with* second-vote coverage. This would have usually been the candidate who came second in terms of first votes, but in exceptional cases it could also

have been the candidate who came third. In any case, each SMC would have a directly elected representative without the intra-parliamentary proportionality being distorted by surplus seats (Vehrkamp 2022).

The second variant proposed by the spokespersons was the ‘substitute vote’ (*Ersatzstimme*). According to this method, all voters could not only cast their first vote for a constituency candidate, but also use a ‘substitute vote’. However, this substitute vote would only have been used in constituencies where the candidate with the most first votes did not have second-vote coverage, which would have resulted in a surplus seat under the old law. In this case, only the substitute votes of the voters who cast their first votes for the candidate with the most first votes would be counted. The direct seat would then be awarded to the remaining constituency candidate who received the most first and substitute votes (Behnke 2023).

These two reform options were also included in the Reform Commission’s interim report, which contained its final recommendations on reducing the size of the Bundestag and was adopted by the MPs from the governing coalition and their experts. In addition to the two variants mentioned in the newspaper article, the report contained two further options of a second-vote-covered allocation of direct seats. This was ‘approval voting’ (*Zustimmungswahl*), according to which each voter could give as many candidates in the constituency as many ‘preference votes’ (*Präferenzstimmen*) as they wished. The direct seat would then be awarded to the candidate with the most second-vote preference votes. The fourth and final reform option was ‘ranked choice voting’ (*Rangfolgewahl*), whereby voters rank the candidates in their constituency in order of preference. In a staggered counting process, the direct seat would be awarded to the candidate who had received the most second-vote-covered preference votes.

All four reform variants recommended in the interim report would thus have reliably maintained the Bundestag’s statutory standard size of 598 seats, guaranteed the allocation of direct mandates in all 299 constituencies and, additionally, left undistorted both the proportionality between the parties’ state lists and the intra-parliamentary proportionality. Furthermore, the interim report expressly rejected the non-allocation of direct seats by capping surplus seats, because ‘it could be perceived as unsatisfactory if some constituencies were not represented by a directly elected person, while others were’ (Kommission 2022b, 15). In addition, the interim report called for the five-percent threshold to be preserved and for any changes to the basic mandate clause to be ‘politically decided’ (ibid., 21).

In dissenting opinions against the majority recommendations, the MPs from the CDU/CSU and their chosen experts rejected the concept of direct seats covered by second votes as ‘extremely problematic in constitutional terms’ (ibid., 23). Instead, they argued in favour of introducing a ‘two-vote electoral system’, which the Christian Democrats had already

brought up several times in the reform debate. In this electoral system, known in the literature as the 'segmented' (or 'parallel') system (*Grabensystem*), one portion of the seats is allocated proportionally according to the second-vote results via party lists, while the other seats are allocated independently in SMCs based on the first-vote results. The mixed-member proportional system would thus have become a genuine mixed system combining plurality and proportional representation. In addition, an unspecified minimum quorum was proposed for the SMC seats, with a run-off to be held if this quorum was not reached (*ibid.*, 17).

Overall, the parties of the Traffic Light Coalition and the Christian Democrats thus entered the subsequent parliamentary process with incompatible reform recommendations. The commission members from the AfD and the Left Party generally supported the approach of allocating direct seats based on second votes. As a result, broader support in the Bundestag for the model of the Traffic Light Coalition's model seemed possible at that point, even though the largest opposition group in parliament had clearly positioned itself against it.

The Parliamentary Process

During the parliamentary process, the recommendations contained in the commission's report underwent several modifications. This applied both to the electoral reform bill introduced by the Traffic Light Coalition and to the relevant counter-proposal from the CDU/CSU parliamentary group.

The draft bill submitted by the Traffic Light Coalition parties on 24 January 2023 contained the following key elements (BT-Drucks. 20/5370):

- The second vote – now referred to as the 'main vote' (*Hauptstimme*) – with which voters choose a party list, would become the sole determining factor in the allocation of seats. This would apply to both the 'upper distribution' of seats based on the nationwide proportional representation and to the subsequent 'lower distribution' of the seats awarded to a party's various state lists.
- As before, the allocation of direct seats would be determined by the plurality of first votes, now referred to as 'constituency votes' (*Wahlkreisstimmen*). However, an additional provision would be introduced whereby direct seats would only be allocated if they were covered by main votes (i.e. second votes). If this was not the case, no direct seat would be allocated in the respective constituency.
- Main-vote coverage of candidates who won the most constituency votes would then be fulfilled if the party for which they ran in the constituency could provide them with a seat from its list entitlement. In addition, all the candidates of a party who won the most constituency votes would be

- ranked according to their percentage share of constituency votes and then allocated, in descending order, no more than the number of seats to which the relevant state list was entitled based on the main-vote result.
- Independent constituency candidates would be exempt from the principle of main-vote coverage.
- The statutory standard size of the Bundestag (598 MPs), the five-percent threshold and the basic mandate clause would remain unchanged.

The parliamentary groups of the SPD, the Greens and the FDP thus opted for a variant of the second-vote-coverage approach, but in the form of ‘capping’, which the commission’s report had expressly rejected. This made it possible to have a fewer or larger number of ‘orphaned’ constituencies from which no direct candidate would be allocated a seat in the Bundestag. This made the draft bill more vulnerable to criticism, and the effects of the mixed-member proportional representation system once again depended on contingent election results – precisely what the reform approach of second-vote coverage aimed to avoid.

The CDU/CSU parliamentary group also distanced itself from the recommendations made by its members on the Reform Commission. Their corresponding motion, which was tabled on the same day as the Traffic Light Coalition’s draft bill, was again strongly based on the 2020 electoral reform (BT-Drucks. 20/5353). Specifically, it called for an increase in unbalanced surplus seats ‘to the constitutionally permissible number’, a reduction in constituencies to 270, the offsetting of surplus seats against list seats in another federal state (*Land*), and increasing the direct seats permitted by the basic mandate clause from three to five.

These two different proposals marked the start of the parliamentary process. In the course of the proceedings, the Traffic Light Coalition’s bill underwent additional significant modifications. A controversial hearing in the Bundestag’s Committee on Internal Affairs, at which experts appointed by the CDU/CSU once again vehemently criticised the proposed electoral reform, had a decisive influence on this. It also became clear that the Christian Democrats were determined to take legal action against the proposed reform before the FCC, including on the (claimed) grounds that the basic mandate clause was incompatible with the reform principle of second-vote coverage. In light of this, the spokespersons from the Traffic Light Coalition made the following amendments, which were approved by the Committee on Internal Affairs with a government majority (BT-Drucks. 20/6015):

- an increase in the statutory number of members from 598 to 630;
- the abolition of the basic mandate clause;
- the retention of the traditional terms ‘first vote’ and ‘second vote’ instead of ‘constituency vote’ and a ‘main vote’;

- the exclusion of the possibility for independent constituency candidates to stand for a party on a state list; and
- the implementation of the recommendations of the Venice Commission of the Council of Europe to adjust the deviation corridor for the population size of constituencies.⁴

Of all the changes, the most controversial was the abolition of the basic mandate clause, as two of the opposition parties represented in the 20th German Bundestag felt directly affected by this measure. In particular, the Left Party had only obtained parliamentary seats after the 2021 election as a result of the basic mandate clause. The CSU, too, would have required the basic mandate clause to secure seats in the Bundestag, if its second-vote results had been only slightly weaker. Consequently, the Left Party joined the camp of opponents of the electoral reform and announced that it would take legal action against it. Even the legal experts representing the governing parties emphasised in the committee hearing how essential it was to retain the basic mandate clause to ensure that the proposed reform remained neutral in terms of party politics (Achenbach, Meinel, and Möllers 2023, 6).

From a normative perspective, there would have been entirely good reasons for abolishing the basic mandate clause (Schönberger 2023; Jesse 1998). However, given the political climate at the time, such a reform would have needed to be formulated with particular care or supplemented by an alternative regulation. From a constitutional standpoint, the failure to consider the specific situation of the CSU – namely that it is a regional party active on the national stage and part of a parliamentary group with the CDU, which does not compete against its sister party in Bavaria – seemed especially problematic. Provoked by the opposition parties' threats of legal action, which also targeted the compatibility of the basic mandate clause with second-vote coverage, the Traffic Light Coalition allowed itself to be tempted into a hasty, ill-considered decision, for which it was ultimately reprimanded by the FCC.

Legal and Political Consequences

The Ruling of the FCC

The opposition brought several constitutional complaints against the 2023 electoral reform before the FCC. In addition to two requests for abstract judicial review by the Bavarian state government and the CDU/CSU parliamentary group in the Bundestag, there were three '*Organstreit*' proceedings brought by the CSU and the Left Party as well as two constitutional complaints (Achenbach and Vogt 2025, 154). The main points of contention were the constitutionality of second-vote coverage and the abolition of the

basic mandate clause. The FCC's ruling on 30 July 2024 cannot be discussed in detail here (see Achenbach and Vogt 2025; Schönberger 2023; Nebel 2024; Michl and Mittrop 2024). Nevertheless, its two most significant aspects should be emphasised: first, the confirmation of the principle of second-vote coverage for allocating direct seats and, second, the reinstatement of the basic mandate clause.

First, the FCC declared the allocation of direct seats on the basis of second-vote coverage to be fully and unequivocally constitutional (2 BvF 1/23, paras. 1–293), arguing that it does not violate the democratic principle of Article 21 of the Basic Law, the principle of electoral equality pursuant to Article 38 of the Basic Law, or the principle of equal opportunity of the parties. In particular, the court expressly endorsed – and even expanded upon – the normative argumentation of second-vote coverage contained in the interim report of the Reform Commission (BT-Drucks. 20/3250: 12). Contrary to what the Christian Democrats had asserted in their legal complaints, the FCC held that the second vote does not lead to a delegitimising devaluation of the election in the constituency, but rather to a stronger legitimisation of the direct seats, stating: ‘Under the system of second-vote coverage, the constituency election alone is not decisive for obtaining a seat. Rather, the system of second-vote coverage ensures that every member of the Bundestag is legitimised by the second votes cast for their party. According to this concept chosen by the legislature, it is not the list-based parliamentarian without a constituency victory who is weaker, but rather the constituency winner without list coverage who is insufficiently legitimised for the allocation of a mandate’ (2 BvF 1/23, paras. 1–293, 185). The court also found that neither the principle of democracy nor the principle of equality requires ‘that the constituency vote confer legitimacy exclusively on its own and not in conjunction with the list vote’ (2 BvF 1/23, paras. 1–293, 186).

With this reasoning, the FCC declared constitutional not only the specific variant of the 2023 electoral reform, but also the underlying principle of allocating only direct seats that are covered by second votes. Other variants of a combined first- and second-vote system are therefore also constitutionally permissible and may serve as future reform alternatives, such as the two-list model (Funk 2018; Schönberger and Schönberger 2019), the ‘mixed majority rule’ model (Vehrkamp 2022), the spare vote model (Behnke 2023; Vehrkamp 2023), or the approval and ranked choice voting models (Kommission 2022b, 16; Vehrkamp 2025).

Regarding the basic mandate clause, the FCC did not declare its abolition per se unconstitutional. According to its ruling, the Bundestag may provide for a basic mandate clause, but it is not obliged to do so. However, in the current system, the five-percent threshold without a basic mandate clause is unconstitutional due to the CSU's unique position as a regional party.

Since the CDU and CSU do not compete in Germany and have long formed a single parliamentary group, the two sister parties must be exempted from the five-percent threshold. Thus, even if the CSU were to fall below the five-percent threshold, it could not be excluded from the distribution of seats because it does not impair the functioning of parliament within the parliamentary group. The abolition of the basic mandate clause would therefore have had to be accompanied and validated by an alternative solution to the 'CSU problem'. Rather than requiring legislative adjustments, the FCC upheld the basic mandate clause in its current form, a prudent decision that reassured that 'the electoral reform does not disadvantage any party' (2 BvF 1/23, paras. 1–293, 291).

The Traffic Light Coalition therefore had two reasons to thank the FCC. Its ruling legally confirmed the principle of second-vote coverage and restored the reform's party-political neutrality, which had been jeopardised by the attempted abolition of the basic mandate clause. Consequently, the reform passed the constitutional test and faced its first practical application in the early general election held on 23 February 2025.

The 2025 Bundestag Election

The results of the 2025 Bundestag election showed that the reform has achieved its main goal: a lasting and reliable reduction in the size of the Bundestag. The 21st Bundestag has 630 members, which corresponds with its statutory standard size for the first time since the 1976 election. Even if the new left-wing populist Sahra Wagenknecht Alliance (BSW) and the FDP, both of which narrowly failed to clear the five-percent threshold, had entered parliament, the new standard size of 630 seats would have been maintained exactly. The principle of allocating only direct seats that are covered by second votes ensures that this reliability will persist regardless of future election outcomes. Neither the Bundestag electoral system in place since 1949 nor the reforms of 2013 and 2020 were able to guarantee this degree of stability.

Simulations based on the 2025 results illustrate how vulnerable the 2020 electoral law would have remained to seat enlargements. Under the old statutory size of 598 seats, the 21st Bundestag would have comprised 633 members (or 699 with the BSW and 705 with both the BSW and FDP). Applying the new statutory size of 630 in the simulations, the Bundestag would have expanded to 645 MPs without the BSW and the FDP – and again to 699 with inclusion of the BSW, and to 705 with both the BSW and FDP.

Compared to the 2021 Bundestag, which had 736 members, the 2020 electoral law would thus have resulted in a smaller chamber. However, this reduction would have triggered the mechanism that offsets surplus seats

by seats of other state lists from the same party. In this case, all 23 direct seats ‘capped’ under the 2023 electoral law would have been allocated. At the same time, twenty list seats that were allocated in the 2025 elections would have been lost to compensate for relevant surplus seats that emerged in other states. Only the CSU’s three surplus seats would have remained uncompensated. In short, avoiding the ‘capping’ of direct seats under the 2023 electoral law would, under the old system, have required ‘compensating’ list seats instead.

The new electoral law also generated considerable controversy in the aftermath of the 2025 election. The main issue concerned first-vote winners whose seats were ‘capped’ because they lacked second-vote coverage. This triggered significant frustration and outrage, particularly among the affected candidates and parties (Tagesschau 2025; Susanka 2025). Although the claim that they had been ‘cheated’ out of their constituency victory followed the logic of the old electoral system, the key weakness of the new system became unmistakably visible. Allowing voters to elect a constituency candidate with their first vote and then not allocating the mandate is implausible and difficult to justify to the public (Wagschal and Jäckle 2025). While many voters are unaware of the candidates and winners of their constituency (Faas 2025), vacant constituencies also undermine the integrative function of elections. Nor does it help to point out that in almost all affected constituencies (19 out of 23), at least one – and usually several – direct candidates from other parties entered the Bundestag via their state lists, meaning the constituencies were not entirely ‘orphaned’.

The non-allocation of direct seats therefore remains the key weakness of the new electoral law, especially as it could affect many more SMCs in future Bundestag elections. Depending on election outcomes, as many as 50, 70 or even 100 unallocated direct seats are conceivable (Vehrkamp 2021), which would greatly amplify both the political and public backlash. For this reason, the new federal government of CDU, CSU and SPD has stated in its coalition agreement that a new electoral law commission should submit proposals on ‘how every candidate with a majority of first votes can enter the Bundestag’ (Koalitionsvertrag 2025, lines 4513–4514). At the same time, the government aims to preserve the proportionality of the second-vote result and avoid enlarging the Bundestag again. Thus, once again, the task resembles ‘squaring the circle’ (Grotz and Vehrkamp 2023).

Conclusion

The 2023 electoral reform by the Traffic Light Coalition government is noteworthy in two respects. First, it provides a technically effective solution for eliminating surplus seats, long considered the ‘eternal warning sign’ (Behnke 2010) of the Bundestag electoral system. Earlier reforms in 2011, 2013 and 2020 had merely attempted to address the problems of negative

voting weight and the enlargement of the Bundestag with eclectic partial measures and therefore failed to stop the steady increase in seats. The Traffic Light Coalition, on the other hand, has changed the mixed-member proportional system in such a way that, for the first time since 1949, the statutory standard size of the Bundestag is reliably maintained regardless of election results. Second, with the principle of second-vote coverage of direct seats, the Traffic Light Coalition provided a coherent systemic rationale for its reform approach. This principle reflects the underlying logic of personalised proportional representation and was explicitly taken up and further elaborated by the FCC. In contrast, previous governments' reforms were largely seen as a 'necessary evil' aimed merely at mitigating constitutional and political problems of the electoral system (Grotz and Vehrkamp 2017; Grotz and Pukelsheim 2020). Taken together, these two achievements represent a considerable success.

Nevertheless, the reform cannot be considered a 'stroke of a genius'. It passed only with the coalition's own majority and against fierce opposition from the CDU/CSU and the Left Party. As in 2011 and 2020, no broad cross-party agreement was achieved, making the opposition's legal action before the FCC all but inevitable. Although the FCC upheld the core of the reform, the cycle of electoral law changes that has been ongoing for more than 15 years appears set to continue in the 21st Bundestag. This is largely due to the second, more substantial problem with the 2023 reform: the vacant constituencies created by 'seat capping'. While these are not, as some critics have argued, an 'attack on democracy', they do conflict with intuitive understandings of personalised proportional representation – even when one accepts the new logic of second-vote coverage, which relativises the previous principle of 'automatic' first-vote winners. The Traffic Light Coalition could have proposed a more convincing solution using one of the four allocation models and then at least attempted to convince the Christian Democrats and the general public of its merits. Instead, it refrained from doing so during the parliamentary process and compounded the problem by the incomprehensible last-minute abolition of the basic mandate clause, predictably fuelling opposition to the entire reform.

Where, then, will things go from here? The variants of a second-vote-covered direct-mandate allocation outlined in the Reform Commission's interim report – and expressly permitted by the FCC – offer promising approaches to resolving the remaining problem of 'vacant' seats. With them, it might even be possible to bring the long reform process to a successful conclusion. However, it is rather unclear whether the principle of second-vote coverage will survive the next round of reforms, and the new government will find a different, more convincing solution that is also acceptable to the other parliamentary parties. As the saying goes, hope springs eternal – including when it comes to electoral law.

Notes

1. In 2008, only the PR allocation method was changed from Hare/Niemeyer to Sainte-Laguë/Schepers (Nohlen 2023, 130–133).
2. There are several other theoretical options for a minimally invasive reform of the Bundestag MMPS, such as the formation of federal party lists that would have abandoned the ‘lower distribution’ as a major cause of surplus seats. However, this and other options were not given serious consideration during the political reform process.
3. This reform would have aligned the voting age for federal elections (18 years) compatible with that for European and numerous state and local elections (16 years). This legal inconsistency meant that some younger citizens were permitted to vote in the 2024 European elections and subsequent state elections, but not in the 2025 federal elections, which could lead to disappointment and a sense of disempowerment (Leininger et al. 2023). However, as a lowering of the federal voting age requires a constitutional amendment with a two-thirds majority, and the CDU/CSU has been firmly strictly opposed to this, there was no chance for its approval. The commission’s final report also included various proposals for institutional reforms to promote gender parity and ‘modernize parliamentary work’ (Kommission 2022c), but none of them were implemented.
4. The European Commission for Democracy through Law (Venice Commission) is an advisory body of the Council of Europe composed of independent experts in constitutional and electoral law. In its Code of Good Practice in Electoral Matters, it recommends that electoral constituencies be drawn on the basis of population equality, with deviations from the average population size not exceeding 10 per cent, and in any case not more than 15 per cent (see Grotz 2013).

Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

About The Authors

Florian Grotz is professor of comparative government at the Helmut Schmidt University/University of the Federal Armed Forces Hamburg.

Robert Vehrkamp is a visiting professor at Leuphana University in Lüneburg. From 2021 to 2023, he served as an expert member of the German Bundestag’s Electoral Reform Commission.

References

- Achenbach, Jelena, Florian Meinel, and Christoph Möllers. 2023. *Stellungnahme zur öffentlichen Anhörung des Ausschusses für Inneres und Recht. Ausschuss für Inneres und Heimat, Ausschussdrucksache 20(4)171H*. Berlin: Deutscher Bundestag.
- Achenbach, Jelena, and Lukas Vogt. 2025. “Das Bundestagswahlrecht – zugleich eine Besprechung des BVerfG-Urteils zum “Wahlrecht 2023”.” *Juristische Ausbildung* 2: 151–161.

- Behnke, Joachim. 2010. "Überhangmandate bei der Bundestagswahl 2019 – das ewige Menetekel." *Politische Vierteljahresschrift* 51 (3): 531–552.
- Behnke, Joachim. 2023. "Das Konzept einer Ersatzstimme für die Erststimme als wesentliches Element des Ampelvorschlags zur Verhinderung der Bundestagsvergrößerung im Mai 2022." In *Mehr Demokratie durch Ersatzstimme? Neue Wahlrechts-Konzepte in der Diskussion*, edited by Björn Benken and Alexander Trennheuser, 111–127. Baden-Baden: Nomos.
- Behnke, Joachim. 2025. "The Spectacular Enlargement of the Bundestag and the Long Road to the 2023 German Electoral Law Reform." *Public Choice*, online first, doi:10.1007/s11127-025-01300-6.
- Behnke, Joachim, Frank Decker, Florian Grotz, Robert Vehrkamp, and Philipp Weinmann. 2017. *Reform des Bundestagswahlsystems. Bewertungskriterien und Reformoptionen*. Gütersloh: Bertelsmann Stiftung.
- Faas, Thorsten. 2025. "Verwaiste Wahlkreise: Kein Anschluss unter diesem Wahlkreis." *Die Zeit*, February 21, 2025, Accessed April 13, 2026. <https://www.zeit.de/politik/deutschland/2025-02/verwaiste-wahlkreise-bundestagswahl-wahlrecht-abgeordnete-mandate>.
- Focus Online. 2025. "Anschlag auf die Demokratie? Analyse zeigt, wie wenig die Ampel-Wahlrechtsreform der Union tatsächlich schadete." *Focus Online*, March 23, 2025, Accessed August 10, 2025. https://www.focus.de/politik/deutschland/wahlrechtsreform-der-ampel-anschlag-auf-die-demokratie-neue-analyse-entlarvt-soeders-empoeuerung-als-falsch_id_260762922.html.
- Funk, Albert. 2018. "Einfach, gerecht, demokratisch, bundesstaatlich – Das Zwei-Listen-Modell als Ausweg aus der Sackgasse der deutschen Wahlrechtsdebatte." *Zeitschrift für Gesetzgebung* 33 (1): 35–46.
- Grotz, Florian. 2013. "Recurrent Challenges and Problematic Issues of Electoral Law." In *European Electoral Heritage – 10 Years of the Code of Good Practice in Electoral Matters*, edited by Venice Commission, 5–14. Strasbourg: Council of Europe Publishing.
- Grotz, Florian. 2014. "Happy End oder endloses Drama? Die Reform des Bundestagswahlsystems." In *Bilanz der Bundestagswahl 2013*, edited by Eckhard Jesse and Roland Sturm, 113–140. Baden-Baden: Nomos.
- Grotz, Florian, and Friedrich Pukelsheim. 2020. "Fehlleistung Wahlrechtsreform." *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 7 September 2020: 6.
- Grotz, Florian, and Wolfgang Schroeder. 2025. *Das politische System der Bundesrepublik Deutschland* (2nd ed.). Baden-Baden: Nomos.
- Grotz, Florian, and Robert Vehrkamp. 2017. "598." *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, January 23, 2017: 6.
- Grotz, Florian, and Robert Vehrkamp. 2023. "Die Quadratur der Wahlkreise." In *Facetten der Gegenwart. 52 F.A.Z.-Essays aus dem Epochenjahr 2022*, edited by Daniel Deckers, 436–445. Paderborn: Schöningh.
- Hartmann, Sebastian, Konstantin Kuhle, and Till Steffen. 2022. "Wie der Bundestag verkleinert werden kann." *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 17 January 2022: 8.
- Jesse, Eckhard. 1985. *Wahlrecht zwischen Kontinuität und Reform. Eine Analyse der Wahlsystemdiskussion und der Wahlrechtsänderungen in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland 1949–1983*. Düsseldorf: Droste.
- Jesse, Eckhard. 1998. "Grundmandatsklausel und Überhangmandate. Zwei wahlrechtliche Eigentümlichkeiten in der Kritik." In *Wahlen und Wähler. Analysen aus Anlass der Bundestagswahl 1994*, edited by Max Kaase and Hans-Dieter Klingemann, 15–41. Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag.

- Kauder, Björn. 2024. "Wahlrechtsreform: Kleinerer Bundestag spart 125 Millionen Euro im Jahr." *IW-Nachricht*, August 1, 2024, Accessed August 10, 2025. www.iwkoeln.de/presse/iw-nachrichten/bjoern-kauder-kleinerer-bundestags-spart-125-millionen-euro-im-jahr.html.
- Koalitionsvertrag. 2021. *Mehr Fortschritt wagen. Bündnis für Freiheit, Gerechtigkeit und Nachhaltigkeit. Koalitionsvertrag 2021–2025 zwischen der Sozialdemokratischen Partei Deutschlands (SPD), Bündnis 90/Die Grünen und den Freien Demokraten (FDP)*, December 7, 2021. Berlin.
- Koalitionsvertrag. 2025. *Verantwortung für Deutschland. Koalitionsvertrag zwischen CDU, CSU und SPD*, April 9, 2025. Berlin.
- Kommission zur Reform des Wahlrechts und zur Modernisierung der Parlamentsarbeit. 2022a. *Kurzprotokoll der 5. öffentlichen Sitzung am 19.05.2022, Protokoll Nr. 20/5*. Berlin: Deutscher Bundestag.
- Kommission zur Reform des Wahlrechts und zur Modernisierung der Parlamentsarbeit. 2022b. *Zwischenbericht. Bundestagsdrucksache 20/3250*. Berlin: Deutscher Bundestag.
- Kommission zur Reform des Wahlrechts und zur Modernisierung der Parlamentsarbeit. 2022c. *Abschlussbericht. Bundestagsdrucksache 20/6400*. Berlin: Deutscher Bundestag.
- Leininger, Arnd, Marie-Lou Sohnnius, Thorsten Faas, Sigrid Roßteutscher, and Armin Schäfer. 2023. "Temporary Disenfranchisement: Negative Side Effects of Lowering the Voting Age." *American Political Science Review* 117 (1): 355–361.
- Meyer, Hans. 1994. "Der Überhang und anderes Unterhaltbares aus Anlass der Bundestagswahl 1994." *Kritische Vierteljahresschrift für Gesetzgebung und Rechtswissenschaft* 77 (4): 312–362.
- Michl, Fabian, and Johanna Mittrop. 2024. "Zwischen Prinzipientreue und Pragmatismus. Das Urteil des Bundesverfassungsgerichts zur Wahlrechtsreform der Ampel." *Verfassungsblog*, published on July 31, 2024, Accessed August 31, 2025. <https://verfassungsblog.de/zwischen-prinzipientreue-und-pragmatismus/>.
- Nebel, Jasper. 2024. "Alles hat ein Ende. Das Bundesverfassungsgericht beendet die Folgerichtigkeit im Wahlrecht." *Verfassungsblog*, published on August 23, 2024, Accessed August 31, 2025. <https://verfassungsblog.de/alles-hat-ein-ende/>.
- Nohlen, Dieter. 2023. *Wahlrecht und Parteiensystem. Zur Theorie und Empirie der Wahlsysteme (8th ed.)*. Opladen: Barbara Budrich.
- Pukelsheim, Friedrich. 2019. "Bundestag der Tausend – Berechnungen zu Reformvorschlägen für das Bundeswahlgesetz." *Zeitschrift für Parlamentsfragen* 50 (3): 469–477.
- Schönberger, Christoph. 2023. "Ein Nachruf ohne Tränen: Das Ende der Grundmandatsklausel." *Verfassungsblog*, published on November 18, 2023, Accessed August 31, 2025. <https://verfassungsblog.de/ein-nachruf-ohne-tranen/>.
- Schönberger, Christoph, and Sophie Schönberger. 2019. "Die Lebenslüge des deutschen Wahlrechts – Die personalisierte Verhältniswahl braucht einen Neustart." *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 9 May 2019: 6.
- Schönberger, Sophie. 2023. "Sturm im Wasserglas: Das neue Bundeswahlgesetz auf dem Prüfstand der Verfassung." *Neue Zeitschrift für Verwaltungsrecht* 11: 785–791.
- Spiegel Online. 2025. "Wahlkreise ohne Direktkandidaten. Merz will Wahlrecht wieder ändern." *Spiegel Online*, February 24, 2025, Accessed August 10, 2025. <https://www.spiegel.de/politik/deutschland/bundestagswahl-2025-friedrich-merz-will-wahlrecht-wieder-aendern-a-9e383dbb-a292-4927-b8ff-046ecaf63afd>.

- Susanka, Christian. 2025. "Zoff um neues Wahlrecht: Wenn siegreiche Direktkandidaten nicht in den Bundestag einziehen." *MDR Aktuell*, March 7, 2025, Accessed September 03, 2025. <https://www.swr.de/swraktuell/baden-wuerttemberg/neues-wahlrecht-als-undemokratisch-kritisiert-100.html>.
- Tagesschau. 2025. "Der Frust der Wahlkreisgewinner ohne Mandat." *Tagesschau24 live*, February 24, 2025, Accessed September 03, 2025. <https://www.tagesschau.de/inland/bundestagswahl/wahlkreissieger-ohne-direktmandat-102.html>.
- Vehrkamp, Robert. 2021. "Wie groß wird der Bundestag? Ergebnisse einer Projektionsrechnung", 2nd ed., Gütersloh, *#Mandaterechner – Wie groß wird der Bundestag? Ausgabe 2 / 2021*, Accessed August 31, 2025.
- Vehrkamp, Robert. 2022. "Personalisierte Verhältniswahl als Verbundsystem. Idee und Konzept der verbundenen Mehrheitsregel." Kommissionsdrucksache 20(31)011, Accessed August 20, 2025. www.bundestag.de/resource/blob/899558/1c2b02aa8e58d32da5d504cd56ff4a7f/K-Drs-011-Prof-Dr-Vehrkamp-Stellungnahme-data.pdf.
- Vehrkamp, Robert. 2023. "Echte statt unechte Ersatz-Erststimme! Anmerkungen zu einem Vorschlag von Joachim Behnke." In *Mehr Demokratie durch Ersatzstimme? Neue Wahlrechts-Konzepte in der Diskussion*, edited by Björn Benken and Alexander Trennheuser, 129–148. Baden-Baden: Nomos.
- Vehrkamp, Robert. 2025. "Mehr Wahlkreis wagen! Plädoyer für die Einführung einer integrierten Stichwahl im Wahlkreis – ein Vorschlag zur Reform des Bundeswahlrechts." *zwd-Politmagazin* 408: 6–7.
- Wagschal, Uwe, and Sebastian Jäckle. 2025. "Das paradoxe Wahlrecht: Ungedeckte Wahlkreise 2025 verfassungsrechtlich erlaubt – problematisch für die Demokratie." *Zeitschrift für Parlamentsfragen* 56 (1): 3–21.
- Weinmann, Philipp, and Florian Grotz. 2021. "Seat Enlargements in Mixed-Member Proportional Systems: Evidence from the German Länder." *West European Politics* 44 (4): 946–968.
- Weinmann, Philipp, and Florian Grotz. 2022. "Reconciling Parliamentary Size with Personalized Proportional Representation? Frontiers of Electoral Reform for the German Bundestag." *German Politics* 31 (4): 558–578.