

**Political Culture: Differences in East and West Germany**

by

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## **AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF**

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Abstract approved: \_\_\_\_\_  
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The purpose of this essay is to examine the reasons for why the political, economic and social merging of East and West Germany has been difficult, and to better understand the factors that could lead one day to the development of one unified political culture.

In order to explain different political behaviors in East and West Germany I examined the political culture of Germany. I mainly focused on the different economic and political backgrounds of both regions, and on the different voting behaviors in order to show that there are two different political cultures in Germany at present.

My results were that different past political and economic socialization experiences created after WWII two different political cultures in East and West Germany. The different present values, materialist values in East Germany and postmaterialist values in West Germany, are the reason why these two different political cultures continue to exist. Economic change and a change in generations is therefore necessary in order to merge the two political cultures into one unified German political culture.

Bachelor of Arts in International Studies in Political Science  
Thesis of Sarah Beckers  
Presented on June 6, 2007

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I understand that my thesis will become part of the collection of Oregon State University. My signature below authorizes release of my thesis to any reader upon request. I also affirm that the work represented in this thesis is my own work.

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Sarah Beckers, Author

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## **Introduction:**

Germany has been one unified country since 1990. The unification of Germany was less a merging of the political and economic systems of East and West Germany, but rather a take-over by the Federal Republic of the former German Democratic Republic (GDR). East Germany adopted the West German democratic political system and was absorbed into the capitalist economy. Even though Germany has been unified for 17 years, the question remains if Germans are unified in their beliefs about society and the state, parties and politicians, or do they live in one and the same state but with different beliefs? Political attitudes and values seem to be different in both regions, as well as economic developments. Social integration has been also a problem, mainly because East Germans and West Germans see themselves still as two different societies. The full political, social, and economic merge of East and West Germany has proven to be not as easy as people had thought it would be.

Despite the optimism that a unified Germany would create a unified political culture, East and West German values and attitudes are quite different. East Germans are more concerned with financial security and West Germans are more concerned with “maximizing nonmaterial forms of well-being” such as a satisfying job, or a clean environment (Sodaro, 267). These different values and attitudes are also reflected in the voting behaviors of East and West Germans. But what are the sources for this? There is one main factor that helps explain the differences in the current values and attitudes of East and West Germans. In the post WWII era, citizens of East and West Germany were socialized in very different economic and political institutions, which in turn shaped citizens values, attitudes, beliefs, and expectations. For example before the unification,

the capitalist economy of West Germany prospered, while the communist East German economy declined. Economic differences still can be seen today as well. Different socialization processes formed East Germany into a modern state with materialist values, and West Germany into a postmodern state with postmaterialist values. As a result, East and West Germany have different political cultures. These different political cultures explain why political reform is not easy in Germany.

In my following writing I will show how different socialization processes in East and West Germany are the driving force of different political cultures in East and West Germany. I will show that economic differences influence different socialization processes, which again influence people's values, attitudes, beliefs, and expectations. These different values, attitudes, beliefs, and expectations are the sources that created and still impact the two political cultures in Germany. I will further show that political culture can change, which means that the two different political cultures can merge one day into one unified German political culture. For this to happen, one would need economic change and a change in generations.

First I will focus on the different historical developments of political and economic processes in both regions. These are first of all significant in order to explain why two different political cultures already existed at the time of unification. They are also very important in order to explain different voting behavior. Voting behavior is one way to express political, social and economic attitudes and values. I will examine party competition, party identification and voting behavior. My results will show that different voting behaviors in East and West Germany are one indication of the different political cultures in East and West Germany.

## **What is Political Culture**

Political culture is “a pattern of shared values, moral norms, beliefs, expectations, and attitudes that relate to politics and its social context” (Sodaro, 255). Political culture consists of the ways the majority of the population thinks about political authority, the government, and society. These attitudes, values, beliefs, expectations, and norms usually “relate to political ideas and social relations” (Sodaro, 256) and are established through the political socialization process (Sodaro, 258). During this process people learn about the politics and political culture of their country. The most important factor in this process is the family, closely followed by peer groups, schools, places of employment etc. Dirk Berg-Schlosser, for example, says that the content of political culture is the result of childhood socialization, education, media exposure, and adult experiences with governmental, social, and economic performances (Berg-Schlosser, 15). I will mainly focus on adult experiences with governmental, social, and economic performances. One can see that individual values, beliefs, expectations, and attitudes are cause and result of the political culture of a society.

The first scientific studies about political culture started in the 1950s and 1960s in the US. The main question was what conditions created political stability. “The social and political science of the 1950s was obsessed with the collapse of democratic institutions in Germany, and the apparent robustness of democratic institutions in Britain and the US. The striking contrast in historical experience, and particularly the disconfirmation of liberal and Marxist theory in the collapse of German democracy, created the ferment out of which political culture theory emerged” (Berg-Schlosser, 16). The important factors in order to explain political behavior were values, beliefs, and feelings.



The most important work about political culture was written by Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba. In *The Civic Culture*, the two scientists tried to examine the psychological and social conditions for the existence of a democracy. They interviewed 1000 people in several countries. Based on these interviews Almond and Verba analyzed political culture based on values, attitudes, beliefs.

Almond and Verba outlined four types of political culture and argued that most political cultures consist of a mixture of these four variants. First there is participant political culture. It consists of people who are “generally knowledgeable about politics and have positive feelings about their governmental system, regarding it as legitimate and worthy to support. They vote regularly and may also get involved in other forms of political activity” (Sodaro, 260). Second there is subject political culture. It consists of people who are “less knowledgeable about what is going on in politics. They have relatively little pride in their political institutions, vote rarely, and have little confidence in their ability to get results out of government, but they are law abiding and can be quite deferential in their attitudes toward governmental authority” (Sodaro, 260). Third there is parochial political culture. It consists of people “who practically know nothing about politics, especially at the national level. Their world is usually confined to their local community or village. They are basically alienated from their government and apathetic, with very low confidence in their ability to get government officials to help them or to effect political change” (Sodaro, 260). Finally there is the civic culture. This one consists of a mixture of a high number of participants and subjects, and a small number of parochials. Almond and Verba argue that this kind of political culture creates a democracy that is most stable. They believe that democracy needs to consist of

participants, subjects, and parochials since a participant political culture by itself could destabilize the political system by demanding too much. A stable democracy does not only need active participants, but also some passive subjects and parochials in its population who accept the political system of their country without making too many demands. Almond and Verba see Britain and the United States as the best examples of countries with civic cultures.

Most political culture studies originated in the United States. But there are also some studies about political culture in Germany. Most German scholars' definitions and interpretations of political culture are very similar to the ones from the United States. For example Martin and Sylvia Greiffenhagen define the term as "subjective dimensions of politics" (Greiffenhagen, 1). They explain that it deals with society's orientations toward a political system. Political orientations are attitudes, beliefs, and values. Political culture also includes non-political areas, such as attitudes toward economy etc. The German political scientist Karl Rohe defines political culture as a mind set (Seitz, 4). He further describes it as the basis for political actions of a society. Other German political scientists think that political culture can be influenced geographically but also historically. Some of the most important factors to them are the geographical conditions, the economic relations, and historical experiences which have influenced the people's way of thinking. In sum, both American and German scholarship indicate that socialization is the main important factor to explain political cultures.

Ronald Inglehart's theories about Modernization and Postmodernization are also very important in order to explain why there are currently two different political cultures in Germany. With these theories one can show why two different political cultures

continued to exist even after Germany was unified. They also show that political culture can change. Ronald Inglehart argues that political cultures in West Germany shifted during the 1960s and 1970s because of increasing postmaterialist values. He explains that people became less driven by financial security, but rather by “broader concerns about the welfare of the community” (Sodaro, 266). Inglehart says that these values are typical of “postmodern” societies. Postmodernization is a period in which postindustrial economies have developed. “The service sector-consisting of government, education, banking and finance, retail stores, and all sorts of consumer services- have replaced manufacturing as the main source of economic growth and employment” (Sodaro, 266). Incomes have increased and a “well-funded” welfare state takes good care of its population by providing medical insurance, social security pensions, and more. An increase in prosperity results in people wanting to “maximize nonmaterial forms of well-being,” such a satisfying job, and a clean environment (Sodaro, 266,267). These values create a lesser reliance on the state and people prefer less government intervention. Inglehart calls these values postmaterialist values.

In contrast Modernization theory argues that people’s main goal is to increase material security. Postmaterialist values are here much lower. During modernization societies develop from agricultural economies to industrialization. This includes a shift of values and attitudes as well. Financial security is based less on survival. People are more interested in maximizing their personal wealth. These economic goals result in increasing political interest. Political participation therefore increases in modern societies which promotes democracy.

But why is a change in political culture important? It is important because there are two different political cultures in Germany at present. Only a change will merge them together and create one unified political culture. Political culture usually changes very slowly. Since political culture is created by the attitudes of the population, which are again influenced by their socialization, it is doubtful that it could change in a short amount of time. It is more a change that occurs over several generations.

### **Economic and Political Developments in East and West Germany**

I will examine the history of West and East Germany in order to provide a better understanding about today's political culture of both sides. Different political systems, different economic developments, and different party politics in East and West Germany shaped different political attitudes. I therefore will examine some of the origins of the reasons why there are still two political cultures in Germany even though the country has been unified for 17 years.

In 1945, the war ended and the four victorious powers, the United States, The United Kingdom, France, and the Soviet Union divided up the country into four occupation zones. The Allied Control Council was established, which assumed governmental authority. The Eastern territories were placed under Soviet administration. The Soviets established the Soviet Military Administration (SMAD) in order to rule their territory of Germany. At the Potsdam Conference in the summer of 1945 the four victorious powers decided that denazification, demilitarization and economic decentralization were necessary in Germany. They also agreed that the German people needed to be re-educated along democratic lines. Over time, however, the western zones and the Soviet zone drifted apart economically, mainly because the Soviet Union took Germany's

industry apart as a form of reparations. Growing tensions between the Soviet Union and the Western powers in economic and political areas resulted in the 1947 refusal of the SMAD to participate in the Marshall Plan. In 1948 the United States, Britain, and France decided to form a West German Republic by uniting their occupation zones. The Soviets were not very happy about this and therefore left the Allied Control Council in order to create an East German State.

In 1945 in the Soviet zone antifascist parties were allowed again and a democratic-antifascist coalition was formed between the KPD, the SPD, the CDU, and the LDPD, which later would be called the National Front. In early 1946 the KPD merged however with the SPD in order to form the new Socialist Unity Party (SED). The SED ideologies were Marxist-Leninist ones. The Soviets started concentrating all political and social functions in the hands of the German communists and persons they trusted. Over time, the SED started to become very powerful. The other political parties together formed the National Front, which was heavily controlled by the SED. Even though elections took place, they were in fact controlled by the SED.

In West Germany, on the other hand, things were different. Most of the West German states were formed in 1946 and 1947, and the first elections for state legislatures were held. The courts were also re-established and the US started sending food packages in order to help with the famine. The development of a system of political administration, compared to the same development in East Germany, was very slow. At first, political parties were only allowed to organize at the local level and then at state level. Only much later were parties allowed at the zonal level. Since this presupposed the cooperation across state and zonal borders, the United States and the United Kingdom decided to

merge their zones into a “Bizonie”. This resulted later in the formation of a West German state. In 1947 the Marshal Plan took action and during the same year an economic council was formed in order to help re-establish the German economy. In 1948 the United States, Britain, and France decided to form a West German Republic by uniting their occupation zones. They decided that the new German state should not be created through direct elections but that its members should be elected by the state legislatures. A committee, lead by Konrad Adenauer, worked out a constitution, and in 1949 the Federal Republic of Germany was officially established. During the first election of the new German parliament, in which 11 parties contested, the CDU/CSU won, closely followed by the SPD. Finally at the end of 1949 Konrad Adenauer was elected chancellor, which created a coalition between the CDU/CSU, the FDP and the German Party. Adenauer also started to create a new confidence in the German state. His focus was economic improvement and to create western alliances.

In 1949 as a reaction to the establishment of the Federal Republic of Germany, the German Democratic Republic was formed. Its constitution created the State’s Chamber and the People’s Chamber. The People’s Chamber was supposed to be the highest state body, vested with legislative sovereignty. The SED, however, controlled the Council of Ministers and therefore drastically reduced the legislative function of the People’s Chamber. Elections to the People’s Chamber and the state legislatures were based on a joint ballot which was prepared by the National Front. The National Front was a coalition between all political parties and mass organizations in East Germany; however, it was heavily influenced and controlled by the SED. In 1950 the SED decided at the Third SED Party Congress to focus more on industrial progress. They wanted to nationalize the

industry. Strict rules about industry and labor productivity caused many East Germans to move to West Germany. This emigration from East to West increased over the years until the building of the Berlin Wall in 1961. In 1954 the Soviet Union granted East Germany sovereignty.

In 1956 Walter Ulbricht became the new SED leader. Ulbricht wanted to catch up economically with West Germany and therefore asked for higher production quotas and an increase in labor productivity. In the following decades East Germany tried to catch up economically with West Germany. It therefore made economic progress one of its main topics at the SED Party Congresses. Relations between East and West Germany finally started to normalize and both states recognized each other as sovereign states, each with its own identity. In 1985, Gorbachev, who was the new Soviet leader, announced his reform program. Honecker did not like this and started distancing the GDR from the Soviet Union.

In West Germany the 1950s were marked by a blooming economy. CDU and SPD were the two most important parties. Over the years they both formed coalition governments either with each other or with other parties like the FDP in order to stay in power. The CDU considered itself to be a more conservative party and the SPD considered itself to be a more social-liberal party. In 1955 West Germany became a member of the NATO and in 1957 West Germany was one of the founding states for the EWG, which later became the EG and then the EU. Over the following years, West Germany also tried to improve its relations with the eastern states. In 1989 Helmut Kohl became chancellor.

The decline of the GDR started when people began to demand a say in the running of their own lives, more individual freedom, and more and better consumer goods. More and more people searched for ways to leave the GDR and move to the West. People also started demonstrating for more freedoms. This time the Soviet Union did not seem to have any interest in suppressing these demonstrations. The demonstrations also increased pressure on the SED regime to reform. The SED finally resigned, which resulted in the German reunification in 1989.

On March 18<sup>th</sup> 1990, for the first time people in East Germany were able to vote in free elections. The SED, which until then had been all-powerful, had renamed itself Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS). In previous elections they often received 90% or more of the votes, because people were told for whom to vote, but in the 1990 election they only received 16.45 % of the votes. The CDU and the Democratic Renewal received 41.7 %. In August, the Unification Treaty decided that the formerly East German states would become states of the Federal Republic of Germany. On October, 3 1990 Germany officially became one unified country. This meant that East Germany adopted the West German political system.

However, unification created many problems. First of all it caused a heavy burden to the German economy. During the years before the unification the capitalist economy of West Germany prospered, while the communist East German economy declined. After unification, many businesses in East Germany collapsed because of the new Western German competition and because many people started to move to the west in order to find better jobs. The German government still supports the former East German states. Recent economic problems were just one of the reasons that created a split in German



political culture. In addition people in East Germany and West Germany experienced different socialization processes before and after the unification. Have these different socialization processes created different attitudes and values?

### **Political Culture in Germany:**

One can argue that Germany currently has two political cultures. There is a West German political culture and an East German political culture. In general one can say that both political cultures are influenced by the attitudes towards the ideas of individual freedom, equality, tolerance, and social welfare, which are all ideas of liberal and social democracy. These ideas shape political behavior. West and East Germany have different economic and political backgrounds which were examined earlier. These different backgrounds provided different socialization experiences for people in West and East Germany, through which they developed different values, attitudes, beliefs, and expectations. These again created different political cultures. The question is if a merging of the socialization experiences in Germany, which could happen after many years of being a unified country, will help to create one political culture. In the following comparison between East and West German socialization experiences, I want to focus on the different developments of political and economic processes in both regions. These are most important in order to explain different voting behavior which again is important to prove that there are two different political cultures in Germany.

### **Socialization Process in West Germany:**

The political culture in West Germany after WWII was marked by the goals of setting up an effective system of competitive, pro-democracy political parties. Next to the SPD, which was founded in 1875, new parties like the FDP, the CDU, and the CSU emerged.

These parties have been in the post-war period the main parties of the new democratic West Germany. But how quickly did the new democratic political culture develop? After WWII in 1953 only about half of the population agreed that democracy is the best form of government. This was mainly caused by the high rate of older generations. In the 1970s, on the other hand, 90 percent agreed. Younger generations, who had grown up after the war and who had therefore experienced a different socialization process, created now with their new attitudes a different political culture. These new attitudes toward democracy were fostered by the economic development in West Germany at the time. The 1950s and 1960s in Germany were marked by an economic boom. Everybody benefited from this boom. Typical for the following decades of the Federal Republic of Germany was a political stability. Sodaro describes this as a period with broad consensus on political and economic fundamentals among its main political parties, and a record of considerable economic achievement over the long term (Sodaro, 466).

The unification in 1990 complicated this picture of economic and political stability. Germany's economic success came to a stop. Unemployment rates, especially in East Germany, increased. The new unified Germany had to battle two different economic value systems, which were the basis for today's different attitudes, values, beliefs, and expectations. This has had a significant impact on German political culture.

#### Socialization Process in East Germany:

East Germany had to start out differently than West Germany. Until 1990 East Germany was an authoritarian socialist state. After WWII, it developed into a one-party system, which only seemed to be democratic. In 1945 antifascist parties were allowed again and a democratic-antifascist coalition was formed between the KPD, the SPD, the

CDU, and the LDPD which later would be called the National Front. In early 1946 the KPD merged however with the SPD in order to form the new Socialist Unity Party (SED). The SED ideologies were Marxist-Leninist ones. In the 1980s, East Germany's government was still focusing on improving the economy. By this time West German's economy had been very successful already for two decades. On March 18<sup>th</sup> 1990 people in East Germany were able for the first time to vote in free elections. The SED which until then had been all-powerful, through heavily dominating and influencing the other parties, had renamed itself Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS). The percentage of votes they received dropped from 90% to 16.45 %. The CDU and the Democratic Renewal on the other hand received 41.7 %. In August the Unification Treaty established that the formerly East German states would become states of the Federal Republic of Germany. On October, 3 1990 Germany officially became one unified country.

East Germany was never able to catch up with the economic success of West Germany, and it is not expected to catch up for another few decades. The unemployment rates are very different in both regions. In 2003 there was only 8% unemployment in West Germany, but 18.2 % in East Germany. East German workers also often earn less money, but have to work longer hours, than workers in West Germany.

One can conclude that West and East Germans have gone through different socialization processes since the end of WWII. West Germany started developing a multi-party democratic state, which was economically successful, and East Germany turned into a one-party authoritarian socialist state, which struggled to develop its economy. East Germans did not start experiencing democracy until the unification of Germany in 1990. Even though the unification helped with East Germany's economic

problems, it still did not solve them. One can therefore still see today that there are economic differences between East and West Germany. These different political and economic processes created different socialization processes which resulted in different values, attitudes, beliefs and expectations toward politics and its social context. People in both regions had different experiences with governmental, social, and economic performances. The result was a wall in the mind of West and East Germans. Even though the wall fell between East and West Germany in 1989, the “wall in people’s minds still stands” (Sodaro, 440). Some of the older generations in East Germany “still feel nostalgia for East Germany’s simpler lifestyle and welfare system” (Sodaro, 440). In the late 1990s only 38% of East Germans were satisfied the German political system. In contrast, in West Germany 60% of the population were satisfied.

In the end the different economic developments also resulted in East Germany becoming a modern state with materialist values and West Germany becoming a postmodern state with postmaterialist values.

#### Shifting Attitudes – Modernization/Postmodernization:

After examining the different socialization processes in West and East Germany, which are caused by different economic and political developments, one should look at the theories of modernization and postmodernization. They explain in fact why even after the unification the two regions remain with two different political cultures.

Postmodernization is a period in which people want to “maximize nonmaterial forms of well-being” (Sodaro, 267). People are less driven by financial security, but rather by “broader concerns about the welfare of the community” (Sodaro, 266). Environmental protection and other concerns became the main influence for political behavior. Inglehart

calls these values postmaterialist values. In contrast, modernization theory explains that people's main goal is to increase material security. Postmaterialist values are here much lower. People are more interested in maximizing their personal wealth.

One can argue now that East Germany has not yet completely arrived at post-modernization. East Germans do not share postmaterialist values to the degree of West Germans. East Germans main concern is financial and material security. They do not care as much about "broader concerns about the welfare of the community," like environmental protection (Sodaro, 266). In a 1997 study of the World Value Survey (WVS), 51% of the East Germans said that they would prefer economic growth and creation of jobs over protecting the environment. Only 32% said they would prefer to protect the environment. In West Germany, 42% of the population was more interested in protecting the environment and only 39% preferred economic growth and creation of jobs over protection of the environment. In a 1999 study of the WVS 66.9% of East Germans disagreed and only 28.5% agreed to give part of their income for the environment. In West Germany 63.6% disagreed but 32.9% agreed. When asked in the 1997 study of the WVS what the aim of the country should be, 70.4% East German said a high level of economic growth. In West Germany only 51.9% agreed with this. The 1997 study of the WVS also documented that for 59% East Germans a stable economy was most important. In West Germany only 48.9% thought that a stable economy was most important. Therefore, a higher percentage of people in West Germany than in East Germany thought that progress toward a less impersonal and more humane society would be most important. Finally, in the 1999 study of the WVS more East Germans than West Germans

thought that guaranteeing basic needs would be very important. This shows again that East Germans are more concerned with material security than West Germans.

**“Importance of guaranteeing basic needs for all”**

	West Germany	East Germany
Very important	58.1%	73.2%
2	33.2%	18.3%
3	6.6%	5.3%
4	1.4%	2.2%
Not at all important	0.2%	0.3%
Don't know	0.6%	0.6%
No answer	0.0%	0.1%

World Values Survey 1999.  
Question E147/ West Germany and East Germany

Inglehart also argues that human happiness is strongly connected to economic development. Rising income levels create rising levels of happiness and life satisfaction. In 1999 more people in East Germany were dissatisfied with their life than in West Germany. West Germans were also happier than East Germans. 85.2 percent of West Germans said they were happy compared to 77.2 percent in East Germany. This again points out the economic differences in East and West Germany.

**“Satisfaction with your life”**

	West Germany	East Germany
Dissatisfied	0.4%	1.4%
2	0.4%	1.1%
3	2.1%	4.2%
4	2.7%	7.4%

5	4.4%	7.3%
6	9.4%	8.8%
7	17.1%	15.5%
8	29.4%	23.2%
9	21.4%	18.8%
Satisfied	12.0%	11.6%

World Values Survey 1999.  
Question A170/ West Germany and East Germany

**“Feelings of happiness”**

	West Germany	East Germany
Very happy	18.9%	20.3%
Quite happy	56.9%	56.9
Not very happy	11.7%	18.4%
Not at all happy	1.3%	2.7%
Don't know	0.9%	1.2%
No answer	0.8%	0.5%

World Values Survey 1999.  
Question A008/West Germany and East Germany

When asked in 1999 about future changes, 54.2% East Germans thought that placing less importance on work would be a bad thing. In West Germany only 39% thought it was a bad thing and 40.1% thought it was a good thing.

All these examples show that East Germans are more concerned with financial security than West Germans. Work and income are very important to them. West Germans on the other hand show typical signs of a postmodern society. As seen above, they do not care as much about financial security as East Germans. They are also generally happier, which results from a better economic development in West Germany. “Broader concerns about the welfare of the community” seems to be more important for

West Germans (Sodaro, 266). Most importantly is here the 1997 WVS study that shows that more people in West Germany would prefer the protection of the environment over economic growth.

**“Protecting the environment vs. economic growth”**

	West Germany	East Germany
Protecting environment	42.7%	32.7%
Economic growth and creating jobs	39.8%	51.0%
Other answer	12.5%	12.4%
Don't know	5.0%	3.9%

World Values Survey 1997.  
Question B008/ West Germany and East Germany

Alliance90/the Greens:

Another way that shows that East Germans are not as interested in postmaterialist values, such as environmental issues, is by looking at the party called the Alliance90/the Greens. This party was founded in the late 1970s as simply the Greens, and it was based on several citizens movements. The main concern of this party was to “preserve the green environment” (Sodaro, 473). “They appealed mainly to younger, educated, middle-class voters with postmaterialist values” (Sodaro, 473). In 1990, the Greens merged with the Alliance 90, which used to be one of the groups that was opposed to communism and that had helped to start the revolution in East Germany. Alliance90/The Greens are sometimes also referred to as a typical West German party. Since the federal elections in 1994 the percentage of votes for Alliance/the Greens in West Germany has been between 7% and 9%. In East Germany the party only received between 4% and 5%.



### Federal election results Alliance90/the Greens 1990-2005

	1990	1994	1998	2002	2005
Alliance90/the Greens – West Germany	4.8%	7.9%	7.3%	9.4%	8.8%
Alliance90/the Greens – East Germany	6.2%	4.3%	4.1%	4.7%	5.2%
Total	5.1%	7.3%	6.7%	8.6%	8.1%

[www.election.de](http://www.election.de)

So in a postmodern society economic growth is still valued, but more people are concerned with nonmaterial forms of well-being. To explain the values in West Germany one has to look at the economic situation. The economic miracle during the postwar period and the rise of a modern welfare state created a West Germany in which people take a high material living standard for granted, which again causes a higher interest in nonmaterial fields. Maximizing nonmaterial forms of well-being is a priority.

But is economic change the only factor that determines values and attitudes that shape political culture? The answer is no. Economic development is one factor, but one cannot forget the socialization process, which is influenced by the economic development.

Inglehart emphasizes in his text *Globalization and Postmodern Values* that the changes from modern to postmodern values do not happen overnight. Rather they are based upon generational changes. He says that “fundamental value change takes place as younger birth cohorts replace older ones in the adult population of a society. Consequently, after a long period of rising economic and physical security, one should find substantial differences between the value priorities of older and younger groups; they have been shaped by different experiences in their formative years” (Inglehart, 4). This

shows that economic development influences socialization which again creates different values and attitudes, which create the political culture of a society. In this case at hand, different economic and political developments in East and West Germany created different socialization processes. These shaped different values and attitudes in East and West Germany which in the end created two different political cultures.

Finally one can argue that East Germany seems to be where West Germany was during the 1970s and 1980s. Its postmaterialist values are much lower than the ones of West Germany. This is mainly caused by the economy. The East German economy still lags behind the West German one. Material security is therefore more important in East Germany than in West Germany. In West Germany, the economic development has allowed people to focus more on the well-being of the overall community. This creates new interests like environmental protection, which, for example, is one of the major goals of the Alliance90/the Greens. The economy is therefore the driving force of socialization processes in present times.

### **Voting Behavior in East and West Germany:**

In the following writing I will show how different voting behaviors in East and West Germany reflect different economic and political socialization experiences, which originated in the post WWII era, and which have branded people's political, economic and social attitudes and values. I will also show that different voting behaviors in Germany also reflect present materialist and postmaterialist values.

Voting behavior is one way to express political, social, and economic attitudes and values. Therefore, voting behavior reflects political culture. The different voting

behaviors in East and West Germany are one way to show that there are different political cultures in East and West Germany.

17 years after the unification of Germany one can still see differences between East and West Germany when it comes to voting behavior. East German voting behavior seems less stable. It is more focused on political issues and political candidates, while ideologies and party identification is less important. There is also a different party competition in East Germany than in West Germany. In East Germany, it consists mainly of the SPD, CDU, and the PDS. In West Germany, it consists mainly of the SPD, CDU, FDP, and the Alliance90/the Greens. These different party competitions were the result of different socio-political values. Finally, East Germans also have different expectations about what the state should do or provide, especially in areas like social security and social justice. The inequalities of the economic status between East and West Germans therefore cause frustration among East Germans which again influences their voting behavior. Different economic developments and different socialization processes, which created different values, created a more issue and candidate related voting system and less voting led by ideology and party identification. Because of this East Germans tend to change voter preference more frequently.

#### Party Competition:

In 1989 the SED regime collapsed and a pluralistic party system was introduced in the former GDR. The first two federal elections of the 1990s showed an East-German voting behavior and party system. One can see that people in East Germany voted mainly for three parties: CDU, SPD, and PDS. Many people were also surprised about the first federal election of the unified Germany. Since many workers lived in the former GDR

everybody thought that the SPD would have a better chance to win than the CDU. But 41.8 % of East Germans actually voted for the CDU. This can be explained by looking at the different solutions each party offered towards the unification and its process. The CDU with Chancellor Helmut Kohl was supporting the unification process a lot. The PDS, on the other hand, wanted two individual states and the SPD was not really sure about either way. It therefore had a more middle position between the CDU and the PDS. Most people in East Germany voted depending on their attitudes toward the political and economic system of the former GDR (socialist political system). In a 1990 World Value Survey which compared East and West German attitudes, 86% of East Germans completely agreed with the statement that the country's economic system needs fundamental changes. Only 5.4 % of West Germans completely agreed.

**“The economic system needs fundamental change”**

	West Germany	East Germany
Agree completely	5,4 %	86,0 %
Agree somewhat	22,9 %	12,5 %
Neither agree or disagree	13,6 %	0,5 %
Disagree somewhat	31,2 %	0,2 %
Disagree completely	20,8 %	0,0 %
Don't know	6,0 %	0,6 %
No answer	0,1 %	0,2 %

World Value Survey, West and East Germany 1990, Question: E057

“The economic system needs fundamental change”

This shows that most East Germans were very frustrated with the former GDR's economic system and they were hoping for change. The CDU and especially CDU Chancellor Helmut Kohl (also sometimes called the unification chancellor) promised economic change and equality, which attracted many East German voters. This explains why so many East Germans voted during the first federal election after the unification for the CDU even though most of them were workers who were usually more affiliated with the SPD.

### **Federal election results in East Germany in 1990**

	SPD	CDU/CSU	Alliance90/the Greens	PDS	FDP
1990	24.3%	41.8%	6.2%	11.1%	12.9%

Source: Federal Election Results. [www.election.de](http://www.election.de)

This changed though over the years since unification was more complicated than everybody thought and economic progress was not established.

### **Voting behavior in East Germany 1990-1998**

		1990	1994	1998
Workers	CDU	50%	41%	27%
	SPD	25%	35%	39%
Total	CDU	42%	39%	27%
	SPD	24%	32%	35%

Source: Forschungsgruppe Wahlen (1998): Bundestagswahl 1998, Mannheim, S. 11,22; entspr. Bundestagswahl 1994, S.22; Bundestagswahl 1990, S. 35 (oder: Ulrich Eith,

„Wahlverhalten und Parteiensystem zehn Jahre nach der Einheit“, Deutschland Ost-Deutschland West – Politisch zweigeteilt? 2000)

The PDS represented in the years right after the unification the still intact socialist group. Since it was pro-GDR it was supported by the kind of East Germans that would benefit from an individual GDR state. Today most people who vote for the PDS are the people who think that many things were great under the GDR political system and wish that certain things could return to the past. People who are unhappy and frustrated with the development of the unification process and the development of equality between East and West German lifestyles also vote mainly for the PDS. The percentage of voters of the PDS has increased since 1990.

**Election results for the PDS in East Germany 1990-2005**

	1990	1994	1998	2002	2005
East Germany PDS	11.1	19.8	21.6	16.9	25.3

Source: Election.de, Bundestagswahlen

The SPD won the federal elections in 1998. 39% of the workers in East Germany voted now for the SPD and only 27% voted for the CDU. Overall, 35.1% of East Germans and 42.3% of West Germans voted for the SPD. This party wanted solidarity and justice. The SPD was also able to win because the CDU, which promised better economic development and equality of East and West German life-styles, did not achieve these goals. Enormous unemployment was actually the result in East Germany and West

Germany. People became frustrated with the CDU government and therefore voted the SPD into government in 1998. People thought that the SPD would be more able than the CDU to handle the problem of unemployment. The SPD was especially successful in attracting voters from the lower income levels and also voters which were not bound to any specific party. This shows that voting is driven a lot by economic satisfaction.

FDP and Alliance90/the Greens can be called West German parties, since they are not very popular in East Germany. The high unemployment rate in East Germany makes the liberal economic position of the FDP as well as the environmental political programs of the Alliance90/the Greens less attractive to East German voters. These two parties usually attract voters with postmaterialist values, which can be more found in West than in East Germany. East Germany has not yet completely arrived at the postmodern period. People focus more on materialist values like financial security. Parties like FDP and Alliance90/the Greens are therefore less attractive to East German voters than to West German voters. West Germany on the other hand is a more postmodern society where people have postmaterialist values. These support parties like the FDP and the Alliance90/the Greens. One can argue again that the economic developments are the driving force for different voting behaviors. Depending on materialist and postmaterialist values, East and West Germany developed different preferences toward parties like the FDP and the Alliance90/the Greens. Alliance90/the Greens competes today mainly with the PDS about the more alternative voters which are also less existing in East Germany than in West Germany.

Finally, one can conclude that different economic developments and different socialization processes created different preferences for different parties. SPD, CDU, and

PDS are the three main parties, for which East German voters vote. In West Germany, voters tend to vote mainly for the CDU, SPD, FDP, and Alliance90/the Greens. In West Germany, the CDU also has consistently received the most votes. East Germans, on the other hand, vote for the SPD. The reason for this could be the higher rate of workers in East Germany than in West Germany. Workers tend to vote for the SPD. The FDP and Alliance90/the Greens have been continually West German parties, where they receive a higher voter turnout than in East Germany. The PDS on the other hand is a typical East German party, representing the socialist groups and people who did not completely denounce the GDR system and who are frustrated with the developments of the unification process.

#### **Federal election results in West Germany 1990-2005**

	1990	1994	1998	2002	2005
SPD	35.7%	37.5%	42.3%	38.3%	35.1%
CDU/CSU	44.3%	42.1%	37%	40.8%	37.4%
Alliance90/the Greens	4.8%	7.9%	7.3%	9.4%	8.8%
PDS	0.3%	1.0%	1.2%	1.1%	4.9%
FDP	10.6	7.7%	7.0%	7.6%	10.2%

#### **Federal election results in East Germany**

	1990	1994	1998	2002	2005
SPD	24.3%	31.5%	35.1%	39.7%	30.4%
CDU/CSU	41.8%	38.5%	27.3%	28.3%	25.3%
Alliance90/the Greens	6.2%	4.3%	4.1%	4.7%	5.2%
PDS	11.1%	19.8%	21.6%	16.9%	25.3%
FDP	12.9%	3.5%	3.3%	6.4%	8.0%



## German federal election results

	1990	1994	1998	2002	2005
SPD	33.5%	36.4	40.9	38.5	34.2
CDU/CSU	43.8%	41.4	35.1	38.5	35.2
Alliance90/the Greens	5.1%	7.3	6.7	8.6	8.1
PDS	2.4%	4.4	5.1	4.0	8.7
FDP	11.0%	6.9	6.2	7.4	9.8

Source: Federal Election results 1990-2005 (SPD, CDU/CSU, Alliance90/the Greens, PDS, FDP). [www.election.de](http://www.election.de)

### Party Identification:

Another difference between the East German and West German political culture is that East Germans have less party identification and are more skeptical about the unified political system. Party identification developed over many years in West Germany through the socialization process. Today it is still a very important factor in determining voting behavior and political behavior. In East Germany party identification with the new democratic parties did not start to develop until 1990. Most East German voters vote more depending on the issues or the candidates. There is no real party identification in East Germany. This means that people are not as bound to certain parties. They do not identify with them. The main reason for this is probably that people in East Germany have not experienced a multi-party system for as long as West Germans have. It will therefore take some time in order for East Germans to start identifying with the different parties as much as West Germans do. In West Germany between 25% and 30% of the people who voted did not have a party identification during the federal elections of 1990-1998. In the federal election of 1990 almost 50% of the East Germans who voted did not

have a party identification. This percentage rate declined over the next two federal elections, but in 1998 it was still higher in East Germany than in West Germany.

**Voters without a party identification in East and West Germany**

	1990	1994	1998
East Germany	48.6	30.2	34.6
West Germany	29.1	25.2	26.9

Source: Befragung 1991, DFG-Project Querschnitt 1994 und Querschnitt 1998 (oder Kai Arzheimer/ Juergen W. Falter, “Annäherung durch Wandel – Das Wahlverhalten bei der Bundestagswahl 1998 in Ost-West-Perspektive”,

Kai Arzheimer discusses in his essay “Annäherung durch Wandel” the two different electoral systems which exist in East and West Germany. He examines the fact that the results of the federal elections from 1990 until 1998 changed more dramatically in East Germany than in West Germany. This again shows that people in East Germany are not as bound to a certain party as people are in West Germany where the results did not change as dramatically.

**West German federal election results**

	1990	1994	1998	2002	2005
SPD	35.7%	37.5%	42.3%	38.3%	35.1%
CDU/CSU	44.3%	42.1%	37%	40.8%	37.4%
Alliance90/the Greens	4.8%	7.9%	7.3%	9.4%	8.8%
PDS	0.3%	1.0%	1.2%	1.1%	4.9%
FDP	10.6	7.7%	7.0%	7.6%	10.2%

### East German federal election results

	1990	1994	1998	2002	2005
SPD	24.3%	31.5%	35.1%	39.7%	30.4%
CDU/CSU	41.8%	38.5%	27.3%	28.3%	25.3%
Alliance90/the Greens	6.2%	4.3%	4.1%	4.7%	5.2%
PDS	11.1%	19.8%	21.6%	16.9%	25.3%
FDP	12.9%	3.5%	3.3%	6.4%	8.0%

Source: Federal Elections 1990-2005. [www.elections.de](http://www.elections.de)

Less political identification has led to a less stable voting behavior in East Germany. Changing parties is easier since the main focus remains on issues and candidates. The reasons for less party identification in East Germany are the different circumstances of the establishment of a multi-party-system, which just create a shorter history of being able to identify with a party, and the different socialization process, which created different values.

East Germans tend to vote for the party that promises better economic development and stability. Everything seems to point out that economic change is necessary in order to merge East and West German voting behavior. Economic change will push East Germany into the postmodern period. This would create similar economic socialization processes for the two regions. This again would create a similar voting behavior which is part of the political culture. Economic change is therefore necessary in order to come one step closer in creating one political culture in Germany.

17 years after the unification the voting behavior in East and West Germany has become more similar but there are still differences. The main difference today is the support for the smaller parties like the PDS, FDP, and the Alliance90/the Greens. The

PDS is more popular in East Germany where it achieved in the 2005 federal election 25.3% of the votes (in West Germany it only got 4.9% of the votes). FDP and Alliance90/the Greens therefore are more popular in West Germany. The FDP won 10.2% of the votes in West Germany and only 8% in East Germany, and the Alliance90/the Greens won 8.8% of the votes in West Germany and only 5.2 in East Germany. This shows that the party competition remains different in East Germany than in West Germany. In East Germany the CDU, SPD, and the PDS are the main parties. In West Germany the PDS is not popular at all and it is rather replaced by the FDP and the Alliance90/the Greens.

**Conclusion:**

In conclusion, there are two different political cultures in Germany today. When the East German communist system collapsed in 1989 everybody expected that East Germans would adapt easily to democracy and the West German way of life. People thought that East and West Germans would from now on have the same political, economic and social attitudes and values. Voting behavior would be the same and the economic developments should merge as well. But this did not happen. The reason is that East and West Germany have two completely different historical backgrounds, which created different outcomes for each region. People could not just forget the past political and economic socialization experiences that had branded their attitudes, values and beliefs. This resulted in East and West Germans differing political, economic, and social attitudes and values. Voting behavior in Germany is different in both regions and economic development did not merge. West Germany has had a stable and growing economy since WWII. Its political system has been a democratic one since the late 1940s

and its people were able to form a identification with certain parties. West Germany developed into a postmodern state with postmaterialist values, which are based on nonmaterial well-being. The East German economy, on the other hand, has had enormous difficulties developing during the post war period. It has tried to catch up ever since WWII with the West German economy, but still has not done so until this day. Further East Germany's political system did not become democratic until 1990 and people in East Germany do not have as high of a party identification as West Germans. East Germany is still a modern state with materialist values, which are based on financial security. In other words, different past economic and political developments created different economic and political socialization experiences. These resulted by 1990 in a) two different political cultures and b) East Germany becoming a modern state and West Germany becoming a postmodern state. These different economic standards, which create different present (since unification) economic socialization experiences, and the past political and economic socialization experiences are the reasons for a continuing of the two different political cultures in Germany. In the end one can see that economic differences from the past and present are the driving force for the two different political cultures in Germany.

In order to show this I examined German voting behavior, which is different in both regions. It proves that there are two different political cultures by reflecting mainly the present materialist and postmaterislist values of East and West Germany.

The question now is will the two political cultures ever merge? The two political cultures have coexisted in Germany for a long time. They were established before the unification, and have ever since tried to merge to one political culture. But the change of

political culture does not take place overnight. Inglehart explains that increased wealth and prosperity will increase postmaterialist values, but does not alone create the change (Inglehart, 5). A change of generations is also necessary to complete the transformation process. The World Values surveys showed in West Germany that for example, older generation even after increasing their financial security had more materialist values than postmaterialist values. This can be only explained through the socialization process that shaped their values and attitudes. As mentioned earlier younger generations, who had grown up after the war in West Germany and who had therefore experienced a different socialization process than people of pre-war Germany, created in post-war West Germany with their new attitudes a different political culture. One can finally argue that it takes many generation changes and a change from a modern to a postmodern society in East Germany, in order to have the same socialization processes in East and West Germany, which will then create the same political, social and economic attitudes and values, which again will result in one political culture.

Finally I want to come back to Almond and Verba and answer the question of what kind of political cultures exist in East and West Germany. Almond and Verba argue that there are four types of political culture: parochial, participant, subject, and civic. I believe that the political cultures of East and West Germany can be both defined as civic cultures. They both have a mixture of a high number of participants and subjects, and a small number of parochials. But even though they are both civic cultures they are still distinct from each other. They are different civic cultures that both have accepted democracy. There is no danger in either region of developing undemocratic political institutions. Therefore there is no need for worries. It is still necessary though to acknowledge the fact

that there are two different political cultures. This can help for future political reforms and predictions about voting behavior. In the overall, a better understanding about the two political cultures will help one day to merge them into one unified political culture.

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## **Acronyms and vocabulary**

CDU: Christian Democratic Union

CSU: Christian Social Union of Bavaria

FDP: Freie Demokratische Partei

KPD: Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands

LDPD: Liberal Democratic Party of Germany

PDS: Party of Democratic Socialism

SED: Socialist Unity Party

SPD: Social Democratic Party

WVS: World Value Survey