



# We Are Not In Bonn Anymore: The Impact of German Unification on Party Systems at the Federal and Land levels

Amir Abedi

To cite this article: Amir Abedi (2017) We Are Not In Bonn Anymore: The Impact of German Unification on Party Systems at the Federal and Land levels, *German Politics*, 26:4, 457-479, DOI: 10.1080/09644008.2017.1365135

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/09644008.2017.1365135>



Published online: 29 Nov 2017.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 78



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)

# We Are Not In Bonn Anymore: The Impact of German Unification on Party Systems at the Federal and Land levels

AMIR ABEDI

*This article assesses the German party system and its development over time. Offering a systematic examination of elections at the national and sub-national levels and using a variety of qualitative and quantitative indicators, this article shows that unification has had a significant impact on party system development. While partisan dealignment among the western electorate and a lack of significant party alignment among eastern voters has led to converging behavioural patterns, there are still notable differences between the party systems in the two regions. The two parties that have dominated government formation at the federal level, the CDU/CSU and the SPD, still do better in the West, while the PDS/Die Linke continues to secure higher vote shares in the East. The FDP and the Greens consistently score higher results in the older states while the parties linked to the populist, radical, and/or extreme right have recently proven more successful in the younger ones. These differences are rooted in the distinctive voter bases of the respective parties and special characteristics attributed to the East German electorate.*

## INTRODUCTION AND THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Existing research into the development of the German party system since 1990 has yielded two sets of conclusions. One line of reasoning holds that unification has had a limited impact on the party system. After all, the three traditional West German parties (CDU/CSU, SPD, and FDP) supported their eastern counterparts early on and involved themselves vigorously in their first free parliamentary elections in March 1990.<sup>1</sup> This undermined the development of distinctive East German parties with the exception of the dominant ruling party, the SED, with its extensive but diminishing resources. In the run-up to that election the SED rebranded itself as the PDS but still experienced a precipitous decline in its members (the party lost almost 40 per cent of its stalwarts from 1990 to 1991).<sup>2</sup> According to Hornsteiner and Saalfeld, Niedermayer, and Poguntke the addition of the eastern electorate just accelerated trends that had already been under way in the West.<sup>3</sup> Consequently, the Federal Republic of Germany's (FRG) two-party dominant system survived the unification process essentially unchanged. It was not until 2005 that a major qualitative change resulting in a more fluid five-party system took root.<sup>4</sup> That development is not viewed as a delayed effect of unification but rather as the result of a broader phenomenon affecting almost all advanced industrial democracies, namely, a weakening of the traditional

cleavages, like class, that had long structured and stabilised Western electorates, leading to growth in the share of non-aligned voters.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, reduced partisan alignment among voters has gone hand-in-hand with a growing distrust of governing elites and established political parties in most advanced industrial democracies, ushering in greater electoral volatility.<sup>6</sup>

Voting patterns in East Germany also reflected broader trends visible in Central/Eastern European democracies. Examining electoral behaviour in post-communist countries, Mair observes that voters 'tend to be more open and more available, and hence they also tend to be more volatile and uncertain'.<sup>7</sup> Since stable voter alignment patterns only emerge slowly over time, the early period of party development tends to be characterised by electoral instability.<sup>8</sup> Partisan ties in East Germany were weak at first; however, after more than two decades of unity, there are no signs of strengthening partisanship among eastern voters.<sup>9</sup> This is because the forces of dealignment prevalent among electorates in advanced industrial democracies, in general, and West German voters, in particular, have prevented stable partisan attachments from developing in the East. Thus, the eastern electorate is said to be in a state of pre-alignment.<sup>10</sup>

The argument that unification did not meaningfully alter the pre-existing FRG party system and that change did not occur until well into the 2000s implies that the differences between East and West were not very significant; the transformation that has occurred since 2005 was the result of forces affecting the entire electorate. Moreover, while voters on both sides started from two different positions (stable alignment versus pre-alignment), broader trends have pushed both towards convergence. Germany is thus experiencing the formation of a common national electorate in a process that plays out quite differently from the one observed marking the original formation of national electorates in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.<sup>11</sup> The current nationalisation process is characterised by a move towards an ever lower level of stably aligned voters. The assumption underlying this line of reasoning is that eastern and western voters are becoming more similar.<sup>12</sup> This would lead one to expect signs of increasing convergence between the party systems in both parts of the country.

Dalton and Jou challenge this view, as do Kopstein and Ziblatt.<sup>13</sup> All assert that unification did have a significant impact on party system development. Specifically, the features that distinguish the current party system from that existing in West Germany prior to unification, e.g. the drop in support for the traditionally dominant forces (CDU/CSU, SPD), as well as the rise in support for historically smaller parties, are seen as resulting from the unification process.<sup>14</sup> According to this argument, two distinct party systems emerged in these regions and they have remained distinctive ever since.<sup>15</sup> As Kopstein and Ziblatt phrase it, 'two party systems that are coherent in different ways can, in combination, produce decay when unified'.<sup>16</sup>

Differences in western and eastern voting behaviour have their roots in the discrete identities that developed in the two parts of the country during the 40 years of separate historical and political development. More than two decades after unification, these identity differences continue to persist. East German political identity was shaped by a complete reliance on the state during the 40 years of the GDR; consequently, Easterners still favour a more active role for the state.<sup>17</sup> Secondly, the experience of mass unemployment after unification was particularly traumatic for East Germans, whose

lives 'had been defined by the individual's role in the workplace'.<sup>18</sup> They also had to cope with the break-down of the associational framework the GDR provided and the resulting shock of social isolation.<sup>19</sup> Eastern women evinced much higher rates of participation in the labour force than their western counterparts; subsequent unemployment resulted in their loss of social status and personal connections with former colleagues.<sup>20</sup> Finally, while xenophobic attacks following unification were seen in the West as well as in the East, surveys have consistently indicated that prejudice against foreigners is higher among Easterners.<sup>21</sup> These differences in attitudes and experiences lead one to expect continuing divergence in voting behaviour between the two parts of the country.

We will assess the validity of the two alternative scenarios by examining the East and West German party systems before unification and then analysing the evolution of the all-German party system since 1990. We follow this with an exploration of differences in voting behaviour at the federal and Land levels on both sides of the former East–West border. The analysis aims to answer four overarching queries. First, what are the causes, effects and direction of change, that is, is party system change mainly driven by domestic or external forces, or a combination of the two? Second, if unification did affect the development of the German party system, was that effect mainly direct or indirect? Third, did changes occur immediately after unification or did they unfold gradually, that is, in stages? Finally, fourth, to what extent do cultural factors account for any party system changes?

Offering a systematic examination of elections at the national and sub-national levels and using a variety of qualitative and quantitative indicators, this article shows that unification has affected the party system in significant ways both directly and indirectly. While the changes are driven mainly by domestic causes they have been rooted in broader international trends. Some of those changes became apparent immediately after unification (e.g. the introduction of the PDS to the all-German party system) while others took a little longer to unfold (e.g. the distinctive electoral fortunes of various parties in East and West). Even though partisan dealignment among the western electorate and a lack of party alignment among eastern voters has led to converging behavioural patterns, there are still notable differences between the party systems in the two regions. The differences are rooted in the distinctive voter bases of the respective parties and specific cultural characteristics attributed to the East German electorate.

#### PARTY SYSTEM DEVELOPMENT IN EAST AND WEST GERMANY PRIOR TO 1990

The German Democratic Republic (GDR) had a multi-party system that had developed in 1945 when the Communist (KPD), the Social Democratic (SPD), the Christian Democratic (CDU), and the Liberal Democratic (LDPD) parties emerged at the local and Land levels. However, competitive elections were soon curtailed. The Soviets forced the SPD to merge with the KPD in 1946, creating the SED. After the Land elections of 1946 no more free elections were held until 1990. Instead, the existing parties, i.e. the CDU and LDPD as well as two new entities, the National Democratic (NDPD) and Democratic Farmers' (DBD) parties, contested all subsequent elections under SED leadership, based on a common list known as the National

Front.<sup>22</sup> Since multipartism in the GDR was not effective in providing competitive elections, East German voters did not develop strong or enduring partisan attachments before unification.<sup>23</sup>

In West Germany, too, parties re-emerged in 1945 to contest elections at the local and Land levels. During the 1949 Bundestag election, 10 parties won seats, leading to fears that the Western system would come to resemble the Weimar Republic with its extreme fragmentation and political instability. However, the 1953 election, which also saw the introduction of the national five per cent electoral threshold, already provided evidence that a process of consolidation and stabilisation reduced the number of viable parties to three by 1961. These parties dominated West German elections at the federal and sub-national levels until 1983, when a new party secured seats in the Bundestag for the first time since 1957. Emerging out of the extra-parliamentary movement of citizens' initiatives, the Greens had already garnered seats at the Land level before entering the Bundestag. This effectively ended the two-and-a-half party system that had existed since 1961 and ushered in a period of de-concentration. Support for the two major parties declined while various smaller protest parties (like the NPD) increased their vote shares and entered legislatures at the sub-national level. By the late 1980s, coalitions between the SPD and the Greens were no longer out of the question, at least at the Land level. Replacing the 'triangular' competition of earlier decades, the party system was now marked by two blocks, with the CDU/CSU and FDP on the one side, and SPD and Greens on the other.<sup>24</sup>

Examining West German developments from May 1949 through September 1990, one can distinguish three time periods: (1) a formative multi-party period, lasting until 1961, saw bipolar but imbalanced competition in which the left was clearly weaker; (2) a two-and-a-half-party period lasting from 1961 to 1983, consisted of stable, triangular competition in which the FDP functioned as a crucial kingmaker in coalition formation; and (3) a period extending from 1983 to 1990 shaped by bipolar multipartism, party de-concentration (especially on the left) and more complex coalition formation patterns.<sup>25</sup>

Deconcentration went hand-in-hand with ever more West German voters severing their ties to specific political parties. The stable party identifications throughout the 1950s and the 1960s had been the result of an increasingly structured electorate; the vast majority developed strong partisan attachments based on social cleavages along the lines of class and religion. As of the 1970s, these cleavages started to weaken as a result of socio-economic changes, for example, the gradual move from an industrial to a post-industrial economy and increasing secularisation. The number of voters indicating strong and enduring ties to specific parties began to decline, a process that is still ongoing in the West.<sup>26</sup>

We can illustrate the existence of three distinct, qualitatively different, party system time periods between 1949 and 1990 by considering the effective number of electoral parties (ENEP), a measure that provides a weighted count of parties in a system based on their relative vote shares.<sup>27</sup> We can also compute the combined vote share of the two major parties at the federal level (CDU/CSU and SPD) by time period. Both methods allow us to assess the degree of concentration. **Table 1** provides average ENEP scores and two-major-federal-party (TMFP) vote shares for the three time periods at the federal level.

TABLE 1  
 ENEP AVERAGE FRG SCORES AND AVERAGE TMFP VOTE SHARES (BY TIME PERIOD) 1949–1990

Party System Time Period	Average ENEP Scores in Bundestag Elections	Average TMFP Vote Share in Bundestag Elections
August 1949–August 1961	3.60	72.1
September 1961–February 1983	2.53	87.8
March 1983–September 1990	2.71	84.2

Note: ENEP and TMFP were calculated using data available at [www.kas.de/wf/de/71.3708/](http://www.kas.de/wf/de/71.3708/)

What emerges from the data in [Table 1](#) is, first, a high degree of concentration during the second time frame: as the number of electoral parties decreases between the first and second period, the combined support for CDU/CSU and SPD rises. Also evident is the slight trend towards de-concentration over the third period, signified by an increase in the average ENEP score and a decrease in the average TMFP vote share.

#### DEVELOPMENT OF THE GERMAN PARTY SYSTEM SINCE 1990

Examining the federal party system and the ways in which it has developed since 1990, one can identify two distinctive periods. Beyond adding the PDS, the first stage saw a continuation of the last period of western party system development, that is, a period extending from 1990 to 2005, involving balanced bipolar multi-partism. Greater bipolarity in the German system became particularly apparent in the late 1990s. After losing power to the SPD–Green coalition in 1998, the FDP moved further to the right on economic issues, advocating lower taxes, a reduced role for the state in the economy and cuts in social programmes. The Greens encouraged and profited from the FDP's transformation into an explicitly neo-liberal party, winning over many left-liberal voters who no longer felt at home among the Free Democrats.<sup>28</sup> A second period commenced with the federal election of 2005, which has seen further de-concentration and a significant drop in support for the two catch-all parties, the CDU/CSU and the SPD.<sup>29</sup>

To assess changes in the post-unification party systems, we once again turn to the TMFP, that is, the combined vote shares of the two major parties at the federal level, and the effective number of electoral parties (ENEP), both of which provide us with a proxy measure for the degree of party system concentration. [Table 2](#) provides the results for the three most recent time periods. The data reveal, first, the trend towards deconcentration during the first post-unification period, indicated by a 0.48 point increase in the average ENEP score and a seven percentage point drop in the average TMFP score. Second, the most recent period shows a significant increase in the number of parties, while the support for the federal catch-all parties dropped by more than 12 percentage points; the two major parties taken together are now even weaker than they were during the formative era, 1949–1961, when their combined

TABLE 2  
 ENEP AVERAGE SCORES AND AVERAGE TMFP VOTE SHARES (BY TIME PERIOD) 1983–2013

Party System Time Period	Average ENEP Scores in Federal Elections	Average TMFP Vote Share in Federal Elections
March 1983–September 1990	2.71	84.2
October 1990–August 2005	3.19	77.0
September 2005–September 2013	4.06	64.5

Note: ENEP and TMFP were calculated using data available at [www.kas.de/wf/de/71.3708/](http://www.kas.de/wf/de/71.3708/)

score was 72.1. Consequently, the share of votes going to smaller parties has seen a major boost over time.<sup>30</sup>

The data show that the all-German party system is more deconcentrated than its Western predecessor was. Moreover, the traditionally dominant players, the CDU/CSU and the SPD, have lost significant support since unification. Since many fundamental features of the West German system remain in place, one could convincingly argue that changes already set in motion in the 1970s and 1980s have merely been accelerated as a result of the unification process.<sup>31</sup>

Because the preceding analysis of the all-German party system does not allow us to assess qualitative changes that have occurred since unification, we turn next to examine the party systems in East and West. This should enable us to answer the question as to whether the eastern voting patterns and party system are distinct from those in West Germany, and whether such differences are diminishing or persisting.

#### ARE THERE STILL TWO GERMAN PARTY SYSTEMS – WEST AND EAST?

Assuming that the East and West party systems each possessed distinctive qualities and characteristics at the time of unification, there are two possible paths forward in terms of party system development. First, as the two Germanys become more integrated over time and a sense of shared identity develops, the voting behaviour in the two regions will become similar, and the party systems will become less distinctive. Alternatively, if the integration process does not lead to increasing integration but rather to the maintenance or strengthening of separate identities, we should expect differences between the party systems to persist or even increase. In order to test these hypotheses, we first consider the average ENEP scores and the combined average vote shares of the two major federal parties.

Table 3 provides data for the western and eastern Länder, including West and East Berlin, respectively. The data confirm the earlier finding for the country as a whole, that as the number of effective electoral parties has gone up, the support for the two *Volksparteien* has decreased between the first and second post-unity periods. This is true for both West and East Germany. Second, it is evident that the combined vote share of the two major parties remains consistently and significantly lower in eastern Germany. While the gap between their ENEP scores decreased slightly

TABLE 3  
ENEP AVERAGE SCORES AND AVERAGE TMFP VOTE SHARES (BY TIME PERIOD) IN  
WESTERN AND EASTERN GERMANY 1990–2013

Party System Time Period	Average ENEP Scores in Federal Elections	Average TMFP Vote Share in Federal Elections
<b>Western Germany (including West Berlin)</b>		
October 1990–August 2005	3.01	79.5
September 2005–September 2013	3.87	66.9
<b>Eastern Germany (including East Berlin)</b>		
October 1990–August 2005	3.69	66.6
September 2005–September 2013	4.30	53.3

Note: ENEP and TMFP were calculated using data available at [www.kas.de/wf/de/71.3708/](http://www.kas.de/wf/de/71.3708/)

between the two periods (West less East score  $-0.68$  during the first stage to West less East score  $-0.43$  in the second period), the gap in the average vote share has actually increased slightly from 1990–2005 (West less East score: 12.9 percentage points) to 2005–13 (13.6 percentage points). This suggests that differences in West–East voting behaviours have persisted; there are no signs of gradual convergence.

Another way to assess diverging voting behaviours is to compare aggregate data, that is, the share of the vote won by each party, using the index of dissimilarity. The index measures the proportion of the voting public that would have to change its vote in order to convert one type of election result into another. It ranges from a value of 0 (which would indicate that all votes were cast in the same way in the two jurisdictions) to a value of 100 (indicating that all votes in the election were cast differently in the two jurisdictions). This index is generally used to explore variations in voting at different levels, for example, between federal and state elections.<sup>32</sup> However, it can also be used to examine elections at the same level but in different regions of a country. The main distinction is that instead of examining the same electorate in first (federal) and second-order (sub-national) elections, we explore two sets of voters participating in the same federal election. The index is calculated as follows:

$$\text{Index of Dissimilarity} = 1/2 \sum (P_{ik} - P_{jk})$$

where  $P_{ik}$  is the percentage of the (second, i.e. party) vote won by party  $k$  in a given Bundestag election in the West, and  $P_{jk}$  is the percentage of the (second, i.e. party) vote won by party  $k$  in the same Bundestag election in the East. Table 4 provides the dissimilarity index values for all Bundestag elections since 1990.

To put these numbers into context, we review the dissimilarity index figures for the German Länder since 1990. According to Hough and Jeffery's data, the average dissimilarity score, measuring the discrepancy between Bundestag elections in all 16 Länder and the closest respective Land elections, was 11.7 for the period 1990 to 2002.<sup>33</sup> Average scores ranged from a low of 6.0 in Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania

TABLE 4  
DISSIMILARITY BETWEEN BUNDESTAG ELECTION RESULTS IN  
THE FORMER EAST AND WEST GERMANY

Year	Dissimilarity Index Value
1990	14.5
1994	18.9
1998	23.8
2002	18.4
2005	22.7
2009	20.6
2013	19.8

Note: Dissimilarity Index Values were calculated using data available at [www.kas.de/wf/de/71.3708/](http://www.kas.de/wf/de/71.3708/)

(where Land and Bundestag elections were often held on the same day) to a high of 18.6 in Hamburg. The scores we see in Table 4 are comparatively high, indicating significant differences in the electoral behaviours of East and West German voters.

The data for the individual Bundestag elections do not indicate a clear trend. What is interesting is the fact that electoral differences between East and West were actually lower in the first all-German Bundestag election than in subsequent ones. A significant increase in dissimilarity after 1990 and through 1994 was followed by consistently high levels of dissimilarity. The highest scores were recorded in the 1998 and 2005 elections. Although there has been a steady if small decrease in the scores since 2005, it is probably too early to speculate about a trend. We cannot yet claim that voters in the two parts of Germany are growing closer in terms of their electoral behaviour. Quite the opposite: significant differences persist. While lower than in 2005, the index scores for 2009 and 2013 still exceed the scores for the 1990 and 1994 Bundestag elections. Moreover, the average dissimilarity scores for the two time periods, 1990–2005 (18.9) and 2005–2013 (21.0), display a marked increase. Overall, the dissimilarity index scores support the hypothesis that there is no convergence between the East and West German party systems; rather, the evidence points to continuing divergence between East and West.

What are the main drivers of the ongoing differences between East and West voters? We have already seen that East Germans are less inclined to vote for parties that have traditionally dominated the political process in the West. While the CDU/CSU and the SPD have also lost support in the old Länder over time, their combined vote share is still significantly higher in the West than in the East.

This implies significant differences in the respective levels of support for other parties or types of parties. We now turn to examine the average support levels by time period for a select number of other parties. These include the PDS/*Die Linke*, the only party represented in the Bundestag that has its origins in the former GDR. Second, we review the combined vote share of two traditional third and fourth players in the West German system, the FDP and Greens. Finally, we assess the combined vote share of parties of the populist, radical and/or extreme right, which have occasionally managed to win seats in various Land legislatures.<sup>34</sup>

Table 5 displays the average vote shares among the parties participating in Bundestag elections in western and eastern Germany (each including its part of Berlin) by time

TABLE 5  
AVERAGE VOTE SHARE (BY TIME PERIOD) OF SELECTED PARTIES IN BUNDESTAG  
ELECTIONS IN WESTERN AND EASTERN GERMANY 1990–2013

Party System Time Period	PDS/ <i>Die Linke</i>	FDP/ Greens	Populist, Radical, and/or Extreme Right Parties
<b>Western Germany (including West Berlin)</b>			
October 1990–August 2005	0.9	15.6	2.3
September 2005–September 2013	6.3	20.1	3.0
<b>Eastern Germany (including East Berlin)</b>			
October 1990–August 2005	17.4	11.4	2.7
September 2005–September 2013	25.5	12.8	5.7

Note: Vote shares were calculated using data available at [www.kas.de/wf/de/71.3708/](http://www.kas.de/wf/de/71.3708/) and various editions of Hilmar Vogel, *Wahlen im Vereinten Deutschland*, Max-Planck-Institut für Gesellschaftsforschung, 1990–2015.

period. The data reveal a wide gap between the vote shares of PDS/*Die Linke* based on region. While the party improved its average vote share in western Germany during the second time period, it still performs much better in the East. The voting gap between West and East actually increased between the first and second time periods (from West less East – 16.5 in the first period to – 19.2 in the second period). This East–West gap exceeds any difference found in the election results of the other parties under study. Nevertheless, it is striking that other parties also see significant differences in the levels of support accrued in East and West. The average combined vote share of the FDP and the Greens is consistently higher in western Germany and has increased between the first and second periods (from West less East 4.2 in the first period to 7.3 in the second period). The same pattern is found among the parties of the populist, radical, and/or extreme right. Across both time periods, their combined vote share was higher in the East than in the West. However, while the gap was almost negligible during the first period (West less East – 0.4), it increased markedly during the second time frame (West less East – 2.7).

The data reinforce our initial finding that the East–West voting gap does not show any signs of closing and may even be increasing. It also suggests that while differences in Bundestag outcomes in West and East are driven largely by the diverging electoral fortunes of the PDS/*Die Linke*, East Germans also evince consistently lower levels of support for FDP and Greens, and an ever higher propensity to vote for parties of the populist, radical, and/or extreme right.

Finally, let us explore the Länder to see if aggregate findings at West and East German levels are replicated by the individual states. It might be the case that the aggregate figures for East and West hide state-level fluctuations, leading to the impression that the eastern Länder behave as a block. In reality we may be dealing with smaller regional trends instead, which would indicate a closer integration of the eastern Länder into the party landscape of the Federal Republic. On the other hand, if the data show that the discrepancies between East and West repeat themselves across all of the Länder, this might attest to a lack of integration and the persistence of distinctive political behaviour in the East.

Tables 6 and 7 examine the major party vote share averages in the western and eastern Länder, respectively. The data reflect the consistent drop in support for the two major federal parties (TMFP) between the two time periods in all sixteen Länder. They also indicate that eastern Länder offer lower levels of support for the TMFP than all of the western Länder. That is true for both time periods, the only exception being West Berlin during the second period. The small city state of Bremen is the only other western entity with a TMFP score in the second time period approaching scores in the eastern Länder. When looking at the average scores across the eastern and western states, we nevertheless see that while the gap between the two regions has narrowed somewhat (from a West less East difference of 16.0 percentage points in the first period to 14.9 percentage points in the second period), the East as a whole is still distinctive.

This is further demonstrated by the Länder in which the CDU/CSU and SPD are not the two major parties (based on vote share). Focusing on the entire period 1990 to 2016, in the West, only the 2011 and 2016 Land elections in Baden-Württemberg (CDU, Greens) and the 2011 Bremen (SPD, Greens) election resulted in outcomes in which only one of the CDU/CSU or the SPD was among the two largest parties. Among the five eastern Länder we find 14 state elections in which that was the case: Brandenburg 2004 (SPD, PDS) and 2009 (SPD, *Die Linke*); Mecklenburg-West Pomerania 2016 (SPD, AfD); Saxony 1999 (CDU, PDS), 2004 (CDU, PDS), and 2009 (CDU, *Die Linke*); Saxony-Anhalt 2002 (CDU, PDS), 2006 (CDU, PDS), 2011 (CDU, *Die Linke*), and 2016 (CDU, AfD); Thuringia 1999 (CDU, PDS), 2004 (CDU, PDS), 2009 (CDU, *Die Linke*), and 2014 (CDU, *Die Linke*). Clearly, one of the main reasons for the distinctiveness of eastern elections at the federal and Land levels is the greater strength of the PDS/*Die Linke*. This suggests that as long as the

TABLE 6  
AVERAGE TWO-MAJOR-FEDERAL-PARTY (TMFP) VOTE SHARE  
(BY TIME PERIOD) IN LAND ELECTIONS IN WESTERN GERMANY  
(INCLUDING WEST BERLIN) 1990–2016

Land	Party System Time Period	
	1990–2005	2006–2016
Baden-Württemberg	71.2	57.1
Bavaria	81.4	65.2
Bremen	71.9	58.8
Hamburg	71.2	69.5
Hesse	79.7	67.8
Lower Saxony	83.1	70.7
North Rhine-Westphalia	83.0	67.3
Rhineland-Palatinate	80.7	72.4
Saarland	86.0	62.4
Schleswig-Holstein	78.4	65.7
West Berlin	72.1	53.5
<i>Western Länder Average</i>	78.1	64.6

Note: Vote shares were calculated using data available at [www.kas.de/wf/de/71.3708/](http://www.kas.de/wf/de/71.3708/); various editions of Hilmar Vogel, *Wahlen im Vereinten Deutschland*, Max-Planck-Institut für Gesellschaftsforschung, 1990–2015; and results published by the respective Landeswahlleiter.

TABLE 7  
AVERAGE TWO-MAJOR-FEDERAL-PARTY (TMFP) VOTE SHARE (BY TIME PERIOD) IN LAND  
ELECTIONS IN EASTERN GERMANY (INCLUDING EAST BERLIN) 1990–2016

Land	Party System Time Period	
	1990–2005	2006–2016
East Berlin	45.3	38.9
Brandenburg	64.4	53.9
Mecklenburg-West Pomerania	67.2	55.7
Saxony	66.5	51.2
Saxony-Anhalt	62.2	50.7
Thuringia	66.9	47.8
<i>Eastern Länder Average</i>	62.1	49.7

Note: Vote shares were calculated using data available at [www.kas.de/wf/de/71.3708/](http://www.kas.de/wf/de/71.3708/); various editions of Hilmar Vogel, *Wahlen im Vereinten Deutschland*, Max-Plank-Institut für Gesellschaftsforschung, 1990–2015; and election results published by the respective Landeswahlleiter.

*Die Linke* remains stronger in all of the eastern Länder, the distinctiveness of the eastern party systems will persist.

Let us further examine the average vote shares among the PDS/*Die Linke*, the combined average vote shares of FDP/Greens and those of parties of the populist, radical, and/or extreme right. Tables 8 and 9 provide data for both time periods in the western

TABLE 8  
AVERAGE VOTE SHARE (BY TIME PERIOD) OF SELECTED PARTIES IN LAND ELECTIONS IN  
WESTERN GERMANY (INCLUDING WEST BERLIN) 1990–2016

Land	Party System Time Periods					
	PDS/ <i>Die Linke</i>		FDP/Greens		Populist, Radical, and/ or Extreme Right Parties	
	1990– 2005	2006– 2016	1990– 2005	2006– 2016	1990– 2005	2006– 2016
Baden-Württemberg	0.0	2.9	17.6	30.2	8.5	7.0
Bavaria	0.0	3.3	9.6	14.7	3.7	0.9
Bremen	1.8	7.8	16.5	23.0	5.2	6.1
Hamburg	0.2	7.1	15.3	17.3	7.9	2.7
Hesse	0.0	5.2	16.3	21.0	2.2	3.0
Lower Saxony	0.1	5.1	12.7	19.9	2.5	1.3
North Rhine-Westphalia	0.4	3.7	13.9	17.0	1.3	2.0
Rhineland-Palatinate	0.0	2.8	14.1	14.6	3.0	6.0
Saarland	0.8	18.7	8.1	10.7	2.6	1.4
Schleswig-Holstein	0.5	3.0	12.7	20.5	4.3	1.2
West Berlin	3.6	6.2	18.3	24.1	2.8	6.3
<i>Western Länder Average</i>	<i>0.7</i>	<i>6.0</i>	<i>14.1</i>	<i>19.4</i>	<i>4.0</i>	<i>3.4</i>

Note: Vote shares were calculated using data available at [www.kas.de/wf/de/71.3708/](http://www.kas.de/wf/de/71.3708/); various editions of Hilmar Vogel, *Wahlen im Vereinten Deutschland*, Max-Plank-Institut für Gesellschaftsforschung, 1990–2015; and election results published by the respective Landeswahlleiter.

TABLE 9  
 AVERAGE VOTE SHARE (BY TIME PERIOD) OF SELECTED PARTIES IN LAND ELECTIONS IN  
 EASTERN GERMANY (INCLUDING EAST BERLIN) 1990–2016

Land	Party System Time Period					
	PDS/Die Linke		FDP/Greens		Populist, Radical, and/ or Extreme Right Parties	
	1990– 2005	2006– 2016	1990– 2005	2006– 2016	1990– 2005	2006– 2016
East Berlin	36.8	24.7	11.7	15.6	3.0	9.6
Brandenburg	20.9	22.9	7.2	10.3	2.6	9.3
Mecklenburg-West Pomerania	19.8	16.3	8.5	10.7	2.7	12.4
Saxony	18.1	19.8	7.9	13.0	4.1	10.3
Saxony-Anhalt	18.0	21.4	12.8	10.4	5.4	11.6
Thuringia	18.5	27.8	8.8	11.0	2.5	9.6
<i>Eastern Länder Average</i>	<i>22.0</i>	<i>22.2</i>	<i>9.5</i>	<i>11.8</i>	<i>3.4</i>	<i>10.5</i>

Note: Vote shares were calculated using data available at [www.kas.de/wf/de/71.3708/](http://www.kas.de/wf/de/71.3708/); various editions of Hilmar Vogel, *Wahlen im Vereinten Deutschland*, Max-Planck-Institut für Gesellschaftsforschung, 1990–2015; and election results published by the respective Landeswahlleiter.

and eastern Länder, respectively. Once again the distinctive role of the PDS/*Die Linke* is obvious. As in Bundestag elections, the party does consistently better in the East than in the West. The only exception is Saarland in the second time period. This should not come as a surprise, given that Oskar Lafontaine, the former SPD chairman and Saarland minister president, was a leading member of the Electoral Alternative for Labour and Social Justice (WASG). Instrumental in ensuring the merger of the western WASG and the PDS, he became federal co-chair of *Die Linke*. His popularity in Saarland secured the party above average election results.<sup>35</sup> In no other western Land does the PDS/*Die Linke* come close to achieving results comparable to those regularly seen in the East. Nevertheless, while the gap between PDS/*Die Linke* results in East and West remains larger than that witnessed among the other parties examined across both periods, the data show a narrowing of the divide (from a West less East difference of –21.3 percentage points in the first party system time period to a difference of –16.2 percentage points in the most recent time period).

The same cannot be said of the other parties, however. In terms of the combined support for the FDP and Greens, on the one hand, and for populist, radical, and/or extreme right parties, on the other, the East–West gap has grown. The difference between the combined average FDP/Greens vote share went from 4.6 percentage points (West less East) during the first period to 7.6 percentage points (West less East), while the difference in the combined average vote share of populist, radical, and/or extreme right parties increased from 0.6 percentage points (West less East) in the first time period to –7.1 percentage points (West less East) over the second period.

The FDP and Greens together do better, on average, in the West than in the East; that is true for the individual Länder as well. During the first period, only the support seen in East Berlin and Saxony-Anhalt approaches the support levels witnessed in the

West; Bavaria and Saarland are the only western entities with combined FDP/Green vote shares comparable to levels seen in the eastern Länder. There is even less variation between East and West from 2006 to 2016. Almost all Länder now conform to the general East versus West pattern. Only East Berlin displays a combined average support for the two parties that approaches the numbers seen in the West. Saarland is the only western state evincing a combined average vote share as low as that found in the East.

The combined average vote share of populist, radical, and/or extreme right parties, is slightly stronger in the West (by 0.6 percentage points) during the first period. Thus, we can draw no clear distinction between the two parts of Germany from 1990 to 2005. Voting behaviour was fairly similar across all the Länder. Only Baden-Württemberg and Hamburg stand out, due to their stronger support for these types of parties. This changes dramatically after 2005. We can identify a clear distinction between voting patterns in East and West. On average, populist, radical, and/or extreme right parties now do invariably better in the eastern Länder. That is very much reflected in the recent electoral success of the Alternative for Germany (AfD), which has done better in Land elections in the East than in the West. Opinion polling data from September 2016 confirm this trend: while the party was preferred by 21 per cent of respondents in the younger Länder its support in the older Länder was significantly lower at 12 per cent.<sup>36</sup> An October 2016 Allensbach study asked voters whether they perceived the rise of the AfD as more of a threat or an opportunity for Germany.<sup>37</sup> While 49 per cent of respondents in the West saw it as a threat and 23 per cent as an opportunity, in the East 36 per cent perceived it as a threat and 38 per cent viewed it as an opportunity. Overall, Land level data once again provide evidence of fairly distinctive voting behaviour in eastern Germany.

#### EXPLAINING THE CONTINUING DIVERGENCE BETWEEN EAST AND WEST

Let us return to one of the alternative arguments outlined at the beginning, namely the assertion that voters in East and West have become more similar over time. There is some evidence to support this. Like other advanced industrial democracies, West Germany saw a steady weakening of strong partisan attachments, a development that gathered steam in the 1970s. Research has shown that this process accelerated in West Germany following unification.<sup>38</sup> Related to this has been the diminishing importance of the traditionally dominant cleavages of class and religion/religiosity due to socio-economic modernisation processes.<sup>39</sup> While West Germany experienced dealignment relative to previously stable partisan attachments, East German voters were said to be in a state of pre-alignment, never having established strong partisan connections in the first place. The expectation in 1990 was that East Germans would develop stronger partisan attachments over time.<sup>40</sup> However, this has not happened; instead, levels of partisan alignment remain low among East Germans.<sup>41</sup> The broader trends evident across advanced industrial democracies are having an impact on the eastern electorate as well, in that they appear to impede the development of strong partisan attachments there.<sup>42</sup> While it is true that the partisan alignment rates of voters in the two parts of Germany are converging, this coming together is

mainly driven by the diminishing rate of partisanship in the West, and not by a growing number of stably aligned partisans in the East.<sup>43</sup>

Given these findings, one would expect to see increasing convergence between the two party systems, but this is not the case. Why is that? Forty years of distinct life experiences and contradictory socialisation processes created separate identities in the GDR and FRG. Moreover, unification did not lead to a gradual reduction in the differences between Easterners and Westerners. By the mid-1990s a majority of Easterners felt that the two parts were growing further apart.<sup>44</sup> The aftermath of unification and the experiences many East Germans shared in being effectively absorbed into the FRG have contributed to the persistence of a distinctive eastern identity.<sup>45</sup> Although the five younger Länder and East Berlin are quite diverse with regard to their respective cultures and economies their inhabitants still share a common political identity that distinguishes them as a block from their western counterparts. It is thus no surprise that voters in the eastern Länder behave differently than their western counterparts.

What specific factors can we identify that have reinforced distinctive attitudes, values, and beliefs in the East? One is related to economic developments since unification. While economic growth in the East initially outpaced that in the West, since the late 1990s this trend has reversed. After closing significantly, the gap between the economies of the two regions has started to increase again.<sup>46</sup> The onset of mass unemployment after unification and the elimination of the GDR welfare system and its replacement with the western Bismarckian model had a profound effect on people in the former GDR who were used to a paternalistic socialist system in which the state took on the role of provider of far-reaching welfare programmes for all its citizens. Employment was not only guaranteed but also considered a constitutional right and a duty. Moreover, being a worker was crucial to a person's standing in the political community.<sup>47</sup> It is hence significant that unemployment rates in the younger Länder are still higher than in the older Länder (2016: 8 per cent in the East; 5 per cent in the West).<sup>48</sup> Decades after unification surveys attest that Easterners still favour more state intervention and expect government to guarantee extensive social rights.<sup>49</sup> Women in the East consistently express greater support for socialist values than not only Westerners but also Eastern men, explained by the fact that women were hit harder by mass unemployment. In stark contrast to the FRG, the GDR had guaranteed women the right to work and promoted higher levels of female employment, through universal child care, legal abortion and other social benefits. In addition to economic dislocation due to post-1990 unemployment, they also suffered from the sudden imposition of conservative western gender roles and benefit regimes.<sup>50</sup>

In general '[citizens of] the GDR suffered a sudden and traumatic disjuncture with their past lives, one with which many are still struggling to come to terms'.<sup>51</sup> This resulted in a high degree of political disappointment with predominantly western politicians and parties that were incapable of adequately addressing the expectations, problems, and concerns of Easterners. Consequently, vexation with politics (*Politikverdrossenheit*) and parties (*Parteienverdrossenheit*) is stronger among East Germans than Westerners. Survey data indicate lower levels of satisfaction with the way democracy works and less trust in the ability of FRG institutions to deal with significant challenges. Since 1991 satisfaction with the way democracy functions in Germany has consistently been lower in the East (2012: 50 per cent) than in the

West (2012: 73 per cent), a gap that has not significantly narrowed over time.<sup>52</sup> Furthermore, Easterners believe that there is no effective way for them to affect government policy; they thus demonstrate more political apathy.<sup>53</sup>

Electoral volatility, voter turnout, and party membership data illustrate that last point. Both populations have displayed higher degrees of electoral volatility, lower voter turnout figures and lower party membership rates for the traditional parties since unification.<sup>54</sup> However, while we can see evidence of changes in both parts of the country, the eastern Länder still evince markedly lower turnout rates than the western Länder (see Table 10).<sup>55</sup> Moreover, the difference in West and East turnout rates has increased in the most recent time period. German survey data suggest that a large percentage of those who abstain from voting do so based on their aversion to politicians and politics.<sup>56</sup>

While there are some signs of convergence, we are still dealing with two distinctive electorates, affecting not just the Eastern parties but also the German party system as a whole. The evidence presented here supports the second hypothesis outlined at the beginning, contending that unification has significantly affected the national party system and that there has been little convergence between the party systems in East and West. This is reflected in the analysis of election results in East and West. A direct and immediate effect of unification was the introduction of the PDS to the all-German party system and it turns out that the PDS/*Die Linke* has been by far the strongest contributor to the continuing divergence between the two parts of the country. The marginalisation of East German interests in the newly unified country allowed the PDS to establish itself as a protest voice and an advocate of eastern regional interests in the new system.<sup>57</sup> While this strategy ensured the party's survival, it precluded the PDS from establishing itself as a significant force in the older Länder, hence the large gap shaping its electoral success in East and West.

When the PDS merged with the western-based WASG to form the Left party, *Die Linke*, in 2007, it appeared as though the new party would have a chance to become a truly all-German party. When *Die Linke* performed well in a number of western Land elections, entering several Landtage it seemed as though the party was on its way to losing its limited identity as an eastern protest party. However, while support for *Die Linke* in Bundestag elections in the West grew from about 1 per cent prior to 2005 to almost 5 per cent in the 2005 election, it scored five times as much, 25 per

TABLE 10  
AVERAGE TURNOUT (BY TIME PERIOD) FOR FEDERAL AND LAND ELECTIONS IN WESTERN AND EASTERN GERMANY (INCLUDING WEST AND EAST BERLIN, RESPECTIVELY) 1990–2016

<i>Time Period</i>	<i>West</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>Difference (West–East)</i>
<b>Federal Elections</b>			
1990–2005	80.2	74.8	5.4
2005–2013	72.3	66.2	6.1
<b>Länder Elections</b>			
1990–2005	68.6	64.6	4.0
2006–2016	61.7	55.3	6.4

Note: Turnout figures were calculated using data available at [www.kas.de/wf/de/71.3708/](http://www.kas.de/wf/de/71.3708/)

cent of the votes, that year in eastern Germany. This pattern was repeated in 2009 (8.3 per cent in the West and 28.5 per cent in the East) and 2013 (5.6 per cent in the West and 22.7 per cent in the East).

The reason for a continuing, if narrowing, gap rests with different electoral support bases for *Die Linke* in East and West. In the West *Die Linke* attracts voters from a lower socio-economic background or ideological voters on the far left of the political spectrum, as well as voters who use it to protest neo-liberal economic policies; it attracts a broader cross-section of society, including civil servants, salaried employees and blue-collar workers in the East. There are also those who support *Die Linke* as a party that represents the interests of Easterners and those alienated from the political process in a Federal Republic, dominated by western interests. Overall, *Die Linke* appears as a traditional working class party in the West but as more of a catch-all party in the East.<sup>58</sup>

*Die Linke* is still strongly anchored as a key player in East Germany but remains a minor party in the West (consistently behind the Greens). An example of the effect of higher levels of political vexation with the parties of the political establishment in the eastern region and another indicator of the ongoing difference between voting behaviour in East and West is the following observation: when we examine Bundestag election results we see that SPD and CDU no longer function as the major federal parties in East Germany. In the 1990s and early 2000s, the PDS performed consistently better in the eastern states but remained weaker than CDU and SPD in Bundestag elections. As a result CDU/CSU and SPD functioned as the major federal parties in both parts of Germany. That began to change in 2005 when, for the first time, the PDS matched the vote share of the CDU (both secured 25.3 per cent). In the 2009 and 2013 Bundestag elections, *Die Linke* became the second-largest party in the East, relegating the SPD to third place by significant margins (28.5 to 17.9 per cent in 2009 and 22.7 to 17.9 per cent in 2013). Despite recent vote losses the CDU/CSU and the SPD are still, by far, the two largest parties in Bundestag elections in the West; in the East that is no longer the case.

An indirect and rather gradual effect of unification that has added to the divergence between the party systems was the rise in support for new populist, radical, and/or extreme right parties in the East, especially since 2005. In the 2013 Bundestag election, the AfD acquired 4.3 per cent of the votes in the West while it attracted the support of 6.5 per cent among East Germans. *Die Linke* lost a significant number of voters (340,000) to the AfD. As Patton points out, both *Die Linke* and the AfD depend on their populist appeal and their role as challengers to the Western political establishment.<sup>59</sup> The fact that a higher number of East Germans belong to ‘an underclass [...] shaped by downward social mobility and marginalization’ (2006: 25 per cent of Easterners and 4 per cent of Westerners) and ‘considered themselves the losers of economic reform’ has provided *Die Linke* and various populist, radical, and/or extreme right parties with a larger potential voter base than in the West.<sup>60</sup> Also, while xenophobic sentiments are an all-German phenomenon, survey data indicate higher degrees of ethnic prejudice in East Germany. Research by Wagner et al. shows that this is mainly due to ‘differences in contact experiences with foreigners’.<sup>61</sup>

Specific characteristics of the East German electorate also explain why FDP and Greens do better in the West. The voters to whom these parties appeal are underrepresented in the East, posing a particular challenge to the FDP and Greens. The FDP

appeals to higher educated, middle and upper middle class voters, especially the self-employed and white collar employees.<sup>62</sup> Moreover, the party's classical liberalism, and especially its neo-liberal policies, fit uneasily into an electorate that is distinctively more pro-state.<sup>63</sup> The Greens' electoral base is composed of better educated, somewhat younger, middle class voters who reside mainly in urban areas.<sup>64</sup> Like the FDP, the Greens' postmaterialist political agenda also does not sit well with Eastern voters, many of whom are concerned about meeting material needs.<sup>65</sup>

This study raises broader questions regarding the future of German political development. First, will generational change eventually lead to more similar attitudes and behaviours between East and West? There is some evidence that younger age cohorts are experiencing a convergence in social values. For example, younger Easterners are less statist in their views than their older counterparts.<sup>66</sup> This trend notwithstanding, other factors ensure that a coming together of attitudes and political behaviours will not happen any time soon. As Westle points out '[i]n East Germany feelings of economic disappointment, deprivation and inequalities still motivate sceptical views on the western kind of democracy and dissatisfaction in broad parts of the population'.<sup>67</sup> Easterners display less social trust, less trust in government, and lower levels of civic engagement than Westerners. According to Grix '[a] weak civil society and an underdeveloped system of interest articulation is coupled with low party membership figures, as East Germans either retreat from politics' or turn to parties that either represent eastern interests or otherwise challenge the political establishment of the FRG.<sup>68</sup> This can be seen in the higher vote shares of *Die Linke* and the rise of the AfD, especially in the East. The AfD has been particularly successful in taking advantage of the refugee crisis and the federal government's ostensible inability to deal with its consequences. An October 2015 poll indicated that while 53 per cent of West Germans believed that the refugee influx can be successfully handled, only 36 per cent of Easterners agreed.<sup>69</sup>

The 2016 Saxony-Anhalt election showcases the potential challenges the political system faces if these trends continue. In the Landtag, *Die Linke* and the AfD taken together control close to half of all the seats, thus forcing the three 'democratic' parties (CDU, SPD, and Greens) into a unique 'Kenya' coalition. Unless *Die Linke* and the AfD are fully integrated into the FRG political system and considered as possible coalition partners (which has partially happened with *Die Linke*), or the established parties are successful in gaining back the trust of voters, by more effectively representing their interests, they will be dealing with many more instances where coalition formation will become difficult, if not impossible. The growing political polarisation that is illustrated by these recent developments, the increasing disparity between rich and poor, and the expanding size of the *Prekariat* all have the potential to cause additional stress to the political system and to further stall the growing together of East and West.

It is important to note that these challenges are not unique to Germany. Thus, while the most significant factors for change in the German party system since unification are internal and domestic there is a larger external context that also played a significant role in shaping the transformation of the party system. Over the last few decades voters in advanced industrial democracies have been exhibiting a growing distrust of governing elites and of the established political parties.<sup>70</sup> Possible sources of disaffection include the seeming inability of national political leaders to tackle problems of

growing income inequality and assorted other economic ills, global climate change, domestic and international terrorism, trans-border population movements and others that are often seen to be the result of increasing economic, social and political interdependence resulting from globalisation and regional integration efforts. Cross-national research indicates that electoral instability has been on the rise across Western Europe, a process that has been particularly pronounced since the end of the Cold War.<sup>71</sup> Assessing the 1990–2015 time period, Chiaramonte and Emanuele identify seven countries that experienced consecutive elections that were all characterised by high volatility, a significant drop in support for the traditionally dominant parties, and the emergence of new parties.<sup>72</sup>

It is also noteworthy that the distinctions we found between West and East Germany mirror the differences between the party systems in Western and Central/Eastern Europe, the latter being less stable and more volatile.<sup>73</sup> According to Bértoa, ‘East European party politics continues to be characterised by instability and unpredictability at all levels’.<sup>74</sup> However, in the future he expects to see a growing convergence between East and West (with the latter becoming more similar to the former). He argues that,

[i]n a globalized world where, on the one hand, the media (...) have replaced mass organizations as intermediaries between the electorate and a country’s government and, on the other, partisan linkages are based on temporary individualistic preferences rather than in well-entrenched socio-political cleavages,

universal volatility may become the new normal.<sup>75</sup> As this article has shown while these trends are also evident in Germany, the electoral distinctions between East and West are likely to persist for the foreseeable future.

## CONCLUSION

The data presented in this article indicate that unification has significantly affected the party system in both direct and indirect ways. The main direct and immediately apparent effect of unification was the addition of the PDS to the party system. *Die Linke*, as it is now known, successfully established itself as a relevant party both in the East and in the West of the country.

Other changes flowed indirectly from unification and emerged in a more gradual fashion; for example, the continuing rise in the number of effective parties. Prior to 1990, there were four parties at the federal level: the CDU/CSU, the SPD, the FDP, and the Greens. In the 2013 Bundestag election there were six parties with a realistic chance of winning five per cent or more of the votes.<sup>76</sup> In addition to these four parties and *Die Linke*, the AfD has a realistic chance of overcoming the legal threshold in Bundestag elections. Overall, it is evident that the combined vote shares of the two major parties have declined while support for protest parties has increased.

While changes to the German party system are driven mainly by domestic factors they have been rooted in a broader international context characterised by globalisation and its political, economic, and social consequences. Growing fragmentation and mounting volatility evident in recent elections is the result of longer-term international trends, common to most advanced industrial democracies. These developments that

can be traced back to the 1970s and 1980s were accelerated by unification. In general, the international context contributed to those changes that were indirect and took a little longer to unfold, like the distinctive electoral fortunes of various parties in East and West. We have seen that the differences between voting patterns and party systems in West and East do not show signs of disappearing any time soon. While the dealignment of the western electorate and the lack of significant partisan alignment among East German voters has led to converging behavioural patterns, there are still notable differences between the party systems in East and West. The two parties dominating government formation at the federal level, CDU/CSU and SPD still do better in the West, while *Die Linke* continues to accrue higher vote shares in the East. The FDP and Greens together perform better in the West while populist, radical, and/or extreme right parties have recently become more successful in the East. These differences are explained by cultural factors, or more specifically, the distinctive voter bases of the respective parties and the special characteristics of the eastern electorate. As long as East German society in general and the electorate in particular continues to face big gaps in its economic opportunities and remains distinctive it is likely that the divergence between party systems in the two parts of the country will persist, affecting future developments in the all-German party system.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

An earlier version of this paper was presented at the 2015 German Studies Association workshop *German Unification as a Catalyst for Change*. The author would like to thank the convenors and participants at that workshop, especially Joyce Mushaben and Frank Wendler, as well as two anonymous reviewers for their helpful suggestions and feedback. The usual disclaimers apply.

#### DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Amir Abedi is a professor and chair of the Department of Political Science at Western Washington University. His research interests include political parties and party systems in advanced industrial democracies and western European politics. He is the author of *Anti-Political Establishment Parties: A comparative analysis* (Routledge, 2004) and has published his research in, among others, the *European Journal of Political Research*, *German Politics*, and *Parliamentary Affairs*.

#### NOTES

1. David P. Conradt and Eric Langenbacher, *The German Polity*, 11th ed. (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2017), p.138.
2. Dan Hough, 'Small but Perfectly Formed? The Rise and Rise of Germany's Smaller Parties', *German Politics* 20/1 (2011), p.195; and Oskar Niedermayer, 'Parteimitglieder in Deutschland: Version 2013',

- available from [http://edocs.fu-berlin.de/docs/servlets/MCRFileNodeServlet/FUODOCS\\_derivate\\_000000002602/ahosz20.pdf?hosts=local](http://edocs.fu-berlin.de/docs/servlets/MCRFileNodeServlet/FUODOCS_derivate_000000002602/ahosz20.pdf?hosts=local) (accessed 15 Apr. 2016), p.2.
3. Margret Hornsteiner and Thomas Saalfeld, 'Parties and the Party System', in S. Padgett, W. E. Paterson, and R. Zohlnhöfer (eds), *Developments in German Politics 4* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), pp.79–80; Oskar Niedermayer, 'Die Entwicklung des bundesdeutschen Parteiensystems', in F. Decker and V. Neu (eds), *Handbuch der deutschen Parteien*, 2nd ed. (Bonn: Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, 2013), pp.124–25; and Thomas Poguntke, 'Towards a new party system: The vanishing hold of the catch-all parties in Germany', *Party Politics* 20/6 (2014), pp.959–60.
  4. Niedermayer, 'Die Entwicklung des bundesdeutschen Parteiensystems', pp.124–25.
  5. Margret Hornsteiner and Thomas Saalfeld, 'Parties and the Party System', in Padgett, Paterson, and Zohlnhöfer (eds), *Developments in German Politics 4*, p.101; and Poguntke, 'Towards a new party system', pp.959–61.
  6. See for example, Russell J. Dalton, 'Apartisans and the changing German electorate', *Electoral Studies* 31 (2012), pp.35–45; Russell J. Dalton and Martin P. Wattenberg (eds), *Parties without Partisans: Political Change in Advanced Industrial Democracies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); and Joseph S. Nye, Philip D. Zelikow, and David C. King (eds), *Why People Don't Trust Government* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997).
  7. Peter Mair, *Party System Change: Approaches and Interpretations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), p.181.
  8. Mair, *Party System Change*, p.182.
  9. Dalton, 'Apartisans and the changing German electorate', p.36; and Russell J. Dalton, 'Partisan Dealignment and Voting Choice', in S. Padgett, W. E. Paterson, and R. Zohlnhöfer (eds), *Developments in German Politics 4* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), pp.63–4.
  10. Dalton, 'Partisan Dealignment and Voting Choice', in S. Padgett, W. E. Paterson, and R. Zohlnhöfer (eds), *Developments in German Politics 4*, p. 64; and Ruth Dassonneville, Marc Hooghe, and Bram Vanhoutte, 'Age, Period and Cohort Effects in the Decline of Party Identification in Germany: An Analysis of a Two Decade Panel Study in Germany (1992–2009)', *German Politics* 21/2 (2012), p.212.
  11. Daniele Caramani, *The Nationalization of Politics: The Formation of National Electorates and Party Systems in Western Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).
  12. See for example, Dan Hough and Michael Koß, 'Territory and Electoral Politics in Germany', *Sussex European Institute Working Paper* 95 (2007), pp.25–6; and Robert Rohrschneider, 'Is there a Regional Cleavage in Germany's Party System? Unequal Representation and Ideological Congruence in Germany 1980–2013', *German Politics* 24/3 (2015), p.355.
  13. Russell J. Dalton and Willy Jou, 'Is there a single German Party System?', *German Politics and Society* 95/28 (2010), pp.34–52; and Jeffrey Kopstein and Daniel Ziblatt, 'Honecker's Revenge: The Enduring Legacy of German Unification in the 2005 Election', *German Politics and Society* 78/24 (2006), pp.134–47.
  14. Kopstein and Ziblatt, 'Honecker's Revenge', p.135.
  15. Dalton and Jou, 'Is there a single German Party System?' pp.34 and 49.
  16. Kopstein and Ziblatt, 'Honecker's Revenge', p.135.
  17. David P. Conradt, 'The Civic Culture and Unified Germany: An Overview', *German Politics* 24/3 (2015), pp.254.
  18. Patricia Hogwood, 'After the GDR: Reconstructing identity in post-communist Germany', *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics* 16/4 (2000), p.50.
  19. *Ibid.*, p.54.
  20. Joyce Marie Mushaben, 'Rethinking Citizenship and Identity: "What it Means to be German" since the Fall of the Wall', *German Politics* 19/1 (2010), p.78.
  21. Ulrich Wagner, Rolf van Dick, Thomas Pettigrew, and Oliver Christ, 'Ethnic Prejudice in East and West Germany: The Explanatory Power of Intergroup Contact', *Group Processes and Intergroup Relations* 6/1 (2003), p.23.
  22. Peter Lösche, 'Parteiensystem der Bundesrepublik Deutschland', *Informationen zur politischen Bildung* 292 (2013), p.25.
  23. Dalton, 'Partisan Dealignment and Voting Choice', in S. Padgett, W. E. Paterson, and R. Zohlnhöfer (eds), *Developments in German Politics 4*, p.63; and Dassonneville, Hooghe, and Vanhoutte, 'Age, Period and Cohort Effects in the Decline of Party Identification in Germany', p.213.
  24. Conradt and Langenbacher, *The German Polity*, 11th ed., pp.160–63; Green, Hough, and Miskimmon, *The Politics of the New Germany*, 2nd ed., p.100; Poguntke, 'Towards a new party system', p.951; and Gordon Smith, 'The "New Model" Party System', in S. Padgett, W. E. Paterson, and G. Smith (eds), *Developments in German Politics 3* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), p.84.
  25. Hornsteiner and Saalfeld, 'Parties and the Party System', in S. Padgett, W. E. Paterson, and R. Zohlnhöfer (eds), *Developments in German Politics 4*, pp.79–80; and Niedermayer, 'Die

- Entwicklung des bundesdeutschen Parteiensystems', in F. Decker and V. Neu (eds), *Handbuch der deutschen Parteien*, 2nd ed., pp.115–20.
26. Dalton, 'Partisan Dealignment and Voting Choice', in S. Padgett, W. E. Paterson, and R. Zohlnhöfer (eds), *Developments in German Politics 4*, pp.61–3.
  27. See: Markku Laakso and Rein Taagepera, "'Effective" Number of Parties: A Measure with Application to West Europe', *Comparative Political Studies* 12/1 (1979), pp.3–27.
  28. Simon Green, Dan Hough, and Alister Miskimmon, *The Politics of the New Germany*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2012), p.100.
  29. Hornsteiner and Saalfeld, 'Parties and the Party System', in S. Padgett, W. E. Paterson, and R. Zohlnhöfer (eds), *Developments in German Politics 4*, pp.80–8; and Niedermayer, 'Die Entwicklung des bundesdeutschen Parteiensystems', pp.120–6.
  30. See also Hough, 'Small but Perfectly Formed?', pp.187–8; and Poguntke, 'Towards a new party system', pp.955–6.
  31. Poguntke argues that in terms of party system change 'the impact of German unification was fairly modest', see Poguntke, 'Towards a new party system', pp.959–60.
  32. See for example: Amir Abedi and Alan Siaroff, 'The Mirror Has Broken: Increasing Divergence between National and Land Elections in Austria,' *German Politics* 8/1, pp.207–27; Dan Hough and Charlie Jeffery, 'Germany: an erosion of federal-Länder linkages?', in D. Hough and C. Jeffery (eds), *Devolution and electoral politics* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006), pp.119–39; and Richard Johnston, 'Federal and Provincial Voting: Contemporary Patterns and Historical Evolution,' in D. J. Elkins and R. Simeon (eds), *Small Worlds: Provinces and Parties in Canadian Political Life* (Agincourt, ON: Methuen, 1980), pp.131–78.
  33. Hough and Jeffery, 'Germany', in D. Hough and C. Jeffery (eds), *Devolution and electoral politics*, p.136.
  34. Parties included in the calculation of the combined vote share of the populist, radical and/or extreme right are the AfD, BfB, BIW, DVU, FP Deutschlands, HLA, NPD, Offensive D, PRO, pro Deutschland, Pro DM, pro NRW, REP, Schill.
  35. Gabriele B. Clemens, 'Saarland – vom deutschen Sonderweg zur bundesrepublikanischen Normalität', in A. Kost, W. Rellecke, and R. Weber (eds), *Parteien in den Deutschen Ländern: Geschichte und Gegenwart* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 2010), pp.322–39.
  36. See: <http://www.wahlrecht.de/umfragen/dimap/ost.htm> and <http://www.wahlrecht.de/umfragen/dimap/west.htm> (accessed 12 Mar. 2017).
  37. See: [www.ifd-allensbach.de/uploads/tx\\_reportsdocs/FAZ\\_Oktober\\_2016.pdf](http://www.ifd-allensbach.de/uploads/tx_reportsdocs/FAZ_Oktober_2016.pdf), page 30 (accessed 12 Mar. 2017).
  38. Dalton, 'Partisan Dealignment and Voting Choice', in S. Padgett, W. E. Paterson, and R. Zohlnhöfer (eds), *Developments in German Politics 4*, p.62; and Thomas Saalfeld, 'Political Parties', in S. Green and W. E. Paterson (eds), *Governance in Germany: The Semisovereign State Revisited* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp.73–4.
  39. Dalton, 'Partisan Dealignment and Voting Choice', in S. Padgett, W. E. Paterson, and R. Zohlnhöfer (eds), *Developments in German Politics 4*, pp.59–64; Green, Hough and Miskimmon, *The Politics of the New Germany*, 2nd ed., pp.106–7; and Saalfeld, 'Political Parties', in S. Green and W. E. Paterson (eds), *Governance in Germany*, pp.74–5.
  40. Dalton, 'Partisan Dealignment and Voting Choice', in S. Padgett, W. E. Paterson, and R. Zohlnhöfer (eds), *Developments in German Politics 4*, p.64.
  41. Russell J. Dalton, 'Interpreting Partisan Dealignment in Germany', *German Politics* 23/1-2 (2014), p.136.
  42. Dalton, 'Partisan Dealignment and Voting Choice', in S. Padgett, W. E. Paterson, and R. Zohlnhöfer (eds), *Developments in German Politics 4*, p.64.
  43. Dassonneville, Hooghe, and Vanhouthe, 'Age, Period and Cohort Effects in the Decline of Party Identification in Germany', p.222.
  44. Mushaben, 'Rethinking Citizenship and Identity', p.76.
  45. Conradt and Langenbacher, *The German Polity*, 11th ed., pp.98–101; and Green, Hough and Miskimmon, *The Politics of the New Germany*, 2nd ed., pp.63–68.
  46. Conradt and Langenbacher, *The German Polity*, 11th ed., p.61.
  47. Hogwood, 'After the GDR', p.47, 50; and Stefan Svallfors, 'Policy feedback, generational replacement, and attitudes to state intervention: Eastern and Western Germany, 1990–2006', *European Political Science Review* 2/1 (2010), p.122.
  48. Conradt and Langenbacher, *The German Polity*, 11th ed., p.61.
  49. Ross Campbell, 'Political Culture and the Legacy of Socialism in Unified Germany', *German Politics* 24/3 (2015), pp.271–91; Dieter Fuchs, 'The Democratic Culture of Unified Germany', in Pippa Norris (ed.), *Critical Citizens. Global Support for Democratic Governance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press,

- 1999), p.143; and Jonathan Grix, 'East German political attitudes: Socialist legacies v. situational factors a false antithesis', *German Politics* 9/2 (2000), pp.119–20.
50. Stefan Bauernschuster and Helmut Rainer, 'Political regimes and the family: how sex-role attitudes continue to differ in reunified Germany', *Journal of Population Economics* 25/1 (2012), pp.5–27; Campbell, 'Political Culture and the Legacy of Socialism in Unified Germany', p.282; and Mushaben, 'Rethinking Citizenship and Identity', p.78.
  51. Hogwood, 'After the GDR', p.47.
  52. See: <http://www.bpb.de/nachschlagen/datenreport-2013/demokratie-und-politische-partizipation/174077/zufriedenheit-mit-der-demokratie> (accessed 28 Feb. 2016).
  53. Conradt, 'The Civic Culture and Unified Germany', p.254; Fuchs, 'The Democratic Culture of Unified Germany', p.13; Green, Hough and Miskimmon, *The Politics of the New Germany*, 2nd ed., pp.65–6, 112–3; Grix, 'East German political attitudes', p.114; and Gerd Pickel, 'Jugend und Politikverdrossenheit im Deutschland nach der Vereinigung?', in G. Heinrich (ed.), *Jugend und Politik – Verdrossenheit?* (Rostock: Universität Rostock, Institut für Politik- und Verwaltungswissenschaften, 2004), p.20.
  54. Poguntke, 'Towards a new party system', pp. 957–9; and Saalfeld, 'Political Parties', in S. Green and W. E. Paterson (eds), *Governance in Germany*, p.74.
  55. Poguntke, 'Towards a new party system', pp.956–9; and Saalfeld, 'Political Parties', in S. Green and W. E. Paterson (eds), *Governance in Germany*, pp.74–5.
  56. Poguntke, 'Towards a new party system', p.957.
  57. Dan Hough, Michael Koß, and Jonathan Olsen, *The Left Party in Contemporary German Politics* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), pp.153–4; and David F. Patton, *Out of the East: From PDS to Left Party in Unified Germany* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2011), pp. 29–88.
  58. Peter Doerschler, 'Die Linke: Still an Eastern Cultural Icon?', *German Politics* 24/3 (2015), p.396; Viola Neu, 'Die Linke', in F. Decker and V. Neu (eds), *Handbuch der deutschen Parteien*, 2nd ed. (Bonn: Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, 2013), pp.324–5; and Patton, *Out of the East*, pp.138–41.
  59. Nicole Berbuir, Marcel Lewandowski, and Jasmin Siri, 'The AfD and its Sympathisers: Finally a Right-Wing Populist Movement in Germany?', *German Politics* 24/2 (2015), pp.154–78; Frank Decker, 'Follow-up to the Grand Coalition: The German Party System before and after the 2013 Federal Election', *German Politics and Society* 32/2 (2014), p.25; Robert Grimm, 'The rise of the German Eurosceptic party Alternative für Deutschland, between ordoliberal critique and popular anxiety', *International Political Science Review* 36/3 (2015), pp.264–78; Matthias Jung, Yvonne Schroth, and Andrea Wolf, 'Angela Merkels Sieg in der Mitte', *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte* 48–49 (2013), p.13; and David F. Patton, 'Small Parties and the 2013 Bundestag Election: End of the Upward Trend?' *German Politics and Society* 32/3 (2014), p.36.
  60. Patton, *Out of the East*, p.147.
  61. Mushaben, 'Rethinking Citizenship and Identity', p.79; and Wagner, van Dick, Pettigrew, and Christ, 'Ethnic Prejudice in East and West Germany', p.30.
  62. Dalton, 'Partisan Dealignment and Voting Choice', in S. Padgett, W. E. Paterson, and R. Zohlnhöfer (eds), *Developments in German Politics 4*, p.69 and 76.
  63. Dalton and Jou, 'Is there a single German Party System?' p.36.
  64. Dalton, 'Partisan Dealignment and Voting Choice', in S. Padgett, W. E. Paterson, and R. Zohlnhöfer (eds), *Developments in German Politics 4*, p.68; David F. Patton, 'The Prospects of the FDP in Comparative Perspective: Rest in Peace or Totgesagte leben länger?' *German Politics* 24/2 (2015), p.186; and Wolfgang Rüdiger, 'The perennial success of the German Greens', *Environmental Politics* 21/1 (2012), p.122.
  65. Dalton and Jou, 'Is there a single German Party System?' p.36.
  66. Conradt, 'The Civic Culture and Unified Germany', pp.265–6; and Svallfors, 'Policy feedback, generational replacement, and attitudes to state intervention', pp.128–9.
  67. Bettina Westle, 'German Views of the Political System', *German Politics* 24/3 (2015), p.348.
  68. Grix, 'East German political attitude', p.115; Christian Lahusen and Lisa Bleckmann, 'Beyond the Ballot Box: Changing Patterns of Political Protest Participation in Germany (1974–2008)', *German Politics* 24/3 (2015), p.426.
  69. See: <http://www.infratest-dimap.de/umfragen-analysen/bundesweit/umfragen/aktuell/deutliche-mehrheit-mit-fluechtlingspolitik-der-bundesregierung-unzufrieden/>; and <http://www.mdr.de/mdr-info/asylumfrage100.html> (both accessed 29 Apr. 2016).
  70. See, for example, Susan J. Pharr and Robert D. Putnam (eds), *Disaffected Democracies: What's Troubling the Trilateral Countries?* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000).
  71. Alessandro Chiamonte and Vincenzo Emanuele, 'Party system volatility, regeneration and de-institutionalization in Western Europe (1945–2015)', *Party Politics* Advance online publication, doi:10.1177/1354068815601330.

72. Ibid. (the countries are: Austria, Finland, France, Greece, Iceland, Italy, and the Netherlands).
73. Jan-Erik Lane and Svante Ersson, 'Party System Instability in Europe: Persistent Differences in Volatility between West and East?' *Democratization* 14/1 (2007), pp.92–110.
74. Fernando Casal Bértoa, 'Post-Communist Politics: On the Divergence (and/or Convergence) of East and West', *Government and Opposition* 48/3 (2013), pp.425–6.
75. Ibid., p.427.
76. Thorsten Faas, 'The German Federal Election of 2013: Merkel's Triumph, the Disappearance of the Liberal Party, and Yet Another Grand Coalition', *West European Politics* 38/1 (2014), pp.238–47.