University of Groningen

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Published in:
German Politics and Society

DOI:
[10.3167/gps.2019.370304](https://doi.org/10.3167/gps.2019.370304)

IMPORTANT NOTE: You are advised to consult the publisher's version (publisher's PDF) if you wish to cite from it. Please check the document version below.

Document Version
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Publication date:
2019

[Link to publication in University of Groningen/UMCG research database](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

Rensmann, L. (2019). Divided We Stand: An Analysis of the Enduring Political East-West Divide in Germany 30 Years after the Wall's Fall. *German Politics and Society*, 37(3), 32-54. [3].
<https://doi.org/10.3167/gps.2019.370304>

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DIVIDED WE STAND

An Analysis of the Enduring Political East-West Divide in Germany Thirty Years After the Wall's Fall

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ABSTRACT: Germany continues to face an inter-regional political divide between the East and the West three decades after unification. Most strikingly, this divide is expressed in different party systems. The right-wing populist Alternative for Germany and the left-wing populist Left Party are considerably more successful in the eastern regions, while German centrist parties perform worse (and shrink faster at the ballot-box) than in the West. The article discusses empirical evidence of this resilient yet puzzling political divide and explores three main clusters of explanatory factors: The after-effects of the German Democratic Republic's authoritarian past and its politico-cultural legacies, translating into distinct value cleavage configurations alongside significantly weaker institutional trust and more wide-spread skepticism towards democracy in the East; continuous, even if partly reduced inter-regional socioeconomic divisions and varying economic, social and political opportunities; and populist parties and movements acting as political entrepreneurs who construct and politically reinforce the East-West divide. It is argued that only the combination of these factors helps understand the depth and origins of the lasting divide.

KEYWORDS: cleavages, East-West divide, German party system, historical legacies, political culture

Introduction

Ten years ago, I first examined lasting political divisions between the East and the West since Germany's unification—then twenty years after the fall of the Wall. There was no Alternative for Germany (AfD) around at that time, no PEGIDA (Patriotic Europeans against the Islamization of the Occident), and neither the level of politicized rage that we witness in recent years. The latter seemingly finds particular expression in the postcommunist eastern Länder, and is often tied to issues of “eastern identity” and immigration. While enduring economic and cultural disparities between the East and the

West were hardly surprising, data suggested that “the gaps may be most striking in the arena of politics: in the sphere of political culture, values, competition, and self-understanding.”¹ There are some indicators, from inner-German migration to attitudinal data among younger generational cohorts, that some of the gaps have become smaller over this last decade, and may eventually be further reduced in the future. Yet, rather than dissipating, the multi-layered divide appears to have become even more solidified in some areas ten years on. Moreover, as public debates, electoral campaigns, and results at the ballot box show, the divide most certainly has been further repoliticized and politically radicalized around eastern identity claims in recent years. In 2019, vast majorities of Germans also think that significant inter-regional divisions persist. 69 percent of West Germans and 74 percent of Germans living in the East agree to the statement that “even thirty years after the fall of the wall, the differences between the East and the West German are still very big.”²

Today, many older east German citizens still feel disillusioned by German unification, and Germany’s liberal democracy. A significant number of them have a lingering sense of having been “occupied” by the West after the fall of the Wall, and over the last thirty years, rather than having been the masters of their own political destiny. While many younger east Germans have left their home towns and moved to the West (and then often state that East-West differences do not really matter much any longer in their daily lives), those who have decided to stay frequently think that there are two Germanys. They often feel as “second-class citizens” whose life experiences remained unrecognized and who are, just as eastern Germany at large, economically, politically, and culturally discriminated by “the West” and the “*Besserwissis*” (western know-it-alls) who seem to call the shots. In the West, in turn, the sentiment is still widespread across generational cohorts—though decreasingly among younger voters—that easterners are somewhat backward-oriented, underdeveloped people with a separate sense of identity who lament their fate instead of being grateful for the contributions made by the West as well as the political and economic opportunities that Germany’s liberal democracy has offered them.

At any rate, while in 2019 Germany commemorated the thirtieth anniversary of the Berlin Wall’s fall, which paved the way to the country’s political unification, there are multiple indicators that the country is still a divided nation on various political, cultural, and socioeconomic levels. Recent regional elections in the eastern states brought this once again to the forefront of political attention. These elections have also generated a renewed, broad public debate about the inner-German divide and its ori-

gins thirty years after the collapse of the authoritarian Communist dictatorship in the East.

In the most striking way, it is argued here, long-lingering politico-cultural and socioeconomic differences within Germany along the old former border translate into and become manifest in profoundly different party systems. They express a deep-seated political divide that is, in turn, reinforced by a variety of political agents. In particular, the right-wing populist Alternative for Germany (Alternative für Deutschland, AfD), founded in 2013, and the left-wing populist party The Left (*Die Linke*), which had originated in the German Democratic Republic's (GDR) ruling party, are considerably more successful in the eastern regions.³ German centrist parties are significantly less electorally successful (and are shrinking faster at the ballot box) than in the West, reproducing different patterns of party competition as well as displaying distinct cleavage configurations among voters. However, considering that the political system is now unified and stable for three decades, and the convergence process of economic conditions is also proceeding, this political divide remains puzzling.

In order to examine the nature of this enduring, profound political divide between the East and the West, this article analyzes in a first section the two still qualitatively distinct party systems. It subsequently offers three main sets of causes and explanatory models for the divide: First, it explores the lasting after-effects of the GDR's authoritarian politico-cultural legacy and their meaning for political cleavage configurations. Second, it examines the role of continuous socioeconomic divisions, related East-West migration among younger cohorts, and (perceived and actual) power concentrations among Western elites. And third, the article examines the actors—parties and movements—which act as political entrepreneurs reinforcing and exacerbating the East-West divide. Rather than seeing these three sets of causes as mutually exclusive, it will be argued here that only the combination of these factors will help us understand the complexity, depth and origins of the long-lasting, resilient political divide—and its meaning for liberal democracy in Germany as a whole.

One Country, Two Party Systems? Measuring the Political East-West Divide

In political terms, the historical East-West divide today still finds expression in two distinct party systems in former East and West Germany, even though with some qualifications compared to a decade ago.⁴ Prima facie,

this seems like a bold claim in 2019. In contrast to a decade ago, today for the most part the same national parties, and the same number of these parties, act as relevant competitors in regional and national elections in the eastern and western *Länder*, or federal states. In all of Germany, the once extraordinarily stable party system, based on a comparatively small number of parties oriented towards centrist positions, has in the meantime become a more fragmented multi-party system, i.e., the number of relevant parties has increased nationwide. Germany's formerly centripetal party system has generally been subjected to a centrifugal trend, that is: increasing ideological polarization of party competition indicated by a widened range of measured aggregated ideological differences among the increased number of relevant parties in the party spectrum. In addition to the continuously shrinking, once all-overshadowing center-right sister parties Christian Democratic Union (CDU) and Christian Social Union (CSU) and the Social Democratic Party (SPD), the market-liberal Free Democratic Party (FDP), the Alliance 90/the Greens, the Left Party, and, most recently, the radical right-wing populist AfD are now the seven parties represented in the German national legislature Bundestag, as well as in most regional parliaments. These parties may perform differently in various regions but they now largely make up the electoral marketplace. The SPD is generally struggling nation-wide after spending ten of the last fifteen years as a junior partner in a CDU/CSU-led national government led by Angela Merkel. The AfD, founded in 2013, is a newcomer that has turned into the strongest opposition party in the Bundestag and is now also represented in every regional/state legislature.⁵ So why should we still speak of two different party systems in the western and eastern *Länder*, and how is such a claim supported and measured?

The radical right-wing populist AfD has now entered all state legislatures in the West, while extreme right-wing or neo-Nazi parties have by now largely become electorally insignificant in the East as well, where they formerly had fluctuating successes.⁶ Yet, the party system remains nevertheless significantly more polarized in the East than in the West.

Both the fragmentation of eastern party spaces and, to some extent, also the traditionally higher polarization in the East have spread to the West. Even though most parties originated in the West, in terms of fragmentation and ideological polarization we may thus speak of an "easternization" of the party system(s), rather than a "westernization" process. Centrist parties, however, are under considerably more pressure in the East, and have even lost significantly more votes there. The center-right CDU/CSU (27.6 percent in the East, 34.1 percent in the West in the 2017 national election), the radical right-wing populist AfD (21.9 percent in the East, but only 10.7 percent,

that is, more than 10 percent less in the West) and the left-wing populist Left Party (17.8 percent in the East, but only 7.4 percent, that is, more than 10 percent less in the West) are now the three main parties in the Eastern Lnder. Meanwhile, the center-left SPD has turned into a small party in three of five eastern states.⁷ In the 2017 Bundestag election, the center-left Social Democrats only received altogether 13.9 percent in the East (including East Berlin; as opposed to 21.9 percent in the West). In the 2005 national election, the SPD was still the strongest party in the East with 30.5 percent.⁸ The other relevant established “centrist” parties, the FDP (7.5 percent in the East, 11.4 percent in the West) and the Greens (only 5.0 percent in the East but 9.8 percent in the West), remain rather marginal players in the eastern states. Despite the recent shrinking of the center left and the center right across (Western) Europe and also in the western German states, the proportional share of established democratic parties remains consistently and substantially stronger in the West than in the East. In contrast to a decade ago, it is no longer only the Left Party that profoundly shapes and alters party competition—the systemic relations among all parties—but also the AfD, which now overshadows all debates on policies and politics in the East.

The distinctly higher ideological polarization in the East can be measured through the views articulated in party platforms by then putting these views in relation to the relatively higher success of more radical agents in the East. Add to this an overall rightward drift in the East, which is by far outpacing the West. It has become manifest in vote shares, voter preferences, and discourses on issues of cultural identity and immigration by eastern representatives of all parties. The latter can be measured by a content analysis of the actual ideological and policy views articulated by party representatives in the East. This indicates that exclusionary, if not anti-immigrant rhetoric, is more accepted among party officials and representatives from most centrist and established parties (the Greens being a distinct exception).⁹

The most extreme instantiation of a rightist drift is found in Saxony. The 2019 state elections confirmed that the radical right AfD and the center right CDU (which can be classified as more rightist in Saxony than in the rest of Germany), have turned into the two major players in Saxony and leave all other competitors at the margins. The AfD gained 17.8 percent there compared to the 2014 election and is now—after having received 27.5 of the vote—the second-biggest force in the state legislature with thirty-eight seats, trailing only the diminished CDU (32.1 percent of the vote and forty-five seats). Almost all districts in Saxony were won either by the CDU or the AfD.

As importantly, the “eastern party system,” reflective of other postcommunist contexts in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), is still significantly more unstable and less consolidated; net voter volatility is still considerably higher here than in the West, while party identification is much weaker.¹⁰ The fluctuation of parties’ electoral fortunes is still by far exceeding the fluctuation in the West. Even though some of the formerly disillusioned nonvoters in the East have recently opted for the AfD, eastern turnout at the ballot box also remains consistently lower than in the West.

All in all, there is still little to indicate a robust convergence or adaptation of voting behavior in the East and the West. East-West differences in voting have *grown* since unification, notwithstanding the recent changes in both regions and the national rise of the AfD. Overall, the political East-West divide has not narrowed but stabilized, even though the same relevant parties compete under the same electoral and political system. While there is no longer a higher level of fragmentation in the East (here the West has adjusted to the East) there is a wider ideological spread and polarization structuring the party system, a distinctly strong rightist drift and overall positioning of parties in the East, and a considerably higher voter volatility as well as higher levels of nonvoters, producing an overall less stable party system in the eastern parts of Germany. But how can this persistent political divide, epitomized in two different party systems, different voting behavior, and even different relationships toward liberal democracy be explained?

The Role of Historical Legacies: On the *Longue Durée* of Democratic Cultures, Democracy Skepticism, and Other Politico-Cultural Cleavages

A first set of key factors relevant to explain the puzzling lasting political divisions between the East and the West within Germany can be found in the realm of political cultures and their historical legacies. Eastern and western political cultures in unified Germany are shaped by very different political trajectories in the course of the twentieth century, which partly translate into a *longue durée* of different configurations of social value conflicts and other political cleavages.

Western Germans have been growing up in an institutionalized liberal democracy for seven decades. This democracy, emerging from a militarily defeated Nazi regime and a society complicit in the regime’s mass atrocities, was initially highly precarious. For many years, its politico-cultural value foundations were far from robust—just think of the quite common publicly

articulated sentiment in the 1960s and 1970s that leftist students, members of the counterculture, or Jews should be “send to the ovens” or “gassed.”¹¹ Over these first decades, however, the relationship to democracy among citizens remained largely instrumental—that is, dependent on the delivery of certain economic goods, and was, thus, fragile—rather than the expression of strong, culturally disseminated dominant beliefs in democracy as a value in and of itself. While political systems can be toppled and changed entirely overnight by external force or from within by revolutions, political cultures and their underlying social values and experiences cannot. Political cultures take generations to be transformed.¹²

Authoritarian institutional and cultural memories, beliefs, and value systems are resilient factors that are transgenerationally transmitted if not processed, actively challenged, or socialized within democratic institutional settings and cultures. Democratization of political cultures in particular is a long, winding, and conflictual process taking place over generations. Nevertheless, western Germans have by now experienced a *longue durée*, i.e., long-term historical institutional and cultural habituation, of democracy. This process included many public, intergenerational, and intra-familial political and value conflicts along the way. By contrast, in the last century families living in the territorial confines of the eastern Länder were primarily ruled by autocratic and totalitarian dictatorships (the monarchy, Nazism, and Stalinist as well as post-Stalinist communism). Only for a quarter of the century they were ruled by democratic systems. Transformation theorists analyzing CEE contexts and post-autocratic eastern Germany in particular have often underestimated the power of these illiberal historical and cultural legacies as a long-term social and political force. Especially in the first decades after the end of communist regimes in Europe, they viewed political authoritarianism, ethnonationalism, and lacking support for or trust in democratic institutions largely as a transitory problem, paying insufficient attention to the *longue durée*: long-term effects, patterns, and the complex and conflictual processes of democratization after a regime change from long-lasting autocratic rule systems.

In their work interpreting democratic values in societies, Ronald Inglehart and Christian Welzel fruitfully distinguish between democratic beliefs that are linked to self-expression values, on the one hand, and instrumental support for democracy, on the other. Many:

who do not emphasize self-expression values support democracy for other reasons, such as the belief that democracy means being secure and prosperous. These other motives are instrumental ... they reflect support of democracy in so far as it is thought to be linked with pros-

perity and order. This type of support can quickly vanish if a society's experience under democracy is disappointing."¹³

Mass support for democracy, however, only engenders and enables robust democracy when linked with or grounded in postmaterialist self-expression values, which are favorable to consistent support for democratic institutions. Although self-expression values "are themselves shaped by socioeconomic resources, they have a significant independent impact on democracy."¹⁴

However, in long-term diachronic studies based on social value surveys Inglehart and Welzel did not find any clearly increasing shift towards self-expression values in postcommunist societies and Germany's eastern *Länder* in the first two decades after the fall of the Wall. Rather, instrumental support for democracy seemed to have prevailed in Central Eastern European contexts, including eastern German states (and in contrast to robust support of self-expression values in the Western *Länder*): in spite of the democratic character of revolutionary change overhauling autocratic Communist regimes, there is evidence that an instrumental support of democracy outweighs a "self-expression" view of democracy in the East, and democratic participation or inclusion as a value in and of itself.¹⁵ Recent studies confirm that the relationship to democracy among eastern citizens is still often more instrumental, predominantly shaped by "survival values." These are social values that emphasize material and physical security, which are often linked to ethnocentrism and low levels of tolerance and trust, rather than "self-expression values," which prioritize subjective well-being, individual freedom and self-expression, and post-material aspects of quality of life. These are intrinsically democratic values displaying independent support for democratic ideals. Overall, according to Inglehart and Welzel, such self-expression values are still considerably weaker in the East than in the West, reflecting the distinctly varying configurations of the authoritarian-libertarian social value cleavage.¹⁶

The more tenuous, instrumental relationship towards democracy in the East (which is typical for postcommunist CEE contexts in general) often easily turns into, or solidifies existing, politico-culturally embedded skepticism towards (liberal) democracy. This is especially likely if economic problems or a lack of prosperity persist and democratic society fails to deliver expected goods, or certain political decisions further erode the still-fragile, limited trust in democratic institutions and frameworks. 77 percent of West German respondents agree that "the democracy we have in Germany right now is the best form of government" (10 percent disagree), as opposed to only 42 percent in the East (with 23 percent disagreeing and the rest abstaining).¹⁷

Hence, despite the fact that East Germans enabled democratization and political unification by means of a democratic revolution (an ideal start for democratization processes), the historical legacies responsible for a politico-cultural lack of experience with democracy and less wide-spread self-expression values that are favorable to democratic systems complicate democratic consolidation in the East. Lingering illiberalism and “survival values” are often salient, which only align with liberal democracies if liberal democracies deliver material goods and collective security, and are less favorable to independent and robust support for liberal democracy. Citizens in all CEE contexts have overall less habitual and politico-cultural experience with democracy, liberalism, pluralism, and (cultural) diversity. Here citizens, then, on average also seem more responsive to external shocks that can influence their relationship to liberal democracy as a political-constitutional framework and principle.

The authoritarian legacy that shaped the twentieth century in the East still matters, and it is closely tied to a national-exclusivist legacy and understanding of political community. This can reinforce distance towards the more cosmopolitan and multicultural West, and it provides more fertile ground for countercosmopolitan discontent and its political mobilization. Fewer eastern Germans tend to support liberal-cosmopolitan values. On average, they tend to be more supportive of collective cultural identity than their west German counterparts. Relatively widespread “ostalgia” (that is “Eastern nostalgia,” the declared love for the “good old times” when the GDR still existed and was not “Westernized” or “cosmopolitanized”) also points to a more widespread rejection of cosmopolitan social value change in the eastern Länder. Studies show that xenophobia generally tends to be especially strong and widespread in areas without immigrants.¹⁸ In Germany’s eastern regions, immigrants live for the most part only in the bigger cities. Overall, only 11.9 percent of denizens in the East (and this figure already includes multicultural Berlin) have some sort of migration background, as opposed to 26.4 percent in the Western states.¹⁹ Considering these robust correlations in addition to the strong historical legacies of both more authoritarian and ethnic-exclusivist cultural self-understandings emanating from the GDR, it comes as little surprise that “unfavorable views of minority groups are more common in East Germany than West Germany.”²⁰ Likewise, whereas 32.0 percent in the West believe “Germany will not manage the refugee crisis,” 45.6 percent in the East think Germany will not manage it.²¹

Finally, there is also a significant, sustained divide on attitudes toward the economic system and economic policy that can be traced back to the

different legacies of the Eastern socialist state and the capitalist West. Over the last three decades until this day, considerably more residents in the East display discontent with a market economy than those in the West. Only 30 percent of survey respondents in the East respond with “no” on the question if “there is a better economic system than the market economy” (as opposed to 48 percent of West Germans).²² Not surprisingly, eastern German citizens have been much more favorable to redistributive policies and state interventionism than western German citizens (this is a robust finding even when controlling for economic status).²³ It is a contributing factor to the higher aggregate level of market skepticism in the Eastern Länder that more citizens there, as will be discussed below, can be classified as economic “globalization losers” who live under precarious socioeconomic conditions or are unemployed. Moreover, many citizens in new postcommunist CEE democracies have historically identified (and confused) liberal constitutional democracy, as an institutional framework of government, with economic market liberalism. Both were introduced simultaneously. The complex, in part disillusioning experience with neoliberal economic policies may then have a reinforcing effect on attitudes towards “Western” liberal democracy and cosmopolitan diversity.²⁴ This politico-cultural identification of democracy and market (neo-)liberalism corresponds to the aforementioned widely shared instrumental view of democracy. If market liberalism does not deliver the expected goods, support for democracy then becomes highly tenuous.

Other related factors may contribute to what can be viewed as an ongoing relevance of these historical legacies that are expressed in inter-regional sociocultural value divides affecting trust in or skepticism of unified Germany’s political and economic system. For instance, rural citizens all over the world tend to display higher levels of skepticism towards social value change, cultural diversity, and liberal democracy—and compared to the western states, proportionally more citizens living in the East live in rural areas.

Socioeconomic Cleavages, East-West-Migration, and the Unequal Distribution of Power: The Lasting Invisible Wall

A second set of factors explaining the divide can be located in the realm of Germany’s internal political economy—and the regional divisions and social inequalities it reproduces—as well as the perceived and actual unequal distribution of economic, political, cultural, academic, and administrative power among citizens born and growing up in the West and the East.

While overall citizens who are socialized and still reside in the Eastern Länder do feel better and are happier than in the past, many simultaneously recognize that there is a persistent economic and power gap when comparing the western and eastern Länder: in median income, employment, wages, economic opportunities, and the allocation of resources, power, and elite positions. There is, accordingly, also measurable relative or subjective deprivation: There is a widespread sense that life is better since unification and people got ahead, yet citizens are not where they wanted to be and feel somewhat stuck in the wrong lane of Germany's economic traffic. Indeed, the economic improvement on individual and aggregate levels in the Eastern states over the last decades faces a subjective sense and objective aggregate data indicating that the East is still economically lagging behind, citizens tend to feel short-changed in terms of average economic prospects as well as upward mobility in the political, societal, and cultural realm. Actual or self-perceived economic and social status, thus, often deviates from one's economic aspiration and hopes for social or political empowerment. This can help foster social frustration and political discontent.

To be sure, 71 percent of East Germans answer "yes" to the question "if you remember your hopes you had in relation to unification, have they been fulfilled?" This figure is higher than in the West (here only 66 percent see their hopes fulfilled). Similarly, 70 percent of East Germans (compared to 53 percent of West Germans) consider themselves as "winners rather than losers of unification," and only 17 percent, that is: less than one in five, view themselves as "losers". This figure has been declining significantly over the last fifteen years, from 30 percent in 2004.²⁵ And even though self-reported life satisfaction is consistently lower in all five states in the East compared to all states in the West, there are also promising signs of convergence. Today, majorities in both the West and the East rate their lives at a seven or higher on a ten-point ladder of life satisfaction (64 percent in the West, 59 percent in the East). Despite these self-reported gains in life satisfaction, however, significant economic gaps between the East and the West remain and have societal effects. In economic terms, this gap reproduces a lingering "invisible wall." It helps reinforce a sense of discrimination and being "left behind" among many citizens residing in the East and, in so doing, negatively affects trust in liberal democracy and its institutions and representatives. While the GDP per capita has increased from 43 percent of the western per capita GDP in 1991 to 75 percent in 2018, income remains significantly lower (euro 32,108 to 42,971 per year on average).²⁶ The average income and wages in the East remain significantly lower than in all western states, even when accounting for other state and regional differences. Unemployment is also

consistently higher in the East, where job opportunities continue to be more limited. Moreover, there is a larger segment of the population that is poor and detached from economic development.

Equally significant may be the impact of the perceived but also evident massive concentration of economic, political and cultural power in “the West” and among an elite based in the West—this reinforces a still widely shared belief that “westerners” call the shots in politics and society. Some of this concentration of power and wealth, and the eastern perception thereof, can be traced back to politico-economic legacies emanating from decisions of the Treuhand, which was charged with transforming and privatizing the government-run GDR economy in the 1990s. There is no DAX-30 corporate headquarters in the East, and only one M-DAX in Thuringia, compared to forty-nine in the West (leaving Berlin aside). 464 of Germany’s 500 biggest corporations have their headquarters in western Länder, only thirty-six in the eastern regions, and that includes the capital Berlin.²⁷ Despite Chancellor Angela Merkel, East Germans also remain underrepresented in positions of political leadership. For instance, in the Bundestag, 14.6 percent of representatives have an Eastern biography, even though 17.2 percent of the general population come from the Eastern states.²⁸ Even more dramatic are data on Germany’s cultural and academic elite. It is still largely western. For example, in 2019, there is not a single university president, or any president in higher education, who has an Eastern biography.²⁹ Overall, eastern Germans hold only 1.7 percent of top-level leadership positions in Germany’s administration, politics, and economy.³⁰

Fostering the politico-cultural divide and the popular East German sense of “being left behind,” until recently inner-German migration has largely been a one-way street—from the East towards the West.³¹ Alongside a dramatic lack of new migration from outside of Germany to its eastern Länder, this inner East-West migration has been a major factor in the disproportionately rapid shrinking and ageing of the population residing in the states of the former East. The migration to the West has been bolstered by an increasing rural-urban migration (and divide). This is particularly evident among the young, with West German metropolitan areas like Hamburg, Cologne, and Munich being major attractions. While these cities gained almost a quarter in the age group of young adults age eighteen to twenty-nine, east German electoral districts such as Bautzen lost almost a quarter within the same seven years, that is: 10,924 of its 46,420 citizens in this age group moved away.³² In such regions like Bautzen, the radical right-wing populist Alternative for Germany has become the leading party in the 2019 state elections. And in some purely rural east German districts, the problem

that young citizens leave is even more dire and goes along with increased AfD support.³³

For a majority of those young migrating Germans, the East-West cultural or political divides are no longer an issue. They often do not see themselves as “easterners” or “westerners;” yet it is precisely this migration—their actions—which reinforces the spatial divide between the regions, and the closure of embattled identities among citizens from areas from which many young and educated have left.³⁴ Cultural hipness and multiculturalism, high-end jobs and higher wages, economic and labor prospects, educational hubs—all these elements are often identified with western metropolitan areas, which especially attract young German citizens from all regions despite the comparably higher costs of living and the current housing crisis in western cities.

The combination of these interrelated socioeconomic and demographic dimensions is undoubtedly a factor in the reproduction of politico-cultural divisions and can foster the distance between residents of the western and eastern parts of contemporary Germany. As the political system has largely been imported from the West, the resilience of those socioeconomic gaps alongside the unequal power concentration among Western elites are often attributed to, or identified with, Western liberal democracy. Likewise, the politico-cultural values supporting liberal or constitutional democracy are often identified with perceived and actual Western political weight. Yet, for these structural problems in the East, socioeconomic gaps and inequalities, as well as related perception patterns to politically play out in full force, agents of discontent are needed. This brings me to a third, agency-based set of factors contributing to the East-West-divide.

Mobilizing Eastern Discontent and the Politics of Rage: The Alternative for Germany and the Left Party as Agents of Eastern Identity Politics

Over the last decades, a variety of agents of discontent have been able to exploit, mobilize and also reinforce lasting politico-cultural and socioeconomic divisions underpinning the still significant political expressions of an East-West divide in Germany analyzed here. The focus of those actors, which are not limited to parties or the political realm per se, are discourses constructing a particular eastern identity. These actors are simultaneously and steadily emphasizing eastern citizens’—as we have seen, partly alleged and partly actual—structural political, social, and cultural discrimination by Germany’s (Western) political system and elite.

Those agents of political discontent included various extreme-right parties that have had several electoral breakthroughs. They periodically had some surprisingly high turnouts at the ballot box since the 1990s and entered eastern state legislatures—from the Deutsche Volksunion (German People’s Union, DVU) in Saxony-Anhalt, Brandenburg, and Mecklenburg-West Pomerania, to the neo-Nazi party Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands (National Democratic Party of Germany NPD) in Saxony. These parties benefitted from consolidated extreme-right subcultures, which developed as a “nationalist opposition” over many years and became part of the backbone of a distinctly eastern radical-right movement.³⁵ In turn, these actors have had some local cultural impact, reinforcing existing milieus, cultures, and subcultures of anti-Western and antidemocratic discontent. An integral element was the attempt to portray East Germans affirmatively as “the true Germans” who are supposedly not yet “westernized,” “multiculturalized,” “feminized,” and “denationalized.” The successes of these parties, however, fluctuated immensely. Due to internal feuds, leadership issues, and inconsistent organizations, their successful electoral mobilizations remained only temporary and could hardly be repeated.³⁶

It is important to take a closer look at the two parties analyzed in the first section that today represent key political agents constructing, affirming, and elevating a sense of “eastern-ness” in electoral campaigns and for political purposes: the Left and the AfD. The latter has increasingly replaced the former in recent years as the dominant force of eastern identity politics in most eastern regions. Without these political entrepreneurs’ mobilization of eastern discontent and eastern identity constructs, the political divisions would have arguably not taken their current shape. Alongside extreme-right players we find these left-wing populist and recently right-wing populist parties that have acted as agents of discontent between East and West.

Over the years, they translated lingering resentments and eastern disenchantment with the performance of unified Germany’s political economy and political system, its institutions, and established (party) actors, into significant “noisy” political rage. They have done so by employing political discourses that emphasize eastern citizens’ political, social, and cultural discrimination by Germany’s (western) political elite—discourses about unjustified disadvantages for eastern residents as “second class citizens”—and matching them with discourses constructing and valuing a particular eastern identity. The latter are often also construed as discourses of a moral superiority that are based on eastern heritage, thus providing collective gratifications and recognition but also fostering East-West divisions.

There are, to be sure, also significant differences in this respect between the AfD and the Left. In electoral terms, for two decades the Left Party was able to gather most voters who strongly self-identified as “easterners,” including those postcommunist voters who felt attached to, or idealized, features of the former GDR’s political culture and system. The Left Party had a competitive advantage for doing so because it was the successor party of the GDR’s ruling party, and thus the only party that survived the transition from dictatorship to democracy. The party de facto inherited the political identification with eastern identity. While precisely this identification was, and arguably still is, political baggage for the Left (initially called the Party of Democratic Socialism, PDS) in the West, in the East the party utilized its eastern legacy effectively by claiming to give voice to “eastern interests” and appealing to distinct eastern-ness among those who felt disadvantaged. To this day, as the most recent eastern state elections show, the party sought to mobilize eastern identity and link it with the party’s leftist identity. Typical eastern campaign posters read “*Der Osten wählt links*” (“The East votes Left”) and “*Ost: Respekt, Würde, Anerkennung*” (“East: respect, dignity, recognition.”)³⁷

Nevertheless, although Eastern voters, as we have seen, tend to prefer a more egalitarian society, the party’s long successful attempt to (mis)construe eastern identity as left-wing identity decreasingly resonates at the ballot box. In contrast to the AfD, the Left construes eastern grievances mostly as socioeconomic injustices. It especially appeals to those feeling left behind and economically short-changed by “the West,” while political and cultural identity grievances are present but play a less prominent role in the Left’s political campaigning. To be sure, the Left Party is still a strong force in the East. Yet, it has recently been drastically diminished—in particular, because the AfD has taken its place as the primary voice expressing eastern anger. The AfD was able to shift the focus of debates about eastern identity to cultural issues, ethnicity, immigration, and sociocultural values.

By now, only seven years after its founding the AfD has become the most popular political force in the eastern states next to the Christian Democrats, and has even taken the lead in some polls.³⁸ It is without doubt now the most prominent actor expressing and mobilizing “eastern grievances” and identity. It stylizes itself effectively as the voice representing the East and promoting “eastern values.” This has also played a role in earning much higher electoral rewards in the East than in the West (in addition to higher electoral demand for such a party in the East). As indicated, rather than focusing on economic grievances, the AfD in the East seeks to frame eastern grievances as cultural grievances, where the party promotes linger-

ing anti-Western sentiment or perceived disenfranchisement by framing it as an anti-elite sentiment. Eastern citizens are frequently construed (and praised) as the “true Germans,” displaying a resilient ethnic and cultural identity not yet diffused by migration, or manipulated into believing the liberal western elite’s values, norms, and alleged “lies.”

Accordingly, recent AfD campaign slogans in state-level electoral campaigns focused on fostering and mobilizing such an eastern cultural identity. Rather than alluding to positive economic elements of the GDR legacy, as can still be seen in the Left, the AfD construes itself as the true heir of the democratic revolution by calling for a “change 2.0” (*“Wende 2.0”*) or urging to “complete the change” that started in 1989 with the fall of the wall (*“Vollende die Wende.”*) The AfD also suggests that voting for the party translates into “the silent revolution at the ballot-box” (*“Die Friedliche Revolution mit dem Stimmzettel”*). The party constantly reiterates the key slogan of the democratic revolution against the GDR regime: “We are the people” (*“Wir sind das Volk.”*)³⁹ By creating parallels between the GDR and today’s unified Federal Republic, however, the AfD negates all differences between dictatorship and constitutional liberal democracy. The party suggests that Germany is not really democratic, but run by a corrupt, western multicultural political elite, assisted by a cultural elite and deceptive mainstream media (the “lying press,” or *“Lügenpresse,”* a term with antisemitic connotations). In the AfD’s lens, this Western elite is running mainstream parties. Allegedly, this elite subjugates the “(true) people” (especially in the East), and instead supports refugees and immigrants as well as liberal western social values. Such a “western elite” the AfD construes as an oppressive regime using norms of “political correctness” to curtail free speech and humiliate eastern citizens.⁴⁰

Actively feeding lingering rage, predominantly in the East, the AfD’s eastern cultural identity politics come natural to a party that is by now programmatically centered on ethnocultural identity, nationalism, illiberal notions of democracy, and anti-immigrant views.⁴¹ It is strengthened by a general shift in public debate to cultural identity issues, as well as growing cultural networks, individuals, and institutions supporting the AfD’s views (especially in eastern states), and the aforementioned more widespread authoritarian-nationalist views matching a more instrumental view of democracy.⁴² The party could also profit from, and actively generate, fear of immigration and refugees in the wake of the 2015 refugee crisis, especially in ethnically homogenous rural communities.

Conclusion and Outlook: On the Political East-West Divide and Democratic Legitimacy Crises in Germany

The inter-regional political divide explored here has significant effects on the German polity and its stability. The political East-West divide and the partly related current populist politics of rage that we witness particularly strongly—though by no means exclusively—in the eastern states embolden lingering skepticism in democracy alongside political polarization eroding shared civic standards and bonds, and weakened institutional trust at large. The political divide, this article has argued, benefits from long-term effects of politico-cultural legacies and related value cleavages; persistent (even if partly diminished) socioeconomic divisions and power gaps; and populist actors reinforcing the divide.

To be sure, we should also be wary of overstating the existing regional political divisions or their potential impact on the democratic polity for several reasons. First, among the younger cohorts the tide is partly turning. There is a significant generational effect, especially among the millennials, on East-West differences and democracy support; while East-West differences are perceived as smaller in these cohorts, support for democracy and self-expression values tend to be more robust.⁴³ Second, the overall assessment of German unification's politico-economic impact is still overwhelmingly positive. Only 17 percent of east Germans and 13 percent of west Germans think that "only the West has profited from unification"—and 68 percent of all citizens think that Germany as a whole profited from unification.⁴⁴ Third, the inner-German divisions replicate a gap between Western and postcommunist Central Eastern Europe but appear to be comparatively moderate if seen in this context. Skepticism towards democracy and a lack of trust in democratic institutions and representatives is lower in the eastern states than in most of postcommunist Europe. In addition, although most European governments suffer from legitimacy crises, support for liberal democracy in Europe is overall robust, and in Germany even more so than in most European countries.⁴⁵ Fourth, overemphasizing the divide may itself discursively reinforce it. While it could be shown that politico-cultural and socioeconomic divisions are biggest between the eastern and western Länder, there are also other inner-German regional differences and at times even mutual resentments, let us say between citizens in Schleswig-Holstein and Bavaria.

Yet, ignoring the political divide cannot provide for a sound analysis or policy. For too long, especially social and political grievances and problems in the East remained politically unrecognized, which helped them flourish.

The complex and partly deep-seated origins of political divisions indicate that there are certainly no easy solutions, and there is no quick fix at hand. Just like the consolidated national-populist upsurge across Europe, inter-regional divisions and divisive inner-German identity politics are likely here to stay in the near future. Nevertheless, a mix of policies reflecting the different clusters of factors discussed here may cushion the divide—alongside acknowledgement of polarization trends as well as related crises of democratic institutional trust and legitimacy that have become more and more salient across Europe, yet appear to be particularly strong in postcommunist contexts and the eastern *Länder*.

Such policies would have to start with the two-fold recognition of a non-democratic past and its legacies in the East, shaping distinct social value cleavage formations, and the fact that eastern German regions remain structurally disadvantaged even thirty years after unification. There is a combination of reasonable policies and institutional strategies by democratic parties and institutional actors that could then help regain, or consolidate, democratic trust in political and geographical contexts where they have been eroding.

First, this would have to entail tackling the “invisible economic wall.” A more socially balanced economic and welfare policy would especially benefit the eastern states, where citizens are disproportionately poor, earn less, and more workers suffer from precarious labor conditions created by the “Agenda 2010” framework. In addition to reverting past welfare state regress and the privatization of social security, important policy measures would include: raising the legal minimum wage; actively addressing the East-West wage discrepancy; and incentivizing collective membership in unions and employer’s organization by means of tax policy in order to help making collective bargaining agreements the norm again rather than the exception. Skepticism towards democracy, which, as shown, is more widespread in the eastern regions, is reinforced by material insecurity. In fact, even robust support of democracy is endangered if democracies do not deliver such security. Combining social welfare policy with anti-immigrant and nationalist views can thus be a winning formula for authoritarian populism if economic insecurity prevails.

Second, democratic consolidation processes and politico-cultural transformations require an extended period of development, long-term social value change, and robust institutional support. Particularly, but not exclusively, in the eastern (and generally in rural) regions of Germany, democratic and educational institutions as well as civil and government services—including law enforcement agencies—have often been reduced to the bare minimum over the last two decades. “Lean state” models calling for a

downsizing of public and government institutions based on economic calculations rather than societal needs have led to long-term cuts, leaving now many of them understaffed and dysfunctional.⁴⁶ In addition to redirecting resources for government institutions and programs essential for democracies to function (and being experienced as such), there needs to considerably more support for local pro-democracy initiatives and the funding of social work. There also needs to be a concerted government effort to enhance (political) education and provide educational space for communicating democratic values and gaining media literacy. This is especially the case in an age of fake news and post-factual social media bubbles, and in recognition of authoritarian legacies in Germany.⁴⁷

Third and finally, in the political realm it will be important to develop new strategies to confront culturally divisive and illiberal narratives that have been successfully promoted by (populist) political agents of rage and discontent. Rather than responding to the agenda these parties are setting—especially to their very active social media usage and spins—democratic parties need to find new ways to communicate and set the agenda while addressing pressing issues. For democratic parties to be able to do so, however, they need to recognize the full scale of current challenges and help enabling discussions about transparent, fact-based policy-making. Most importantly, political parties and governmental institutions need to better demonstrate actual problem-solving capacities in pressing policy areas and thus increase output legitimacy—from combatting widening socioeconomic gaps and ecological problems to managing the challenges of twenty-first century immigration societies—while also improving conditions for democratic inclusion and deliberation (such as the model of the Irish Citizens' Assembly) in order to take groups that feel left behind on board, and thus increase overall input legitimacy. Democratic leadership in times of legitimacy crises, which also affect unified Germany thirty years after the fall of the Wall, requires both a sober social scientific analysis and a firm commitment to democratic constitutions, principles, and values engendering democratic pedagogy of inclusion that strengthens the substantive practice of democracy.⁴⁸

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Notes

1. Lars Rensmann, "Mind the Gap: Explaining Unified Germany's Divided Party System," *European View* 8, no. 2 (2009): 271-283, here 272.
2. Kantar Public Survey commissioned by the Körber Stiftung, 12-20 August 2019 based on 1001 respondents; cited in *Spiegel Spezial* (October-November 2019), 25.
3. Jonathan Olsen classifies the Left Party as left-wing "populist." See Jonathan Olsen, "The Left Party and the AfD: Populist Competitors in Eastern Germany" in *Twilight of the Merkel Era: Power and Politics after the 2017 Bundestag Election*, ed. Eric Langenbacher (Oxford, 2019).
4. Rensmann (see note 1), 273ff.
5. Frank Decker and Philipp Adorf, "Coalition Politics in Crisis? The German Party System before and after the 2017 Federal Election" in Langenbacher (see note 3).
6. The AfD has replaced other radical right competitors. In the first twenty-five years after unification, different extreme right parties like the DVU and neo-Nazi parties like the NPD had recurring successes, in particular in Saxony, Mecklenburg-West Pomerania, Brandenburg, and Saxony-Anhalt.
7. In contrast to other regions, in Brandenburg the SPD remains the strongest party with 31.9 percent after the 2019 state elections, and in Mecklenburg-West Pomerania the SPD was also still the strongest political party in the 2016 state elections, though it lost 5 percent compared to the previous elections (while the Left Party lost 5.2 percent).
8. Rensmann (see note 1), 275.
9. Eastern party representatives tend to be more pro-Russian across the board, reflecting widespread support of good relations to Russia in large segments of the eastern German population. 72 percent of eastern Germans want Germany to "get closer to Russia" (and 43 percent even "much closer"), as opposed to 54 percent in the West, where also 29 percent prefer stronger distance from Putin's regime. Cornelia Karin Hendrich, "Mehrheit der Deutschen wünscht politische Annäherung an Russland," *Die Welt*, 17 March 2019; available at <https://www.welt.de/politik/ausland/article174648662/WELT-Trend-Mehrheit-der-Deutschen-wuenscht-politische-Annäherung-an-Russland.html>, accessed 15 February 2020. The right-wing populist AfD is the most explicitly pro-Russian and pro-Putin party, and it has close ties with Putin's party United Russia. In 2016, the AfD's youth organization Junge Alternative became a partner organization of the youth organization of United Russia. *Der Spiegel*, "AfD-Jugend und Putin-Jugend verbrüdernd sich," *Der*

- Spiegel*, 23 April 2016; available at <https://www.spiegel.de/politik/deutschland/afd-jugend-und-putin-jugend-verbuenden-sich-a-1088721.html>, accessed 15 February 2020.
10. Lars Rensmann, "Volatile Counter-Cosmopolitans: Understanding the Electoral Performance of Radical Right Parties in Eastern Germany and Poland," *German Politics and Society* 30, no. 2 (2012): 64–102, here 68–72; see also Russell J. Dalton and Willy Jou, "Is There a Single German Party System?," *German Politics and Society* 28, no. 2 (2010): 34–52.
11. Cited in Michael Sontheimer and Peter Wensierski, "Als die Polizei 'Gammer' jagte," *Der Spiegel*, 8 March 2018; available at <https://www.spiegel.de/geschichte/berlin-in-den-1960ern-als-die-polizei-gammer-an-der-gedaechtniskirche-jagte-a-1196555.html>, accessed 25 February 2020. See for a general analysis Julia Bernstein, "Sprachgebrauch: Der schwierige Umgang mit dem Erbe," *Jüdische Allgemeine*, 27 January 2020, <https://www.juedische-allgemeine.de/kultur/der-schwierige-umgang-mit-dem-erbe/>, accessed 25 February 2020.
12. For an original account, see Gabriel A. Almond and Sidney Verba, *The Civic Culture: Political Attitudes and Democracy in Five Nations* (Newbury Park, 1989).
13. Ronald Inglehart and Christian Welzel, *Modernization, Cultural Change, and Democracy* (Cambridge, 2005), 268.
14. *Ibid.*, 182. More recently see Ronald Inglehart and Pippa Norris, "Trump and the Populist Authoritarian Parties: The Silent Revolution in Reverse," *Perspectives on Politics* 15, no. 2 (2017): 443–454. See also Rensmann (see note 1), 278.
15. Inglehart and Welzel's conceptional and empirical distinction between such instrumental and noninstrumental support of democracy (the latter being grounded in self-expression values), is both useful and meaningful. In reality, however, the boundaries between the two are often more blurred. While survival values and instrumental support of democracy can radiate towards noninstrumental, postmaterial democratic self-expression values, even robust noninstrumental values independently favoring democratic participation and democracy for the sake of democracy (rather than viewing democracy as a tool to deliver the goods of economic prosperity and order), can fail. No democracy is likely to survive without some basic level of military and economic security, i.e., a basic level of peace and prosperity. Grave economic crises causing modernization shocks and widespread material insecurity can also put robust democracies, and hitherto robust democratic self-expression values supporting them, to the test.
16. Inglehart and Norris (see note 14).
17. Cited in "Allensbach-Umfrage: Ostdeutsche vertrauen der Demokratie weniger als Westdeutsche," *Die Zeit*, 23 January 2019; available at <https://www.zeit.de/gesellschaft/zeitgeschehen/2019-01/allensbach-umfrage-ostdeutsche-vertrauen-demokratie-marktwirtschaft>, accessed 15 February 2020.
18. Klaus Ahlheim, *Der unbequeme Fremde: Fremdenfeindlichkeit in Deutschland. Empirische Befunde* (Schwalbach, 1999).
19. "IWH-Untersuchung: Wirtschaft im Osten hinkt weiter hinterher," *tagesschau.de*, 2 March 2019; available at <https://www.tagesschau.de/wirtschaft/ost-west-studie-103.html>, accessed 15 February 2020.
20. John Gramlich, "How the attitudes of West and East Germans compare, 30 years after the fall of Berlin Wall," *Pew Research Center*, 18 October 2019; available at <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/10/18/how-the-attitudes-of-west-and-east-germans-compare-30-years-after-fall-of-berlin-wall/>, accessed 15 February 2020.
21. Hedda Nier, "Deutschland uneins in der Flüchtlingsfrage," *Statista.de*, 28 September 2016; available at <https://de.statista.com/infografik/6017/einstellung-fluechtlinge-in-ost-und-west/>, accessed 15 February 2020.
22. To be sure, according to the Institut für Demoskopie Allensbach, only 14 percent of eastern residents respond with "yes" (and only 9 percent of western residents), which leaves large groups of 56 percent in the East and 43 percent in the West undecided. See Friedel Taube, "Ostdeutsche sehen Demokratie skeptischer," *Deutsche Welle*, 23 January 2019; available at <https://www.dw.com/de/ostdeutsche-sehen-demokratie-skeptischer/a->

- 47204467, accessed 15 February 2020. The relatively high level of discontent with, or lack of support of, the economic market system in the East may of course also be reinforced by ongoing economic inequalities between the Western and Eastern Länder. This “invisible wall” will be discussed in the next section.
23. Rensmann (see note 10), 76.
24. On this argument see Jacques Rupnik, “Explaining Eastern Europe: The Crisis of Liberalism,” *Journal of Democracy* 29, no. 3 (2018): 24–38.
25. See Kantar (see note 2), 25.
26. John Gramlich, “East Germany has narrowed economic gap with West Germany since fall of communism, but still lags,” *Pew Research Center*, 6 November 2019; available at <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/11/06/east-germany-has-narrowed-economic-gap-with-west-germany-since-fall-of-communism-but-still-lags/>, accessed 25 February 2020.
27. “Hauptsitze der größten deutschen Unternehmen,” *Spiegel Spezial* (October–November 2019), 66. Source: Stiftung Familienunternehmen; Deutsche Börse.
28. MDR Zeitreise, “Ostdeutsche Abgeordnete im Deutschen Bundestag,” 8 December 2019, *Mitteldeutscher Rundfunk*; available at <https://www.mdr.de/zeitreise/Ostdeutsche-Abgeordnete-im-Bundestag100.html>, accessed 15 February 2020.
29. “Führungskräfte an Universitäten: Keiner der deutschen Uni-Chefs kommt aus Ostdeutschland,” *Die Zeit*, 7 February 2019; available at <https://www.zeit.de/gesellschaft/2019-02/fuehrungskraefte-deutsche-universitaeten-ostdeutschland-hochschulstudie>, accessed 15 February 2020.
30. Vera Kern, “Folgen der Wiedervereinigung: Kaum Ostdeutsche ganz oben in den Eliten,” *Deutsche Welle*, 11 October 2017; available at <https://www.dw.com/de/kaum-ostdeutsche-ganz-oben-in-den-eliten/a-40909192>, accessed 15 February 2020.
31. Statistisches Bundesamt, *Ost-West-Wanderungen* (Wiesbaden, 2019); available at <https://www.destatis.de/DE/Themen/Gesellschaft-Umwelt/Bevoelkerung/Wanderungen/vorlaeufige-ergebnisse.html;jsessionid=70F9997A8CED3DF3707CC2E34D54239A.internet742>, accessed 15 February 2020.
32. See Juliane Morgenroth, “Die Jungen fliehen in die Städte: Sachsens Landgebiete vergehen,” 25 October 2019, *Tag24*; available at <https://www.tag24.de/nachrichten/die-jungen-fliehen-in-die-staedte-sachsens-landgebiete-vergehen-bautzen-1260888>, accessed 15 February 2020.
33. Florian Diekmann, “Binnenmigration: Die Landflucht der jungen Deutschen,” *Spiegel Online*, 24 October 2019; available at <https://www.spiegel.de/wirtschaft/soziales/deutschland-die-extreme-landflucht-der-jungen-und-ihre-gruende-a-1292981.html>, accessed 15 February 2020.
34. Strikingly, among the chronically underfunded and overburdened German universities, university students find considerably better conditions and student-instructor ratios in the East. Still, east German university populations are shrinking and are struggling to recruit students despite special PR campaigns—and of those who do decide to study in East German university towns, many leave for the West afterwards. See Miriam Olbrisch, “Ostdeutsche Universitäten: Studier’ doch mal drüben,” *Der Spiegel*, 24 September 2019.
35. On extreme right subcultures and their ideological campaigning in the East, see Gideon Botsch, “From Skinhead-Subculture to Radical Right Movement: The Development of a ‘National Opposition’ in East Germany,” *Contemporary European History* 21, no. 4 (2012): 553–573.
36. Rensmann (see note 10).
37. Cited in “Der Osten entscheidet,” *Volksstimme*, 1 August 2019; available at <https://www.volksstimme.de/deutschland-welt/politik/landtagswahlen-der-osten-entscheidet>, accessed 15 February 2020.
38. “Sonntagstrend: AfD stärkste Partei im Osten,” *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 4 August 2019; available at <https://www.faz.net/aktuell/politik/wahl-in-sachsen/sonntagstrend-afd-vor-landtagswahlen-staerkste-partei-im-osten-16317232.html>, accessed 15 February 2020.

39. On these and other AfD campaign slogans see Andrea Hilscher, "Friedliche Revolution in der Lausitz: So vereinnahmt die AfD die Wende von 1989," *Lausitzer Rundschau* 18 October 2019; available at <https://www.lr-online.de/lausitz/die-friedliche-revolution-in-der-lausitz-so-vereinnahmt-die-afd-die-wende-von-1989-39554439.html>, accessed 15 February 2020.
40. See Sabine am Orde and Dirk Begrich, "Soziologe über den AfD-Ost-Wahlkampf: Systemkollaps hat geprägt," *taz*, 12 August 2019; available at <https://taz.de/Soziologe-ueber-den-AfD-Ost-Wahlkampf/!5614479/>, accessed 15 February 2020.
41. On the current programmatic outlook and development of the AfD to a radical right-wing populist party see Lars Rensmann, "Radical Right-Wing Populists in Parliament: Examining the 'Alternative for Germany' in European Context," *German Politics and Society* 36, no. 3 (2018): 43-71; Charles Lees, "The 'Alternative for Germany': The Rise of Right-Wing Populism at the Heart of Europe," *Politics* 38, no. 3 (2018): 295-310; Gideon Botsch, "AfD: Im Parlament gegen das Parlament," *Blätter für deutsche und internationale Politik* 63, no. 4 (2018): 17-20.
42. As shown above, this is also reflected in considerably stronger views sympathetic to Russia and the Putin regime in the East. See Hendrich (see note 9).
43. See Eva Krafczyk, "Junge Generation Ost und West: 'Die Unterschiede werden geringer,'" *Neues Deutschland*, 12 August 2019; also Rainer Faus and Simon Storks, *Im vereinten Deutschland geboren—in den Einstellungen gespalten? OBS-Studie zur ersten Nachwendegeneration* (Frankfurt/Main, 2019); available at https://www.otto-brenner-stiftung.de/fileadmin/user_data/stiftung/02_Wissenschaftsportal/03_Publikationen/AH96_Nachwendegeneration.pdf, accessed 15 February 2020.
44. See Kantar (see note 2), 67.
45. On robustly pro-European attitudes, support of EU political authority, pro-democratic and anti-populist views in Germany and Europe see Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser, Robert Verhkamp, and Christopher Wall, *Europa hat die Wahl: Populistische Einstellungen und Wahlabsichten bei der Europawahl 2019* (Gütersloh, 2019). For instance, 68 percent of Germans support EU financial sanctions for countries violating democratic norms and principles, 64.
46. The German civil servants' organization, the "Deutscher Beamtenbund," criticizes that more than 200,000 civil servants are needed after decades of politically and economically motivated cuts by the government, and warns that the system of public service in Germany is close to a "collapse." See "Beamte warnen vor Systemkollaps: 'Kaputt gespart und heruntergewirtschaftet,'" *Merkur.de*, 26 November 2019; available at <https://www.merkur.de/politik/systemkollaps-beamten-personalnot-oeffentlicher-dienst-fachkraefte-mangel-zr-13368522.html>, accessed 15 February 2020.
47. In Germany's federalized education system, civil values and democracy education as well as basic media literacy training enabling young students to distinguish fake news from factual sources are not yet sufficiently part of basic education across the country. They would have to become part of regular state school curricula across the nation to bolster democracy.
48. See Theodor W. Adorno, "Democratic Leadership and Mass Manipulation" in *Gesammelte Schriften* vol. 20.1, Theodor W. Adorno (Frankfurt/Main, 1986 [1958]), 267-286; and Shannon L. Mariotti, "Adorno on the Radio: Democratic Leadership as Democratic Pedagogy," *Political Theory* 42, no. 4 (2014): 415-442.