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Spring 5-7-2022

Traumas of German Unification and Weakness of Civil Society: Contributing Factors to the Disproportionate Strength of Populist Parties in Eastern German States

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TRAUMAS OF GERMAN UNIFICATION AND WEAKNESS OF CIVIL SOCIETY:

CONTRIBUTING FACTORS TO THE DISPROPORTIONATE STRENGTH OF POPULIST

PARTIES IN EASTERN GERMAN STATES

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A thesis presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for completion

Of the Bachelor of Arts degree in International Studies

Croft Institute for International Studies

Sally McDonnell Barksdale Honors College

The University of Mississippi

University, Mississippi

April 2022

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Abstract

While East and West Germany reunified into one country in 1990, populist parties have done better in the former GDR than in the "old lands". This paper draws on the political science literature on populism performing better in the absence of robust civil society, as well as the specific history of the region. I argue that because the GDR had not permitted the development of robust civil society, when the unexpected economic difficulties of unification arose, they were compounded by resentment over the necessity of importing more experienced western politicians to help run western institutions and that the lack of such institutions further hindered communication between the federal government and the residents of the new states. The strength of populism in eastern Germany has been an attempt to bridge this gap.

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In the late 2010s, populist movements succeeded across Europe. Marine Le Pen reached the second round in both the 2017 and 2022 French presidential elections. The United Kingdom did leave the European Union. Viktor Orban's Fidesz party solidified power in Hungary, and the Law and Justice Party came to power in Poland. Germany too saw its share of populism. However, populism in Germany did not appear equally across the whole country but showed a strong preference for eastern Germany, for what had once been the German Democratic Republic. A cursory look through the library of most academic institutions will confirm that the populist parties of Germany, particularly the AfD, are well-studied, and the psychologies of their voters extensively discussed by many researchers. Therefore it is not difficult to explain the existence of these parties. However, less-well understood than the "supply" of populist parties in Germany is the "demand," specifically the way it is unevenly distributed throughout the country. It is not self-evident why both the right and left-wing populists should perform better in what used to be the GDR.

Research Question and the Argument in Brief

The data (Tables I and II) about the 2017 election clearly shows that Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, Saxony-Anhalt, Brandenburg, Saxony and Thuringia -- the states which used to comprise the German Democratic Republic -- have a markedly higher voter turnout for the populist parties than do the other states. Why, then, is eastern Germany more hospitable to populist parties than western Germany? This is the research question of this thesis.

Table I: 2017 Federal Election Results in Eastern Germany

State	Alternativ für Deutschland 2017 Federal Election	Die Linke 2017 Federal Election	Combined vote percentage
Brandenburg	20.2	17.2	37.4
Mecklenburg-Vorpommern	18.6	17.8	36.4
Saxony	27.0	16.1	43.1
Saxony-Anhalt	19.6	17.8	35.4
Thuringia	22.7	16.9	39.6
Average for Former East Germany	22.62	17.16	38.38

Source: Tagesschau.de. "BUNDESTAGSWAHL 2017: BUNDESLÄNDER." Tagesschau,

https://www.tagesschau.de/wahl/archiv/2017-09-24-BT-DE/.

Table II: 2017 Federal Election Results in western Germany

State	Alternative für Deutschland 2017 Federal Election	Die Linke 2017 Federal Election	Combined vote percentage
Baden-Wurttemberg	12.2	6.4	18.6
Bavaria	12.4	6.1	18.5
Berlin	12.0	18.8	30.8
Bremen	10.0	13.5	23.5
Hamburg	7.8	12.2	20.0
Hesse	11.9	8.1	20.0
Lower Saxony	9.1	6.9	16.0
North Rhine-Westphalia	9.4	7.5	16.9
Rhineland-Palatinate	11.2	6.8	18.0
Saarland	10.1	12.9	23.0
Schleswig-Holstein	8.2	7.3	15.5
Average for Former West Germany	10.23	8.77	19.0

Source: Tagesschau.de. "BUNDESTAGSWAHL 2017: BUNDESLÄNDER." Tagesschau, https://www.tagesschau.de/wahl/archiv/2017-09-24-BT-DE/.

Excluding Berlin, which was itself partitioned between East and West, the vote share for the AfD in the eastern states ranged from 18.6% to 27%; the vote share for die Linke in the eastern states ranged from 16.1% - 17.8%. By contrast, the vote share for the AfD in the western states ranged from 7.8% - 12.4 %; the vote share for die Linke in the western states ranged from 6.1% - 13.5%. For both the right-populist and left-populist parties, the best results in the western states were inferior to the lowest ones in the eastern states. The average combined vote count for the populists is 38% in the eastern states and 19.98% in the western states.

Why would it be the case that support for populist parties in eastern states is almost twice what it is in western states? I argue that this is the result of multiple factors. The GDR crushed most civil society in East Germany. During unification, this necessitated the importation of western institutions and western Germans with experience to run them. This created resentment of the western Germans for "colonizing" the East. Additionally, the economic dislocations of unification produced economic insecurity and hardship for many people, increasing the strong sense of grievance in eastern Germany. This also left many eastern Germans feeling betrayed by, and resentful of, the western federal government. Finally, it was more difficult for eastern Germans to communicate these grievances to the federal government because of the lack of institutional memory of civil society, and the aforementioned western domination of the federal organizations. Political scientists generally argue that a lack of civil society is a cause for greater populism as people seek a new style of politics to communicate with the unresponsive government. Each of these factors, operating in conjunction with one another, led to strong feelings of dissatisfaction in the eastern states that die Linke and the AfD were able to court for votes.

Die Linke and the AfD as Populist Parties

The AfD is the more novel (and more successful) party. Founded in 2013 as a primarily eurosceptic party, it transitioned to opposition towards immigration, as its primary issue in the 2017 election, in which it saw what -- so far -- has been the peak of its success, as in the 2021 election its share of the vote declined to 10.3%. The AfD is considered a radical right party, and has consequently had difficulties finding coalition partners even at the state level.

The GDR was governed by the SED, which was created out of a merger of the GDR's Social Democrats and Communists. Perhaps unsurprisingly, once Germans in the East began to partake in competitive elections again, the SED rapidly lost much of its influence and voters. It renamed itself the PDS (Party of Democratic Socialism) and continued to compete in elections, pushing a left-wing agenda and partaking in governments at the state level. In 2005, to broaden its reach and break out of its regional focus, it allied with the WASG (Electoral Alternative for Labor and Social Justice). In 2007 the PDS and the WASG formally merged into *die Linke*[1]. Die Linke reached its national height in 2009 with 11% of the national vote. They then returned to their level of about 9% until the 2021 election, when they fell to 4.9%.

Mudde defines populism in general as a "thin-centered ideology" that pits "the people" against the corrupt elite in a Manichean struggle.[2] Populism is better understood as this political style rather than an ideology; the basic formula that depicts the good senses of the common people being trampled upon by contemptible elites who refuse to implement simple and obvious solutions can be filled out by attachment to a given ideology, left or right.[3] Populist parties may furiously oppose one another on economic policy, climate change, abortion or any other issue.[4]

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[1] Hough, Dan, and Michael Koß. "Populism Personified Or Reinvigorated Reformers? The German Left Party in 2009 and Beyond." *German Politics and Society*, vol. 27, no. 2, 2009, pp. 76-91.
[2] Hansen, Michael A., and Jonathan Olsen. "Flesh of the Same Flesh: A Study of Voters for the Alternative for Germany (AfD) in the 2017 Federal Election." *German Politics*, vol. 28, no. 1, 2019, pp. 1-19.
[3] Hough, Dan, and Michael Koß. "Populism Personified Or Reinvigorated Reformers? The German Left Party in 2009 and Beyond." *German Politics and Society*, vol. 27, no. 2, 2009, pp. 76-91.
[4] Olsen, Jonathan. "The Left Party and the AfD: Populist Competitors in Eastern Germany." *German Politics and Society*, vol. 36, no. 1, 2018, pp. 70-83.

What unites populists is that they generally evince a lack of faith in the democratic political process and call for greater involvement by "the people." [5] This sometimes takes the form of calling for referendums.

The AfD was initially categorized as a eurosceptic party that fought for conservative economic policies. However, since 2014 it escalated its use of populistic techniques, particularly anti-immigrant rhetoric after the European debt crisis ended. Olsen cites 2015 as the turning point wherein the AfD became a right-populist party, emphasizing a distinction between "natives" and "non-natives."[6] Compared to other parties, the AfD is not particularly representative of any socio-demographic group of gender, educational level, union membership, or employment. What unites its supporters is their shared discontent; the AfD mobilized discontented voters across these groups. The AfD also advocates for referendums as a way to constrain the government and empower the people.[7] By 2017, the AfD was therefore generally considered to be a standard populist party, as well as a right one, especially in light of its voters' greater distrust of democracy.[8]

Die Linke evolved from a combination of PDS and WASG. The PDS was the successor party to the SED that ruled East Germany. The WASG was more opposed to cooperation with the establishment SPD than the PDS. After the merger, the WASG leadership -- especially Lafontaine -- was able steer the nascent die Linke in a more populist direction. The party's 2011 platform cast them as oppositional, whereas the PDS had earlier entertained hopes of allying with the SPD to escape political isolation. In this respect, die Linke has moved into a more populist position.[9]

Die Linke often advocates for simple solutions to complex problems, in line with rhetoric advocating for the common sense of the average person. Hough and Koss also link this to a

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[5] Ibid.

[6] Olsen, Jonathan. "The Left Party and the AfD: Populist Competitors in Eastern Germany." *German Politics and Society*, vol. 36, no. 1, 2018, pp. 70-83.

[7] Ibid.

[8] Hansen, Michael A., and Jonathan Olsen. "Flesh of the Same Flesh: A Study of Voters for the Alternative for Germany (AfD) in the 2017 Federal Election." *German Politics*, vol. 28, no. 1, 2019, pp. 1-19.

[9] Patton, David "The Left Party at Six: The PDS–WASG Merger in Comparative Perspective" *German Politics*, Vol. 22, No. 3, pp.219-234

rejection of market economics.[10] In line with descriptions of populist parties, die Linke has called for Germany to "dare more democracy" and institute sweeping reforms. Die Linke also exhibits populist behavior by labeling mainstream German political groups as elitists, lionizing other leftists, etc. Die Linke's populist positioning had made them appealing to the large pool of eastern German protest voters who are discontented with the German status quo. The similarity between the bases of the two parties can be seen in how the AfD was able to poach away voters from die Linke in 2017, as well as their shared Russophilia, promotion of referenda, pessimism about German democracy and hostility to globalization, the European Union, and free trade agreements.[11]

Theoretical Background on Civil Society

Civil society is often held to be important in strengthening democracy. Civil society, or the institutions that bind people together with their fellow citizens, is often held to be a fundamental ingredient in democracy. It is what creates the potential for larger scale organization and political discourse between otherwise unlike groups. This is a view most famously championed by Robert Putnam in *Bowling Alone* and *Making Democracy Work*. Putnam argues that civil societies help to build up social capital by connecting individuals who otherwise would not be associated and thereby allow for a more robust democracy.[12] In chapter 4 of *Making Democracy Work*, Putnam examines Italian civil society to compare the efficacy of its political institutions and the presence of civil society. He finds a strong correlation between the two and describes it as being so strong that the economic disparities between the regions become superfluous as independent variables, though he qualifies that economic differences may beget

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[10] Hough, Dan, and Michael Koß. "Populism Personified Or Reinvigorated Reformers? The German Left Party in 2009 and Beyond." *German Politics and Society*, vol. 27, no. 2, 2009, pp. 76-91.

[11] Olsen, Jonathan. "The Left Party and the AfD: Populist Competitors in Eastern Germany." *German Politics and Society*, vol. 36, no. 1, 2018, pp. 70-83.

[12] Putnam, Robert. "Tuning In, Tuning Out: The Strange Disappearance of Social Capital in America." *Political Science and Politics*, Vol. 28, No. 4 (Dec., 1995), pp. 664-683

differences in civil society. Putnam also found, in the same survey, that politicians in areas with more civil society were more likely to receive questions about policies than they were to receive requests for patronage. Putnam also finds that the voters of southern Italy, where there are far more exercises of direct democracy, are less civic and face a more corrupt and populistic environment than those in northern Italy; he finds that they are more likely to feel cynical about politics and less likely to believe that ordinary voting will make a difference.[13]

Indeed, many sources have argued that civil society is a major influence in how democracies relate to populism once they are established. Civil society has been consistently observed to vitiate the successes of populist parties by a significant margin.[14] Boeri et al. define populism as "an ideology that considers society ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonist groups", "the pure people" versus the "corrupt elite", a standard definition. The idea this entails, that the people speak with one voice, that the people are united in their righteousness, leaves little room for dissent or alternative points of view, as civil societies may present.

Boeri et al. infer from this that there will be an inverse correlation between the presence of civil societies and the strength of populism. They show that although economic recession generally tended to promote populism, it was not the only determinant factor. Indeed, they found indications that "membership of a civil society reduces the vote for [a] populist party by roughly 20–30%."[15] They also found that the 2008 financial crisis strengthened rather than weakened this effect. Building from this, they conclude that civil society has a statistically significant impact on the probability of support for populist parties because, explicitly echoing Durkheim, a lack of social connection produces a feeling of disconnect or *anomie* which then leaves a gap which populist politics can fill by providing a way of communicating with the state.[16]

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[13] Putnam, Robert. *Making Democracy Work*. Princeton University Press. 1993. pp. 96-100
[14] Boeri, Tito, Mishra, Prachi, Papageorgiou, Chris, Spilimbergo, Antonio. "Populism and Civil Society." *Economica*, vol. 88, no. 352, 2021, pp. 863-895.
[15] Ibid, p. 871
[16] Ibid

Osborne begins by treating civil society as a feature of liberal democracy. He explains how theories generally treat them as both a barrier against the indefinite atomization of society and as "intermediate powers" between the masses of voters and the liberal democratic state, insofar as they communicate the wishes of groups of citizens who are not actively and automatically engaging in partisan or governmental work. Populism relies on a general sense of alienation from "intermediate powers," and promises to resolve the populace's problems by the creation of a partisan state. In this way, it often comes into conflict with civil society, which generally serves as a forum and endeavors to act as an impartial mediator between different factions within society.[17] The promises of populist candidates on the other hand generally entail promising to bring the state into combat against the causes of the people's problems, marshaling its powers to provide direct aid. Additionally, once in a position of national power, populists are generally uninterested in autonomous local institutions, or other buffers as, per Osborne, "The ideal is to have no representative 'space' between the popular will and its expression—directly—in forms of power."[18]

Arato and Cohen begin in a similar vein by defining civil society as possessing three parameters: publicity, plurality, and privacy. Arato and Cohen also draw a distinction between political and civil society. Populism is described as being "in but not of" civil society in that populism benefits in key ways from the freedoms allowed to civil society and much of its legitimacy comes from democratic norms that emphasize the sovereignty of the people. However, while populism does sometimes promote greater equality of wealth, social justice, or the challenge of oligarchy, it also claims to speak on behalf of a unified people (see above). Moreover, populism has a great capacity to be used in attacking those institutions which make it and civil society possible in the first place. Arato and Cohen also expand the idea that populism is best understood not as an ideology with a substantial set of beliefs but rather as a method of

[17] Osborne, Thomas. "Civil Society, Populism and Liberalism." *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society*, vol. 34, no. 2, 2020;2021, pp. 175-190.
[18] Ibid.

discourse. Populism is a discourse that emphasizes a struggle between "the people" and the elite and manifests a desire to recapture sovereignty from the elite. Populism is thus understood best as a style of politics onto which ideology can be grafted.[19]

There is, of some relevance here, also evidence from other post-communist countries that the relative deprivation of civil society in those countries helps to fuel illiberal attitudes and a lack of attachment to the norms of democratic politics as usually practiced.[20] It should be noted that Hann explicitly criticizes those who believe that civil society can play the role of an ersatz-state; nonetheless, the paper outlines a connection between the two. Another aspect to this may be that Tito et al. argue that there is evidence for the idea in sociology that populism is the result of a perceived failure on the part of institutions to provide an anchor in the aftermath of dramatic events. This in turn leads to disaffected persons joining populist movements to regain their cross-cutting ties with other members of society.[21] Consequently, it would be reasonable to predict that if one area had a history of weakening civil society in a way that another did not, then, *ceteris paribus*, the area with the weakened civil society will probably have stronger populist movements.

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[19] Arato, Andrew, and Jean L. Cohen. "Civil Society, Populism and Religion." *Constellations*, vol. 24, no. 3, 2017, pp. 283-295.
[20] Ibid.
[21] Boeri, Tito, Mishra, Prachi, Papageorgiou, Chris, Spilimbergo, Antonio. "Populism and Civil Society." *Economica*, vol. 88, no. 352, 2021, pp. 863-895.

Chapter II: Explaining the Disproportionately High Support for Populist Parties in Eastern Germany

Suppression of Civil Society in the Former GDR

In this chapter I will examine the factors that I believe explain the disproportionately high support for populism in eastern Germany. First I examine suppression of civil society in the former GDR. Second I look at the economic traumas of unification and the resentment that this generated in eastern Germany. Third I look at the weakness of civil society in eastern Germany and the western domination of economic associations and political parties.

After the Second World War and the partition of Germany into Allied Zones of Occupation, the zone of Soviet Military Occupation (Mecklenburg, Brandenburg, Sachsen-Anhalt, Saxony, Thuringia, and what would become known as "East Berlin") were formed into the German Democratic Republic. The GDR was a one-party, Communist, state; it is generally considered to have been a satellite of the Soviet Union. Due to the fact that West Berlin remained outside of the GDR, it was common for East German dissidents or discontented persons to flee there and from there to the rest of West Germany until the building of the Berlin Wall between them in 1961. In 1953, the government forcibly put down demonstrations in Berlin with Soviet help.

The GDR employed extensive coercive measures, some of which are detailed below.

These are necessary to provide context for the development of civil society in Eastern Germany.

The GDR was, unquestionably, a police state; however, it would be incorrect to depict the non-Stasi population as living in a state of constant terror. It must be understood that the scale of the Stasi was not common knowledge until *after* the fall of the Berlin Wall, when many people were shocked to discover that those closest to them had been agents of the secret police. However shocking these revelations were, the fact that they were shocking is proof that most people were unaware of the Stasi's extent and, consequently, could not have previously resented the intrusion of which they were unaware.[22] Furthermore, the Stasi did not arrest everyone who dissented. This is not to deny their role or their actions. The fact remains that a great many of the eastern Germans interviewed on the subject after the unification felt that they had lived "perfectly normal lives." Their lives did not constitute some desperate struggle against the overweening tyranny of an omnipotent state. Nonetheless, despite the eagerness of many Germans to declare that they lived normal lives under the GDR, it had a chilling effect on public speech. It was generally understood that one did not discuss politics in public.[23]

It was also difficult, in the early years, to induce political loyalty in people who were primarily concerned with how they would rebuild their lives. Many people were also disillusioned with politics. They had been drawn into one German state politically and ended in an apocalypse. Now they found themselves in another, and there was a strong desire "not to be taken in again." This attitude led to a general cynicism about political matters, and, in later decades, the rise of "niche societies." Niche societies served as a way for people to express their discontent with the political order within the confines imposed on them by the GDR.[24] Prior to the construction of the Berlin Wall, people who were discontented with the GDR could simply leave for the West. It is therefore not a coincidence that the practice of making veiled critiques of

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[22] Fulbrook, Mary. *Dissonant Lives: Generations and Violence through the German Dictatorships*. Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2011, p. 379

[23] Ibid, p. 381

[24] Dochartaigh, Pól Ó. "Introduction: The GDR between Conformism and Subversion." *German Life and Letters*, vol. 63, no. 3, 2010, pp. 230-233.

the regime in public became more common after the Wall was built.[25]

The GDR did not intend to leave open any private association or enterprise apart from the state; political groups, churches, civil associations, unions and the press were infiltrated and pressured, especially throughout the 1950s and 1960s. In the 1970s, Honecker came to power and adopted a strategy of "consumer socialism," emphasizing the need to provide people with comfortable lives under socialism to secure their loyalty. Fiedler and Meyen note that citizens of the GDR complained less often about the state of the economy and the state-control of the media during the years of "consumer socialism", but began to turn against the GDR more strongly in the 1980s.[26]

Newspapers were much easier to control than people's access to than western electronic media, which far more easily permeated the Iron Curtain. Accordingly, newspapers were under the control of the state. Perhaps not surprisingly, this led to a growing degree of cynicism about the intentions of newspapers.[27] Writers were also under pressure to conform. In 1979, dissenting writers found themselves expelled from the *Schriftstellerverband*, effectively making them unpublishable in the GDR.[28] This initiated a new wave of writers fleeing abroad. The damage of this was compounded by the fact that, in the years following this, the arms race led to an increasing desire by Germans in both intellectual circles and peace movements, on both sides of the Iron Curtain, to unite in opposition to the looming shadow of a conflict that would land firmly on them. Returning briefly to the idea of increased discourse on nationalism during the dissolution of the Communist Bloc, it is perhaps possible to retroactively read into this an increasing degree of shared sense of "German-ness", which would help explain the drive

[25] Tismaneanu, Vladimir. *Stalinism Revisited: The Establishment of Communist Regimes in East-Central Europe.* Edited by Vladimir Tismaneanu. Central European University Press, Budapest; New York, 2009.
[26] Fiedler, Anke, and Michael Meyen. "The Steering of the Press in the Socialist States of Eastern Europe: The German Democratic Republic (GDR) as a Case Study." *Cold War History*, vol. 15, no. 4, 2015, pp. 449-470.
[27] Fulbrook, Mary. *Anatomy of a Dictatorship: Inside the GDR*, 1949-1989. Oxford University Press, New York, 1995. p. 131
[28] Conacher, Jean E., YBP DDA, and JSTOR. *Transformation and Education in the Literature of the GDR.* Camden House, Rochester, New York, 2020.

towards unification following afterwards.

Indeed, the peace movement is one area in which one still reads about sizable civil society that is not led by the state -- though the state tried to heed Talleyrand's advice about joining those movements that cannot be stopped, lest one be compelled to do what they want and be shown as a puppet. The GDR implemented a policy of universal conscription which pacifists could avoid only by doing unarmed service under the army's auspices while facing discrimination in their job searches. As the peace movement grew and faced pushback after the 1975 Conference of Security and Co-operation in Europe in Helsinki, activists began to shelter under the still semi-autonomous church.[29] The general discontent of the intelligentsia helped fuel increasing disillusion in the students in GDR schools.[30] Thus the churches paradoxically were simultaneously co-opted by the regime with regard to their hierarchy, and yet played a vital role in fostering resistance to that regime.

One key difference between the FRG and the GDR is the species of unions, for no democratic, non-partisan unions existed in the GDR after 1949, when the *Freier Deutsche Gewerkschaftsbund* (FDGB) became a compliant instrument of the state and the ruling SED party. From that point forward, the FDGB assumed the attributes of a "conveyor belt" of ideas and orders from the Party to the workers. It served to discourage self-initiative and promote a homogenization of labor. The FDGB was also involved in the administration of healthcare, social security, and the GDR's largest travel agency. There were no traditional unions or workers councils as these were deemed superfluous by the SED, which claimed to already be promoting the interests of the working class and allowing unionization by virtue of creating a de facto obligation to join the FDGB. Despite its awareness of growing discontent in the GDR, the FDGB leadership elected to continue supporting the SED until they fell from power.[31]

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[29] Hadjar, Andreas. "Non-Violent Political Protest in East Germany in the 1980s: Protestant Church, Opposition Groups and the People." *German Politics*, vol. 12, no. 3, 2003, pp. 107-128.

[30] Conacher, Jean E., YBP DDA, and JSTOR (Organization). Transformation and Education in the Literature of the GDR. Camden House, Rochester, New York, 2020.

[31] Michael Fichter. "A House Divided: a View of German Unification as it has Affected Organized Labor." *German Politics*. Vol. 2, No. 1, April 1993. pp. 21-39.

When it came to the Protestant Church, church and state had an evolving and complicated relationship to each other. Initially, the GDR had clashed with the Church in East Germany, but as infiltration increased and opposition to the regime mounted, some modus vivendi became both more practical and more desirable; therefore, the government began attempting to co-opt it instead.[32] This turn towards cooperation was not a one-sided affair. The Church also came under pressure and had suffered a steep decline in active membership as children and their parents were forced to choose -- until 1960 -- between formal initiation of their children into the Church and *Jugendweihe* -- a formal "confirmation" into the politics of the GDR and loyalty to it and its Soviet ally.[33] Another round of reconciliation followed the clashes between the Church and the state over the peace movement, itself partially a response to the introduction of *Wehrkunde* (communist military theory mixed with basic soldiering instructions) in schools.[34] It is important to observe that the state ultimately got the better of the Church in both of these confrontations, with the vast majority of children partaking in *Jugendweihe* and *Wehrkunde* remaining in the curriculum, though the Church was able to claim a sort of victory with greater peace measures. These aside, the Church too could not stop the state from encroaching on ever more aspects of society. One must also take into account the degree to which the state sought to blur the lines between itself and the Church. At least four of the Protestant *Landeskirchen* were infiltrated by Stasi informants at the highest levels.[35] Many more were generally influenced by or cooperated with Stasi agents -- for instance Manfred Stolpe, Consistorial President of the eastern Region of the Evangelical Church in Berlin-Brandenburg, served as an informer for the Stasi.

Until the dramatic shift back to open confrontation with the churches in 1987, the GDR generally attempted to infiltrate churches and break up dissident groups. They generally achieved

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[32] Fulbrook, Mary. *Anatomy of a Dictatorship: Inside the GDR*, 1949-1989. Oxford University Press, New York, 1995., p. 88-91

[33] Cordell, Karl. "The Role of the Evangelical Church in the GDR." *Government and Opposition*, vol. 25, no. 1, 1990, p. 49

[34] Ibid, pp. 51-54

[35] Fulbrook, Mary. *Anatomy of a Dictatorship: Inside the GDR, 1949-1989*. Oxford University Press, New York, 1995., p. 99

short-term results, in terms of quieting opposition. *Inoffizielle Mitarbeiter* (informal collaborators) would inform their controllers of church affairs and the state would use this information to formulate its preferred response from the clergy. Buttressing this indirect control was the direct influence exerted over actual infiltrators and *offizielle Mitarbeiter* (official collaborators).[36] However, in the long term, this did not prove a viable strategy. It foundered against the reality that the hierarchy of the Protestant church in Germany was rather less rigid than had been hoped. It remained generally true that Lutherans of all political persuasions found it more important to spread Lutheranism than any political message, a fact which was utilized by the GDR to induce clergy to spread GDR friendly messages and see to it that the State's point of view was always represented. But by the same token, this meant that even most collaborating clergy would not have the suppression of ideas critical to the state as their primary goal.[37]

While the collaborationist strategy did not augment state control as much as desired, neither did it preserve the church's autonomy as much as some clergy hoped. Even aside from the scandals of Stasi *Mitarbeiter* which plagued the Church (and most other organizations in the former GDR), the years of the GDR oversaw a marked decline in the Church's membership and social authority. For instance, marriage rates in the former GDR are significantly lower than in the old FRG.[38] Religion of all kinds has declined substantially more in eastern than western Germany, a fact which was noticed and celebrated by some in the Stasi.[39] Whatever may be said about German Protestant churches as institutions, they did serve as civil societies; their relative absence manifests in a lower degree of prosocial attitudes.[40]

In the waning years of the GDR, the church served as the primary incubator of protest against the regime. Protests in the late GDR took many forms, from leaving anonymous critical

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[36] Ibid, pp. 100-101
[37] Ibid.
[38] Klarner, Andreas. "The Low Importance of Marriage in Eastern Germany – Social Norms and the Role of Peoples' Perceptions of the Past." Demographic Research, vol. 33, 2015, pp. 239-272.
[39] Heineck, Guido. "Love Thy Neighbor – Religion and Prosociality." *International Journal of Social Economics*, vol. 44, no. 7, 2017, pp. 869-883.
[40] Ibid.

notes to leaving the SED. At the most perilous to the participants were illegal public demonstrations, such as the 1988 candle light marches or peace concerts, both of which were broken up with many arrests. The organization of these protests generally ran through the church.While the Church was insufficient to ignite revolution, it was the only significant institution to be autonomous under the GDR and thus was able to serve as a crystallization point for dissatisfied groups in society to come together and coordinate larger scale protests, offering them shelter and serving as umbrella organizations.[41] None of this negated the extensive infiltration of the Church or the general preparedness of Church hierarchy to cooperate with the GDR by blocking prominent dissidents from rising too far or by giving information. However, the role of the Church in protecting the opposition until it was able to emerge cannot be disputed.

In some sense, the origin of the GDR required it to remain a closed system. The GDR was, even after almost half a century, still widely considered an illegitimate state. Created as it had been from military occupation, the GDR always bore the shadow of being an artificial state. One of the key dilemmas for reformers was that fully opening the GDR to reform would almost certainly have resulted in its rapid dismantling and absorption of its constituent states into the Federal Republic, as indeed happened following the fall of the Berlin Wall.[42] Indeed, even after almost fifty years, the GDR had failed to bind the population to itself in any meaningful way.[43]

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[41] Hadjar, Andreas. "Non-Violent Political Protest in East Germany in the 1980s: Protestant Church, Opposition Groups and the People." *German Politics*, vol. 12, no. 3, 2003, pp. 107-128.
[42] Fulbrook, Mary. *Anatomy of a Dictatorship: Inside the GDR, 1949-1989*. Oxford University Press, New York, 1995. pp. 178-179
[43] Lohmann, Susanne. "The Dynamics of Informational Cascades: The Monday Demonstrations in Leipzig, East Germany, 1989-91." *World Politics*, vol. 47, no. 1, Cambridge University Press, 1994, pp. 42–101, https://doi.org/10.2307/2950679.

Eastern German Economic Transition and its Discontents

Over the course of Gorbachev's reforms in the 1980s, the USSR became less willing to use its troops to prop up other members of the Warsaw Pact against their own populaces. In 1989, the Berlin Wall was torn down and the borders opened. In 1991, the GDR ceased to exist and its constituent states were absorbed into the Federal Republic of Germany. Unfortunately, the integration of the eastern states was not a perfectly smooth affair. When the GDR ended, most of its associated institutions ended with it. Compounding difficulties, the eastern Germans found themselves in a region of the country which was economically much weaker than the rest. While there has been extensive modernization, the eastern states remain more dependent on the western ones than vice versa.[44]

Economic Transition

After unification, the new states of the Federal Republic suffered from economic difficulties, which resulted in an unequal distribution of misery. An important step towards unification was the brief customs union between the two Germanies. Despite the fact that the exchange rate was designed to be somewhat favorable to the GDR, it was not favorable enough to avoid serving as a sort of "shock therapy". The terms of unification were extremely uneven. The GDR had little to bargain with and was absorbed into the FRG. In terms of economic turbulence, the GDR resembled most other post-Communist societies, but the absorption into a larger political unit and national economy was unique and involved the direct transfer of western economic institutions to East Germany. This transfer resulted in the spread of western experts and administrators throughout the former GDR.

In addition to the "administrative inequality" this also meant that the East was

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[44] Hölscher, Jens, and Anja Hochberg. East Germany's Economic Development since Unification: Domestic and Global Aspects. Ch. 9. St. Martin's Press, New York, 1998.

disproportionately vulnerable during eastern Germany's transfer to the Federal Republic's economic system following unification. As unification was planned, the FRG planned to use a "shock therapy" strategy on East Germany, sought to convert the GDR to the FRG's economy as quickly as possible, rather than attempt to prop up the socialist system.[45] Accordingly, the two republics entered into an economic union by means of which the GDR -- previously a closed, centrally planned economy -- adopted the FRG's banking system, currency, labor markets, and other aspects of the economic system. The conversion of currency was pegged at a rate disproportionately favorable to the Ostmark (East German currency). After a brief period of the two Germanies existing in economic unity, they politically unified.[46]

However, with the loss of its Comecon markets and the artificially raised cost of industry, eastern Germany experienced economic difficulties. Additionally, the FRG's strategy of pursuing privatization of formerly public assets with the *Treuhandanstalt* was not as profitable as had been hoped.[47] As unification proceeded, the labor market in eastern Germany contracted sharply from 10 million to 7.3 million by 1993. The unemployment rate was disguised by retraining, early retirement, and short term work.[48] Ulrich Blum writes that "about two-thirds of industrial workers lost their jobs and were redirected into part-time programmes, early retirement, restructuring and training programmes and unemployment."[49] Large transfers of money from the western states to eastern states quickly became necessary; in 1993, the western states transferred 180 billion dollars to the eastern states. The numbers of the self-employed rose dramatically by 1993 but insufficiently to make up for the collapsed industrial sector that accounted for 70% of net material product prior to unification but by 1996 had dropped to a

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[45] Germany's economic system is often referred to as a social-market economy or a coordinated market economy

[46] Flockton, Christopher. "The German Economy since 1989/1990: Problems and Prospects" *Germany since Unification: The Development of the Berlin Republic*, edited by Larres, Klaus. Palgrave, 2001, pp. 63-86

[47] Ibid. p. 75

[48] Ibid. p. 67

[49] Blum, Ulrich. "Eastern Germany's Economic Development Revisited: Path Dependence and Economic Stagnation before and After Reunification." *Post-Communist Economies*, vol. 25, no. 1, 2013, pp. 37-58.

mere 12% of total eastern effective demand.[50]

       Psychological Impact of Economic Dislocation

       Unification was shocking for German society, on both sides of the border. As a result, there

was little proper build up for it psychologically. Because West and East Germany had each been an

economic leader in their respective blocs, many economists and members of the public assumed that

uniting the two would produce a rapidly swelling economic giant. This vision held great appeal to

many in the GDR, who were disillusioned with the utopianism of the Communist Bloc and longed

for more concrete improvements in their day-to-day lives, and who developed far vaster hopes in

this regard than their western counterparts.[51]

       As discussed, unification was economically disruptive for the former GDR. Many

eastern Germans came to believe that they had been lied to by the affluent western Germans.

They felt that their labor was being exploited by those who lived in the western states of the

FRG. Many blamed the Bonn government for deceiving them, proclaiming themselves

"deceived and sold -out"; many argued that they were suffering unjustly because -- through no

other fault than poor geography -- they lived in the former Soviet occupation zone, and

resented the West for not doing more to equalize them vis-a-vis industry.[52]

       Compounding the resentment many in eastern Germany felt over having been deceived

about their future prosperity, frustration bubbled in the new states over the way the "Wessis"

seemed to lord over them. They watched as the *Treuhandanstalt* sold what had been their

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[50] Flockton, Christopher. "The German Economy since 1989/1990: Problems and Prospects" *Germany since Unification: The Development of the Berlin Republic*, edited by Klaus Larres Palgrave, 2001, pp. 68-77

[51] Edinger, Lewis J., and Brigitte L. Nacos. *From Bonn to Berlin: German Politics in Transition.* Columbia University Press, New York, 1998. pp. 1-18

[52] Ibid. pp. 18-22

economic assets to the "Wessis" for seemingly nothing.[53] The majority of bankers and lenders to

eastern businesses and citizens come from the western states or abroad, and are denounced as

"robber barons." Eastern Germans also fulminated against instances where factories in the new

states were purchased by westerners, who then shut them down, mortgaged them, or otherwise

took advantage of their power of the economic fortune of the workers. While this was not a

common experience, neither was it completely anomalous, and it was therefore easy to blame

the general mass of westerners for what happened. Eastern Germans felt like a defeated,

conquered people. Disgruntled easterners saw themselves as the losers of the Cold War, now

annexed and "colonized" by the conquering Wessis.[54] These feelings of colonization were

reflected in eastern Germans even calling themselves second class citizens, as Table III shows.

In Table III, over half the population of Brandenburg, Saxony, and Thuringia affirm to the

pollster that they feel like they and their fellow eastern Germans are second-class citizens.

Table III: Positive response to the statement 'Eastern Germans are second-class citizens'

Region	All	AfD voters
Brandenburg	59%	77%
Saxony	66%	78%
Thuringia	70%	86%

Weisskircher, Manès. "The Strength of Far-Right AfD in Eastern Germany: The East-West Divide and the Multiple Causes Behind 'Populism'." *The Political Quarterly*, vol. 91, no. 3, 2020, pp. 614-622.

Because West German Chancellor Kohl promised "blossoming landscapes" (à la the

post-World War Two *Wirtschaftswunder*) in eastern Germany after unification, it is worth

comparing the first decade of the FRG with the FRG's first decade of control over the

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[53] Flockton, Christopher. "The German Economy since 1989/1990: Problems and Prospects" *Germany since Unification: The Development of the Berlin Republic*, edited by Klaus Larres Palgrave, 2001, p. 75
[54] Ibid. pp. 22-31

whole of Germany. Both eras saw economic growth which served to legitimize the new state of affairs; however, the former saw the beginning of the economic miracle in West Germany, whereas the latter was much less remarkable. Moreover, the starting point for the FRG-as-West-Germany was the near total destruction of society, towards which it would be very difficult to feel any sort of nostalgia. By contrast, when Germany reunified, the GDR was absorbed by the FRG. While standards of living in the GDR had been generally lower than in the FRG, they profoundly exceeded the wreckage of Europe in the "Zero Hour". This meant that the residents of the former GDR had something to lose, and felt that they had lost it.[55]

More specifically, life under the FRG would be the first experience many citizens of the former GDR would have with large-scale unemployment, which did not endear them to the new order. This change was particularly hard to endure because the government of the GDR had been able to provide near universal employment such that the citizenry of the GDR collectively had virtually no experience with unemployment. Now those who were unemployed had to endure the stigma of having failed in the new economy, an economy which had only a 15% unemployment rate. Now these individuals had to turn to the new (to them) government of the FRG. In consequence of this mix of economic growth and previous standards of higher employment, the merger of the Germanies has been legitimized enough that there is general acceptance of unification, but it is viewed as unfair and embarrassing to the easterners.[56]

Civil Society Institutions in Eastern Germany: Domination of Western Germans

It was perhaps inevitable that the absorption of the former GDR by the FRG also created some degree of social upheaval; this was exacerbated by the fact that the GDR had not permitted

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[55] Offe, Claus . "German Reunification as a "Natural Experiment," *German Politics*. Vol. 1. No. 1, 1992. pp. 1-12
[56] Ibid.

strong social movements, resolving situations instead through state fiat. For instance, while the

GDR afforded stronger legal protections to women in the workplace, education, and the family,

these protections were the result of action by the state, not a response to a robust civic movement.

Consequently, when the GDR ceased to exist, and these protections vanished, there was no civic

force to effectively push for their reinstatement. This is only one example of a larger phenomenon.

The protest movements which brought about unification were the exception and not the rule, as is

demonstrated by the rapidity of their disappearance following the consummation of unification.[57]

According to Gary Lease, eastern Germany arguably did not experience a

comprehensive revolution during unification. Eastern German Churches served as valves for

discontent but they were not in a position to unilaterally lead to a revolution. Because the

churches in the GDR did not call for opposition, they cannot be described as public focal points

for opposition. Neither can the churches take credit for the outpouring of protest that brought

down the regime, nor can the fact that large numbers of people were demonstrating in favor of

freedom be attributed to the churches, despite their role in incubating those inclined to resist. It

follows therefore, that the opposition to the GDR cannot be understood as a manifestation of

strong civic behavior on the part of the churches. In this respect, Lease supports Offe in arguing

that the unification of Germany did not demonstrate the presence of robust civil society in the

GDR, for powerful movements were generally as quick to dissolve as they were to appear.[58]

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[57] Ibid.
[58] Lease, Gary. "Religion, the churches, and the German "revolution" of November 1989", *German Politics* Vol. 1, No. 2, August 1992. pp. 264-273

Kaase observed the results of this combination in 1997. Conceding that the citizens of the GDR were briefly more democratic in practice than those of the FRG in 1990/1991, he argues these were anomalous circumstances. After they democratized the GDR -- and thereby set in motion its abolition -- they did have a brief period of influence. However, the actual processes of unification, the economic turbulence, the political confusion, etc. caused a diminution of this influence. Beginning in 1993 and continuing up at least through 1997, researchers have observed a drift towards illiberalism. In 1996, authoritarianism was measured to be higher for the eastern states than the western. Accompanying this, researchers found higher levels of *anomie*. The increased *anomie* is a logical consequence of the upheaval that the eastern Germans went through in those years.[59]

It is also another demonstration of how many citizens in the eastern states feel a greater degree of disconnect from their government than do their peers in the western states because, in addition to old GDR institutions being ineffectual or no longer extant, western ones have failed to properly take root in the eastern states of the Federal Republic.

Trade Unions and Employer Associations

After die Wende, in early 1990, the FDGB (*Freier Deutsche Gewerkschaftsbund* or Free German Trade Union Confederation) congress voted for radical reform measures, including the decentralization of the union and the creation of autonomous local chapters. However, this was too late to redeem the FDGB in the eyes of the DGB (*Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund* or German Trade Union Confederation), a collection of West German trade unions which sent advisors to help manage the process of establishing western German unions in eastern Germany and had no interest in helping the FDGB survive.[60]

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[59] Kaase, Max "Consensus, conflict in democracy in Germany." *German Politics* Vol. 6, No. 2. August 1997, pp. 1-28
[60] Fichter, Michael . "A House Divided: A View of German Unification as it Has Affected Organized Labor." German Politics. Vol. 2, No. 1, April 1993. pp. 21-39.

The DGB had displayed little interest in cooperating with eastern workers prior to unification. Its representatives did not initially expend much effort attempting to bridge the divide even once the process of unification had begun until March 1990. At this point it became clear that unification would be proceeding at a much more rapid pace than had hitherto been understood. Faced with the possibility of the new states joining with no functional unions at all, the DGB scrambled to build up democratic unions in the East. They primarily sought to transfer western institutions over to the East, and did not interact with or seek to incorporate local initiatives or attempts by the FDGB to remain part of the institutional framework. Attempts at finding a hybrid form of unionization were rejected. As it became clear that East Germany would be directly incorporated into the Bundesrepublik and that the Federal Republic's institutions would be transferred over, a consensus emerged that failing to mirror unionization strategies exactly would result in the unions being less powerful. This idea was accepted amongst eastern workers because they generally had a low opinion of the FDGB, and high expectations for the DGB.[61]

The transfer of western unions into eastern Germany was fraught with difficulty. By the time substantial cooperation between the East and West began, most officials in the FDGB who were seen as politically compromised had been voted out. Reform advocates in the FDGB moved into positions of greater power, but they too came from the upper echelons of the FDGB and were not immediately accountable to its members. The degree of cooperation between old FDGB and new DGB union officials and administrators varied. However, even in cases where the DGB officials did not want to cooperate directly with their counterparts, they made working agreements with their staff to create a functioning system. That said, some DGB officials had an exceptionally deep mistrust of the old FDGB and sought to recruit from East Germans outside the FDGB hierarchy and from western Germans. In this, one can see a particularly strong case of institutional transfer from the West and how it served to strongly undermine what institutions

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[61] Ibid.

had existed in the old GDR. Moreover, the transfer of institutions was not always accompanied by a transfer of resources. Despite the urging of East Germans, many western unions were reluctant to transfer funds to them.[62]

Despite these shortcomings and difficulties, the first decade of unification saw a sharp rise in the enrollment of East Germans into unions, which generally held prestige. Concurrent with the rise of western-style unions, however, was the precipitous rise in unemployment in the new states, as well as the increased social alienation from the loss of the old civic groups (controlled and state-centric as they were) and the economic chaos unleashed by unification.[63]

This economic turmoil left the unions little room to maneuver in their pursuit of jobs and wages equivalent to the West for eastern workers. Their lack of success resulted in many people resigning their membership and led to a corresponding loss of income from membership fees. So severe was the situation, that 18.6% of the membership left between 1991 and 1992. This can be partially attributed to the fact that union membership immediately following unification was artificially high, because membership in the old FDGB was mandatory. This entailed both that the membership numbers would be higher than any voluntary organization, but also that the degree of commitment rooting people in would be weaker. Trade unions were also weakened by a lack of personnel compared to what they had in the western states.[64]

Another aspect of Unification which proved difficult to manage was the construction of institutions for Corporatist Interest Mediation. The *Arbeitsamt* administers unemployment and benefits to German workers. However, as the managers of liquidated companies cannot be members of this association or represent it in any official capacity, the fall of the East German economy meant that its businesses were decimated and therefore underrepresented. Likewise, the lawyers who represented the eastern workers in labor courts were often western Germans with eastern lawyers being relegated to mere junior roles.[65]

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[62] Ibid.
[63] Ibid.
[64] Ibid.
[65] Ibid.

Political Parties: the Greens and the CDU

Political parties proved no more palatable to easterners, who struggled to deal with the numerical superiority of westerners, as well as the desire on the part of many activists to reckon with the past events of repression in the GDR. Some argued that having cooperated with the GDR authorities should disqualify one from public office or trust. While citizens came together to disband many Stasi offices, so much of the political and cultural leadership of the GDR had been compromised by Stasi *Mitarbeiter* that it was difficult to make a clean start of things.[66] For these and other reasons, the all-German parties remained predominantly western spaces, despite the Greens' best efforts to the contrary.

The Greens made an effort to avoid simply absorbing the Green groups in East Germany, in contrast to other major parties. Instead they sought to negotiate a union of equals. However, the sharp disparities in organization and political power between the western Greens and the various small groups in the East meant that, in practice, the results were not significantly different. It is worth examining this in more detail as a demonstration of how the splintered nature of East German civil society impacted the nature of politics during the unification.[67]

The resistance movement to the GDR was ideologically and logistically dispersed. This was not an accident but a result of GDR policy. Under the GDR it had been impossible for dissidents to hold public meetings and the constant surveillance hindered communication. This meant that it was virtually impossible for the dissident movements, including their Green components, to develop in a centralized or ideologically coherent way. By splintering into small groups, often meeting in the protective shadow of the Protestant churches, they were able to survive. Nevertheless, their decentralized nature made it difficult for it to coordinate electorally

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[66] Torpey, John . "Coming to Terms of the Communist Past: East Germany in Comparative Perspective". *German Politics* Vol. 2, No. 3, Dec. 1993, pp. 415—435.

[67] Poguntke, Thomas and Schmitt-Beck, Ruediger. "Still the Same with a New Name?: Buendis 90/Die Gruenen after the Fusion." *German Politics*. Vol. 3, No. 1. 1994. pp. 91-113

after the fall of the GDR. The relative reluctance of the western Greens to throw their support

behind immediate unification also complicated efforts by some citizens' groups to cooperate;

ultimately the eastern citizens' groups stood separately from the Greens in the 1990 elections.

The Greens and their allies were thoroughly unsuccessful; neither the Greens nor Alliance 90

(the Green's Citizens' Movement) won any seats. As a result of this electoral catastrophe, the

Greens and Alliance 90 began to prioritize coordination and eventual fusion to maintain

relevance.[68]

One of the reasons this initial decentralized approach was pursued was that the eastern

Greens were only able to be founded in 1989 and were concerned about preserving their eastern

identity, as well as the political complications attendant to party fusion when there were (in

1990) separate 5% hurdles for the East and West. The fear of western dominance was justified as

there was an overwhelming numerical disparity. Many eastern citizens' groups like Demokratie

Jetzt und Menschenrechte and Initiative Frieden did not have numerically significant

membership but drew their strength from elite membership. Neues Forum had about 5,000

members and even the political party Alliance 90 had only 2,700. By contrast, the western

Greens had approximately 38,000 members. Moreover, it was not clear how unification could

protect the eastern Interests of its new constituents in the event of a merger. Weighting the party

votes to equalize East and West would require severely underrepresenting the western Greens,

but proportional representation would erase any eastern identity at the party level. However, the

aforementioned pressure made unification of the western and eastern Greens virtually

unavoidable if political relevance was to be maintained.[69]

Simply put, the refusal of the SED to allow the development of any civil society in the

GDR outside of its control led to a situation where the political groups of eastern Germany could

neither stand on their own - membership in citizens' groups began to fall rapidly once unification

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[68] Ibid.
[69] Ibid.

had been achieved - nor even merge on even terms with their western counterparts. Though the Greens took more precautions than other parties, initially guaranteeing the East one fifth of party conference delegates, four out of nine members of the federal executive, and one of two speakers, in 1994 it was already feared that the eastern Greens would be left without a party directly representing them and they would be dominated by the western Germans.[56]

A contrast to the way the Greens in the West had attempted to link up with a collection of small groups may be seen in the CDU's attempts to unite with the "East CDU." The "East CDU" was frequently charged with being a defanged mock opposition to the SED that served only to give it the appearance of legitimacy. Because extensive cooperation - ties with the SED were only formally cut after the Berlin Wall fell - between the East CDU and the SED had robbed it of moral authority, some members attempted to reforge the organization. To this end, Lothar de Maiziere was made chair, and while ideas of pursuing a "third way" between socialism and capitalism dissolved into support for the western German economic system, the East CDU joined the briefly democratic GDR's all party "round table" government to build a bridge to the West.

The eastern CDU was not without its competition. The Demokratischer Aufbruch competed in Berlin and the South, and the Deutsche Soziale Union had been started by the CSU to rally conservative foes of the old regime. However, ultimately the power of institutional inertia prevailed again and the East CDU rapidly emerged as the senior partner of the group. Despite the fact that secularized Protestant East Germany was not advantageous territory for them to compete from, the East CDU won over 40% of the vote in March 1990. Thus the east CDU, in coalition with the Demokratischer Aufbruch and Deutsche Soziale Union as the Alliance for Germany, made de Maiziere the GDR's Prime Minister. This set the stage for the merger of the West CDU and East CDU in October 1990. The CDU did well again in the state elections, roughly on par with its western performance, and the Demokratischer Aufbruch merged into the CDU as well. However, much of this success was based in a strong

dissatisfaction with the SED and a desire to signal a clear break with the past.[70]

Personnel were to be a major problem for the CDU in the eastern states going forward. Almost 75% of those in the eastern leadership had joined during the communist era and almost none had spoken out against the SED. As a result, the CDU in the East drew heavily both from the Demokratischer Aufbruch, whose relative youth gave them clean records, and increasingly from western politicians. There were also profound clashes of culture between the East and West. The western CDU, with its bureaucratized structure, was disdainful of the comparative disorganization of the eastern CDU, leading to dismissal of eastern ideas and insights. Worsening the matter, many politicians imported from the West were relatively unimportant there and began to steer the party in the direction they thought was preferable. There were many policy differences between the eastern and western sections about European integration, privatization, and the costs of an internal market. However, the West generally overruled the East and many western Germans working in the East did not even give up their roles in the West. This increased the feeling on the part of many eastern Germans that they were being lorded over and that they would never be able to concentrate on rebuilding the eastern economy, or deal with the legacy of the Stasi because the West would hold them eternally on a path of emphasizing low inflation growth and Germany's new role in Europe. As a result of these difficulties, the CDU lost members in the East. The CDU in the East found itself trapped between its eastern needs and the western political apparatus, without a substantial way to push back and properly course correct.[71]

Environmental Groups in Eastern Germany

Some institutions created during the GDR, even though they represented popular forces in GDR society, failed to do well in the transition to the unified Federal Republic. One example

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[70] Clemens, Clay. "Disquiet on the Eastern Front: the Christian Democratic Union in Germany's New Länder. *German Politics* Vol. 2, No. 2, August 1993.
[71] Ibid.

of this is the Gemeinschaft für Natur und Umweltschutz (GNU). By the 1970s,

environmentalism was becoming an increasingly prominent concern in the GDR. To channel

this energy towards state-friendly ends, the regime created the GNU, an official organ for

advocacy that would keep its members in line. Some activists refused the proffered alliance and

instead sheltered under the umbrella of the churches. Following the democratization and then

dissolution of the Democratic Republic, the GNU still appeared to be an illegitimate

organization to the non-GNU activists and the idea was generally reciprocated. The GNU did

not invite church-affiliated groups to join the founding of the Green Party in Sachsen-Anhalt.

Matters were not helped as the GNU broke into smaller groups such as the Bund für Natur und

Umweltschutz and the Grüne Liga, as these groups suffered from their association with the old

regime.

In the area of environmental activism, however, western institutions were not particularly

successful at moving into the East. The West German BUND Naturschutz and Greenpeace both

reached into the new states, but neither was able to achieve a sizable membership. What

leadership there was in the former GDR has generally been pulled into other political

institutions. As a result of these failures, the former GDR remained an institutional vacuum

which has fueled alienation and a sense of isolation on the part of the many people in the East

who still feel themselves to be fighting for a more ecologically friendly world.[72]

The early years of unification showed that it was very difficult to transfer western

institutions to the east. The twin difficulties of the CDU and the Greens, despite having had

opposite reactions to the prospect of immediate unification with their counterparts, shows that

the problems were larger than mere tactics. While the economic turbulence further weakened the

efforts of the parties to consolidate their hold, an explanation dealing only with economics does

not account for the persistence of the gap after those first years. Moreover, it would have greater

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[72] Boll,Bernhard. "Interest Organization and Intermediation in the New Länder", *German Politics* Vol. 3, No. 1, 1994, pp. 114-128.

difficulty explaining the obstacles confronting the environmentalists, who don't have the same crisis of legitimacy during economic crises. The domination of various East German institutions by western Germans helped weaken the sense of connection between the average German in the East and their society, but this was itself enabled and prompted by the preexisting organizational deficiencies in the East.

Chapter III: Populism since Unification and Conclusion

PDS and AfD

Parties that styled themselves as protest parties and or populist parties targeted voters who felt unrepresented by the Western parties. The first such party was the PDS. As the PDS was the successor to the SED, it established itself in the East as a regional party. The PDS initially campaigned during the 1990s as both a leftist party and a protest party. They attempted -- relatively successfully -- to drum up support with slogans like "election day is protest day." This strategy had some success in eastern Germany where 84% of eastern Germans felt like second-class citizens and crowds chanted "Wir sind das Volk" outside *Treuhand* centers.[73] As a leftist party, the PDS stood to benefit from this. The PDS retained much of the SED's old organizational infrastructure as well. The PDS reached new electoral heights in the 2004 state elections as a result of backlash against the Hartz reforms. These reforms attempted to reduce the scope of the welfare state, in particular by reducing unemployment compensation.[74]

In the 2005 federal election, the PDS won a full 25% of the eastern vote. Discontent over the reforms also led to the foundation of the "Alternative for Jobs and Social Justice" Party or WASG, which did well in western Germany. In 2007 WASG and PDS joined in the founding of Die Linke, which went on to compete in both West and East, though never quite on even terms.[75]

The PDS was not the only party in Germany to attract protest votes at this time. On the far right, the German People's Union (DVU) did shockingly well in Saxony-Anhalt, winning 12.9% of the votes in 1998. The DVU primarily drew votes from economically frustrated voters who supported it -- in many cases -- without regard to ideology. The DVU's success marked the first

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[73] "We are the people!"
[74] Patton, David. "Protest Voting in Eastern Germany: Continuity and Change across three Decades". *German Politics and Society*, Vol. 37, No. 3, 2019. pp. 72-88.
[75] Ibid.

time in the history of reunified Germany that a far-right party had done better in the East than in the West.[76] Disgruntled voters turned to both the left and to the right.

The party that enjoyed the most success in eastern Germany has been the AfD. The AfD was founded in 2013 to protest against the Eurozone bailouts. It expanded and transformed into a party which stressed its populist opposition to immigration as well as a deep Euroscepticism. While the Saxon Frauke Petry was critical in pushing the AfD away from Euroscepticism and towards hardline immigration policies, the leadership of the AfD remained mostly western Germans. Despite this, it did better in the East than in the West. This was because its strategy of courting disgruntled voters engaged in protest voting met with a larger "supply" of potential voters in the East. Part of this stems from the fact that eastern Germans generally have much lower degrees of trust in their institutions than western Germans.[77] By courting the non-ideological voters who support populist parties, not due to ideology but due to the style of populism, the AfD has undermined die Linke's base of support. This demonstrates the way in which even a non-regional populist party in Germany finds its base of support gravitating towards the East.

Thus, the 2017 and 2021 federal elections provide a clarifying coda for this history of populism. 2017 saw, even as the mainstream parties suffered from diminishing support, the AfD and die Linke remain firmly anchored in the East. Even as the CDU and SPD faced their collective nadir, the smaller parties remained regionally divided. The Greens and FDP were strongest in the West and sought to depict themselves as responsible parties, whereas die Linke and AfD were strongest in the East and sought to depict themselves as being against the system. In 2021, however, both populist parties suffered at the polls and die Linke failed to even clear the five percent threshold. While it is too soon to do a full analysis of why populist parties suffered in general in 2021, in defeat, die Linke seems to have returned to being a party with a presence

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[76] Ibid.
[77] Yoder, Jennifer. "'Revenge of the East'?: The AfD's Appeal in Eastern Germany and Mainstream Party's Responses". *German Politics and Society*, Vol. 38, No. 2. 2020. pp.35-58

primarily in the East, like in the days of the PDS.

Thus the history of populist parties in Germany shows how the legacies of the GDR and unification have shaped the supply of voters in the East. The East has a far deeper reservoir of support for populist parties than the West, and the AfD and die Linke are currently competing for this populist vote.

Conclusion

The dissolution of the GDR did not meet with the prosperity that Kohl and so many others promised. Instead, unemployment struck the eastern states for the first time many could remember; rich western Germans swept in and bought freshly privatized industries. As the list of "betrayals" by western industrialists swelled, resentment blossomed against the "Wessis" responsible for selling out and exploiting the "Ossis," who sometimes felt that they were the second-class citizens of a colonized country after losing the Cold War. These twin challenges, the economic dislocation and the fury it bred, augmented the appeal of populism, which promises to bypass the ordinary, ineffective channels of communication with the government.

What the problems of labor, party consolidation and environmentalism reviewed in Chapter II have in common is the supreme difficulty of establishing institutions where none previously existed in the midst of economic crisis. It would be incorrect to ascribe the disarray in which these fields fell during unification solely to the economic difficulties. However, it is clear that, whatever role the economic crisis may have had as a catalyst, there were long-term structural vulnerabilities in the civic societies of the eastern states caused by the GDR government's concerted attempts to control or eliminate civil society in the GDR. This meant that no organizations not tainted by "collaboration" could be built up in East Germany before unification and therefore the West found itself attempting to unite with disparate organizations

that were challenging to merge or cooperate with.

This paper argues that populism has found greater purchase in the former GDR than in the western states, in significant part because attempts by the GDR to monopolize civil society resulted in East Germany's civil society being underdeveloped relative to the West. Once the GDR was abolished and its states incorporated into the Federal Republic, this underdevelopment persisted and contributed to the failure of some western institutions to fully transfer to the East. It also caused them to be unduly dependent on western leadership in eastern areas which contributed to a general sense of alienation on the part of the eastern electorate.

Thus, because the GDR pursued a policy of a controlled society, it significantly impeded the development of robust institutions, which in turn meant that attempts to unify them with their western counterparts necessarily took place on uneven footing. This ensured that, as even the Greens were forced to concede, any attempt at fusion would result in western dominance, spreading feelings of alienation. These feelings were strengthened because the adoption of capitalism entailed a sharp rise in unemployment in the East. This in turn made it even more difficult for eastern interests to be heard in the western institutions, while simultaneously placing the eastern Germans in the position of needing the central government more, even as they seemed less able to be represented in it. This combination of western dominance of key institutions and economic disruption fostered a sense of *anomie* and perpetuated the underdevelopment of civil society in eastern Germany.

This helps explain that the traditional parties did not take root as firmly in the East and instead the populists began to see success there. The underdevelopment of civil society itself has contributed to the relative strength of populism in the new states, up through the most recent federal election.

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