24 Does protest affect MP roll-call votes in Germany?

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Introduction

When asked to contribute to a Festschrift for Thomas, I found myself reflecting on my first encounters with him and what he taught me while being his research assistant in Bamberg. I recall his caution against becoming a mere "numbers cruncher" and his reminder not to rush into regression models before truly understanding one's data.[1] In this chapter, I embrace both sides of that counsel: I leverage rigorous quantitative methods while remaining deeply attentive to the underlying patterns and stories in the data. My work here aims to bring together Thomas's passion for legislative behaviour and my long-standing interest in whether protest matters for policy-making. Despite its intuitive appeal, the research question I seek to ask has received remarkably little systematic attention: *how swiftly do legislators respond when citizens take to the streets?*

Although social movement scholars have long documented how protest can shape public discourse and influence executive agendas, empirical work connecting episodes of collective demonstration to concrete parliamentary action remains scarce (but see Agnone 2007; Bernardi et al. 2021;

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Gillion 2012; Wouters and Walgrave 2017). We know, for example, that well-organised demonstrations can shift media coverage and public sentiment and that legislators may vote differently when they face an angry electorate. Yet no prior study has measured, across a broad range of policy domains and over many decades, the time interval between visible street mobilisation and the moment when deputies formally record their votes. Filling this gap matters not only for our theoretical understanding of representation but also for democratic practice: if protest truly accelerates lawmaking on its targeted issues, it suggests that citizens can wield timely influence over the pace of policy decisions; if not, it raises questions about the responsiveness of elected bodies in times of social upheaval.

To investigate my research question, I develop a simple but powerful theoretical framework grounded in the idea of "legislative urgency." Citizens mobilise to signal the salience and size of their demands; confronted with a wave of public attention, deputies face both political incentives and opportunities to place the same issues on the parliamentary agenda. In contrast, legislators face a range of constraints beyond public opinion signals affecting their legislative behaviour. This might mean that they are not inclined to react to short-lived public opinion signals, such as a protest. In fact, protest might signal the involvement of many public stakeholders in the policy process and thereby *decelerate* policy-making.

Testing these ideas demands data that capture both the timing of protest events and the precise dates of parliamentary votes. I draw on two complementary sources. Firstly, I use a landmark dataset of every roll-call vote recorded in the German Bundestag from 1949 through 2013, collected by Thomas Saalfeld and co-authors (Sieberer et al. 2020). This resource represents years of painstaking work, during which transcribers transcribed parliamentary stenographs and official voting logs to make accessible – issue by issue, vote by vote – more than 1,100,000 individual ballots across nearly 2,000 recorded divisions. Secondly, I rely on a comprehensive protest catalogue assembled by a team of sociologists and their research assistants; the Prodat data (Rucht 1998). Their systematic review of newspapers yields exact protest dates, estimates of participant numbers, and indicators of police presence and property damage for every event linked to the Bundestag's policy categories. By merging these two datasets, I construct for each vote the number of demonstrations in the preceding six months, the first date of such a protest, and a suite of protest intensity measures.

I analyse these data with survival-analysis techniques, an approach borrowed from medical and engineering disciplines but increasingly valued in political science for modelling event timing. Survival models estimate the probability of "failure" – in this case, the occurrence of a vote – over time since the first protest. By including protest characteristics, electoral period indicators, and fixed effects for policy domains and calendar years, I demonstrate the correlation between street mobilisation and legislative urgency.

My findings confirm that protest does indeed slow down parliamentary action. Votes follow more slowly when citizens demonstrate more frequently and in greater numbers, and when demonstrations involve visible law-enforcement responses or even property damage. But I also find considerable heterogeneity in how the legislative agenda reacts across policy fields, with some of the most prominent agendas (environment, civil rights) receiving low attention from the legislative agenda.

This study makes three contributions. Firstly, it introduces a novel "time-to-vote" metric, rigorously linking protest events to parliamentary decisions, thereby providing a new lens for studying legislative responsiveness. Instead of focusing on the number of laws developed, as some previous studies have done (Bernardi et al. 2021; Hutter and Vliegenthart 2018), I focus on the quality of the response, specifically how long it takes legislators to respond. Secondly, it provides the first large-scale test of how protest intensity and timing influence the pace of representative bodies, moving beyond studies of vote choice to the question of vote scheduling. Thirdly, how protests slow policy-making speaks directly to debates about accountability and democratic feedback. Together, these insights advance our theoretical and empirical understanding of how collective action translates into formal policy action, demonstrating that, in modern Germany, the voice of the streets can indeed reach the halls of Parliament.

What we know about protest and legislative behaviour

Legislators in parliamentary democracies balance multiple, often competing incentives when casting their votes (Mitchell 2000; Strøm 2000). Members of Parliament (MPs) must reconcile their personal policy preferences, party discipline (Saalfeld 2008), and constituency interests (Miller and Stokes 1963), all within the institutional rules that structure the timing and visibility of votes (Martin et al. 2014). Strøm emphasises that MPs occupy distinct "roles" (policy-maker, delegate, trustee) that shape their behaviour under varying procedural contexts. Electoral vulnerability and committee assignments further constrain decision-making, as legislators weigh the risk of dissent against the benefits of signalling independence (Martin et al. 2014). Within this general framework, roll-call votes (RCVs) occupy a special status: by requiring an explicit request, often from a parliamentary minority or by constitutional mandate, RCVs transform routine show-of-hands into high-stakes, recorded divisions. Bergmann et al. (2016) show that the frequency of RCVs rises in periods of elevated party fragmentation, ideological polarisation, or when institutional thresholds for demanding a count are relaxed.

Turning explicitly to the German Bundestag, the Parliament analysed in this chapter, scholars have long noted its selective use of RCVs (Bergmann et al. 2016; Sieberer et al. 2020). Early analyses by Saalfeld reveal that, unlike more open systems, Germany reserves formal divisions for moments of genuine contestation, such as confidence motions or tight budget passages. Using

over 40 years of data, Saalfeld documents how professionalisation of parliamentary roles led to a modest increase in roll-call requests, even as overall legislative cohesion remained high (Saalfeld 1997). More recently, Bergmann et al. (2016) rely on nearly 2000 RCVs from 1949 to 2013 and report peaks after reunification and during periods of narrow government majorities. Their work underscores how both procedural rules and the strategic calculations of government and opposition shape when the Bundestag moves from voice votes to recorded divisions.

But what influence MPs behaviour during RCVs? An enormous literature, largely based on groundbreaking work by Miller and Stokes (1963), analyses the link between public opinion and MP behaviour. For instance, Page and Shapiro's (1983) study demonstrates that policy outcomes in mature democracies often reflect shifts in public sentiment, suggesting that legislators closely track their constituents' attitudes. More recent research has turned to field experiments, also known as audit studies, in which constituents contact MPs via letters, and MPs' responses to these stimuli are recorded and analysed (Bischof, Cheng-Matsuno, et al. 2022; Bischof, Cohen, et al. 2022; Grose et al. 2015). Using such a design, Butler (2011) demonstrates that tailored constituency feedback can produce measurable vote changes; however, more recent research cautions that elite misperceptions of public opinion can mitigate these effects (Broockman and Skovron 2018). Together, these studies suggest that while party and procedural constraints powerfully shape roll-call dynamics, legislators remain open to public opinion when deciding about their vote behaviour. In turn, voters also want their MPs to be responsive to their demands (Vivyan and Wagner 2015).

Research into how protest influences legislative behaviour has steadily expanded, revealing multiple mechanisms through which collective action may shape lawmaking. Early "dramatic events" theories posited that the disruption caused by protest rallies or sit-ins could compel policymakers to negotiate or concede (Gamson 1975). Building on these ideas, scholars have documented cases, most famously the US civil rights movement, where televised images of harsh police tactics, as well as media reporting, accelerated federal voting rights legislation (McAdam 1999; Wasow 2020). Yet most quantitative studies find mixed evidence for a simple direct effect (Agnone 2007; Bernardi et al. 2021; Giugni 2004).

A refined literature emphasises mediation by the mass media and shifts in public-opinion salience. Vliegenthart et al. (2016) show that protest only influences parliamentary agendas when media coverage translates street demonstrations into widely circulated news stories, effectively "amplifying" citizens' signals for legislators (for a similar argument of mediation, please see: Agnone 2007). Bernardi et al. (2021) present numerous null findings on the relationship between protest and legislative agenda; many factors must align for protest to have an impact. Finally, Hutter and Vliegenthart (2018) note that partisan alignment is significant: opposition parties are more likely to translate protest into questions or motions than governing

parties, suggesting that the strategic position of "elite allies" influences the efficacy of protest.

Recent experimental and survey-based studies confirm that legislators are sensitive to both protest and expressed constituent views. Wouters and Walgrave (2017) demonstrate in controlled experiments that MPs are influenced by what they term WUNC – worthiness, unity, numerical strength, and commitment of protesters. Barrie et al. (2023) uncover similar effects in the UK, where climate-action demonstrations prompted more parliamentary questions on environmental policy – particularly when protests occurred outside constituency offices rather than in central London, highlighting the importance of proximity to lawmakers. Arguably, most prominently, Gillion finds that the US Congress is responsive to protest, but only to very loud and excessive forms of protest (Gillion 2012).

Overall, the protest-policy literature now converges on a nuanced view: protest matters less as an isolated shock and more as one element in a mediated, context-dependent chain. Key mediators include media coverage, shifts in public opinion, and the institutional position of sympathetic parties. While some earlier dramatic events models captured strong direct effects, the weight of evidence across these ten studies suggests an "amplification" process, in which protest heightens issue salience, making public opinion signals more responsive.

Developing a theoretical framework: should protest matter at all?

To understand how and why protest activity might influence the timing of roll-call votes in the German Bundestag, we must first recognise two fundamentally different expectations about the relationship between street mobilisation and parliamentary action. For one, grounded in much of the empirical literature on protest and legislative behaviour, collective demonstrations have at best an indirect, muted impact on lawmaking. Protesters may influence the tone of debate or the salience of an issue in the media, but the formal calendar of the legislature is driven overwhelmingly by party leaders, procedural routines, and coalition bargaining rather than by the ebb and flow of public demonstrations. In contrast, an alternative perspective sees large-scale, attention-grabbing protests as powerful signals of shifting public sentiment that can prompt parties to accelerate recorded votes in order to demonstrate responsiveness or to pre-empt an unfavourable opinion shift.

The "no-effect" baseline rests on two interlocking arguments. Firstly, Germany's highly disciplined party system insulates individual deputies from moment-to-moment public pressure. Party whips orchestrate votes according to coalition agreements and legislative priorities, and the scheduling of roll-call votes follows negotiated agendas rather than external cues. Secondly, empirical studies in other parliamentary settings typically find only modest or indirect effects of protest on actual voting behaviour (Bernardi et al. 2021). In both the United Kingdom and the United States, large demonstrations

may shift what MPs say in speeches or the content of committee reports, but they are unlikely to force a change in the timing of formal votes (Gause 2020). Suppose German parties treat roll-call votes as costly and exceptional, mostly reserved for constitutional or particularly contentious issues. In that case, it follows that the decision to bring a motion to the floor is made well in advance of any street-level action and remains largely immune to protest signals. In fact, one might actually expect, based on these theoretical insights, that protests might slow the policy process. Why? Because excessive protest might suggest that many public stakeholders are involved in the policy process, or at least seek to influence which policy is being developed. From this view, protest might actually slow policy-making considerably.

Yet a very different theoretical account highlights protests as rich, public signals of opinion and urgency. When tens or hundreds of thousands of citizens take to the streets around a clearly defined policy issue, they not only shift media attention but also broadcast information about the intensity and direction of public opinion (Olzak and Soule 2009; Vliegenthart et al. 2016; Wouters and Walgrave 2017). Legislators, particularly those in governing parties, may interpret such mobilisation as a leading indicator of a broader constituency shift. Faced with the risk that their party brand will be tarnished by appearing unresponsive, they have an incentive to accelerate formal votes; to register their own position publicly and to shape the narrative before a backlash hardens. In this way, protest functions not simply as a demand for substantive policy change but as a temporal nudge: the louder and more disruptive the demonstration, the stronger the signal that Parliament must act more swiftly.

These competing logics yield clear, testable hypotheses about which protest characteristics will matter. Under the null expectation of no direct effect, none of the protest measures should systematically shorten the interval between the first protest and the recorded vote in the Bundestag. Timing remains a function of parliamentary schedules, institutional thresholds, and coalition negotiation, not street pressure. By contrast, the signal-based theory predicts that higher-intensity protests – those with large numbers of participants, a visible law enforcement presence, or documented property damage – will lead to faster roll-call votes. Such protests convey that public sentiment has crystallised and that delay risks political costs, prompting an anticipatory response. Conversely, low-intensity or widely dispersed protests may fail to generate a clear call to action, resulting in little or no impact on vote timing.

Importantly, these hypotheses do not deny that protests can have subtler, longer-run effects on policy content or legislative debate (Barrie et al. 2023). Rather, they focus specifically on the "time-to-vote" dimension: the speed with which the Bundestag as a collective body moves from visible public mobilisation to the formal act of a recorded division.

In sum, the theory I advance is driven by a contest between institutional insulation and signal-driven responsiveness. If roll-call timing is insulated

from protest, we expect no systematic relationship between protest measures and vote timing. If protesters' intensity and visibility serve as a credible public-opinion alarm bell, we expect that more disruptive or larger protests will shorten the time-to-vote. Empirically adjudicating between these expectations will shed light not only on the specific mechanics of the German Bundestag but more broadly on the causal power of protest in modern representative democracies.

Research design

To test how quickly legislatures develop policy after protests occur, detailed, fine-grained, and timestamped data are needed – both on the protest level and on policy-making. I now outline the data that fulfils such needs before I describe my methods to analyse the data.

Legislative behaviour: Sieberer et al. (2020)

My investigation builds upon a landmark effort to systematise and publish every roll-call decision taken by the German Bundestag from its very first session in 1949 through 2013. This dataset represents years of painstaking work by a team of legislative scholars, among them Thomas Saalfeld, and research assistants, who meticulously combed parliamentary stenographic records, government archives, and official voting logs to capture, clean, and classify each instance in which deputies' individual votes were recorded. Their generosity in making these records openly accessible has opened entirely new possibilities for understanding how and when the Bundestag responds to societal pressures. Since their publication, the data have been used widely to study MP behaviour in Germany. In their published version, "the data cover almost 2,000 RCVs, more than 3,500 MPs, and about 1,100,000 individual voting decisions" (Sieberer et al. 2020: 1137). Since then, the data have also been updated regularly and used to analyse legislative behaviour in Germany (Bergmann et al. 2016).

Unlike many other democratic assemblies – in particular, the US Congress, where recorded votes occur nearly every day on a vast array of bills – the German system reserves roll-call votes for moments of heightened significance. The German Bundestag records individual parliamentary votes only at moments of genuine procedural weight; its roll-call records offer a uniquely powerful lens on legislative responsiveness. In Germany, deputies cast publicly recorded ballots not on every routine amendment or procedural motion, but only when a formal division is formally demanded – either by a significant minority of members or by constitutional requirement, as in confidence votes, budget approvals, or other high-stakes decisions. This selectivity means that every entry in the dataset corresponds to a moment when legislators have judged the issue sufficiently important to count each deputy's support or opposition.

For my purposes, this feature is an advantage rather than a limitation. By design, the data isolates the Parliament's most visible reactions – votes that follow intense debate, media scrutiny, or public mobilisation. When a protest movement succeeds in influencing an earlier roll-call vote, that vote is more than a routine parliamentary step: it is the Bundestag's formal acknowledgement of the issue's salience and its collective decision under public pressure. In contrast to legislative systems that log thousands of marginal votes each session, such as the US Congress under the presidency of Donald Trump, the Bundestag's selective transparency ensures that each recorded vote in our analysis represents a clear exercise of electoral accountability.

Because ordinary, behind-the-scenes negotiations and voice votes are excluded, we avoid conflating routine parliamentary management with constituent-driven urgency. Instead, our dataset highlights precisely those moments when public protest and parliamentary procedure intersect most directly, yielding sharp insights into how – most importantly for me – how quickly German representatives translate street-level demands into binding legislative choices.

The original dataset supplies, for each decision, the precise calendar date on which deputies registered their ballots, along with the broad policy category, ranging from economic regulation and social welfare through defence, energy, and environmental policy. As we shall see in the following text, it is particularly the information on date and policy area which is needed to enrich this data with protest information.

Protest data: the protest data collection

My analysis relies on the comprehensive Prodat protest-event dataset (Rucht 1998), which systematically records every collective public dissent in Germany from 1950 to the early 2000s. A team of social movement scholars assembled Prodat under the direction of Dieter Rucht and Friedhelm Neidhardt at the Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin. Since its early days, it has been updated through 2005 and has been collecting data for East Germany since the fall of the GDR. Drawing on two national quality newspapers (the *Frankfurter Rundschau* and the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*), research assistants scanned every weekend issue and a rotating monthly weekday sample, extracting each instance in which citizens mobilised to press demands on political or societal institutions. For each event, coders noted its precise date, the main policy domain (e.g., environmental regulation or social welfare), the exact reported headcount and, where available, the numbers of law-enforcement officers deployed and incidents of property damage. Additional attributes include the classification of protest form (e.g. demonstration, sit-in, petition), legal status, and principal sponsoring groups. To ensure comparability over four decades, Prodat applies a consistent codebook and has been subjected to intercoder reliability testing (Rucht 1998).

Despite its breadth, Prodat carries two well-understood limitations. Firstly, like any media-based source, it undercounts small, locally contained events that never reach national headlines. An evaluation by Hocke (1996)

shows that roughly 12% of all protests captured by a local newspaper are reflected in Prodat. However, the vast majority of protests, in particular on a very local level, remain unnoticed by any actor. Thus, we have little reason to assume that the following results are affected by such small events. Secondly, detailed participant figures or damage reports are missing for only a minority of cases, particularly confrontational or clandestine actions. Again, while this might be considered a flaw, the following analysis is not attempting to provide such fine-grained analysis involving these protest characteristics.

In my analysis that follows, I will rely on all protests reported in the dataset, irrespective of the type of protest.[2] Firstly, I recoded all protests into policy fields reported in the legislative data. The data relies on the coding of the Policy Agenda project; it provides 20 policy topics into which all votes are coded. Table 24.1 reports all coding decisions I made to recode the topics of the protest events.

Table 24.1 Recoding Prodat policy fields into policy agendas

German domain (English translation)	*Recoded roll-call category (policy1)*	*Conceptual category*
ka (unknown)	–	no corresponding roll-call category
recht (law)	12	law, crime & family issues
inneres (internal affairs)	2	civil rights & liberties
soziales (social policy)	13	social welfare
familie, gesundheit (family & health)	3	healthcare
umwelt (environment)	7	environment
energie (energy)	8	energy
landwirtschaft (agriculture)	4	agriculture
haushalt (budget)	1	macroeconomics
finanzen, steuern (finance & taxation)	15	banking, finance & commerce
wirtschaft (economy)	1	macroeconomics
forschung (research)	17	science & technology
verkehr (transportation)	10	transportation
städtebau, wohnungspolitik (urban & housing)	14	housing
post (postal affairs)	20	government operations
innerdeutsches (inner-German affairs)	20	defence
verteidigung, sicherheit (defence & security)	16	defence
bildungspolitik (education policy)	6	education
auswärtiges (foreign affairs)	19	international affairs
entwicklungspolitik (development policy)	18	foreign trade
sonstiges (miscellaneous)	–	other/unmapped

Secondly, I merged the Prodat data with the roll-call votes. I construct for each parliamentary decision a "time-to-vote" measure that begins at the first relevant protest in the preceding six-month window (or, in the absence of any demonstration, at window start) and ends on the date of the recorded vote. This means that for each vote in the Bundestag, I record all protest-related characteristics on the same policy topics within a six-month window prior to the vote. This means that the unit of analysis is a roll-call vote in the German Bundestag.

I then examine how the intensity and character of street mobilisation – its size, repetition, whether public order forces were involved, and whether property damage occurred – influence the tempo with which deputies take the same issue to a recorded division. In Table 24.2, I report all protest characteristics that I will include in my analysis. Each of these variables turns Prodat's raw archival entries into quantitative indicators of public protest pressure. Other than property damage and police presence, I assume that all indicators will have a positive effect on the legislative agenda, meaning that votes will happen earlier if more of the protest characteristics are present.

Note: I merged "innerdeutsches" (inner-German affairs) and "post" into broader "defence" and "government operations," respectively, as they aligned best with these categories given the detailed claims in the protest events.

In sum, Prodat offers a uniquely fine-grained chronicle of German protest politics. Its combination of precise dating, headcounts, tactical

Table 24.2 Protest characteristics included in the analysis

Measure	*Conceptual definition*
Number of demonstrations	Count of distinct protest events in the same policy area during the six-month window before the recorded vote.
Total participants	Sum of all reported attendees across those demonstrations captures the overall volume of mobilisation.
Average participants	Mean number of attendees per demonstration – a gauge of typical protest size.
Police present	Binary indicator for whether any protest in the window involved formal law-enforcement deployment (yes/no).
Property damage	Binary indicator for whether any protest in the window resulted in documented property damage (yes/no).
Mobilisation area	Maximum geographic scope of any protest in the window (e.g. local, regional, national), capturing how widely the issue was mobilised.
Media coverage	Total count of contemporary news-item citations of those protests, reflecting the level of press attention and public visibility.

coding, and policy-domain classification makes it exceptionally well-suited to survival-analysis methods. By marrying these street-level observations to the Bundestag's selective roll-call record, I can trace the real-time echo of public mobilisation in the formal mechanisms of parliamentary decision-making.

Results

My analysis focuses on 1,072 roll-call decisions recorded by the German Bundestag between 1950 and 2002, each linked to prior citizen mobilisation on the same policy issue. For each vote, we identify the first protest event in the preceding six months and measure the number of days until deputies formally recorded their ballots. When no demonstration occurred within that window, we treat the observation as censored at 180 days, reflecting a full six-month interval without demonstrable public pressure.

In Figure 24.1, I report the number of protests that occur for each policy field in my data. We observe that demonstrations clustered most heavily around macroeconomic and social welfare issues in the six months preceding a Bundestag roll-call vote. Fully 200-plus protests addressed questions of budgetary policy and broader economic management, while social-welfare concerns drew roughly 100 visible actions. Defence and healthcare each registered between 70 and 90 protests, while civil rights,

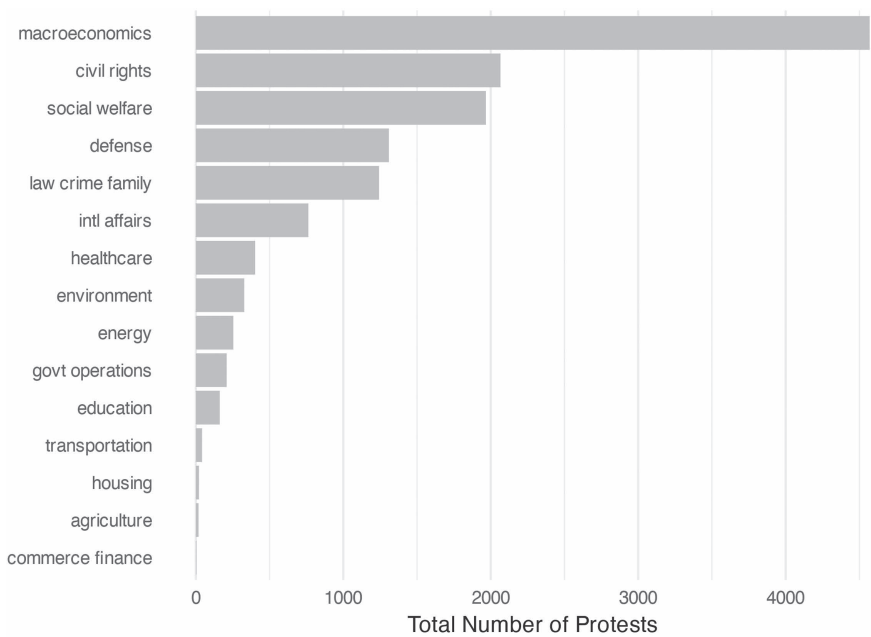

Figure 24.1 Protest per voting domain.

energy, agriculture, and immigration clusters accounted for between 30 and 60 demonstrations each. By contrast, domains such as education, housing, science and technology, foreign trade, and procedural or niche fields (e.g., state administration or constitutional amendments) saw fewer than 20 protests in the same window. This uneven distribution demonstrates that German citizens mobilise most often around fundamental economic and social policy questions, with noticeably less street activity in more technical or post-legislative arenas.

These patterns match nicely to long-standing observations about the contours of German protest culture. Scholars such as Dieter Rucht have shown that, over the post-war period, citizens have most readily taken to the streets around questions of economic justice and social protection – precisely the macroeconomic and welfare domains where we now observe the heaviest concentration of demonstrations ahead of parliamentary votes (Rucht 1998). Rucht's work emphasises how mobilisation infrastructures, trade unions, social movements, and welfare advocacy groups, tend to coalesce around issues that directly affect broad swathes of the population, generating sustained protest activity when budgets, pensions, or healthcare reform are at stake. By contrast, technical policy areas such as education, housing regulation, or science-and-technology policy, while not untouched by grassroots activism, rarely inspire the same scale of collective action, a pattern confirmed by the bar plot.

Descriptive analysis

To describe how quickly the Bundestag responds to street mobilisation, I first employ the Kaplan–Meier estimator, a nonparametric survival-analysis technique. All figures plot days since the first protest on the x-axis and the percentage of votes still pending on the y-axis.

Figure 24.2 shows the overall time-to-vote curve. At day 0 every vote is, by definition, outstanding; thereafter, the curve falls as recorded divisions occur. By roughly 160 days after the first protest, half of all votes have been held, and nearly all by 200 days. This establishes our baseline pace: once citizens mobilise visibly, lawmakers bring the issue to a formal roll-call roughly five months later.

Next, I turn to how protest intensity relates to that pacing. To simplify the continuous measures, I split each at its median and compare the survival curves for "low" (≤ median) versus "high" (> median) values. As outlined in the last section most of the protest characteristics are continuous. For instance, the number of protests is a count variable, ranging from 0 (no protest occurred) to infinity in theory (in practice, no more than 122 protest events occurred). However, the idea with descriptives is to simplify data and their relationships. To do so, here I split most protest characteristics by their median, and then report how being below or above the median correlates with the probability of a vote occurring.

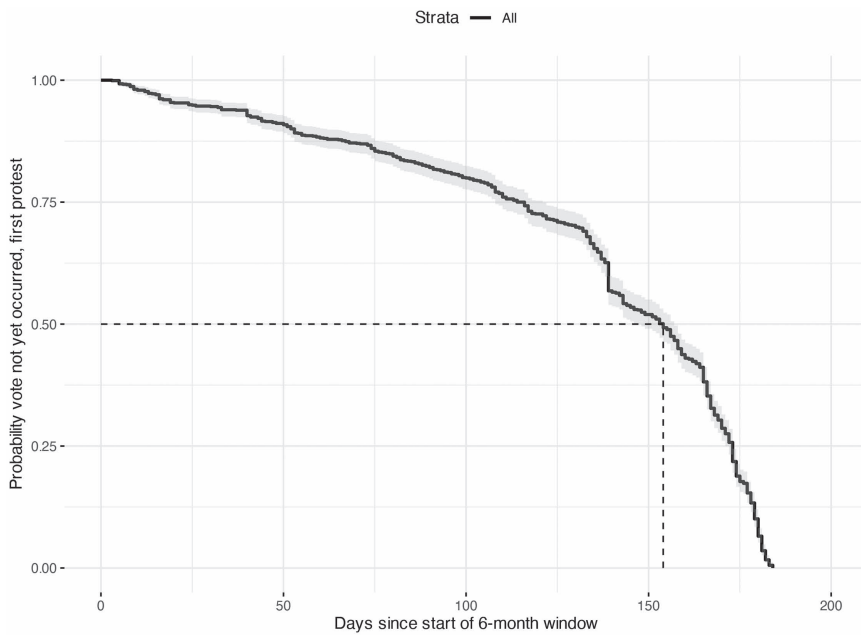

Figure 24.2 Overall time to vote.

Figure 24.3 divides votes by whether the number of protests in the six-month window exceeded the median of seven protest events. Contrary to a "pressure-accelerates-policy" expectation, windows with more protests actually show slower scheduling: the survival curve for high-protest windows lies above that for low-protest windows, delaying the 50% mark by roughly 20 days.

Where protests were more frequent, recorded votes came noticeably later: the 50% mark shifts left by about 20 days, indicating that lawmakers slow their response when protests pile up. The difference between the two samples is quite drastic, after 125 days, half of the votes with low protest pressures have occurred, while only 10% of the high-pressure votes have occurred.

Figure 24.4 follows the same strategy but splits by the number of people involved during the protest events prior to a vote. Here, we compare windows with below-median total turnout (10,000 people) to those above.

Low-mobilisation windows again yield faster votes: when protests drew modest participant numbers, half of the votes occurred by roughly 140 days, versus closer to 160 days when turnout was high. Interestingly, that showcases that there is much less power in numbers than most previous research on protest has assumed (Biggs 2018; DeNardo 1985; Giugni 2004, 2007; Rucht 2003). This finding is particularly relevant if we are interested in how legislators respond to these issues. Most MPs are arguably driven by

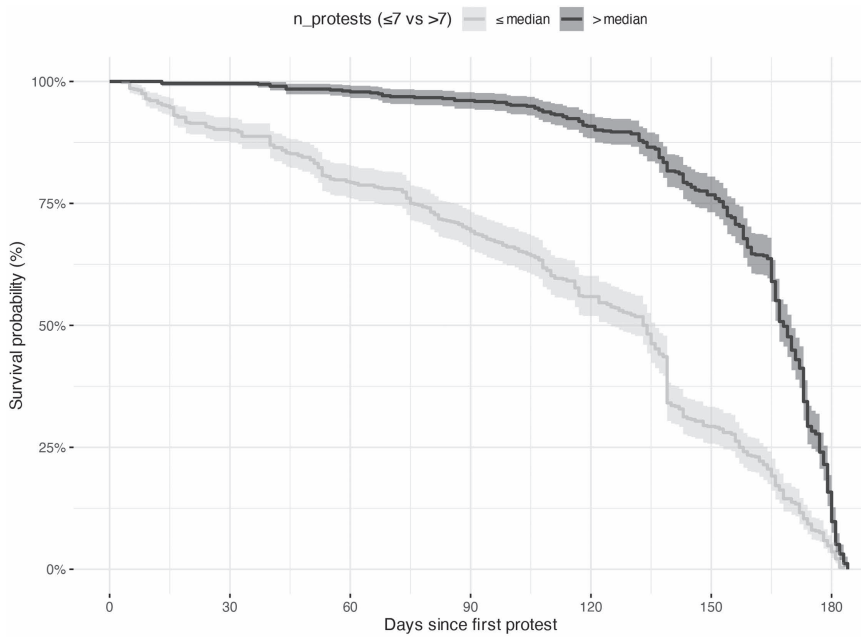

Figure 24.3 Split by number of protest events.

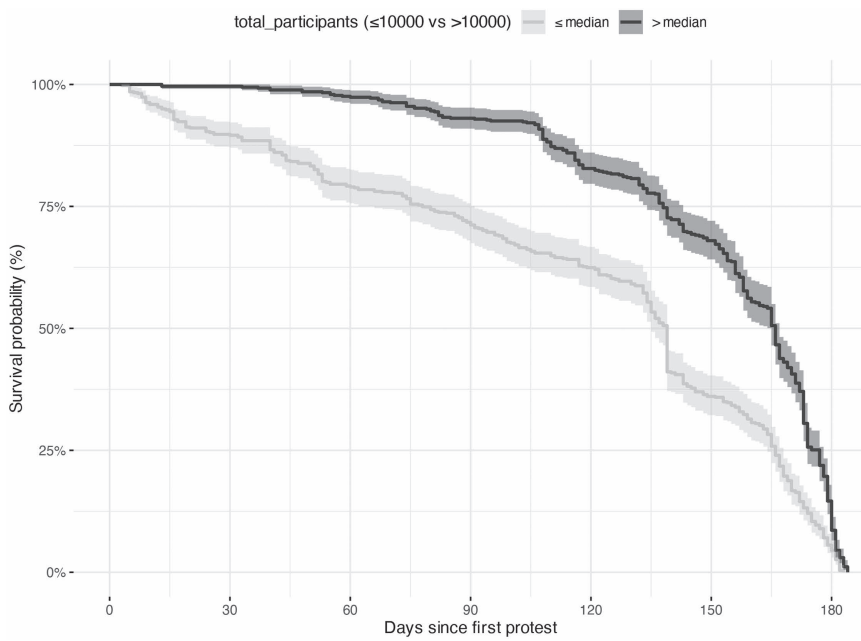

Figure 24.4 Split by total protesters.

re-election efforts, along with many other relevant pressures, of course. However, being responsive to citizen demands is, in any case, a key effort that MPs are involved in to ensure re-election. The number of citizens taking to the streets and pressuring MPs should, thus, have no substantial effect on how quickly legislators react; if anything, higher numbers make policy development lengthier.

Regarding geographic spread, my measure reflects the highest level at which protests were mobilised. It constitutes a proxy of how geographically dispersed mobilisation was. Splitting at the median of four (protest are nationwide), we find that international geographic reach also prompts slower voting: densely localised protest windows see votes about 15 days earlier, on average, than windows with widespread demonstrations. In Figure 24.5, the effects of the mobilisation area seem again small. In a similar vein to the number of protesters, this reflects that more national, or even international, pressures slow policy-making in the Bundestag.

Finally, I estimate separate survival curves for each major policy domain. The reason behind this is that we have little reason to assume that protests have the same effect across all policy domains (see Figure 24.6). For some domains, for instance, healthcare, few protests occur, and even if they do, they are unlikely to overshadow other societal pressures and demands.

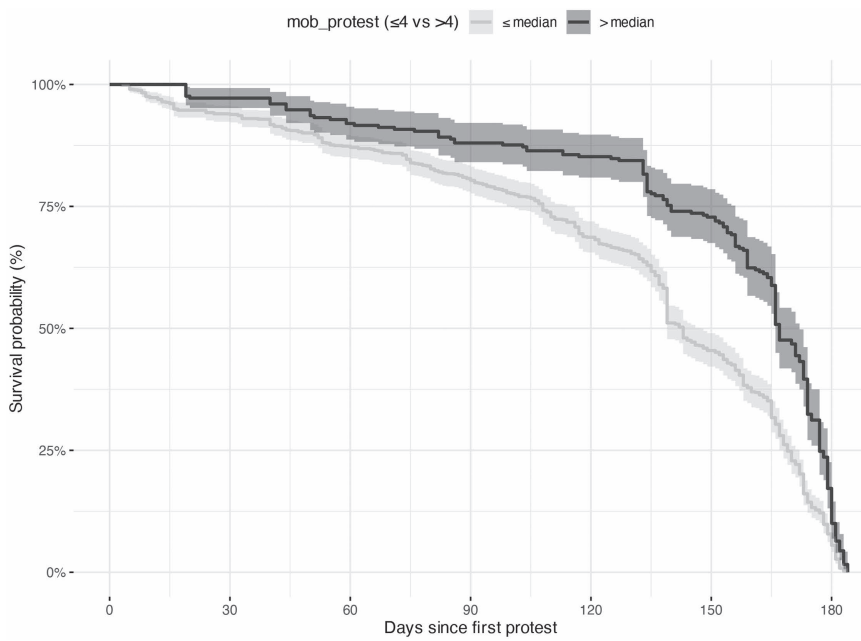

Figure 24.5 Split by geographic spread.

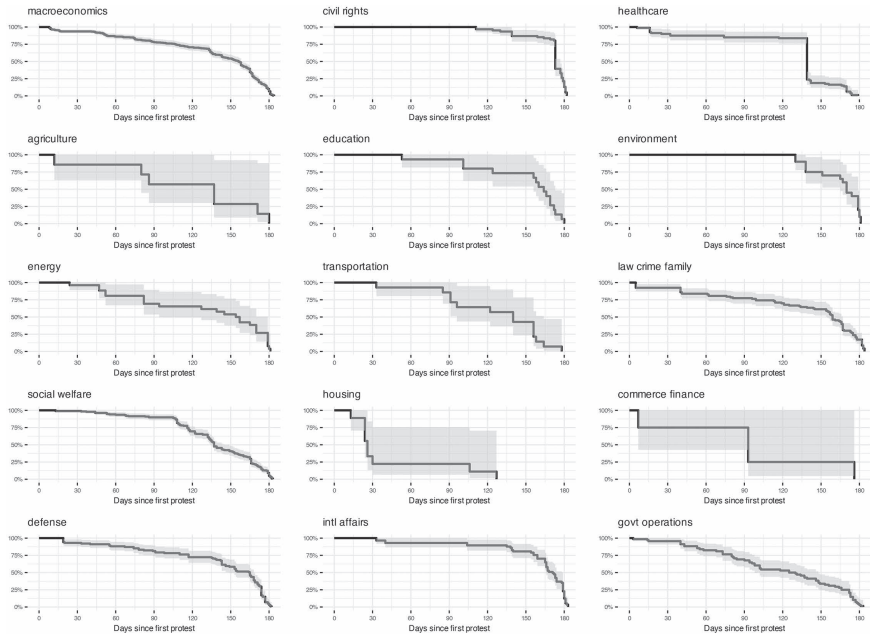

Figure 24.6 Stratified by policy field.

In fact, the pace of legislative reaction varies considerably across issues: votes on budget or finance matters (such as banking and commerce) and defence issues tend to occur much faster (median around 130 days), whereas roll-calls on social welfare, housing, and environmental issues lag (medians closer to 170 days). It is interesting to see that, in particular, civil rights issues are much less influenced by protest than one would assume a priori. Influenced by events in the US, including the Civil Rights Act and preceding protests, the area is likely to be affected by the protests. However, my findings indicate that in many instances, protests appear to have no effect on how quickly legislators bring it to a vote. Even more shocking is the effect on questions of the environment, a policy domain rattled by protests at least since the 1970s in Germany (Rüdig 2000). However, it appears that this policy field is hardly influenced by the amount of pressure exerted through protests. In combination with Figure 24.1, this figure in particular illustrates the unresponsiveness of policy-making in Germany in the field of civil rights questions, the field in which the second most protests fell within my dataset. In contrast, the field with the most pressure, macroeconomics, seems to be driven also by the pressures protesters put on the legislative agenda.

Across all figures, a clear negative relationship emerges between protest intensity – whether measured by count, turnout, or geographic dispersion – and the time until a roll-call vote on the same issue. Legislators

take more time once protests escalate. These findings support the theoretical prediction that policy making becomes more complicated when protests are louder. In essence, protest might reflect a wider politicisation of a political issue, with more stakeholders being involved in seeking to influence the policy process. This, in turn, makes policy-making more complex and slows down voting in the Bundestag.

These Kaplan–Meier curves provide compelling, nonparametric evidence of protest-driven "deceleration" in parliamentary scheduling. But do these effects hold up to a more rigorous regression design that controls for various factors simultaneously?

Survival models

The Cox proportional-hazards models recast "time to vote" as an instantaneous event rate, so that a hazard ratio below 1 implies a faster legislative response (higher instant "risk" of a vote) among the group in question relative to the reference category, while a hazard ratio above 1 indicates a slower response. All variables are coded as earlier for two reasons. Firstly, this makes comparisons with the bivariate relationships outlined earlier straightforward. A hazard ratio below 1 indicates that the above-median protest characteristics slow down the policy process, while ratios above 1 indicate that above-median protest characteristics accelerate the policy process. Secondly, protest coding from newspapers, or from any resource, comes with a lot of noise and errors. Thus, higher aggregation of the protest characteristics makes it less likely to fall prey to coding errors in the data.

In Table 24.3 I report four specifications in which each key protest indicator is dichotomised at its median value. Model 1 ("Baseline") estimates the bivariate association between above-median protest counts, total turnout, and geographic spread and vote timing. In essence it provides the multivariate analysis of the descriptive findings earlier. Model 2 adds control variables that mimic media attention, whether property damage, and whether police were deployed during any of the protest events. Model 3 introduces policy-field fixed effects to account for the fact that some issue areas (e.g. defence, social policy) may routinely move faster or slower through the Bundestag. Finally, Model 4 further includes decade fixed effects, capturing any long-run shifts in parliamentary procedure or data-collection practices over the second half of the twentieth century and into the early twenty-first century.

Across all specifications, the hazard ratio for large numbers of protests remains well below unity (≈0.51 in Model 1, rising modestly to 0.64 in Model 4), indicating that when protest counts exceed their median, votes occur more slowly compared to lower-protest windows. In substantive terms, a below-median number of demonstrations nearly doubles the instantaneous rate at which the Bundestag records a division once citizens first mobilise. Above-median turnout also slower votes, though its effect is weaker and sensitive to the inclusion of fixed effects (HR ≈ 0.82–0.87, $p < .10$). Geographic

Table 24.3 Cox proportional-hazards regressions (median split)

	Baseline	*+Media*	*+Policy FE*	*+Policy & Decade FE*
High number of protests	0.508***	0.650***	0.664***	0.644***
	(0.037)	(0.069)	(0.070)	(0.070)
High total participants	0.820**	0.873	0.855*	0.819*
	(0.060)	(0.066)	(0.066)	(0.064)
High protest area	0.828*	0.845*	0.921	0.923
	(0.066)	(0.068)	(0.083)	(0.083)
High media coverage		0.804*	0.764**	0.804*
		(0.083)	(0.078)	(0.083)
Property damage		0.992	1.026	1.129
		(0.091)	(0.102)	(0.118)
Police present		0.768**	0.820*	0.806*
		(0.064)	(0.075)	(0.073)
Policy field fixed effects	No	No	Yes	Yes
Decade fixed effects	No	No	No	Yes
N	1072	1072	1072	1072
Log-likelihood	–6262	–6252	–6230	–6221

Note: hazard ratios; standard errors in parentheses; * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

spread follows a similar pattern: localised demonstrations (vs. international ones) are associated with a 15–20% faster vote (HR ≈ 0.83–0.92, $p < .05$ in simpler models, attenuating as controls are added).

Media coverage exerts an independent slowing effect (HR ≈ 0.80, $p < .05$ once included in Model 2 and persisting through Models 3–4), whereas neither property damage nor police presence significantly alter the hazard of a vote after accounting for core protest measures. Introducing policy-field fixed effects leaves the core protest coefficients largely intact, suggesting that these results are not driven by, for example, larger protests occurring in inherently faster-moving issue domains. Adding decade dummies in Model 4 further improves model fit without substantively changing the pattern of findings.

In substantive terms, then, the models suggest that more intense, more dispersed, and more visible protest episodes are followed by longer waits for a formal roll-call vote. This runs counter to a simple "protest-speeds-legislation" story and instead hints that, once protest passes a certain threshold, it may complicate negotiations or prompt more cautious scheduling rather than immediate action.

Conclusion

This chapter asks a simple question: how swiftly does the Bundestag move from visible public protest to recorded division? Across six decades and 1072 roll-call votes, I find that the escalation of demonstrations paradoxically *lengthens* the interval to a formal vote. When protests accumulate beyond

the median frequency, involve above-median numbers of participants, or spread across wider geographies, the risk of a Bundestag division decreases by 30–50% relative to calmer periods. Media attention similarly slows legislative scheduling, whereas damage and police presence have no discernible effect once protest density and scope are taken into account.

Why might vigorous street mobilisation erect a legislative brake, rather than a green light? The evidence suggests that protests, especially when sustained or expansive, raise stakes for MPs who must reconcile competing demands, negotiate amendments, and manage intra-party dissent. In a system where roll-call votes are costly, high-visibility events and an onslaught of street pressure may signal complex, multi-stakeholder conflicts requiring additional deliberation. Far from a straightforward "rally to the floor," protests appear to complicate agenda-setting, prompting caution and coalition management before deputies commit to a public tally.

These findings carry three broader implications. Firstly, they challenge the assumption that protest unambiguously accelerates formal policy action. In highly institutionalised parliaments, citizen-driven urgency can collide with procedural inertia and party discipline, producing a net deceleration. Secondly, they affirm the value of "time-to-vote" as a distinct dimension of legislative responsiveness, complementing vote-choice studies by spotlighting scheduling rather than just policy direction. Thirdly, they underscore the conditional nature of protest efficacy: without sympathetic media framing, partisan allies, or clear issue ownership, street mobilisation alone may not yield immediate parliamentary outcomes.

Looking ahead, future research might explore the downstream effects of this deceleration. Does slower scheduling dampen protesters' momentum or shift their tactics? Do certain parties or committees respond differently to street signals? And how do these dynamics play out in other parliamentary contexts with different norms around roll-call voting? By marrying rich protest-event data with legislative calendars, this chapter has opened a new window on the temporal dance between streets and chambers – one in which visibility and volume can, somewhat counterintuitively, give protesters more time for their voices to be heard.

Notes

1 His actual take was "Junge Studenten wie du können je Matrices umdrehen, aber kannst du noch eine einfach Korrelationsmatrix richtig interpretieren?"
2 Such analysis would go well beyond the scope of this chapter. Future research may be interested in exploring how different forms of protest impact the speed of the legislative process.

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