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Moving the Unmovable: Political Strategies of Pension Reform in Germany

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This article has two aims: First, to present a descriptive analysis of the recent pension reforms in Germany, focussing on the reforms of 2003 and 2004 and on the political process instead of policy outcomes. Second, this article analyzes political strategies used by the red-green government (and its predecessors) in pursuing its pension reform agenda. In contrast to a majority position in the relevant literature, which claims a broad consensus is a precondition for successful pension reform, I will argue that in Germany, a large variety of political strategies have been applied. Most involve consensus or at least an attempt to create cooperation with trade unions or the opposition parties, but some also rely on unilateral governmental action. The article discusses advantages, disadvantages, benefits, costs and preconditions of the political strategies observed in Germany. It concludes with the remark that the complexity of the German polity with its high density of veto points goes along with a large variety of political strategies that can be used to circumnavigate veto positions.

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