CHAPTER 4
CHANGING POLITICAL CULTURES

Outline

Quote of Note:

"*We must risk more democracy! (Mehr Demokratie wagen!).*"

Chancellor Willy Brandt

Imagine that you were a German citizen, in either the West or East, in 1949: What political lessons would you have drawn from recent German history? Like most people, you probably would conclude that politics was something to avoid. Not only had three regimes failed during a brief thirty-year period, but supporters of the previous regime had often suffered as each new regime was established. The treatment of the political opposition following the National Socialists' rise to power, as well as the denazification program after World War II, probably convinced many people that politics was a questionable, if not risky, pursuit.

These conditions led analysts to ask whether the Federal Republic (or even the GDR) possessed a *political culture* congruent with its new political institutions and processes. The political culture of a nation is what people think and feel about politics. It includes everything from beliefs about the legitimacy of the political system to opinions about the adequacy and appropriateness of political input structures, governmental policies, and the citizen's role in politics. Political culture research maintains that people must accept the norms of democracy in order for democracy to endure. Similarly, public expectations about the regime and their role in the political process shape citizen behavior. Finally, expectations of government–how politicians should act, what are the goals of government, and what policies the government should pursue–provide a context for the operation of the political system. In short, political scientists argue that congruence between a political culture and political institutions/ processes affects the working of a political system and its stability.

However, rather than the tolerant, supportive, and participatory political culture that was identified with successful democratic political systems, observers of postwar West German culture saw it as detached, cynical, and unsupportive of democratic politics.(1) Many people feared that West Germans lacked the political attitudes necessary for the Federal Republic to endure and prosper politically. The democratic transition of the GDR in 1989 also required a cultural transformation (albeit of a different sort).

We examine three cases of cultural change in Germany in this chapter. First, a primary goal of Allied and German elites in the postwar period was to remake the political culture in the West so that it was

congruent with the new democratic system. This task took on extra urgency because the FRG was born with many of the handicaps that had plagued the Weimar Republic. Thus, there were common fears that the Federal Republic would share the same fate as Weimar. For nearly a generation, the Federal Republic was haunted by the question, "*Ist Bonn doch Weimar*?" ("Is Bonn another Weimar?").

Second, the collapse of the German Democratic Republic and unification in 1990 created a new question of the cultural basis of democracy. Most political analysts believed the GDR had successfully socialized the public in the East to accept the communist regime and its principles. Unification thus meant the blending of these two different political cultures in West and East. How wide was the cultural gap between East and West, and how has this changed as a result of unification? As with the Federal Republic's first democratic transition, the success of this second transition depends on the nation's cultural inheritance.

Third, after discussing Germany's two modern democratic transitions, we discuss a separate process of cultural change. In the early years of the Federal Republic, most citizens were worried about the basic necessities of life and ensuring the future for themselves and their families. After the tremendous social changes wrought by the Economic Miracle, many of these traditional political concerns have been largely addressed. This has led many Germans–especially among the young and the better educated–to stress a new set of social and political goals that differ from their elders. This is often described as a "second culture" embedded within the dominant paradigm of Germany society. This internal process of cultural change is also transforming politics.

The Postwar Cultural Inheritance

The political culture in 1949 reflected the historical legacy of the Second Empire and the Weimar Republic, but especially the influence of the Third Reich. It is difficult to imagine the political climate of Nazi Germany solely from reading historical accounts because the experience is so alien to life in contemporary Western democracies. Many historians draw a parallel to other German or European authoritarian regimes, but true comparisons are difficult to sustain. In an environment without pluralism or dissent, there were few controls on government behavior or opportunities to question the government. The Führer cult surrounding Hitler took on the trappings of a religion deifying a god. The film of the 1934 Nuremberg Nazi party rally, *The Triumph of the Will*, is an awesome testimonial to the power of Nazi propaganda. The intensity of support for the Nazi regime, or at least the public displays of support, indicated that a political fever had spread through Germany. The historian, Gordon Craig, recounted one not atypical example.(2) In 1935 he was an exchange student in Munich; on the daily ride to school the occupants of the bus raised their right arms in unison as they passed the site of Hitler's 1923 putsch attempt and the entire bus gave the straight-armed Hitler salute to the putsch memorial!

The Third Reich's control over the individual was nearly absolute. Individual will and responsibility were subordinated to the state. Those who questioned authority or held "alien" views soon disappeared--sent to concentration camps or worse. Outright resistance to the Nazi regime was virtually extinct by the start of World War II. The Nazi propaganda machine worked to remake the political culture in its own image. Most young people were members of some type of Nazi youth group, the media and education system became tools of the government, and Nazi organizations disseminated propaganda throughout society. The government told the average citizen that "you are nothing, the nation is everything." The public learned that liberalism, democracy, communism and socialism were the enemies of Germany, and these enemies must not be tolerated.

What explains the breakdown of human values that occurred during the Third Reich? How could an entire nation ignore the oppression and eventual arrest of their Jewish neighbors, the imprisonment of socialists,

communists, and liberals, and the destruction of individual rights? One explanation holds that this failure represented a specific flaw in the German political character: Intolerance was a prominent feature of the political culture under previous regimes and was encouraged by Nazi propaganda.

Intolerance alone is not a sufficient explanation, however. Many Germans disapproved of the Nazis' extremist policies but still did nothing. In an experiment designed to explore the psychology of the Third Reich, Stanley Milgram uncovered a pattern in human behavior that suggests a more ominous explanation.(3) Milgram asked volunteers in Connecticut to participate in his experiments to test "training" methods. Under the demands of the project director, these average Americans inflicted what they thought were painful, or even life-threatening, electric shocks to the trainee. Almost every volunteer submitted to the demands of the project director, even though they believed that this was just a college psychology experiment. The experiment, in short, showed that average people would perform inhuman acts under pressure from an authority figure. By comparison, for several generations German governments had conditioned the public to follow orders unquestioningly. The Nazi state exploited these authoritarian and intolerant aspects of the political culture under a totalitarian system that severely punished dissent. Many Germans followed orders and did not openly challenge authority, until it was too late to act.

It is difficult to know how many Germans truly supported Hitler's actions and how many simply remained silent and followed orders.(4) Various accounts suggest that Hitler enjoyed popular support before the outbreak of World War II and during the early war years. Many Germans accepted policies aimed at strengthening the state, international expansion, and discrimination against the Jews. As the war progressed, however, the Nazi state descended into a pit of horrors. Rumors of the atrocities committed by the German *Einsatzkommandos* in the Soviet Union were rampant, but discredited by the government. The public knew of the forced deportation of European Jews, but the regime claimed that they were destined for work camps. Certainly, thousands of government employees knew what was happening and participated in the atrocities, but the government always blurred the reality of the situation. (Even in Britain and the United States, experts were uncertain on the status of the Jews under Germany’s control.) Forced to live in this environment, riddled with fear and oppression, many people chose to believe what they wanted to believe. A common explanation of inaction after the war was that individuals withdrew into a self-created psychological shell ("inner migration"). It is certain, however, that the Third Reich left behind a political culture that provided a very poor foundation for the democratic process.

Within a few months of the end of the war, the U.S. military forces began surveying public opinion to assess the legacy of the Third Reich.(5) These findings are probably as applicable for the East as they are for the West. The surveys showed that Allied concerns about the German political culture were well justified. Even after the collapse of the Third Reich, roughly one sixth of the population were unrepentant Nazis. Sympathy for the Nazi ideology was even more widespread. For several years after the war, half of the public felt national socialism was a good idea badly carried out, and nearly as many felt Nazism represented more good than evil. Anti-semitic feelings were common, and a small core of extremists refused to believe the Nazi attempts to exterminate the Jewish race ever happened. After reviewing this evidence, Anna and Richard Merritt concluded that "even if the Nazi party and its leaders were discredited, it was by no means certain that their underlying principles were."(6)

YouTube video of U.S. image of postwar Germany; from "Why we Fight" series of U.S. propaganda films (10:00min)

The prospects for establishing a democratic political system in the West were also suspect. Few individuals wanted to risk becoming politically active. More than two-thirds of the people living in the U.S. occupation zone preferred to leave politics to others. In early 1946, a survey of community leaders

found opinions nearly equally divided on whether democracy was possible in Germany.(7) This was the political culture postwar Germany inherited from the Third Reich.

Remaking the Political Culture – Round One

Although both the FRG and GDR began with quite different political goals, they shared many common experiences in trying to remake their respective political cultures. The military occupation forces in both the Western and Eastern zones began their efforts to reshape the political culture nearly as soon as the war ended.(8) The Western powers immediately set up youth groups to counteract the earlier effects of the Hitler Youth organizations. Public addresses and the media were used in public education campaigns. The Western Allies gave newspaper licenses only to individuals with strong democratic orientations. Denazification programs aimed to discredit Nazi ideas as well as punish individual crimes.

Sensitivities to the Past

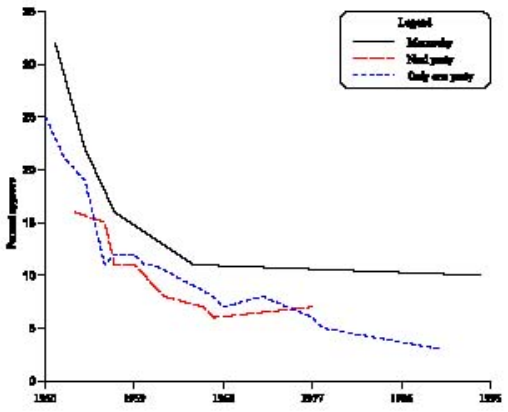
Attempts to avoid the past occasionally went to extreme lengths. For instance, references to the Nazi military were cut from early German showings of Humphrey Bogart films such as *Casablanca* or *The African Queen*. Imagine making sense of Rick's actions in Casablanca if there were no German officers in the movie! The emotional scene in *Cabaret* in which a young boy leads beer garden patrons in singing a patriotic Nazi song was deleted when the film was first shown in Germany in the mid-1970s. German theaters were hesitant to show the film *Europa, Europa*, the provocative film of a Jewish boy's experience in the Third Reich, even though the film had received wide critical acclaim outside of Germany and a 1992 Golden Globe award. Even more recently, there was widespread debate on the appropriateness of the dramatic movie on Hitler's last days (*Downfall*) as the first major German film to directly deal with Hitler. These examples illustrate the difficulty a nation faces when it tries to renounce a part of its own history.

It is difficult to reshape a political culture, because it involves changing how people think about themselves and society. For example, efforts to compare democratic politics to the previous regimes touched a sensitive nerve for many. How could school teachers lecture their pupils on the horrors of the Third Reich when they themselves had been citizens of the Reich? How could parents who may have voted for Hitler explain Nazism to their children? How could the government publicly castigate National Socialism while some judges and civil servants of the Third Reich still served under the Federal Republic?

Perhaps even more miraculous than the Economic Miracle was the Federal Republic's success in reshaping the political culture it inherited from the Third Reich. This included both orientations toward the new political system of the Federal Republic, and the democratic values that underlie the new regime. In both areas, the transformation of the political culture created a new foundation for the democratic political system. At the same time, however, there are parts of the political culture that still retain the stigma of the past, especially affective attachments to the nation.

Attitudes toward the Political System

Figure 4.1 Support for Germany's Authoritarian Past



Source: Institut für Demoskopie, Allensbach.

In the early 1950s, large proportions of the West German public still looked favorably on the symbols and personalities of prior authoritarian regimes, implying lingering public identification with these systems. Most people initially felt that the Empire or Hitler's prewar Reich had been the best times for Germany. Citizens in the Federal Republic also saw Bismarck as the most admirable figure in German history–hardly the ideal model for a democratic political system–and even support for Hitler was disturbingly common.

These ties to previous regimes gradually eroded between the 1950s and the early 1970s.(9) For instance, the already low evaluations of Hitler declined over time. The substantial minorities who had once favored a restoration of the monarchy, support for the Nazis, or a one-party state became a mere trace element in public opinion surveys (figure 4.1). Favorable images of Bismarck as the man who had "done the most for Germany" dropped from 35 percent in 1951 to 18 percent in 1964. Positive feelings toward National Socialism showed an even more precipitous decline in the decade following the formation of the Federal Republic.

As the bonds to earlier regimes weakened, the links to the new institutions and leaders of the Federal Republic grew steadily stronger (Figure 4.2). The number of citizens who believed that Bundestag deputies represent the public interest doubled between 1951 and 1964. Public respect shifted away from the personalities of prior regimes to the chancellors of the Federal Republic, especially Konrad Adenauer. More people preferred the FRG flag and its colors similar to Weimar than a return to the imperial flag. Other survey questions found that by the 1960s people overwhelmingly felt that the Federal Republic represented the best time in German history. In fact, by the mid-1960s political support was so widespread that annual monitoring of many of these basic indicators was discontinued. For perhaps the first time in modern German history, a consensus existed on the symbols and basic structure of the political system, at least in the Federal Republic.

Figure 4.2 Support for Symbols of the Federal Republic

Source: Institut für Demoskopie, Allensbach.

Democratic Norms and Procedures

The Federal Republic also faced the challenge of creating public support and understanding for democratic political norms. For many West Germans in 1949, the rules of democratic politics--majority rule, minority rights, individual liberties, and pluralist debate--were new concepts that did not fit their experiences. Germans traditionally viewed the state in an idealistic, almost mystical way. Progress, stability, order, and well-being were achieved by subordinating individual interests to the general interests represented by the state. Political power was absolute and flowed from the state, rather than the people. This model of the authoritarian state was basic to the political regimes of the Second Empire and the Third Reich.

To develop experience with democracy, political leaders in the Federal Republic constructed a Basic Law that formalized democratic procedures (see Chapter 2). Citizen participation in elections was encouraged and expected; policy making was legally defined to involve all legitimate interest groups. The West German public also learned democratic norms by continued exposure to the new political system. Domestic politics during the 1950s and 1960s was marked by political stability and a strengthening of the democratic political culture.

YouTube video of President J. F. Kennedy's "Ich bin ein Berliner" speech (4:41min)

As a result of these experiences and the addition of new generations raised under this democratic system, a commitment to democratic norms gradually developed. For instance, in the early 1950s a bare majority of the public expressed a preference for a democratic political system, but by the mid-1960s there was nearly unanimous agreement that democracy was the best form of government. Equally important, research on the changing political culture found a growing acceptance of democratic political procedures: a multiparty system, conflict management, minority rights, political tolerance, and representative government. (10) Later in this chapter, we present other evidence of the breadth of commitment to democratic values that had developed by the 1970s and which endures to the present (see Table 4.1 and accompanying discussion).

Admittedly, no democratic nation is immune to anti-democratic sentiments, and the same applies to the Federal Republic. And these democratic values have been severely tested at times. For example, the *Baader-Meinhoff* terrorist period of the 1970s strained democratic values. On the negative side, the government's actions betrayed a still-uncertain commitment to protection individual liberties when the public order was threatened. An example of this excess is the *Radicals Decree* (*Radikalenerlass*) that barred individuals with "anti-constitutional" attitudes from public employment. On the positive side, the democratic system faced the violent onslaughts of urban guerrillas and survived with its basic institutions and procedures intact. A radical “autonomous” movement also challenged the political order in the 1980s, and some scholars worry that the terrorist threat in contemporary Germany may also erode civil rights in the face of security threats. In the post September 11th world, the nation now struggles to balance the fight against terrorism relative to the protection of civil liberties.

Because of the nation’s history, political analysts (and some of Germany’s European neighbors and allies) have expressed persisting concerns about the political culture and the viability of German democracy. Even today, it is not unusual to hear political commentators speculate about the ability of German democracy to withstand economic downturns or other crises that would not be considered as threats to democracy in other West European nations. But the evidence from political culture, and from the experience of the Federal Republic’s own history, indicates that Germans are committed to democratic values and preserving the democratic order. This element of the political culture has been remade.

Developing a National Identity

Another essential part of a political culture is a sense of community. People typically feel they are part of a nation and its history, beyond commitments to a specific set of values or regime norms. Indeed, a common history, culture, territory, and language developed a sense of national community long before Germany was politically united. Germany was the land of Schiller, Goethe, Beethoven, and Wagner, even if the Germans disagreed on political boundaries. The imagery of a single *Volk* bound Germans together, despite their social and political differences.

Previous regimes had failed, however, to develop a sense of political community as part of the German national identity. Succeeding political systems never fully developed a popular consensus on the nature and goals of German politics. Both postwar German states thus faced a challenge of getting the public to identify with the political system. Both states faced a difficult task of building a new political identity because they were uncertain about how, or even whether, this should be done. The postwar division of Germany was supposedly a temporary situation.

Despite the eventual definition of Germany as “two states in one nation”, FRG citizens lacked the emotional attachment to their nation that political culture research suggests is necessary to cement political identities.(11) The trauma of the Third Reich had burned a deep scar in the German psyche. This made Germans hesitant to express pride in their nation or an emotional attachment to the symbols and institutions of the state.

The Federal Republic's uncertain identity was also reflected in its relationship to German history. In the immediate postwar years, attempts to learn the lessons of history usually reached no further than 1933. The shadow cast by the Third Reich was so large that it nearly obscured all other aspects of German history. Thus, the FRG lacked the historical roots that could add a sense of continuity and strength to the culture.

In this instance, the German political culture may differ from most other democratic systems. The leaders of the Federal Republic saw emotionalism and excessive nationalism as a source of weakness, not strength. They believed that the nationalist excesses of the past should not be repeated. Government reeducation efforts, therefore, aimed at developing popular attachments to the Federal Republic, without nurturing excessive nationalism. The emotional national symbols that are common in other industrialized democracies were rarities in the FRG. There are few political holidays or memorials, the national anthem is seldom played, and the anniversary of the founding of the Federal Republic attracts little public attention. There is no real equivalent to Uncle Sam, Fourth of July celebrations, or the other symbols of U.S. patriotism. In international comparisons, schools in the Federal Republic devote less time to patriotic activities, such as singing national songs or pledging allegiance. The public seems more willing to boast about the accomplishments of an international soccer star or cultural icon than to display pride in the political system. Germans normally rank near the bottom in national pride in most cross-national surveys.(12) While more than 95 percent of Americans routinely express pride in their nation, barely half of the German public is proud of their nation.

Perhaps this aspect of the Federal Republic’s political culture might be best expressed by an exchange in Bertolt Brecht's play, *Galileo*: "Unhappy is the nation that has no heroes," said a character in the play. "No," Galileo replies, "unhappy is the nation that needs heroes." This is the German sentiment toward nationalism and expressions of national pride.

Can One Be Proud, and German?

Could anyone imagine a French president or a British prime minister or indeed just about any other world leader refusing to say he was proud of his nationality? Yet this is a contentious statement in Germany because expressions of nationalism are still linked by some to the excessive nationalism of the Third Reich. Thus, when in 2001 the general secretary of the CDU declared: "I am proud to be German," this set off an intense national debate. A Green member of the SPD-Green Cabinet replied that this statement demonstrated the mentality of a right-wing skinhead. President Rau tried to sidestep the issue by declaring that one could be "glad" or "grateful" for being Germany, but not "proud." Then Chancellor Schröder entered the fray: "I am proud of what people have achieved and our democratic culture. . . In that sense, I am a German patriot who is proud of his country." It is difficult to image such exchanges occurring in Washington, D.C. or Paris.

Source: *The Economist* (March 24, 2001): 62.

Explaining Change

The success of the Federal Republic in remaking the political culture is due to many factors. Ironically, one reason for the cultural change was the social destruction wrought by the Third Reich.(13) The traditional aristocratic elite was first reduced by the Nazi purges and then ended with the fall of Hitler's Reich. The power of the great economic dynasties was similarly crippled. Thus, in contrast to the experience of the Weimar Republic, the Federal Republic did not face significant opposition from political and economic elites committed to the prior regime. The scorched-earth policy of the Third Reich left society fertile for new developments. In short, Germany had a chance to start over; mindful of history but freed from its grip.

From the beginning, widespread support for a democratic system existed among the leaders of the major political parties and other political elites in the Federal Republic. Political extremism on the right had been discredited by the Third Reich, and the actions of the communist governments in the Soviet Union and East Germany undercut popular support for communism in the West. Small extremist parties on the right and the left challenged the democratic consensus, but they garnered few votes and were not a significant political force. Democracy was the only viable option.

Elite consensus in support of democratic ideals led to the conscious efforts to reeducate the public to adopt a democratic political culture. But more important than formal reeducation programs were the positive experiences generated by the new political system. As A. J. P. Taylor argues in his history of modern Germany:(14)

> There was a great pother after the war about how we should educate the Germans in democracy. I never understood how this should be done. Democracy is learnt by practice, and not by sitting on forms at a political finishing-school.

Actual experience in the role of a democratic citizen also increased support for democratic and participatory norms. Furthermore, political leadership provided a generally positive example of political competition in a democratic setting. Despite initial fears to the contrary, democracy in the Federal Republic functioned fairly smoothly when crises arose.

Another key factor in the success of these efforts to remake the culture was the economic and social performance of the system. The accomplishments of the Economic Miracle stood in marked contrast to

the crises that had undermined the Weimar Republic. Instead of inflation and economic collapse, democracy in the FRG was associated with affluence and full employment. The new regime's political and economic success was a very important source of popular support during the early 1950s.(15) By the 1970s the public had developed more generalized commitments to democratic political norms. (16) The positive political experiences of the Federal Republic influenced the attitudes of almost all Germans, but especially the young. Free of the negative political experiences of their elders, younger Germans were more receptive to democratic and participatory politics. Public opinion surveys routinely showed higher levels of democratic norms and political involvement among the young. In other words, the political culture may have been remade less through the reeducation of the old than by the education of new citizens.

Remaking the Political Culture — Round Two

Up until the revolutionary events that led to the collapse of the GDR, it seemed that the East German regime had been relatively successful in developing popular acceptance of the communist system. The GDR was widely cited as the model of communist efficiency and commitment in the Eastern bloc. While Poland, Hungary, or the Soviet Union might struggle with questions of political reform, the GDR appeared the island of orthodoxy in this rising sea of uncertainty. The GDR was where communism supposedly worked, and was accepted by the public.

YouTube video of East Germany scenes to music of national anthem (2:59min)

Given the Federal Republic's accomplishments and public's broad support for democratic norms, many political observers worried about the consequences of integrating 16 million East Germans into the FRG. Easterners had been raised under a communist system, living with an authoritarian regime that did not allow pluralism and political competition. To many political analysts, 1989 appeared to be a rerun of 1949: the Federal Republic would again have to transform the political values of many of its (new) citizens. As one of the leaders of the East German democracy movement warned, the Federal Republic was "opening its doors to 16 million crazies."

Attitudes toward the Political System

As the GDR was officially celebrating its 40th anniversary, the signs of its internal decline were increasingly apparent, at least to government leaders who had access to such information. During the 1980s, student support for socialism and identification with Marxism-Leninism suffered sharp declines. Even before the revolutionary changes of late 1989, less than half of East German youth identified with these principles of the regime. The GDR was losing its future, its own youth. the growing activities of autonomous environmental and peace groups were additional signs of a strengthening dissident movement and decreasing support for the communist regime. Perhaps East German government officials were aware of their vulnerability, and this shaped their actions in 1989.(17)

One of the most surprising aspects of German unification was the extent to which Easterners initially accepted the system of the Federal Republic. Surveys immediately after unification found that most Easterners were trustful of the institutions of the FRG–the Constitutional Court, the Bundesrat, the Bundestag and the federal government– although Western publics were even more trustful. Moreover, citizens in the East began their association with the Federal Republic with positive images–in marked contrast to the negative images toward democracy in 1945.(18)

In summary, Easterners led the peaceful revolution and the destruction of the old regime, and they were looking toward a new political order, even if they are a bit unsure about this new system. Therefore, these

new residents of the Federal Republic began their new political life with a positive orientation toward the Federal Republic and its institutions. At the same time, these attitudes require more time and experience before they become ingrained in the political culture in the East.(19)

Democratic Norms and Procedures

Democracy was another example of the internal contradictions of the East German state. Although the communist regime suppressed dissent and prohibited meaningful forms of democracy, the East German government officially endorsed democracy as a founding principle of the state. The German Communist party's first public declaration in 1945 rejected the idea of a political system based on the Soviet model and called for a parliamentary system with full democratic rights and freedoms for the populace.(20) When the communists consolidated power under the leadership of the Socialist Unity party (SED) in 1946, they maintained the rhetorical commitment to democracy and appeared to support democratic pluralism. Even after the division of the two Germanies, the first constitution presented the GDR as a democratic state. It was, after all, the German *Democratic* Republic.

The democratic rhetoric of the GDR stood in sharp contrast to the reality of politics. The government held elections for their symbolic value and as a tool of mass mobilization and education, but they offered little opportunity for citizens to influence the government. Social groups, mass membership organizations and political parties existed to mobilize the public in support of the government, not to represent the members' demands. The SED firmly held the reins of social, economic and political power. The political process of the GDR actually was more consistent with the passive and authoritarian culture inherited from prewar Germany than with the democratic and participatory values the government officially proclaimed.(21)

In creating the trappings of democracy, however, the government might have undermined itself. There were elections, which inevitably sensitized the Easterners to the lack of real choice. The GDR developed extensive ways to involve citizens in government advisory bodies, trade union boards, works councils, parent-teacher bodies, and similar quasi-political structures (see Chapter 6). Despite the restrictions on these organizations, such organizational life develops participatory skills and values that can carry over to politics.(22) In short, in contrast to the ideology of earlier German authoritarian regimes, the German Democratic Republic told its citizens to believe in democracy (just not to act like democrats).

Because of these experiences, and inevitably the spectacle of watching communism collapse before their eyes, East Germans began the second transition to democracy with an expressed support for democratic values. Table 4.1 presents several measures of democratic norms that researchers had used over the previous twenty years to document the commitment to democracy among the West German public.(23) Since the late 1960s, West Germans gave broad support to values such as tolerance of a political opposition, the right of citizens to protest, party competition, and freedom of speech that are described in the top half of the table. This evidence prompted researchers to claim that the West German political culture had been remade

The most interesting part of Table 4.1 is the comparison of West and East German attitudes toward democracy from a survey conducted in April 1990. This survey finds a broad similarity in the democratic values of the two publics despite their differing political experiences over the previous 40 years. Many of the basic tenets of democracy in the top half of the table receive nearly universal support in both Germanies. For example, 93 percent of West Germans believed that democracy requires a viable opposition; 95 percent of the East Germans agreed. The lower panel in the table taps toleration of conflict in a democratic setting. Here, East Germans displayed a higher tolerance than West Germans in 1990. For instance, a third of the East German public disagreed with the statement that a citizen loses the right to protest if (s)he threatens the public order; only 28 percent of West Germans held this same view. Perhaps

having lived through the experience where opposition to the regime won them their freedom, Easterners were more likely to see political conflict and competition as an essential part of the democratic process.

Another 1990 study found that when compared to Westerners, East Germans initially displayed higher levels of political efficacy, greater interest in politics, more support for a multiparty system, more positive attitudes toward minorities, and equivalent criticisms of Hitler and the Third Reich.(24) When the Allensbach institute repeated its classic measure of support for democracy in 1990, 81 percent of Westerners said "democracy is the best form of government," as did 79 percent of Easterners!

Table 4.1. Support for Democratic Principles in West Germany and East Germany

	West Germany						East	
Democratic Values	**1968**	**1979**	**1982**	**1988**	**1990**	**1996**	**1990**	**1996**
Democracy requires a political opposition	89	93	93	93	93	93	95	92
Every citizen has the right to demonstrate	74	86	87	91	90	92	90	93
Everyone should have the right to express their opinion	93	95	94	94	92	98	90	94
Every democratic party should have chance to govern	86	93	93	91	91	89	88	91
Public interests should have priority over individual interests	94	95	92	89	89	--	85	--
Consensus vs Order (percent disagreeing)								
Citizen forfeits right to protest if threatens order	30	26	21	30	28	27	32	36
Political opposition should support the government	28	31	34	46	39	40	42	47
Conflicts between interests are adverse to public interest	27	26	21	48	47	--	74	--
In a democratic society, some conflicts require violence	73	81	83	86	79	--	81	--

Source: Kaase (fn 23); ALLBUS surveys; and 1990 German Identity Survey.

One should be cautious in inferring too much from public opinion surveys conducted during a very turbulent political period. Other research shows that understanding of democracy was initially limited in the East; they accepted the principle but this was not always translated into practice.(25) Table 4.1 also shows that these sentiments have persisted over time–this was not just the transitory reaction to the collapse of the GDR. However, Easterners are disenchanted with some aspects of FRG-style democracy,

such as the contentious of politics, the emphasis on individual interests, and the irresponsibility of some democratic politicians.

Thus, public opinion surveys typically find high support for democratic principles among Easterners, but simultaneous skepticism about how democracy functions in the Federal Republic. Residents in the new Länder learned that even in democracies there is a gap between democratic theory and political reality; often this was a rude shock. Yet, the widespread expression of such values still indicates that the East German situation after the 1989 revolution is far different from the West German situation in 1949. East Germans do not begin their modern experience with democracy with negative orientations toward the new political order, but with stated opinions that broadly support the democratic process. In the end, rather than remaking this aspect of the East German political culture, the greater need is to transform Eastern enthusiasm for democracy into a deeper and richer understanding of the workings of the process and its pragmatic strengths and weaknesses.

Developing a National Identity

The political culture of the new Germany also bears the legacy of the past. For example, as preparations were being made for German unity day on October 3, 1990, the press asked how much could Germans allow themselves to celebrate (as if there was a limit). Was a fireworks display too expressive, would the ringing of church bells be appropriate, should there be parades? Similarly, public opinion surveys find that Western and Eastern Germans still lack an emotional tie toward the nation, despite the historic and emotional events of German union. Public opinion surveys consistently show that West Germans and East Germans are more hesitant to express pride in their nation when compared to other Europeans and Americans.(26)

The difficult course of German unification further weakened the political commitments of the former citizens of the GDR. Easterners are more likely to express dissatisfaction with the workings of the political system.(27) These experiences led many Easterners to retain a distinct identity as an Ossie (Easterner), a feeling they carry even if they reject the values of the old communist regime. In a 1991 public opinion survey, for instance, residents of the new Länder were more likely to think of themselves as “East Germans” (58 percent) than as “Germans” (38 percent); most Westerners thought of themselves as “Germans”.(28) This so-called “wall in the mind” has created a separate identity among Easterners.(29) It has proven easier to demolish the concrete wall separating Germans than some of the psychological walls that still remain.

Goodbye Lenin!

This 2003 German film provides a nostalgic look back at life under the German Democratic Republic. A communist activist suffers a stroke just as the GDR is collapsing. When she is recovering in the hospital, the doctor’s tell her son that he should protect her from stress to avoid another stroke. So he brings her home and tries to convince her that the GDR lives on. The film looks at life under the old regime, and how quickly life changed in the GDR after unification.

YouTube trailer from the film (2:10min)

Unification can be a process where this search for a national political identity might finally be resolved. The opening of the Berlin Wall created a opportunity to finally answer the question of what it means to be German. The celebration of unification and the designation of October 3rd as a national holiday finally

gives Germans something political to celebrate. Given enough time and progress in the unification process, the split German psyche now might grow into a single personality.

Capitalism and Socialism

Another potential contrast between East and West involved the values underlying their respective economic systems. Erich Honecker told East Germans that there were fundamental differences with the West:(30)

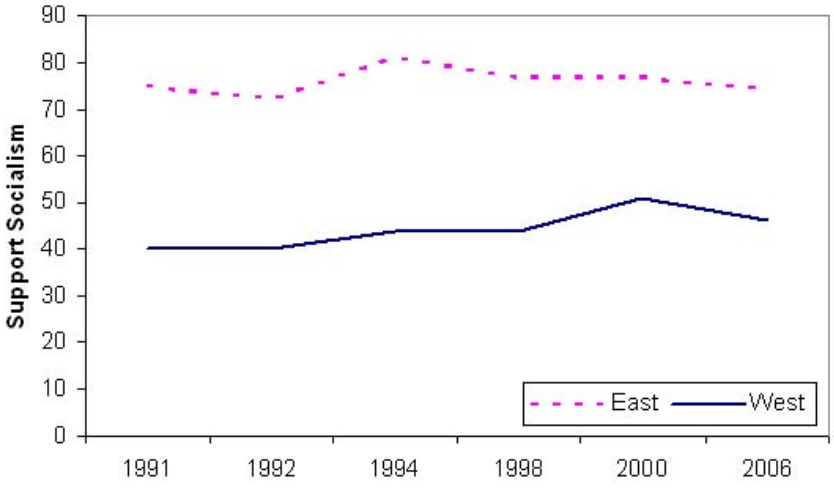
The contradictory characteristics of socialism and capitalism are more than ever apparent: socialism brings peace, economic growth, a secure way of life, freedom and justice, while capitalism--marked by crisis stagnation, economic insecurity and the denial of elementary human rights--again and again creates tensions and dangers of war.

Similar attacks on the evil empire in the East were offered by the leadership of the Federal Republic. In part, this was the rhetoric of the Cold War. In part, the two regimes were based on fundamentally different values.

The Federal Republic built the Social Market Economy on a shared commitment to a capitalist market and the social protections of the welfare state. People were expected to be self-sufficient and self-interested economic actors. Social and economic inequality were considered a byproduct of this competitive environment, as long as basic social needs were met.

In contrast, the German Democratic Republic tried to form a new "socialist personality" among its citizens.(31) Instead of the individual orientation of West German society, the GDR encouraged its citizens to embrace egalitarian values and the collective. Neighborhood collectives addressed local needs, work collectives dealt with shop floor relations, and education stressed collective problem solving. Government ownership of the economy built on these beliefs. Social programs emphasized collective needs and responsibilities; the state accepted a broader social responsibility than in the West. Feelings of international solidarity with other socialist states were another element of the socialist personality.

Figure 4.3 Socialism is a Good Idea



Source: ALLBUS Surveys

While Easterners have accepted the economic system of the Federal Republic, we can again see signs of a continuing nostalgia for the past. For instance, on standard opinion question asks whether "socialism is a good idea, only badly carried out". Most Westerners reject this opinion–but it is supported by three-quarters of Easterners (Figure 4.3). Moreover, these opinions have persisted over the first decade of a unified Germany.

Few residents in the East want to return to the economic and political systems of the German Democratic Republic. But there is a feeling that some of the positive features of the old regime have been lost, and the struggles of life under the new regime were greater than they expected. Perhaps only the passage of time will change these attitudes. But Easterners do accept the institutions and processes of the present system.

Explaining Change

How could forty years of separation, forty years of different political experiences, and forty years of living under such different social and economic systems have left such a little trace in the beliefs of the two German publics? The full array of social beliefs include East/West differences in support for inequality and state-guaranteed social benefits (also see Chapter 10). East Germans also display some residual sympathy for socialism as a good idea that was poorly applied in the GDR. In overall terms, however, the separation of the two Germanies has not produced the type of broad and dramatic differences in political views that their histories would have led us to suspect. Again, here is evidence of a gradual convergence of opinions by both publics over time, creating a culture different from that inherited from the Third Reich but similar between the two Germanies.

Several factors apparently produced this convergence. In the case of democratic and participatory norms, the East German state espoused values that were antithetical to its own institutions and procedures. In other words, the state created norms that were partially inconsistent with itself. There was a potential conflict between publicly stated beliefs versus privately held values.(32) As long as people were not allowed to express their private beliefs, this inconsistency was not apparent. But when the control functions of the state began to crack in the late 1980s, these sentiments bubbled forth.

The increasing political and economic problems of the GDR regime during the 1980s also affected public opinion. Declining living standards and a increased regulation of society tested prior support for the political and economic systems. The cultural contradictions of the regime probably made it easier for people to develop doubts about the system. Youth surveys conducted during the 1980s, showed a sharp dropoff in support for the principles underlying the GDR before the Berlin Wall began to crack.(33) In addition, exposure to life in the West, through personal contacts with relatives in the Federal Republic or by watching western television, created an awareness of an alternative. If people were uncertain about their personal situations, these uncertainties could gain additional force by seeing another life of affluence and relative freedom just across the border.

Finally, the revolutionary events of 1989 probably forced many Easterners to rethink their political beliefs. The first public opinion surveys after the opening of the Berlin Wall suggest that many Easterners initially did not favor unification with the West or had mixed opinions about life in the Federal Republic. As the GDR began to self-destruct before their eyes, however, and newspapers began to publish stories of the rich lifestyles enjoyed by communist politicians, the legitimacy of the regime suffered a mortal wound. What, after all, is a communist to say after observing communism's funeral?

The Alternative Culture

The Federal Republic's past economic and social progress has made it the political success story of postwar Europe. As is often the case, however, success in dealing with one set of objectives creates new challenges. Once the FRG made substantial progress in addressing traditional socio-economic needs (see Chapter 2), public interests broadened to include a new set of political goals. Beginning in the late-1960s and early-1970s, the government faced new demands for reform in education and social programs. Issues like pollution, women's liberation, and co-determination increased in salience.

The development of these new political issues is generally linked to a broad theory of value change proposed by Ronald Inglehart.(34) Inglehart maintains that the family and societal conditions of one's early formative years heavily influence a person's value priorities. In a time of depression or civil unrest--such as prewar Germany--economic well-being and security undoubtedly receive primary attention. If a society can make significant progress in addressing these goals, then some people may shift their attention to higher-order values such as individual freedom, participation, and the quality of life. This general theory is especially relevant to the Federal Republic. The social, economic and political changes within German society during the later half of the twentieth century were probably the largest within Western Europe, and produced vastly different life experiences for succeeding generations.

Members of older generations, socialized before World War II, lived at least partially under an authoritarian government, experienced long periods of economic hardship, and felt the destructive consequences of world war. Given these experiences, many older Germans retained a relatively high priority for what Inglehart labels material values–economic security, law and order, strict moral values, and physical security–even after decades of material well-being and political stability.

Younger West Germans, in contrast, grew up in a fundamentally different environment. Presentday living standards in the FRG are several times higher than Germans ever experienced before World War II. The welfare state now protects most citizens from major economic problems. Postwar generations also have a broader world view, reflecting their higher educational levels, greater exposure to political information, and more diverse cultural experiences. Under these conditions, security concerns may diminish in urgency. Some younger Germans thus broaden their interests to include new postmaterial goals. This phenomenon is most closely identified with the generations that came of age during and after the student and environmental movement mobilization of the 1960s and 1970s.

Because more than just economic values are involved, research describes this value change process as a transition from Old Politics to New Politics values. (35) The Old Politics comprise the traditional goals of industrial societies, such as economic well-being, social stability, and security. Some New Politics goals -- freedom of expression, participation, and personal freedom -- represent an expansion of traditional European liberalism to a wider popular base. Other New Politics orientations -- dealing with social relations, life-styles, and environmental quality -- represent the emerging political issues of advanced industrial societies. The overall nature of the New Politics might best be understood in comparison to Old Politics goals:

Materialist/ Old Politics	**Postmaterialist/ New Politics**
Economic growth	Economic policy that ensures environmental quality
Marketplace economy based on mass consumption	Social-needs economy and subdued consumption
Representative government	Grassroots democracy
Strong military defense	Collaborative foreign policy
Social order	Personal freedom
Traditional family values	Equality of sexes

Instead of unlimited economic growth, postmaterialists believe that development must occur in harmony with nature. Instead of a highly structured and elite-dominated political system, postmaterialists want

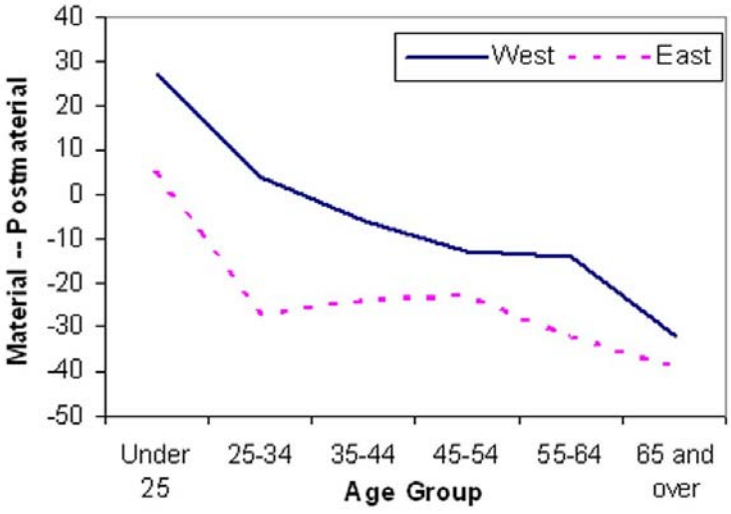
people to have more say in the decisions affecting their lives. While materialists believe in national security through nuclear deterrence, postmaterialists generally feel that the best security comes from nuclear disarmament. Postmaterialists also argue that the social aspects of the Social Market Economy deserve more attention than they have received. Postmaterialists do not necessarily reject materialist goals; rather, past progress in addressing material goals produces the situation where New Politics goals are added to the priorities of the past.

YouTube video from Greenpeace Germany to save the whales (1:19min)

The breadth of value change can be seen most clearly in public opinion trends over the period of postwar socioeconomic recovery. One question measures the priority given to four basic human freedoms: freedom of worship, freedom of speech, freedom from fear, and freedom from want. In the harsh economic environment of postwar Europe, a plurality of West Germans felt that freedom from want was most important. As the success of the Economic Miracle lessened these basic needs, there was a long term shift away from this materialist goal and a growing emphasis on freedom of speech.

Inglehart devised another measure of value priorities that asks individuals to rank the priority of material and postmaterial goals.(36) These questions show that the problems of economic well-being and security are still a major concern for many individuals. At the same time, these questions document the process of value change. Most citizens are now concerned with a mix of material and postmaterial concerns. The number of postmaterialist has increased from 11 percent in 1970 to 19 percent in 1999–despite the varied economic conditions of the intervening period. Furthermore, figure 4.4 shows the relative balance of materialist and postmaterialist values across age groups.(37) Materialists predominate in older Germans reared before the Federal Republic; among the youngest age groups the number of postmaterialists actually outnumbers materialists by a substantial margin. Moreover, these data indicate that generational change is continuing among the youngest Germans, and this has not reversed among the youngest Germans.(38)

Figure 4.4 Value Priorities by Age



To a more modest extent, a similar counter-culture has developed among young people in the East. Certainly the conditions of affluence did not exist as in the Federal Republic. But the structured socio-economic system and extensive social benefits of the GDR provided its citizens with a level of personal and economic security that partially compensated for lower living standards. A 1990 survey found that 12 percent of Easterners expressed postmaterial values, and there is a similar age trend as in the West. After a decade of life in the Federal Republic, the materialist/postmaterial balance shifted toward the materialist direction because of the economic uncertainties that accompanied unification.

Because New Politics values are more common and widespread among Western youth and the better educated, the first evidence of these changing values came from among university students in the FRG. West German universities shared in the student unrest on social values that was common the Western Europe in the late 1960s. The student movement in West Germany laid the groundwork for organized efforts to pursue New Politics interests. One strategy called for young people to work for change within the Federal Republic's existing political institutions. The reformist goals of the Brandt government attracted many young people into the Social Democratic party. The Young Socialists (*Jusos*) recruited a new constituency of young, middle class activists into the SPD's traditionally working-class ranks. Former chancellor Schröder, for example, rose to a position of political prominence through his activities as a *Jusos* leader. The political orientation of the SPD (and for a time the FDP) underwent a gradual change from within.

Another byproduct of the student movement was the development of political groups explicitly committed to New Politics goals (see Chapter 7). These groups provide an institutional base for new political orientations, harnessing the energies of political activists and representing their viewpoints within the political process. Newly-formed environmental groups constitute a major new public interest lobby. Even in the East, environmental activism steadily developed over the past decade, often under the shadow of church discussion circles. The women's movement works to change traditional sex roles. Many of the early democracy protests in the East, for example, had demonstrators calling for "*Freiheit und Umwelt*" ("Freedom and the Environment").

The creation of the Green party (*Die Grünen*) in 1980 further developed the political base of the New Politics movement. The Greens are a living example of postmaterialism (see Chapter 8). Their founding principles were environmental issues, democratization of society, and a violence free world. The party pursued both an unconventional issue agenda consistent with a postmaterial perspective, and an unconventional political style. The party won a small initial following among younger voters, especially university students and university educated. When the Greens entered the government in 1998 as part of the SPD/Green coalition, this symbolized the “march through the institutions” that had begun with the 1968er generation. Indeed, most of the Green ministers in the new governments were student radicals during their youth.

The New Politics is still a minority viewpoint among the Western population, and is even more limited in the East. Still, the evidence of substantial political change is already clear. Public interest in the New Politics has gradually spread beyond its youthful and developed a wider base of popular support. Issues such as environmental protection, including opposition to nuclear energy, now attracts widespread public attention throughout Germany. New attitudes towards work and social relations are also apparent. And when the Greens entered the government, this interests were transformed into government policy. A new, alternative set of cultural values is now embedded in German society.

Cultural Change

The scenes of young people dancing on the Berlin Wall and Berliners embracing each other in the former no-man's land dividing East and West will remain an emotional memory for those who observed these events. The amazing series of events over the following year, capped by the celebration of German union on October 3rd, has reshaped how Germans think of themselves and how others think of them. Germany is united and free. For the first time in over a century, nearly all Germans agree on where their borders begin and end, and the nature of the political system. Thus Germans might now be able to end their quest for the German political identity in the form of the Federal Republic.

Over the previous forty years, both states had tried to remake their respective political cultures, albeit with very different goals in mind. Yet, the historic differences between the FRG and GDR do not consistently show in the beliefs of their citizens, especially Easterners. Political socialization efforts in the East apparently removed the fascist legacy inherited in 1949, but did not create a new socialist personality in its place. At least for the last decade of the GDR, citizen beliefs shifted on many key political values. Thus, the Federal Republic's second transition to democracy begins with the public sharing a broad commitment to democratic norms and the values underlying the Social Market Economy.

Although these commonalities in political beliefs provide an important cultural foundation for politics, we should also recognize that the expression of similar political values does not assure that these values are understood and will be applied in equivalent ways. Indeed, given their contrasting backgrounds, we should expect that Westerners and Easterners are thinking of different things when they talk about political rights or political processes. For example, the growing political controversies regarding foreigners in Germany have stimulated widespread debates on the real levels of tolerance in the behavior of Easterners (and Westerners).(39) Similarly, both publics have different ideas about how abstract democratic norms apply to practical politics. The open, sometimes confrontational style of Western politics has required a major adjustment for citizens raised under the closed system of the GDR. This is already apparent in how Easterners respond skeptically to Western style election campaigns (and Western-style consumer advertisements).(40)

The broad agreement that both publics share about the principles of market economics have also been tested as Germany has struggled economically for the past decade. Westerners emphasize the *market* aspect of the Social Market Economy, while Easterners emphasize the *social*. In policies where economics and social benefits are placed in conflict, the two publics have different priorities. Easterners are less willing to accept the belief that social services and economic growth are competing policy goals.

Unification also heightened material/postmaterial conflicts within German society. East Germany was struggling to become a materialist success, while West Germany was enjoying its postmaterial abundance. Consequently, materialist values receive greater weight in the East. Most East Germans want to first share in the affluence and consumer society of the West, before they begin to fear the consequences of this affluence. Some Easterners therefore worry that the pro-environment and non-material goals of New Politics groups from the West could undermine the economic development of the East. The clash of values within West German society has now been joined by East/West differences.

Germany’s course since unification has been a challenging one. Indeed, many indicators point to growing public frustration with parties and the political system for the slow rate of progress. Citizens in East and West are supportive of the principles of democracy, but dissatisfied with the performance of government.(41) This does not represent a threat to the political system–as occurred during the Weimar Republic–because the public supports the democratic principles of government. But it does produce pressures for governments to be more transparent in their actions and more attuned to public preferences.

The final story on the German political culture is now being written. Germans share a common language, culture and history–and a common set of ultimate political goals. The process of unification may build upon these commonalities and finally answer the political question of what it means to be German. A successful economic and social reconstruction of the East should promote even greater cultural convergence in the years ahead. Culture, as the German experience shows, is a changeable aspect of politics. Whether the nation successfully builds upon its basic commonalities, or is polarized by the differences, is a major factor in determining the course of the new Germany.

Key Terms

democratic norm	Old politics
material values	political culture
national pride	postmaterial values
New Politics	

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