

Political Culture in East and West Germany



REPORT by Felix Arnold, Ronny Freier and Martin Kroh

Political culture still divided 25 years
after reunification?

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»Similar levels of political interest between East and West,
notable differences in turnout«

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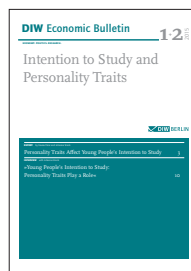
Press office

Renate Bogdanovic
Tel. +49-30-89789-249
presse@diw.de

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DIW Autumn Economic Forecast

Political culture still divided 25 years after reunification?

By Felix Arnold, Ronny Freier and Martin Kroh

In 1990, during reunification, West German democratic institutions and the existing political party system were expanded to the East German states. Even after 25 years, the people of eastern and western Germany still differ in their political engagement and attitudes.

However, these differences do not apply across the board by any means. A detailed analysis of survey data from the Socio-Economic Panel (SOEP) study shows that differences both in terms of general interest and active participation in politics cannot be identified statistically in many years. By contrast, there are considerable differences between eastern and western Germany in terms of party attachments and actual turnout in national and state elections. The gap in turnout at national elections is not only evident over the years but is also clearly recognizable across all age groups.

There are also still distinct differences in the political party systems of eastern and western Germany. In particular, the Left (*Die Linke*) plays a major role in eastern Germany but despite some electoral successes in some state parliaments, this party has not been able to establish itself to the same extent in the former West German states. What is more, according to our data, individuals' attitudes to the welfare state in the two parts of the country, which differed significantly at the beginning of the 1990s, have converged since.

Political unification through the accession of the German Democratic Republic to the Federal Republic of Germany 25 years ago on October 3, 1990 created unified government institutions in both parts of the country. The convergence of political attitudes and political participation of citizens in the two parts of the country is, by its nature, a long-term process due to their different past and present experiences and life situations.

The convergence process of life situations is not yet complete in many areas and this is frequently documented in the economy (unemployment, wealth, and productivity), in general attitudes (confidence, self-esteem, and anxiety about the future), and in social aspects (women in work and child daycare).¹

While some of the differences are still considerable, in many areas of life a convergence between levels in eastern and western Germany can be observed—albeit in gradual steps. Unemployment in eastern Germany has fallen from its highest levels at the turn of the millennium to 9 percent in 2015 (compared to 5.7 percent in western Germany). Productivity in eastern Germany is increasing slowly (it currently stands at 71 percent of the western German level). Also in terms of women in work and child daycare, the two parts of the country are more closely aligned because western Germany is catching up with eastern Germany. On a positive note, general life satisfaction in the two parts of Germany has continuously converged over the past 25 years.²

¹ See for example, K. Brenke, M. Fratzscher, M. M. Grabka, E. Holst, S. Hülle, S. Liebig, M. Priem, A. Rasner, P. S. Schober, J. Schupp, J. F. Stahl, and A. Wieber, "Reunification: An Economic Success Story," *DIW Economic Bulletin*, no. 11 (2014); P. Krause, J. Goebel, M. Kroh, and G. G. Wagner, "20 Jahre Wiedervereinigung: Wie weit Ost- und Westdeutschland zusammengerückt sind," *DIW Wochenbericht*, no. 44 (2010); P. Krause and I. Ostner, eds., *Leben in Ost- und Westdeutschland: Eine sozialwissenschaftliche Bilanz der deutschen Einheit 1990–2010* (Campus, 2010); Alesina and Fuchs-Schuendeln (2007); Rainer and Siedler (2009); Ockenfels and Weimann (1999); Brosig-Koch et al. (2011).

² J. Schupp, J. Goebel, M. Kroh, and G. G. Wagner, "Life Satisfaction in Germany at Highest Levels since Reunification," *SOEP Wave Report* (2013).

On the occasion of the 25th anniversary of political unification, it is of general interest to examine differences in the political attitudes and political participation of individuals in eastern and western Germany and to document the development of a unified political culture.³

The country was divided for over 40 years and this has had a varying impact on the regions, also in terms of dealing with democracy. While individuals in western Germany had already had experience of a parliamentary democracy since 1949, people in eastern Germany were denied this opportunity up until 1989. Consistent differences in political participation, electoral behavior, and attitudes toward government and politics and their own role in the political system are therefore to be expected and—as our results show—these are clearly evident.

The following analyses examine the period from 1990 to 2014 and are based on official election data from the national and state election administrators, INFRATEST DIMAP, the latest data collected from the longitudinal Socio-Economic Panel (SOEP)⁴ study by DIW Berlin in cooperation with the survey institute TNS Infratest Sozialforschung and the German General Social Survey (*Die allgemeine Bevölkerungsumfrage der Sozialwissenschaften, ALLBUS*) which is made available by the Leibniz Institute for the Social Sciences (*Leibniz-Institut für Sozialwissenschaften, GESIS*).⁵ In the following trend analysis from 1990, we have distinguished between adults living in East or West Germany at the time of the survey or election. It should be noted that official election data refer to votes by eligible citizens, howev-

er, the survey data comprise all adults living in Germany—including migrants not entitled to vote.⁶

Importance of politics and political parties

Active participation in the political process presupposes that citizens consider politics to be relevant to them. Respondents to the SOEP survey, conducted on an annual basis, indicate how interested they are in politics,⁷ whether political or social engagement is important to them personally,⁸ and whether they feel they have a long-term attachment to a particular party.⁹ The repeated survey, in which more than 25,000 adults currently participate, was established in 1984 in West Germany and first conducted in the former GDR in 1990, several months before political unity.¹⁰

The following section examines differences in political engagement between citizens in eastern and western Germany. We have used odds ratios to demonstrate these differences (see Box). These odds ratios summarize the differences in the shares in a single measure. An odds ratio value of one means the share of individuals in western Germany who are interested in politics is equal to the share of individuals in eastern Germany who are interested in politics. An odds ratio value higher than one means that the share of people interested in politics in western Germany is higher than in eastern Germany; a value of less than one means that the share of those interested in politics is higher in the east.

3 See, for example, O. W. Gabriel, ed., *Politische Orientierungen und Verhaltensweisen im vereinigten Deutschland* (Opladen: Leske + Budrich, 1997); J. van Deth, H. Rattinger, and E. Roller, eds., *Die Republik auf dem Weg zur Normalität? Wahlverhalten und politische Einstellungen nach acht Jahren Einheit* (Opladen: Leske + Budrich, 2000); D. Fuchs, E. Roller, and B. Wessels, eds., *Bürger und Demokratie in Ost und West. Studien zur politischen Kultur und zum politischen Prozess* (Wiesbaden: Westdeutscher Verlag, 2002); O. W. Gabriel, J. W. Falter, and H. Rattinger, eds., *Wächst zusammen, was zusammengehört? Stabilität und Wandel politischer Einstellungen im wiedervereinigten Deutschland* (Baden-Baden: 2005); J. W. Falter, O. W. Gabriel, H. Rattinger, and H. Schoen, eds., *Sind wir ein Volk? Ost- und Westdeutschland im Vergleich* (Munich: 2006); M. Kroh, "Wertewandel: Immer mehr Ost- und Westdeutsche sind Postmaterialisten," *DIW Wochenbericht*, no. 34 (2008).

4 The SOEP is a representative longitudinal study of households conducted every year since 1984 in West Germany and since 1990 in eastern Germany, see G. G. Wagner, J. Göbel, P. Krause, R. Pischner, and I. Sieber, "Das Sozio-ökonomische Panel (SOEP): Multidisziplinäres Haushaltspanel und Kohortenstudie für Deutschland – Eine Einführung (für neue Datennutzer) mit einem Ausblick (für erfahrene Anwender)," *ASa Wirtschafts- und Sozialstatistisches Archiv*, 2 (4) (2008): 301–328.

5 www.bundeswahlleiter.de; www.infratestdimap.de; Socio-Economic Panel (SOEP) study, Daten für die Jahre 1984–2014, Version 31 beta, (SOEP, 2015); Leibniz Institute for the Social Sciences (GESIS), German General Social Survey (ALLBUS) 2014, ZA5240 Datenfile Version 2.0. (Cologne: GESIS Datenarchiv, 2015).

6 The SOEP is able to distinguish between people who lived in West or East Germany in 1989 (abbreviated to: East and West Germans) as well as between those who lived in the territory of former West Germany and West Berlin or in East Germany and East Berlin (abbreviated to: persons in eastern and western Germany). Both definitions are not identical due to persistent migration between East and West Germany. Since in the German General Social Survey (ALLBUS) only the place of residence at the time of the survey is known, we consistently differentiated between people in eastern and western Germany when analyzing the survey data. In official election data, the distinction between eastern and western Germany is only possible up until the national election in 1994 after which the data only differentiate by state, with West Berlin being designated as one of the five former West German states (abbreviated to: people from the former West and former East German states).

7 The question was, "Generally speaking, how interested are you in politics?" Possible answers were: *very interested*, *moderately interested*, *not interested*, and *disinterested*. In our analyses, we only differentiate between interested (*very or moderately interested*) and not interested (*not interested or disinterested*).

8 The question was, "Is social or political engagement important to you personally?" Possible answers are: *very important*, *important*, *less important* and *quite unimportant*. We also summarized these answers into a binary indicator from important (less important or quite unimportant) or not important (very important or important).

9 The question was, "Many people in Germany lean towards one party in the long term, even if they occasionally vote for another party. Do you lean towards a particular party?" Possible answers were *yes* and *no*.

10 J. Schupp and G. Wagner, "Die DDR-Stichprobe des Sozio-ökonomischen Panels – Konzept und Durchführung der "Basiserhebung 1990" in der DDR," *Vierteljahreshefte zur Wirtschaftsforschung*, no. 2 (1990): 152–159.

Box

Odds-ratio

The odds ratio is a statistical measure that determines the strength of an association between two characteristics.

The following example illustrates how odds ratios are calculated. The table below shows two characteristics: the rows show the number of votes cast for the Left Party and other parties registered in the national election in 2013. The columns show the regions (west/east, excluding Berlin). Seven million votes were cast in eastern Germany and 35 million in western Germany. The total number of 4 million people who voted for the Left Party is divided into 2 million in the east and 2 million in the west. 38 million German citizens voted for parties other than the Left Party.

The odds ratio now indicates how much higher (or lower) the chance of meeting an individual who voted for the Left Party is in western Germany than in eastern Germany.

The ratio is calculated as follows:

$$\text{odds ratio} = \frac{(\text{votes for the Left Party} \mid \text{west}) / (\text{does not vote for the Left Party} \mid \text{west})}{(\text{votes for the Left Party} \mid \text{east}) / (\text{does not vote for the Left Party} \mid \text{east})}$$

The chances (odds) are calculated for both groups.

Substituting the figures from the table gives the following value:

$$\text{odds ratio} = (2/33) / (2/5) = 0.15$$

Therefore, the chance of meeting someone who voted for the Left Party in eastern Germany is almost seven times (odds ratio: $1/0.15 = 7$) higher than in western Germany. The correlation between "living in eastern Germany" and "voting for the Left Party" is therefore very strong.

Table

Calculation of the odds-ratio

Example: Voting patterns in East and West Germany

| | East | West | Sum |
|---------------------------------|----------|-----------|-----------|
| Voted for the Left Party | 2 | 2 | 4 |
| Did not vote for the Left Party | 5 | 33 | 38 |
| Sum | 7 | 35 | 42 |

The numbers represent the valid votes (in millions) in the recent federal election in 2013.

Source: www.bundeswahlleiter.de

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Odds ratios have values between zero and infinity. An odds ratio value of precisely one means that the odds in both groups are identical. If the figure is greater than one, the odds are higher in the first group and if it is less than one, the odds are lower than in the first group. In our case, the odds ratio value is less than one so the chances of meeting someone who voted for the Left Party in eastern Germany (= the second group) are higher.

Since the data underlying the calculation of odds ratios are from survey data with a random-based sampling, estimates of the odds ratios are subject to statistical uncertainty. The confidence intervals of this statistical uncertainty are each shown in the figure as vertical lines around the odds ratio value. They specify the range in which the estimate falls with an error tolerance of five percent. If the confidence interval includes the value one, these are statistically insignificant differences between eastern and western Germany (i.e., parity).

There are no statistically significant differences between east and west in the share of politically interested citizens in most years from 1990 to 2014. While in June 1990 more people were interested in politics in eastern Germany than in western Germany, in some years, such as the national election years of 1998 and 2013, political interest in the west was slightly more pronounced than in the east. In 2013, for example, the share ratio of politically interested individuals to those less interested was around 20 percent higher than in the east (an odds ratio

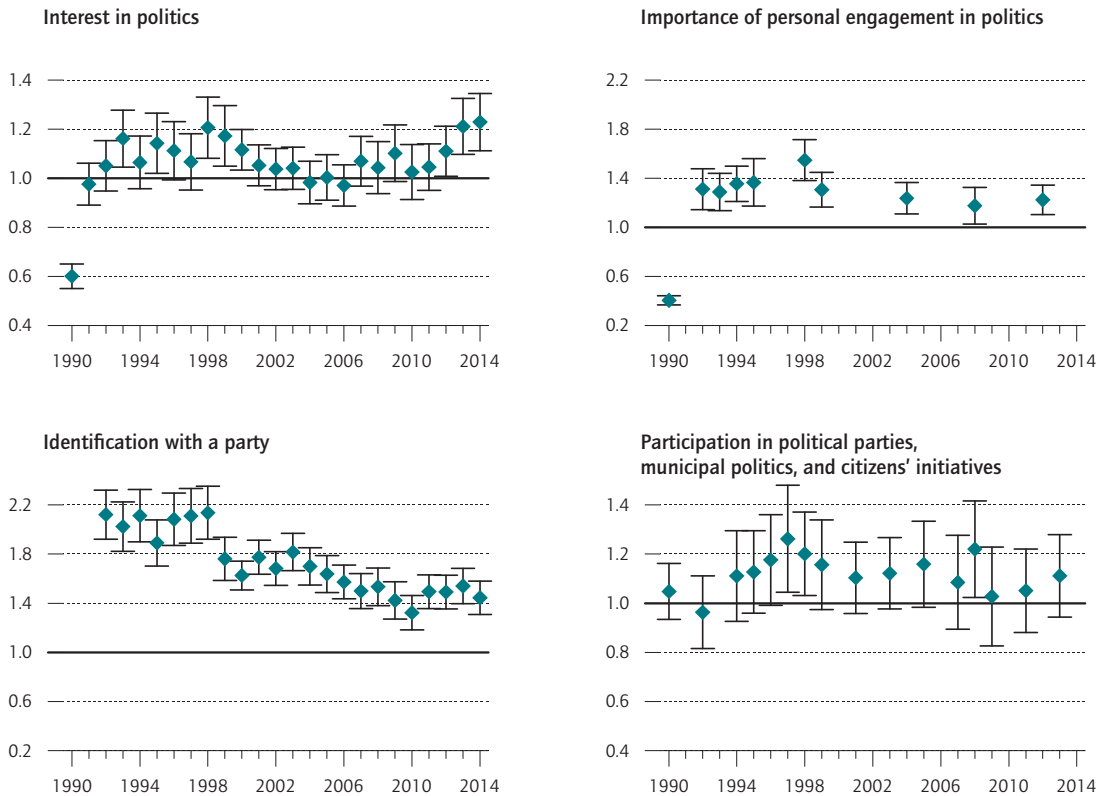
value of around 1.21). No clear trend can be observed as far as the question of political interest was concerned.

While differences in the share of politically interested individuals in eastern and western Germany mainly fall within the margins of statistical error and develop unsystematically, the east-west difference on the question of personal importance of political and social commitment is somewhat more pronounced. Then again, it appears that, as expected, during the period of reuni-

Figure 1

East-West differences in the personal relevance of politics

Odds-ratios



Source: SOEP 1990-2014 (v31beta)

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Differences between East and West are marginal for interest in politics, however, sizable differences exist concerning the attachment to parties.

fication, political engagement was of greater personal importance to individuals in eastern Germany than those in western Germany. This changed in the ensuing years. Political and social engagement have since been rated personally more important in western than in eastern Germany. Over the entire observation period, statistically significant differences remained largely stable here (see Panel 2, Figure 1). At its peak, in the national election year of 1998, the ratio was 1.55 (in favor of the west).

The most considerable east-west differences were on the question of whether individuals felt a long attachment to a particular political party (see Panel 3, Figure 1). Although East Germans were often familiar with West German parties during the reunification period, as expected, they did not have the same links to these parties

as West Germans.¹¹ In this respect, it is not surprising that the share ratio of individuals with party attachment was higher in the west than in the east in the early 1990s. For example, the odds ratio value in 1992 was around two, which corresponds to 54 percent of long-term party identifiers (compared to 46 percent non-party identifiers) in western Germany and 36 percent party identifiers (compared to 64 percent non-party identifiers) in eastern Germany $[(54/46)/(36/64) = 2.09]$. The comparatively high number of east-west differences fell in subsequent years. This convergence is also partly due to a decline in party attachment in western Germany.

¹¹ For a discussion on the transfer of the concept of party identification in the former East German states in the 1990s, see C. Bluck and H. Kreikenbom, "Die Wähler in der DDR. Nur issueorientiert oder auch parteigebunden?," *Zeitschrift für Parlamentsfragen*, no. 22 (1991): 495–502.

Currently, the share ratio (odds ratio value) is around 1.5. In 2014, this represented share differences of 50 percent party identifiers in the west and 41 percent in the east.

Overall, the people of eastern and western Germany are very similar in terms of their fundamental interest in politics. Citizens in western Germany, however, consider political and social engagement to be slightly more important. Both findings have remained quite stable over the past 25 years since political unity. There used to be and still are considerable differences with respect to individuals' identification with political parties, with the shares of long-term party identifiers in both parts of the country slowly converging. This difference is often linked to the volatility of election results: the lower the long-term attachment of individuals to the established parties, the more willing they are to vote for different parties in elections or support new political parties (swing voters).

Active political participation

Interest in politics, the perceived importance of political and social engagement, as well as long-term attachment to a party are indeed important factors that favor active participation in the political process but, as expected, these conditions alone are not sufficient. It is therefore important to shed light on the actual political participation of people in eastern and western Germany. To achieve this, the following section considers both participation in elections, the most common form of political participation in Germany, for which official figures are available from national and *Länder* election administrators, and participation in parties, in local politics, and in citizens' initiatives which we can identify through survey data from the SOEP.¹²

For each year, approximately ten percent of all adults stated that they actively participate in political parties, in local politics, and in citizens' initiatives. The odds ratio value, which expresses the difference in this share between western and eastern Germany, tends to be more than one, thus indicating that the share of politically active people is slightly higher in the west than in the east (see Panel 4, Figure 1). However, this difference fluctuates within the band of statistical uncertainty in most of the years observed. No clear trend is evident in the time series either.

Signs of slight disparities in political participation between the two parts of Germany can be found in the survey data. How do these differences manifest themselves, however, in a measure such as voter turnout which is commonly perceived by citizens as a key instrument for articulating intention in representative democracies?

Figure 2 compares voter turnout in eastern and western Germany at four different election levels (national elections, European elections, state elections and local government elections).¹³ First, it is clear that voter turnout has decreased over time in both parts of the country across all election levels (in line with trends in many other developed democracies). In national elections, voter turnout was still 82.2 percent in 1998, falling to 71.5 percent in the last election in 2013.

Voter turnout in eastern and western Germany indicates significant differences at almost all election levels. Participation in all national elections in eastern Germany (excluding Berlin) is between three and eight percentage points lower than in the western part of the country. There is also a discrepancy between eastern and western Germany in other elections but the differences are not always so clear. This is only surprising inasmuch as the public perceive national elections as the most important elections in Germany. In the European elections, voter turnout in the east was only lower than that of the west in the 1990s. Since 2004, it has fallen to below 50 percent in both parts of the country. In state elections, the picture in the first four electoral periods after 1990 is mixed: only in recent years has the gap in voter turnout opened considerably (at its height, this gap was 12 percentage points). The historically low participation rates in state elections in Saxony (49.1 percent in 2014), Brandenburg (47.9 percent in 2014), or Saxony-Anhalt (44.4 percent in 2006) give cause for concern.

While the sign of the gap in voter turnout is clear, we identify no clear trend for the differences in voter turnout between eastern and western Germany in the preceding analysis. The discrepancy in the national election remains stable over time. Results are mixed in the European and local government elections and only in the state elections does a trend emerge over time—here, the gap between eastern and western Germany has widened considerably in recent years.

In order to be able to draw a conclusion about the future development of voter turnout, it is worth examining

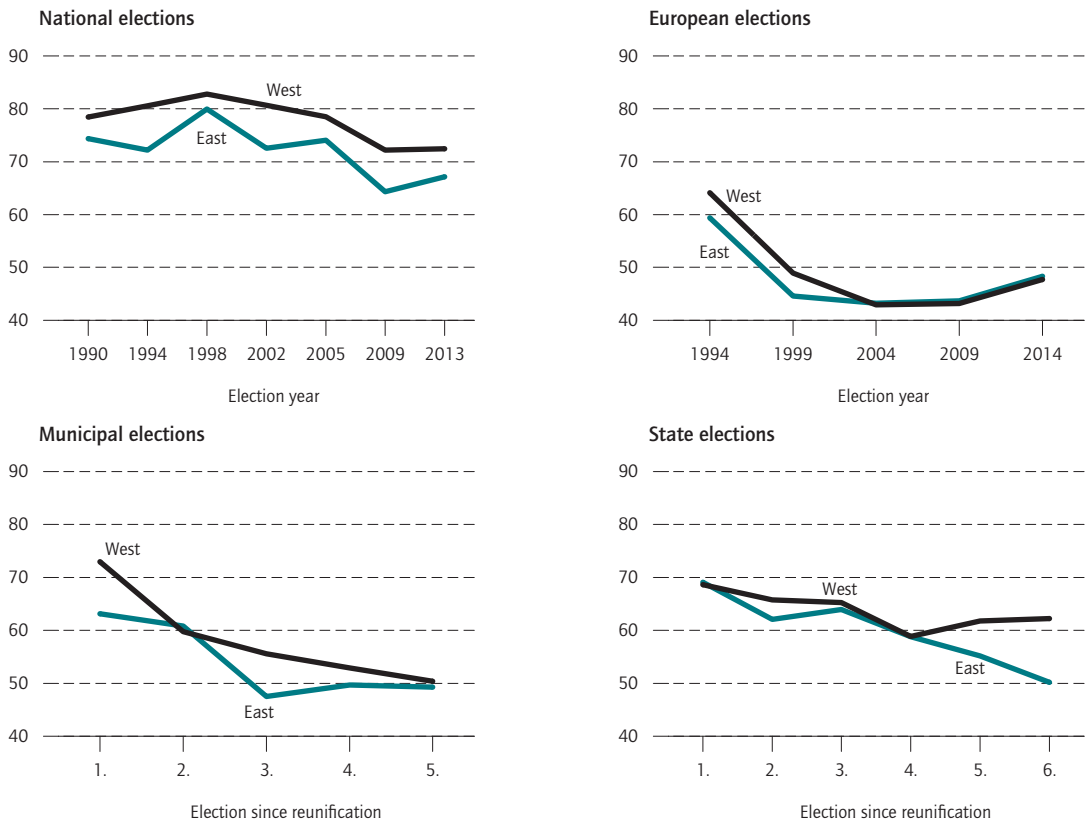
¹² In roughly every second year, SOEP participants are asked for detailed information about how they spend their time (question wording: "Please indicate how often you take part in each activity:" to which respondents could answer: *daily, at least once a week, at least once a month, seldom or never*" to the activity, "Participation in in political parties, municipal politics, and citizens' initiatives." We differentiate between those individuals who actively participated daily, weekly, monthly, or seldom and those that never did.

¹³ In national and European elections, describing voter turnout over time is not a problem since elections in eastern and western Germany took place simultaneously. The timing is not as easy to depict in *Länder* and local government elections as state-specific election periods and election dates make it more complex. We decided to allocate the elections here according to election periods (regardless of the specific election year).

Figure 2

Voter turnout

In percent



Source: State election offices.

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East-West gap in voter turnout is especially evident in federal elections.

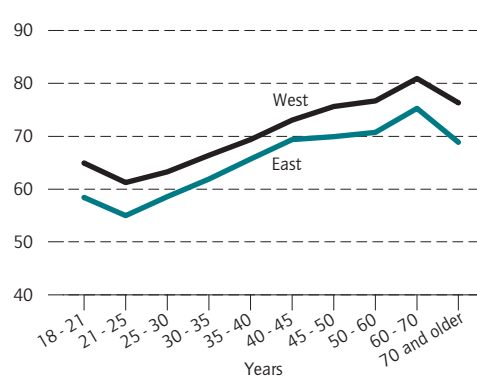
voter turnout across the different age groups (see Figure 3). Here we have used representative electoral statistics from the national election in 2013. Voter turnout across all age cohorts was 67.2 percent in the east and 72.4 percent in the west. The figure clearly shows that the discrepancy in voter turnout is evident across all age cohorts. In fact, the differences are most evident among the oldest (over 70 years) and the youngest (18-21 years) with 7.4 and 6.5 percentage points, respectively. Given this clear picture across all age groups, it is not expected that the gap in turnout in national elections between east and west will close in the foreseeable future.

Democratic forms of direct participation have been introduced in many federal states since around the mid-1990s. In addition to elections, this alternative form of political expression is now available to citizens in all federal states. The number of citizens' initiatives actually implemented is also suggestive of differences in the culture of political participation. More than 5,000 citizens' initiatives have been launched all over Germa-

Figure 3

Voter turnout in the national election 2013 by age groups

In percent



Source: Representative election statistics.

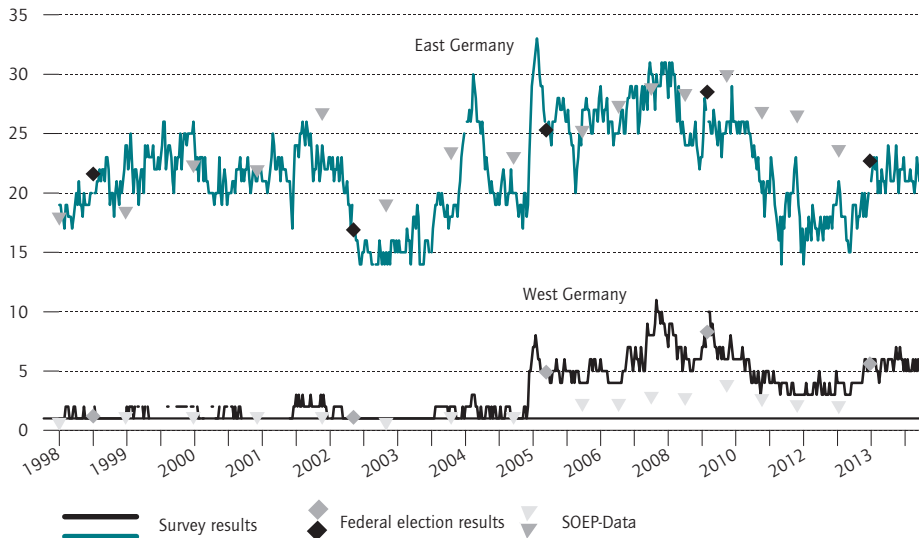
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All age groups show similar gap in voter turnout.

Figure 4

Survey and elections results for the party "The Left" (PDS until 2007)

In percent



Sources: Infratest/Dimap; Federal election office, SOEP (1998-2014, v31beta)

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"The Left" is major political player only in the East.

ny since 1990 (5,189 by 2011).¹⁴ Only 741 directly democratic measures were introduced in eastern Germany (around 4.5 initiatives per 100,000 inhabitants), while 4,448 citizens' initiatives were launched in the west (6.7 initiatives per 100,000 inhabitants).¹⁵ These figures also reveal a discrepancy in political participation between eastern and western Germany, bearing in mind that obstacles to implementing¹⁶ citizens' initiatives through quorums or similar instruments varied from state to state in the observation period and tended to be greater in eastern than in western Germany.

In summary, there are east-west differences in turnout in national elections and, increasingly, also in state elections as well as in the number of citizens' initiatives implemented. Alongside these more institutionalized forms of participation, there are considerably fewer east-west differences in locally organized political party engagement, in local government politics, and in citizens' initiatives. There is a lack of long-term survey

data to draw any conclusions on the extent to which any east-west differences have developed in unconventional forms of participation such as willingness to take part in a political protest.¹⁷

"The Left" – Major player in the East but of less importance in the West

The differences in voter turnout are all the more significant, the more political preferences of individuals in eastern and western Germany differ. In particular, the strength of the Left (formerly the Party of Democratic Socialism, PDS) highlights differences in political attitudes.¹⁸

Figure 4 shows the results of an opinion poll conducted by infratest dimap, the national election results for

¹⁴ Calculated with data from *Mehr Demokratie e.V.*

¹⁵ These figures refer to local government level and also include council initiatives originating from the municipal council. In contrast, referenda at state level are not included.

¹⁶ To avoid misuse of initiatives, the law prescribes multiple hurdles for direct democracy such as quora, signature requirements and negative lists. See Arnold and Freier (2015): Signature requirements and citizen initiatives, *Public Choice*, Vol. 162(1), 43-56.

¹⁷ Current data from the European Social Survey of 2012 and the German General Social Survey (ALLBUS) 2014 indicate a balanced relationship between eastern and western Germany or even that respondents in eastern Germany, by their own account, take part more frequently in demonstrations than those in western Germany.

¹⁸ The political party known as "The Left" was founded in June 2007 through a merger of the WASG (a union-affiliated party which was largely active in the west) and the PDS (the successor to the Socialist Unity Party of Germany (SED)) which achieved substantial electoral support in elections in the east but which was also represented in the west). In the following analysis, we refer to the Left or the Left Party for the sake of simplicity although the party was actually called the PDS up until 2007.

the relevant period, and information on party identification from the SOEP.¹⁹ All three sources paint a unified picture of the strength of the Left in eastern and western Germany.²⁰

In the opinion poll, support for the Left Party varied in eastern Germany between 14 percent in 2003 and 32 percent in 2005. The collapse around 2002 coincided with the resignation of Gregor Gysi as the Senator for Economics in the Berlin state government. Then, between June 2004 and mid-2005, there was a rapid resurgence in two waves, which was closely linked to the Social Democratic Party (SPD)'s Agenda 2010, the protests of large sections of the labor unions, and the Left Party against these reforms and the political merger of the PDS and the west German Labour and Social Justice – The Electoral Alternative (*Wahlalternative Arbeit und soziale Gerechtigkeit*, WASG) (and with Oskar Lafontaine). Essentially, the time series here hovers around 20 to 25 percent. As a result, the Left can be seen as a major party in eastern Germany.

In western Germany, however, support for the Left Party remained considerably under five percent until mid-2005. When the announcement of a collaboration between the PDS and the WASG was announced in spring 2005, there was a significant rise in the opinion polls. At its height (around the time of the financial crisis in 2008), the figure reached 11 percent. In general, approval in western Germany never exceeds five percent; the Left Party remains on the fringes here.

Figure 5 outlines, by region, differences in election results of the former PDS and later the Left Party in the 16 German federal states. It shows results in the most recent elections for each state and a comparison with previous elections in parentheses. The figure clearly shows that the Left reported strong results across the board at all election levels. The variation here is minimal (with a few exceptions in state and local government elections). The success of the Left in the eastern federal states is also reflected in the number of representatives they have in government. Bodo Ramelow was the first member of the Left Party to be elected Minister-President of Thuringia, a position he has held since 2014.

As indicated above, the Left Party has much less support in western Germany. In addition, there are considerable regional disparities. The Left Party's strongest sup-

port in the west comes from Saarland and Bremen but the party also achieves high approval ratings in Hamburg, North Rhine-Westphalia, and Hesse.

Convergence in attitudes toward the welfare state

The successes of the Left in eastern Germany are often attributed to the perception of the party as the representative of eastern German regional interests, and to the greater political orientation of the people of eastern Germany to the left. In fact, a number of previous studies show that issues of equality and redistribution of incomes are more pronounced in eastern Germany than in western Germany.²¹

As part of the German General Social Survey (ALLBUS), respondents have been asked the following four questions repeatedly since 1991:

- "On the whole, do you consider the social differences in our country just."
- "On the whole, are economic gains in Germany distributed justly today?"
- "Do you think the state must ensure that people receive a decent income even in illness, hardship, unemployment and old age?"
- "Should social benefits be cut in the future, should things stay as they are, or should social benefits be extended"

Approximately 66 percent of respondents consider social differences to be unjust on the whole (completely agree/tend to agree/tend to disagree/completely disagree), 79 percent think the distribution of economic gains is unjust (completely agree/tend to agree/tend to disagree/completely disagree), 88 percent believe the state has a responsibility in cases of illness, hardship, unemployment, and old age (completely agree/tend to agree/tend to disagree/completely disagree), and, finally, 32 percent are in favor of extending social benefits (compared to reducing them or maintaining the *status quo*).

¹⁹ In the SOEP, the question is divided into two parts. The first part asks whether respondents are generally inclined toward a particular party in Germany (see Figure 1). The second part asks respondents which party they feel affiliated to. We calculate the share of those with a party preference for the Left Party to respondents who generally indicated a long-term party attachment.

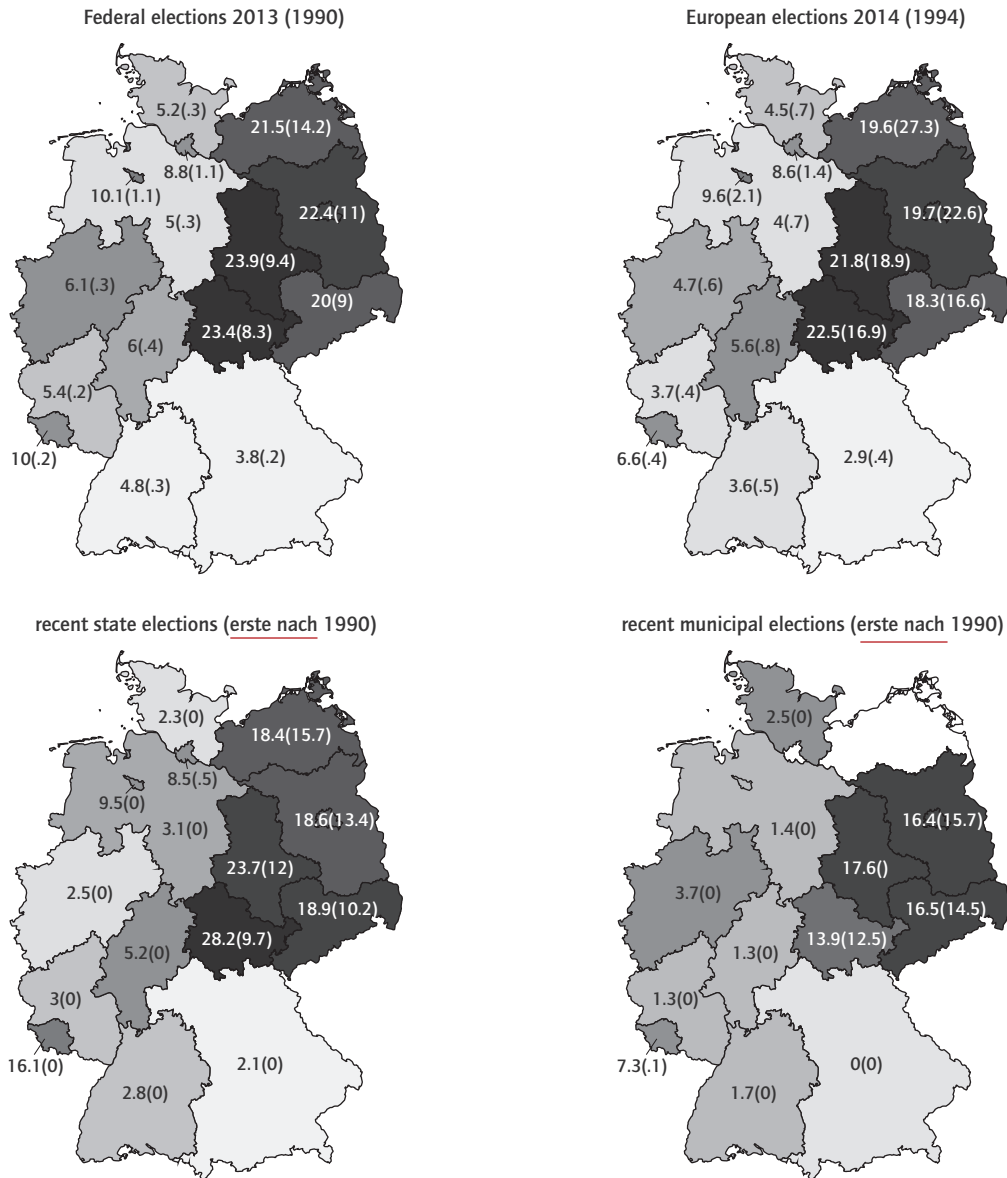
²⁰ M. Kroh and T. Siedler, "Die Anhänger der Linken: Rückhalt quer durch alle Einkommensschichten," *DIW Wochenbericht*, no. 41 (2008).

²¹ E. Roller, "Kürzungen von Sozialleistungen aus der Sicht der Bundesbürger," *Zeitschrift für Sozialreform*, no. 42 (1996): 777-788; B. Wegener and S. Liebig, "Is the 'Inner Wall' Here to Stay? Justice Ideologies in Unified Germany," *Social Justice Research*, no. 13, (2000): 177-197; S. Svallfors, "Policy Feedback, Generational Replacement, and Attitudes to State Intervention: Eastern and Western Germany, 1990-2006," *European Political Science Review*, no. 2 (2010): 119-135; E. Roller, "Sozialstaatsvorstellungen im Wandel? Stabilität, Anpassungsprozesse und Anspruchszunahme zwischen 1976 und 2010," in *Bürger und Wähler im Wandel der Zeit. 25 Jahre Wahl- und Einstellungsforschung in Deutschland*, eds. S. Roßteutscher, T. Faas, and U. Rosar (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften).

Figure 5

Vote shares of "The Left" by elections and states

In percent



Source: State election offices.

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Significant differences in vote shares throughout all levels of elections.

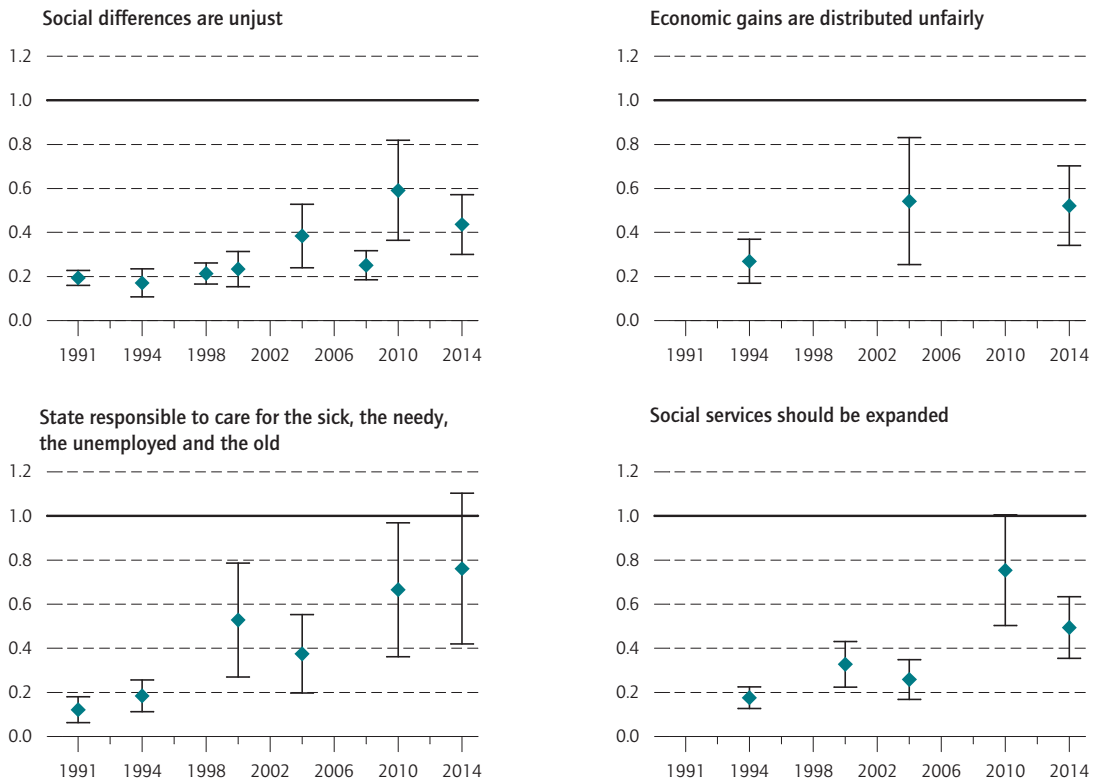
Figure 6 outlines the differences in attitudes to the welfare state between western and eastern Germany based on odds ratio values. The share of respondents from eastern Germany who believe there are injustices and are in favor of a strong welfare state was higher than in western Germany. (The odds ratio values are consistently lower than one.)

Panel 1 shows that in the first ten years after reunification the odds ratio value remained relatively stable at a very low 0.2. This corresponds to approximately 85 percent of respondents from eastern Germany who perceive injustices compared to around 55 percent in western Germany $[(55/45)/(85/15) = 0.22]$. After 2000, however, there was a slow convergence of the views of people in eastern

Figure 6

East-West differences in attitudes towards the welfare state

Odds-ratios west to east



Source: Allbus (1991–2014).

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East Germans view social inequalities more often as unjust.

and western Germany on the issue of justice and social differences resulting in the odds ratio value rising to approximately 0.45 in 2014. A similar picture emerges with regard to the question of whether economic gains are unjustly distributed (see Figure 6, Panel 2). Despite the slow increase, the difference is still clear and statistically significantly different from one. This shows that 25 years after unification, people in eastern and western Germany still have different perceptions of what is fair.

Panel 3 indicates that the odds ratio values on the question whether the government should provide for individuals in cases of illness, hardship, unemployment, and old age are initially much less than one. However, the differences between eastern and western Germany have reduced considerably over time. The odds ratio value at the beginning of the 2000s was 0.5. In 2014, the ratio is no longer significantly different from one (i.e., parity). This implies that preferences are now largely

aligned and both western and eastern Germans have similar views on the tasks of government. It should be noted that there was a broad consensus throughout the observation period that it was the government's responsibility to help in cases of illness, hardship, unemployment, and old age: in 1991, almost 99 percent of eastern Germans thought it was one of the tasks of government, compared to 91 percent of western Germans. In 2014, the corresponding figures were 91 percent in the east and 88 percent in the west. Eventually, the shares of those in favor of expanding social services also converged, although the share in eastern Germany is still higher than in western Germany.

In contrast to political engagement and voter turnout in elections—the most profound differences overall between eastern and western Germany were found in attitudes to the welfare state; however, in these attitudes we also found the strongest alignment in political culture.

Conclusion

Although German Chancellor Angela Merkel and Federal President Joachim Gauck are both from East Germany and hold the top political offices in Germany, political unity has not occurred in the attitudes of citizens toward politics and participation in the political process.

In terms of general interest in politics and active participation in local politics (working for political parties, in local government politics, and citizens' initiatives), the differences are often slight and statistically insignificant. Individuals from eastern and western Germany are politically engaged to a very similar degree.

There are, however, disparities in party attachment and voter turnout. Although the population in eastern Germany was quite familiar with the political system of the West at the time of reunification, attachment to specific parties is still considerably less pronounced in eastern Germany. There is, however, a slow convergence between people of eastern and western Germany. Today, there are virtually no differences in willingness to have a long-term attachment to a political party among the generation of citizens who were children and adolescents during the period of reunification.²² There is, however, an

alarming discrepancy in voter turnout, especially in national elections, which has remained constant for many years and across all age groups. Even more dramatic is the trend in participation in state elections, where the 50 percent threshold in voter turnout was often missed in recent years.

Clear differences can be identified between eastern and western Germany in terms of political preferences (in addition to people in eastern Germany supporting the Left Party) and attitudes to the welfare state: individuals in eastern Germany would like a stronger welfare state to provide support in social emergencies and would like to expand social benefits accordingly. In addition, social inequality and the distribution of economic gains are perceived as far more unjust than in western Germany. However, it is worth noting that after 2002 attitudes toward the welfare state—despite continuing differences—slowly began to converge between east and west.

²² As part of the analyses conducted for the present article, all east-west differences were also calculated for those born after 1975, i.e., who were children or adolescents during the period of reunification. The pattern of

east-west differences for this generation who grew up in a unified Germany mostly coincides with those of the entire population. One exception is the difference between east and west in long-term attachment to political parties. See also M. Kroh and H. Schoen, "Politisches Engagement," in *Leben in Ost- und Westdeutschland: Eine sozialwissenschaftliche Bilanz der deutschen Einheit 1990–2010*, eds. P. Krause and I. Ostner (Campus, 2010).

Felix Arnold is Research Associate in the Public Economics Department at DIW Berlin | farnold@diw.de

Ronny Freier is Research Associate in the Public Economics Department at DIW Berlin and Assistant Professor in the department of economic policy at FU Berlin | rfreier@diw.de

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Martin Kroh is Deputy Head of the Research Infrastructure Socio-Economic Panel (SOEP) at DIW Berlin | mkroh@diw.de



Prof. Dr. Martin Kroh, Deputy Head of the Research Infrastructure Socio-Economic Panel (SOEP) study at DIW Berlin

SIX QUESTIONS TO MARTIN KROH

»Similar levels of political interest between East and West, notable differences in turnout«

1. Professor Kroh, on October 3, 1990, the German Democratic Republic acceded to the Federal Republic of Germany. Have differences between the political cultures in eastern and western Germany persisted or has some convergence been observed here? *There is no clear answer to this question. It really depends on what area you are looking at.*
2. How do attitudes toward political parties differ between eastern and western Germany? *Over the past 25 years, the expected weaker political party attachment in eastern Germany has approached western German levels. In this sense, there has been a convergence. It is important to add here, however, that this is not just a matter of eastern German political culture converging on western German attitudes. In this case, the reverse is also true and, over the last 25 years, we have actually observed a decline in political party attachments in western Germany and, at the same time, a slight increase in eastern Germany. This has resulted in a narrowing of the gap.*
3. How does voter turnout differ between eastern and western Germany? *The weak party attachment is frequently used as an explanation for a higher number of floating votes or the willingness of the electorate to more strongly support new political parties. If we examine voter turnout in isolation, the differences by electoral level were, on the whole, not particularly significant. At least this was the case for local government and European elections and, for a long time, also for Länder elections. Particularly with respect to the latter, however, the gap has increased over the last few years and it is widely known that voter turnout was below 50 percent in the most recent Länder elections in Saxony and Brandenburg. For national elections, overall, we have observed a relatively stable difference between eastern and western Germany of just a few percentage points across all elections.*
4. Where do we find the most politically active individuals? *Our survey data extend as far back as 1990 and, in some cases, even cover the period prior to reunification.*

The data show that, at the time, East Germans were more politically active in all spheres than West Germans. This was to be expected during the reunification period. However, since then we have observed minimal differences with respect to interest in politics. Thus, the fundamental willingness to actively participate in politics appears to be very similar in eastern and western Germany. Levels of participation in citizens' initiatives and local politics are also very similar in both parts of the country. It is therefore impossible to generalize and say that individuals in one part of the country or another are more or less politically active since it depends largely on the form of participation you examine. For example, though voter turnout may be somewhat weaker in eastern Germany, there are also indications that the willingness of individuals to participate in demonstrations is greater than in the west.

5. To what extent do fundamental attitudes to the political system and welfare state differ between the two parts of Germany? *Our report focuses on attitudes to the welfare state. In eastern Germany, at the beginning of the 1990s, it was commonly expected that the welfare state was responsible for many more spheres of life than is actually the case in western Germany and the injustice of social inequalities was felt much more keenly than in the west. Over the last few years, however, eastern and western Germany have gained some common ground. Social injustices are perceived more strongly in western Germany and to a lesser extent in eastern Germany. Thus some convergence between the two parts of Germany has been observed.*
6. Do these differences also apply to the younger generation which grew up or was already born in the reunified Germany? *Many of the differences also apply to this younger generation even though they did not, in fact, grow up in either East or West Germany before reunification. One exception here is the aforementioned party attachment where, for the younger generation, there are no longer any differences between eastern and western Germany.*

Interview by Erich Wittenberg