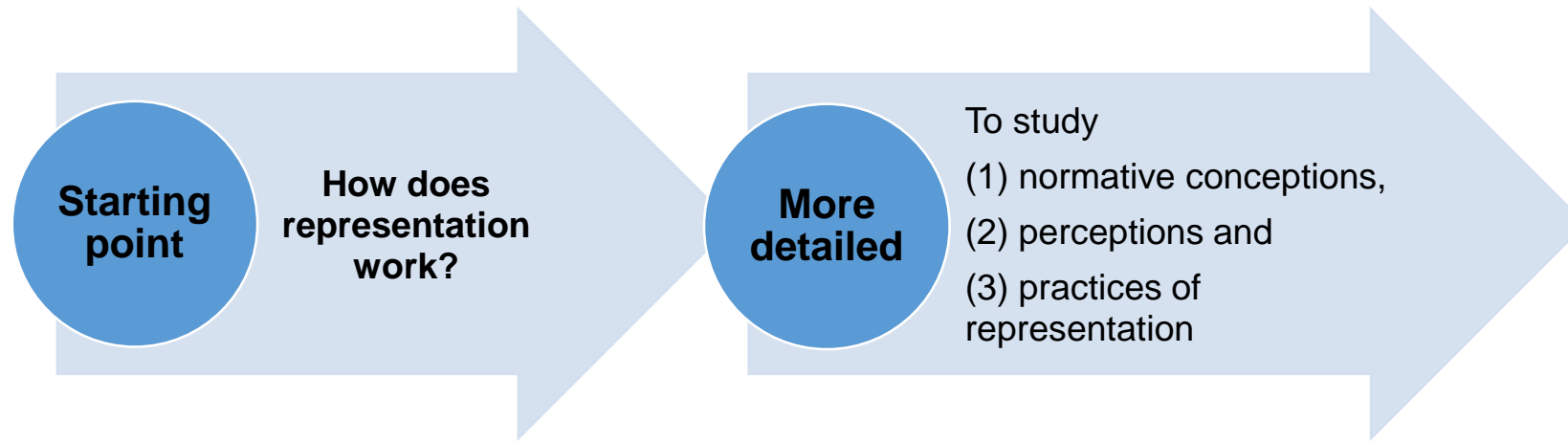


# How MPs Understand Representation: Reasoning, Emotion, and Responsiveness in the German Bundestag

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# Purpose of the project



## Aims:



**(1) describing**  
(„thick description“)



**(2) explaining**  
institutional arrangements and  
cultural traditions  
(i.e., parliamentary system,  
MP-related and district-related  
criteria)

# Study design: Approach of data collection

## Survey of 71 MPs of the 20<sup>th</sup> German Bundestag:



We wrote to all Members of Parliament and received a response rate of nearly 10%



all Parliamentary Party Groups of the 20<sup>th</sup> Bundestag  
(SPD: 27, CDU/CSU: 18, The Greens: 10, FDP: 9, AfD: 3, Die Linke: 3, BSW: 1)

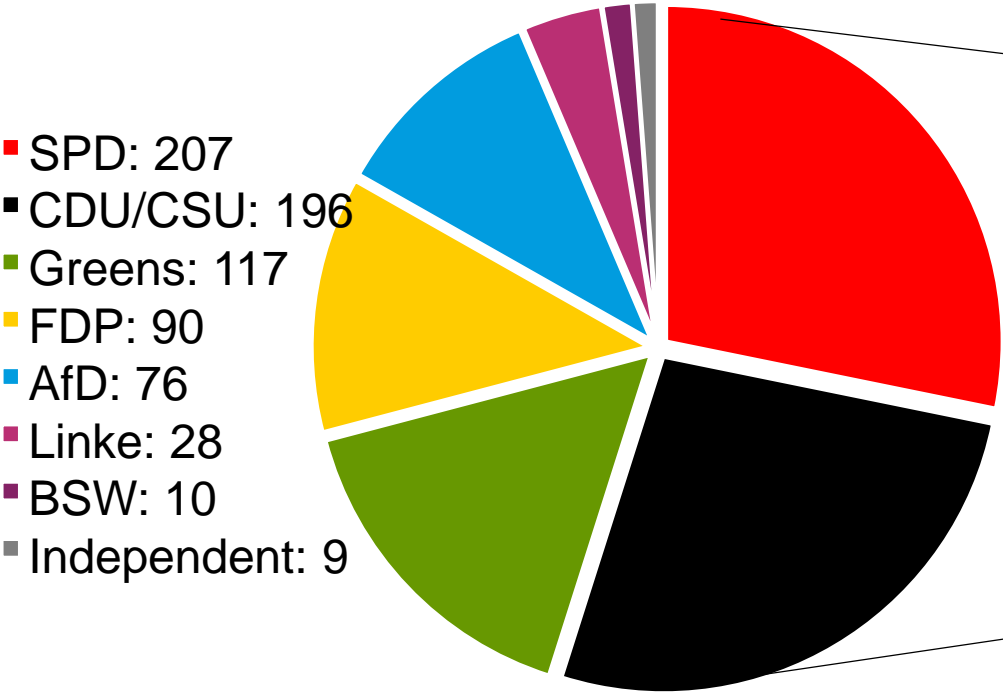


guided interviews face-to-face or via video conference with a duration of 20 minutes to 3 hours (average of 35 minutes, total of nearly 41 hours)



between July 2024 and February 2025

**20<sup>th</sup> German Bundestag (N=733)**



**our study (N=71)**



comprising:

- SPD: 27
- CDU/CSU: 18
- Greens: 10
- FDP: 9
- AfD: 3
- Linke: 3
- BSW: 1



**Sample nearly displays PPG sizes**

# Concept: Research questions



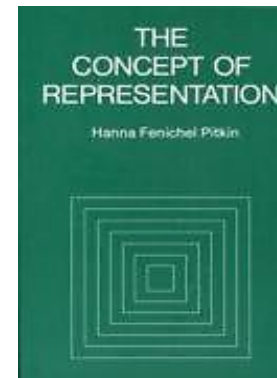
## fundamental – realistic – practice-oriented

- (1) How do members of the Bundestag perceive parliamentary representation?
- (2) In what specific ways do they exercise representation?
- (3) How do they take the interests and needs of the citizens into account?
- (4) What relationships do the parliamentarians have with companies, interest groups, media or the political party grassroots on the ground?
- (5) And how do they communicate with citizens?



## ... and theory-driven

Pitkin's concept of political representation remains the key framework for the newer theoretical approaches and for the empirical research on representation.



Source: Pitkin, Hanna F. 1967: The Concept of Representation, Berkeley.

**24 questions  
in 3 modules  
(core, rotating,  
additional module)**

# Research content: Representation according to Pitkin

## Type of representation:

### formalistic views

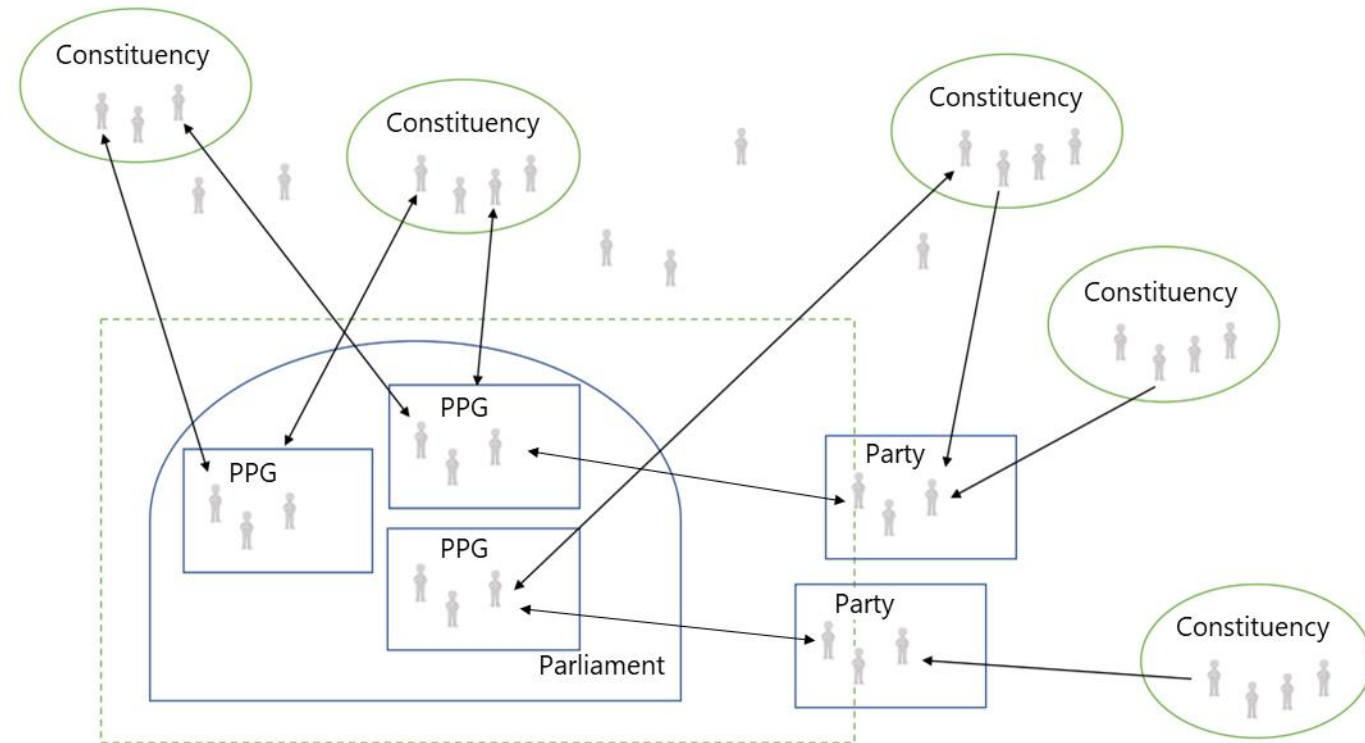
1. **authorization** of the representatives and **accountability** of the representatives towards the represented

### standing for

2. **descriptive representation** (congruence between the represented and the representatives in terms of their social demographic characteristics)
3. **symbolic representation** (idealised embodiment of a political entity, emotional connectedness on the part of those represented)

### acting for

4. **substantial representation of interests**, active role of the representative; balancing responsiveness and political leadership (delegate-trustee controversy)



# Symbolic representation: Our study

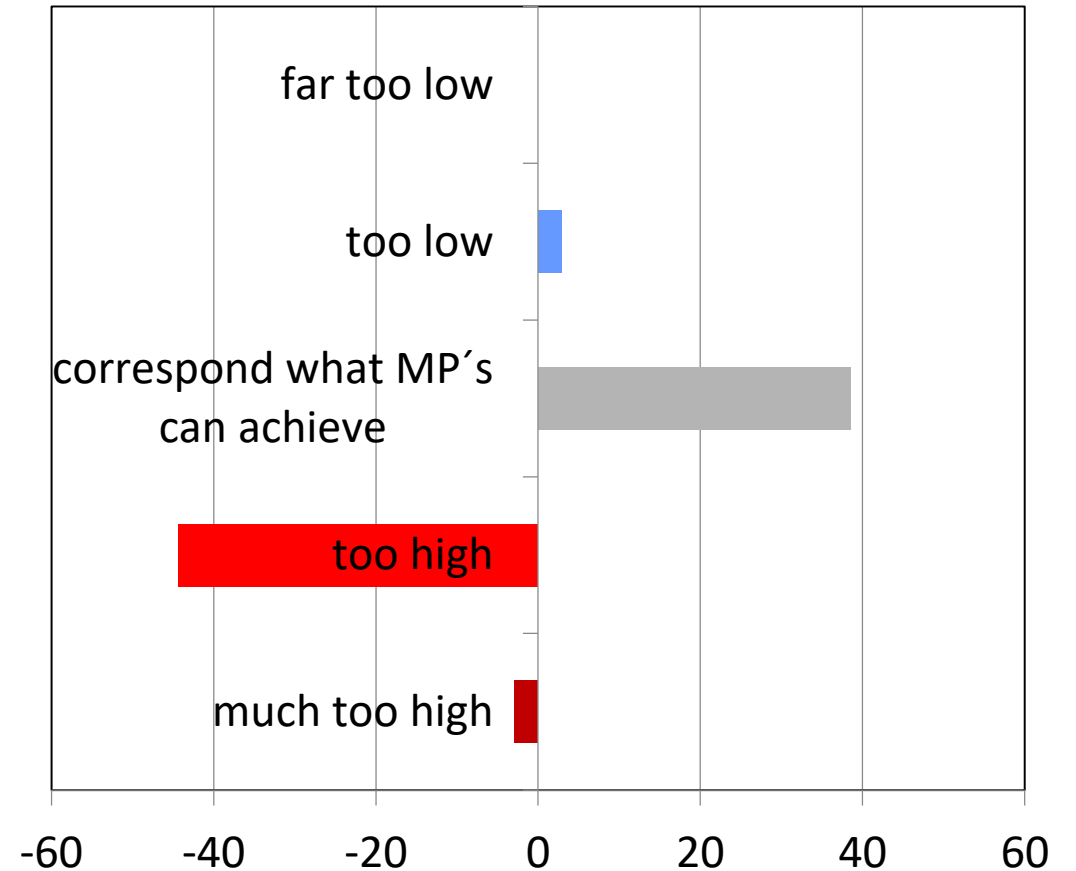
**Q:** Surveys and scientific studies show that citizens' expectations of the Bundestag and its members are high and constantly growing. The vast majority of all citizens in Germany want active and, above all, visible representatives.

How would you rate the **public's expectations** of your work as a member of parliament? The expectations of the public are ...

- \_\_\_ far too low,
- \_\_\_ too low,
- \_\_\_ correspond to what members of parliament can achieve,
- \_\_\_ a little too high,
- \_\_\_ much too high.

For "too high" and "far too high", open follow-up question: Why is that?

## Public's expectation are...



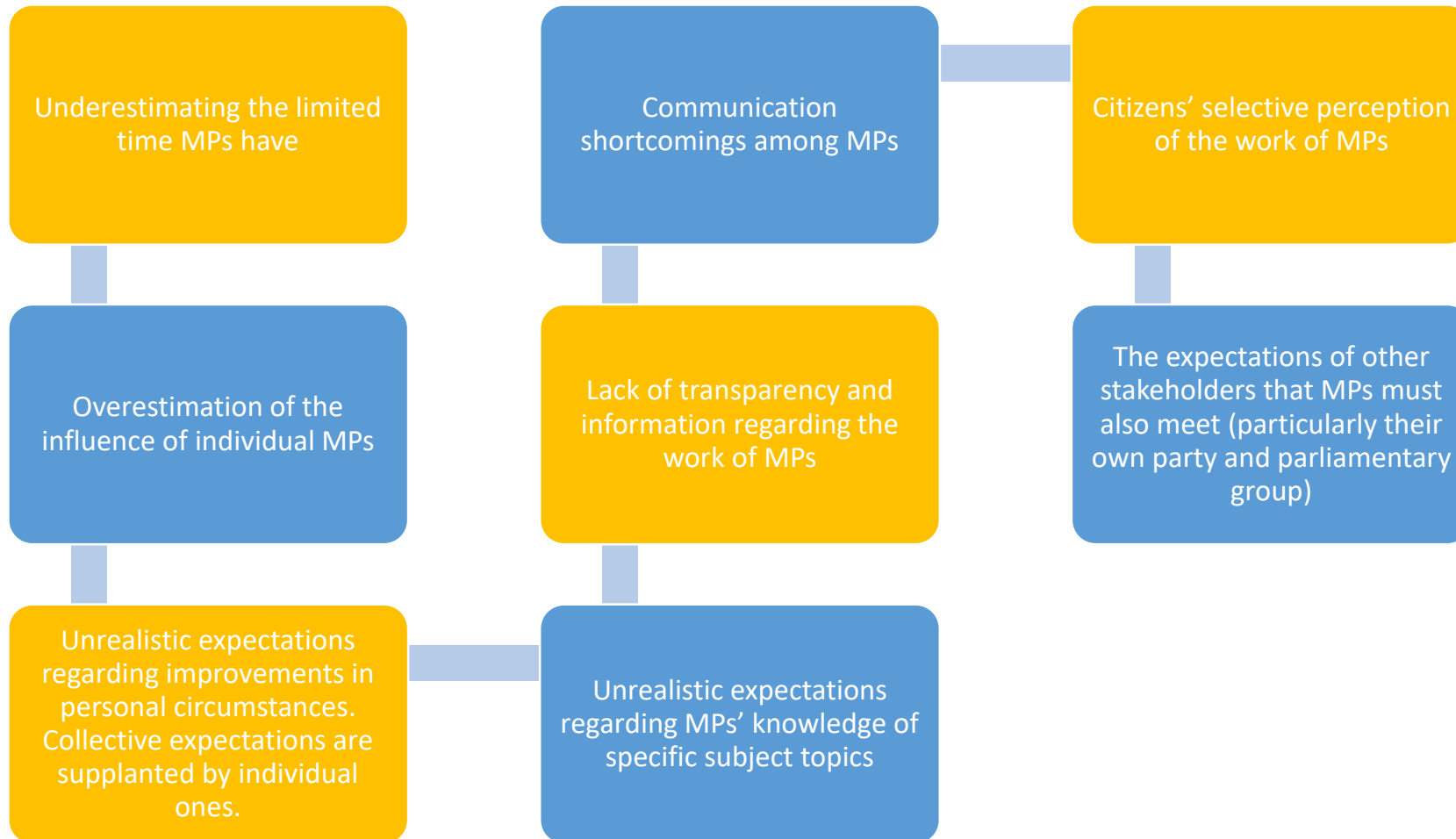
“It is often a dilemma inherent in the role of an MP that they constantly receive more requests for meetings than they can possibly attend, and so every MP must constantly make a **sensible judgement call**. Which meeting will best enable me to fulfil my responsibilities right now?”

“The fact that citizens can only perceive an MP’s work in a **selective way**. After all, they can only talk about what they read in the media – which is very general – or what they experience personally. So you just think to yourself, there are 100 local festivals, the MP is only at one of them, he’s never there.”

“There’s a completely **misguided expectation** here. And if my personal problem isn’t resolved, then politics is useless. So that’s something MPs simply can’t deliver on.”

**Lack of transparency.** People have no idea what MPs actually do all day. Much of the work we do, takes place behind the scenes. People might see a plenary debate and wonder, ‘Why isn’t he there?’ (..) Or they might not see me at an event in my electoral district that I unfortunately have to cancel because I’m in Berlin at the time.

# Reasons for too high expectations



# Emotional results from too high expectations

**Pressure**  
**Hope**  
**Expectations**  
**Fear**  
**Disappointment**  
**Optimism**  
**Overstress**

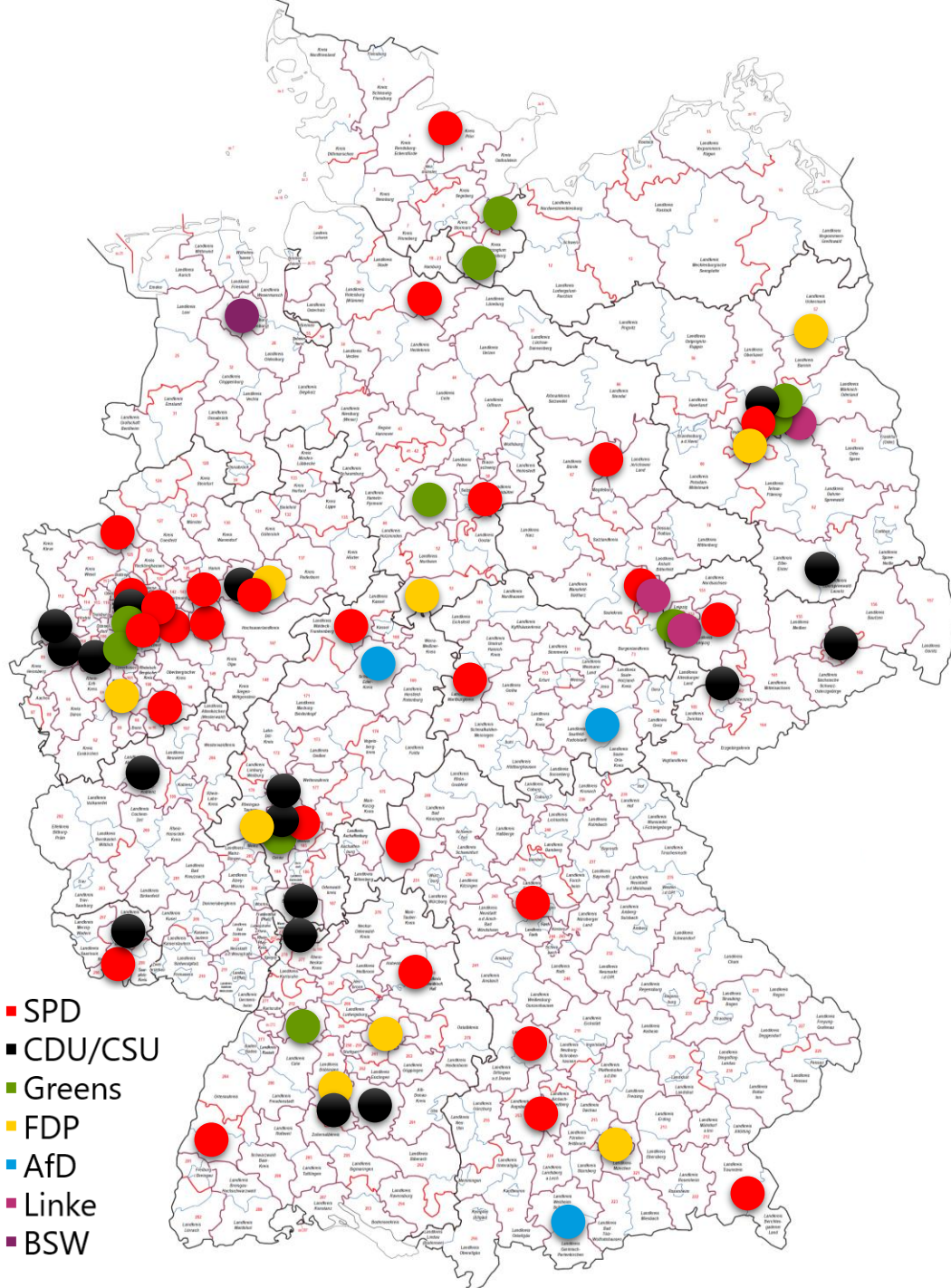
# Dealing with pressure

"We also  
unnecess  
procedu  
approach w  
over the medi  
annoyed when, on a Friday, I  
that we need a text by Monday  
issue that's be  
weeks  
driver  
it's rare  
drive us,  
bold type. An  
misleading rather than help

"I voted against the party line once. But it wasn't a particularly important vote. In fact, I only decided to vote against it that very morning, on the day of the vote. Normally, you're supposed to give twelve hours' notice to the Parliamentary Group Executive Committee. **So I broke the rules without really realizing it**, because it was my fifth week here, and I came under quite a bit of pressure afterwards."

"For example, I negotiate asylum seeker benefits and take a stance on this issue that is currently under a great deal of public pressure. But I feel it's so important to me because it's **such a fundamental issue**. Perhaps at some point people will read one or two personal statements from me about how I voted and realize, 'That's right, it turned out exactly as she wrote.' But right now, it doesn't necessarily go down well."

citizens  
ssive  
wards  
s. You can't,  
and, want courageous  
and then, when dealing with  
them to be



## Analysis of shaping criteria

### (1) MP-related

- Party and party wing affiliation
- Age, gender, migration history
- Professional/educational background
- Seniority (terms in office)
- Position (leadership vs „ordinary“ MPs)
- Direct vs list mandate

### (2) District-related

- Rural vs urban
- „Geography“ (east/west)
- Party stronghold or diaspora
- Competition (several MPs in a district)

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# Thank you very much for your attention.

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