BECOMING PARTY POLITICIANS

Eastern German State Legislators in the Decade following Democratization

Louise K. Davidson-Schmich

University of Notre Dame Press

Notre Dame, Indiana

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Eastern German State Legislators’ Political Attitudes and the Party State

While the Berlin Wall and East-West German border clearly embodied the dividing line between western Europe and eastern Europe prior to 1989, post-unification eastern Germany is much more difficult for scholars to categorize. Academics within the field of German studies, originally focused on West Germany, tend to view the eastern part of the united country and its inhabitants as being more politically unlike western Germans than alike. More broadly focused comparativists and eastern Europeanists, in contrast, often exclude eastern Germany from their analyses of post-communist Europe because the unification of Germany, with its concurrent adoption of the Federal Republic’s established political system, is assumed to have made eastern German politics more closely resemble public life in western Europe than in a post-communist country.

These differing outlooks are likely a result of their proponents’ contrasting vantage points. Viewing eastern Germany from the outside, eastern Europeanists focus on the presence of identical political institutions—including the Basic Law’s parliamentary, electoral, and legal systems, as well as the existence of established political parties. Not only did eastern Germany enjoy the advantage of inheriting a “ready made state” (Rose et al. 1993), this institutional transfer was supported by extensive human and financial resources. Clearly, eastern Germany is unique among post-Soviet states in this regard and thus has been referred to as an “advanced post-communist society” (Padgett 2000, 25).
Because scholars in this camp assume united Germany’s political institutions will shape political outcomes, eastern German political elites are expected to more closely resemble established western European politicians than elites in a post-communist polity. From the vantage point of German area specialists, however, the eastern individuals who occupy these identical political institutions have very different political attitudes and values than their western counterparts. Given that they were socialized under extremely different political conditions, eastern and western Germans’ different political values are not surprising. The school of thought stressing elites’ socialization and their resulting political attitudes in turn assumes that differing political attitudes will lead to different political outcomes in the eastern and western parts of the Federal Republic.

The eastern German case is unique across Europe in that it allows social scientists to empirically test these conflicting assumptions about the causes of elite political behavior and policy choice. In western Europe, established democratic political institutions are inhabited by elites whose political attitudes and values have been shaped by decades of experience with democracy. In eastern Europe, in contrast, democratic political institutions are only emerging, and political elites hold post-communist political attitudes and values. In these two settings, it is not possible for social scientists to determine whether elite behavior and political outcomes are a result of institutional constraints or elite values. United Germany, in contrast, offers researchers a “laboratory”-like setting (Rohrschneider 1994) with near experimental conditions to investigate these questions. There politicians with very different attitudes and values work within virtually identical political institutions—institutions whose incentives are often at odds with post-communist political elites’ values. If elite political behavior and public policy converge across the united country, institutions would seem to override the influence of elite attitudes and values. Conversely, if eastern political elites’ political behavior and resulting policy choices differ greatly from westerners’, even though the two groups occupy identical political institutions, elite attitudes would seem to have a stronger influence.

This book focuses on state parliamentarians in eastern and western German Länder in the decade since unification and explores the conflicting implications for legislative behavior of the two perspectives outlined above. These state legislators’ political attitudes and values have
been extensively investigated by both English- and German-speaking social scientists. I draw on their well-established findings about the differences between eastern and western legislators' political attitudes and values, and ask whether these beliefs have actually influenced politicians' legislative behavior and policy choices. (See table 1.1.) Specifically, I investigate whether eastern parliamentarians' skepticism of political parties reduced their willingness to run on a party ticket, assume inner-party office, or join an interest group affiliated with their party; whether eastern deputies' widespread distrust of party discipline hindered the creation of disciplined parliamentary party groups; whether eastern elites' preferences for direct democracy and social equality led eastern states to create constitutions more conducive to referenda than western states' and to more enthusiastically embrace citizen initiatives designed to bring about greater economic equality; and whether eastern legislators' political intolerance led them to deny rights to a disliked group.

Why Study German State Parliaments?

In October 1990 the eastern German Democratic Republic (GDR) was dissolved and joined the western democracy, the Federal Republic of Germany. The latter provided a reservoir of experienced individuals to fill leadership positions in politics, public administration, law, business, and other fields. A 1995 study of German elites in various sectors found fewer than 12% to be of eastern German origin, although approximately 20% of the German population lived in the GDR prior to 1989; of all the sectors, politics had the highest representation of easterners at 32%. Nonetheless, the more important the political office, the less eastern Germans were represented. Only 9.5% of the federal executive and 16.7% of the Bundestag's party leadership were eastern Germans. Ten years after unification, two of the five governors of eastern German states were westerners as were about 40% of the ministers in state governments (Hoffmann-Lange 1998, 153).

It is only when one reaches the level of state parliaments that virtually all politicians are eastern Germans: since 1990, 95.6% of the people elected to eastern state legislatures were easterners. Thus in order to examine the interplay between eastern German political elites' attitudes
Table 1.1  Eastern state legislators’ political attitudes, institutions, political behavior, and policy outcomes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Easterners’ attitudes</th>
<th>Western institutions</th>
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<tr>
<td>Distrust of political parties</td>
<td>The party state including a ready-made party system and an electoral system conducive to a high level of party involvement</td>
<td>Do eastern candidates join political parties, hold inner-party office, or join party-affiliated interest groups at the same rate as westerners?</td>
<td>Convergence toward the western model over the course of a decade.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Distrust of party discipline</td>
<td>Parliamentary and electoral systems conducive to a high level of party voting</td>
<td>Once elected, do eastern legislators vote with their party group at the same rate as westerners?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Support for direct democracy</td>
<td>Highly representative form of democracy with only limited provisions for direct democracy; increasing budget constraints</td>
<td>Did eastern state constitutions provide for more direct democracy than western ones?</td>
<td>Eastern constitutions were slightly more conducive to referenda than western ones, but the partisan composition of government best explains institutional choice; over the course of a decade majorities oppose referenda initiatives while opposition parties support them. The same is true in the west.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Support for a large government role in ensuring economic equality</td>
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<td>EU and federal policies requiring a minimal level of rights for gays and lesbians; Basic Law sets upper bound on rights</td>
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<td>In both eastern and western states, the partisanship of government rather than east/west origin of deputies predicts rights extended.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
and united Germany’s political institutions, I focus on these subnational parliaments. German unification created five new federal states out of what had been the German Democratic Republic; at the same time, eastern Berlin became part of the already-existing city-state Berlin. The five eastern Länder created at unification include Brandenburg, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, Sachsen, Sachsen-Anhalt, and Thüringen. Each of these new states was to be governed by a democratically elected state legislature, or Landtag; each state modeled its legislature and electoral system on a western partner state’s. Their western partners were, respectively, Niedersachsen, Schleswig-Holstein, Baden-Württemberg, Nordrhein-Westfalen, and Rheinland-Pfalz. There are five additional western German Länder: Bayern, Bremen, Hamburg, Hessen, and the Saarland. The parliamentarians serving in these sixteen state legislatures are usually called Mitglieder des Landtages (MdL).

The Landtage are politically important in Germany’s federal system because they can address regional concerns not dealt with at the national level, influence national-level politics through their executive’s representation in the Bundesrat, shape the implementation of federal laws, and control education, the police, and the media. Since the initial Landtag election in 1990 there have been three further rounds of state-level elections. The first was held in 1994, the second in 1998 (in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern and Sachsen-Anhalt) and 1999 (in Brandenburg, Sachsen, and Thüringen), and the third rounds in 2002 and 2004. The following analysis is based on events in the eastern Landtage and their partners between the former’s creation in 1990 and the year 2002.

I study the effects of eastern legislators’ antiparty sentiment, their skepticism of party discipline, their support for referenda and economic equality, and their political intolerance because these are the main areas in which extensive empirical research has determined that eastern and western German elites differ. Because their attitudes diverge most sharply in these areas, my argument that institutions—rather than values—shape elite political outcomes is most difficult to prove in these cases. If attitudinal factors are found to have little impact in the areas where Germans differ the most, it is unlikely that they will be of import in shaping other facets of elite political behavior. What I do not seek to do here is explain where the causal origin of these different attitudes and values lies; as will become clear in the chapters ahead, this topic has been extensively researched by others. Instead, I am simply concerned
with what effect—if any—differing attitudes and values have on German parliamentarians’ political behavior.

The cases chosen here were also selected to minimize the influence of the west’s superior resources. All were instances where eastern legislatures had the maximum possible leverage over their own affairs and were relatively independent of western pressure. For example, I deliberately did not investigate policy areas where states had to take a stance in the Bundesrat that would influence national-level politics, nor did I examine areas such as taxation and spending that would have an influence on other Länder through Germany’s system of fiscal federalism. In these areas western actors may indeed have used their superior economic resources to pressure easterners into acting a certain way. This was decidedly not the case in the issues under study here, however.

In Germany, state-level parties serve as the selectorate for the Landtage and candidates are elected by eastern voters. Thus individual politicians deciding which affiliations to pursue to gain an eastern state legislative seat are not subject to the concerns of westerners. Similarly, unlike deputies in the Bundestag, who are in a setting dominated by westerners, members of state parliaments were in caucuses made up overwhelmingly of eastern politicians. Whether party discipline was practiced at the state level or not was of little interest to national-level party organizations or other western-dominated bodies. While there was a national-level debate over direct democracy at the federal level, eastern state constitutions’ rules governing plebiscites did not apply beyond state borders and were thus not of pressing importance to western party leaders. In the subsequent decade, whether eastern parliaments supported referenda in areas delegated to the Länder (such as education or state-level direct democracy) was also of little interest at the national level. Finally, while the same-sex partnership law was indeed an initiative of the governing coalition at the federal level, it was not a priority of the Social Democrats; instead, they were pressured into adopting the law by their Green coalition partner. At the time the Landtage had to implement this law, however, the Greens were not represented in any eastern state parliament and the ambivalent national-level Social Democrats did not exert discernable pressure on state-level parties to implement the law in certain ways. In all of these cases, then, eastern German politicians faced little direct pressure from westerners to behave in a certain way and instead are likely to have been motivated by the incentives inherent in the party state’s institutions.
The research done on eastern and western Germans’ political attitudes and values has identified five main areas of difference between both mass publics and political elites in each part of the country. Here I only briefly summarize these findings; the coming chapters will more thoroughly review this literature. First, opinion research has found that eastern Germans’ experiences with decades of dictatorship by an all encompassing political party led them to distrust political parties even more than an increasingly skeptical western German electorate. This is true both at the mass and elite levels. As a result of this skepticism, parties across eastern Germany have fewer members and less-active inner-party organizations than their western counterparts—despite the best efforts of the major parties to develop such organizations. In addition to these societal trends, a majority of individuals considered electable after unification spent the pre-unification period either avoiding political life or high profile roles within the communist party and its allies. Thus while western German state legislators are consummate party politicians, the easterners elected to state parliaments following unification distrusted political parties and had little partisan political experience.

Second, attitudinal research has found that eastern politicians and their voters are skeptical of strict party discipline and united in their belief that common interests should outweigh partisan concerns when legislation is made. Political life in East Germany revolved around the practice of democratic centralism, which called for unquestioning adherence to decisions made by communist party elites. Those politicians and individuals who dared criticize the Socialist Unity Party (SED) and went against its iron discipline suffered personal and career setbacks, imprisonment, exile, or worse. As a result of these experiences, easterners strongly mistrust decisions made along party lines. A majority of those who were elected to eastern German state legislatures in 1990 had previously been apolitical professionals including doctors, teachers, veterinarians, and engineers. Some other new parliamentarians had been involved in the Roundtables which spontaneously emerged as communism crumbled; these bodies were set up expressly to oppose hierarchical, party-oriented decision making. These legislators had been trained to seek consensual or pragmatic technical solutions to problems rather than to engage in partisan debates. Their attitudes differ sharply from
western German legislators’ views, which are far more supportive of partisan competition.

Third, public opinion surveys of both German elites and the mass public have discerned that, while both eastern and western Germans favor democracy as a form of government, they have very different understandings of the term. In studies of mass attitudes toward democracy in Germany, easterners were found to be much more in favor of holding referenda to decide issues than were westerners; the latter were more comfortable with representative democracy. Similarly, the main difference between German elites’ conceptions of democracy lay in their assessment of plebiscitary elements. When asked whether the adoption of referenda was a necessary supplement to representative democracy, eastern elites were more than twice as likely as westerners to favor plebiscites. Easterners’ abundant support for direct democracy has been attributed to their experiences during the peaceful revolution that brought down the GDR. New Forum and the citizens’ movements that brought down the communist regime were strong supporters of direct democracy, and their success legitimized direct democracy, in the eyes of eastern Germans.

Fourth, opinion surveys at both the mass and elite levels in eastern and western Germany have consistently found that eastern Germans hold socialist or planned economic values, whereas their western counterparts are much more strongly in favor of a market or social market economy. When asked what role the government should play in reducing income differentials among citizens, easterners are much more strongly in favor of government action than their western counterparts. These attitudes are not limited to the eastern German mass public, however. In a study of Berlin parliamentarians, eastern deputies expressed more support for government intervention in the economy and less support for unlimited profit and large income differentials than western elites. In all party families, western parliamentarians were more supportive of a market economy than their eastern colleagues; furthermore, eastern Christian Democratic Union (CDU) and Free Democratic Party (FDP) deputies’ views of a market economy were closer to western Social Democratic Party (SPD) members’ views than to members of the western branches of their own parties. There is considerable debate within this literature as to the origins of these attitudinal differences. Some scholars have argued that these results occur despite individuals’ personal economic situation given their socialization in the GDR, while
others believe that pocketbook assessments condition—at least in part—
easterners’ support for economic equality; still others argue that these
changes result primarily from easterners’ experiences as an econom-
ically disadvantaged group in united Germany. Despite their disagree-
ments, all authors agree that significant attitudinal differences vis-à-vis
the desirability of economic equality exist among Germans.

The fifth and final east/west attitudinal difference discussed here
has to do with the willingness of both mass publics and political elites in
Germany to “put up with what they don’t like” by extending rights to dis-
liked groups. This willingness, also called political tolerance, is a key
component of a democratic political culture. Competitive elections and
respect for all citizens’ democratic rights and liberties are unlikely in a
context where people are not willing to extend freedoms to those they
dislike. Political tolerance has been widely studied in established de-
mocracies, and the introduction of public opinion surveys to eastern
Europe after the fall of communism led to a number of investigations of
political tolerance there as well. Mass levels of tolerance in eastern Eu-
rope were consistently found to be lower than in established democra-
cies. Multiple studies have found that this intolerance also extended to
eastern German citizens and political elites. For example, eastern citi-
zens and parliamentarians were less likely than their western counter-
parts to favor allowing disliked groups to exercise freedom of speech.
Explanations for lower levels of political tolerance in post-communist
settings include Stalinist era indoctrination, the communist party’s en-
couragement of citizens to show intolerance toward regime opponents,
citizens’ lack of opportunity to exercise tolerance for most of the twenti-
eth century, and low levels of post-materialism in this part of Europe.

Thus eastern and western German mass publics and, the focus here,
political elites differ greatly in terms of their political attitudes and val-
ues. When compared to their western counterparts, eastern German
politicians entered office more skeptical of political parties, party disci-
pline, representative democracy, the desirability of economic inequal-
ity, and political tolerance.

United Germany’s Political Institutions
and Elite Political Behavior

These well-established findings on eastern German political elites’ atti-
tudes raise, but fail to answer, a significant question: do eastern and
western German politicians’ contrasting values actually matter in terms of their political behavior and substantive policy choices? While it seems plausible that easterners will act in accordance with their beliefs, each of the five sets of eastern attitudes discussed above are at odds with the incentives created by the political institutions that eastern Germans inherited with unification. As a result, easterners acting in accordance with antiparty or antidiscipline beliefs are likely to find themselves marginalized or even excluded from political life, while some MdL also face strong disincentives to support plebiscites or to deny rights to disliked groups. An examination of united Germany’s political institutions shows how they clash with the attitudes and values eastern parliamentarians brought with them to office.

The Party State and Politicians’ Affiliations

Political parties play such a strong role in the German form of democracy that Germany has often been called a “party state”:

The Federal Republic is a functioning, stable party state. . . . The West German political parties tend to interpret this sentence of the Constitution, “The parties are to take part in forming the political will of the people,” as their exclusive party privilege. . . . In fact, all political decisions in the Federal Republic are made by the parties and their representatives. There are no political decisions of importance in the German democracy which have not been brought to the parties, prepared by them and finally taken by them. This does not mean that other social groups have no power but that they have to realize their power within the party state. (Sontheimer 1973, 95)

With unification, eastern Germans inherited not only the institutions of the party state but also a well-established, well-funded party system. Germany’s dual electoral system is a key component of the party state and provides many incentives for state-level politicians not only to join but to take an active role in a political party. At least half of the candidates elected to state legislatures are elected via party lists; the exact percentage varies from state to state. As a result, candidates not affiliated with a political party cannot easily receive seats vis-à-vis the “second vote.” The rest of the candidates are elected via single member districts.
While it is possible to run as an independent candidate in an electoral district, such candidates face stiff competition from members running on established parties’ tickets. The latter enjoy the “brand” recognition that the party label offers them along with public funding for campaigns, monies given in Germany only to political parties. Finally, independent legislators have fewer rights in parliament than do members of a party caucus. As a result, independent candidates are less able to translate constituent wishes into public policy, reducing their attractiveness to voters.

Thus in order to win a seat in one of united Germany’s state legislatures, a politician generally must be affiliated with a political party. Those individuals whose antiparty sentiment is so strong that they refuse to join a party are quickly excluded from political life by these institutional mechanisms. In order to run on a party ticket, however, an individual must do more than simply decide to adopt a party label. In Germany, party organizations control the nominations for coveted district mandates and top spots on party lists. As a result, ambitious politicians must prove their loyalty to their party by taking on inner-party positions, holding local-level offices for their political parties, and possibly becoming active in an affiliated interest association if they are to be nominated and subsequently elected. It is this process that has produced loyal party politicians in western Germany since the founding of the Federal Republic and, I argue, has begun to produce a cadre of partisan politicians in the eastern German state legislatures as well. Those individuals who have not acted in accordance with these incentives, and instead followed their antiparty beliefs, have not been selected to run for state-level office.

To trace eastern legislators’ growing involvement with political parties I rely on the biographical data that the nearly 2500 state legislators under study were required to publish about themselves in the Handbook of each state parliament. This discussion and all others in the book are supplemented with material drawn from thirty-seven personal interviews with legislators representing all parties in seven different eastern and western Landtage. During the summer of 2001, I interviewed caucus leaders from each party in the state legislatures of Schleswig-Holstein, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, Niedersachsen, Brandenburg, Sachsen, and Sachsen-Anhalt. I also interviewed the Social Democratic whip in Berlin as well as newspaper reporters who covered state parliaments for the Kieler Nachrichten, Nordkurier, and the Sächsische...
Zeitung. In the text I identify these interviewees using their state and party affiliation. See Appendix A for a complete list of individual interviews. The interviews took a semistructured format; the section of the interviews relevant here concerned relationships between parliamentary party groups and groups outside the Landtag, including the party outside parliament, local officials, and interest groups. Rather than tape-recording the interviews, a practice which in previous research distracted some eastern respondents, I took detailed interview notes. The quotes presented in the text are drawn from these records.

The Party State and Party Discipline

While eastern legislators may run for office on a party ticket and be personally involved with their political party, this is not a guarantee that they will always vote with their parliamentary party group once in office. In western German Landtage, however, the party state manifests itself in a very high rate of disciplined voting. Again, though, this type of elite political behavior is starkly at odds with eastern mass and elite preference for technically correct, nonpartisan decision making. Despite these attitudes, the institutions of the party state offer ambitious politicians strong incentives to vote with their party caucus once elected.

The first incentive, of course, is the fact that in a parliamentary system the governing party or parties in the legislature must stand behind their chief executive and cabinet, or the government can fall (Gallagher, Laver, and Mair 2001). In order for opposition parties to provide voters with clear-cut alternatives to a disciplined majority, they too must act coherently in the legislature. Even scholars studying presidential systems where such executive branch instability is not a problem find that in the absence of legislative parties, new majorities would have to be cobbled together to pass each piece of legislation—a highly inefficient practice (Aldrich 1995). By joining a parliamentary party, MdL can rely on the expertise of other caucus members to guide their voting on issues about which they know little and simultaneously find allies who will support their positions on issues of importance to them (Cox 1987). Without coherent legislative parties, then, parliamentary work would be inefficient and uncertain. Moreover, the German system contains a number of resources and rules of procedure that enable such efficiency to occur. If individual members of a German state parliament want to have access to
the resources and opportunities needed to influence policy, they are best associated with a party caucus. Further, if a party group hopes to pass the legislation it drafts, it must stand together when votes are taken.

The German political system also includes electoral factors promoting united legislative parties. In all but one state, between 50% and 100% of parliamentarians are elected via the list form of the proportional representation electoral system. In all but one state, voters must vote for a party and cannot alter the rank ordering of candidates on the ballot. Party members nominate candidates for places on electoral lists and are unlikely to select people who have consistently gone against their own party. Further, voters have little incentive to vote for a party whose caucus does not stand together in the legislature because they cannot predict what that party will do. Thus even the legislators who win constituency seats may find their electoral chances dimmed if their caucus is divided amongst itself or at odds with other branches of the party. All MdL, then, have incentives to vote with their party. If they do not toe their party’s line, and instead act in accordance with their preference for consensus or cross-party decision making, they will likely not be returned to office.

Empirical investigation finds that eastern state legislators have indeed learned this lesson over the course of the past decade. The rise of disciplined voting in eastern legislatures was established by coding over 10,000 floor votes taken in 1991, 1996, and 2000. These votes are recorded in the transcripts of Landtag plenary sessions; the latter are available for all western states dating back to the founding of the Federal Republic and for all eastern states since 1990 from the German Parliamentary Information System called Parlamentsspiegel. This analysis was also supplemented by personal interviews with parliamentary whips, interviews that revolved around decision making on the floor of parliament, within parliamentary committees, in party caucuses, between coalition partners, and between the executive and the legislative branches.

The Party State, Direct Democracy, and Economic Equality

The party state’s power extends not just to the procedural—how legislative decisions are made—but also to the substantive—what decisions are
made. Germany’s well-funded political parties have many resources to
devote to developing public policies, and branches of the same party
work across state lines to coordinate their party’s position on issues re-
lating to the Länder. This practice was common in the west before uni-

fication and simply expanded to incorporate eastern branches of the
same party after unification. Thus parliamentarians who have adopted
roles within their parties, and who vote along party lines, are likely to se-

lect the same public policies across states, regardless of whether these
states are located in eastern or western Germany. One way to empiri-
cally verify this assertion is to examine cases where, based on their ini-
tial attitudes, one would expect state legislators in the two parts of
Germany—regardless of party—to adopt different issue stances. Given
Germans’ varying attitudes toward direct democracy, economic equali-
y, and political tolerance, ideal test cases of this hypothesis would involve
policy implementation in these areas.

One of the first tasks with which eastern state legislatures were
charged was drafting state constitutions, which regulated, among other
things, the laws governing direct democratic procedures in their Län-
der. The Federal Republic’s political institutions are highly representa-
tive; at the national level in Germany there is no provision for referenda.
At the time of unification, some western German state constitutions
contained no provisions for plebiscites, while others had very restrictive
procedures. Given easterners’ pro–direct democracy attitudes and the
fact that they had free reign to determine the rules governing referenda
in their states, it might be expected that the five new states’ constitutions
were likely to be much more conducive to direct democracy than west-
ern states’. To a limited extent this was indeed the case. In contrast to
the west, all eastern states adopted some form of direct democracy in
their constitutions. Furthermore, although the procedures they chose
were marginally more friendly to citizen initiatives than the western
model, the overall form of direct democracy selected by easterners par-
alleled the western Länder’s restrictive model.

The specific details of the adopted model—as would be expected in
the party state—fell along partisan lines. Just as at the national level and
in western states, Christian Democratic/Free Democratic coalitions fa-
vored the most restrictive possible rules governing referenda, whereas
Social Democrats and especially the Greens and members of the Party
of Democratic Socialism (PDS) advocated institutions more conducive
to plebiscites. Thus the form of direct democracy ultimately adopted in

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state constitutions can be explained to a considerable degree by the partisanship of the coalition drafting the constitutions.

When confronted with citizen initiatives throughout the 1990s, governing parties in eastern Germany—just as their counterparts in western states—fought to keep political decision making in parliamentary, rather than citizen, hands. This allowed the majority party (or coalition) in the Landtag to retain the control over policy making that it otherwise would have enjoyed in the Federal Republic’s highly representative party democracy. Across Germany only opposition parties—regardless of partisanship—came out in favor of citizen initiatives as a way to curry favor with voters and to critique the governing party or parties. Since strong party discipline limits the ability of the parliamentary opposition to influence public policy, supporting citizen initiatives is also one of the few ways the opposition might actually be able to affect policy change.

When the substantive content of direct democratic initiatives over the course of the past decade is examined, it becomes clear that these findings are especially relevant to the hypothesis that Germany’s party state, rather than easterners’ political attitudes and values, is the main determinant of political decision making in the new Landtage. Over half of citizen attempts at referenda involved demands that the government either allow greater direct democracy or become more involved in the economy. But rather than embracing such initiatives, as their initial attitudes and values would suggest, eastern state legislatures proved just as resistant to these initiatives as their western counterparts. Majority parties and coalitions—regardless of partisanship—routinely refused to adopt policies put forth by citizens, legally challenged the validity of petitions put toward them, and campaigned vigorously against citizen-sponsored referenda. Just as in the west, only opposition parties favored these citizen initiatives. Thus in terms of direct democracy and social equality, MdL’s partisan affiliation and their status as government or opposition better explain their policy stances than do their eastern or western origin. Parliamentarians were consistently more swayed by their institutional position than their political attitudes and values.

The extent to which state constitutions embrace direct democracy is based on data collected by the University of Marburg and the plebiscite organization Mehr Demokratie e.V. The political debates that led up to these choices are traced by examining parliamentary debates over the drafting of state constitutions in 1990. Eastern states’ actual experience with direct democracy is based on Mehr Demokratie’s archive.
of attempted citizen initiatives. These sources of data were supplemented with personal interviews with parliamentarians focusing on their attitudes toward direct democracy, economic equality, and various citizen initiatives.

The Party State and Political Tolerance

Given that easterners have been found to have politically less tolerant attitudes than westerners, that is, they say they are less willing to extend rights to disliked groups, a second ideal test of the above hypothesis would be one involving choices about whether to actually grant civil rights to an unpopular group. The issue of same-sex unions offers just such a case study. In 2001, Germany’s federal government passed a domestic partnership law that the Länder were required to implement, although each state enjoyed some leeway as to how many of the rights enjoyed by heterosexual couples would be granted to same-sex pairs in their Land. If easterners had acted on their intolerant beliefs, they would have extended homosexual couples fewer rights than their more politically tolerant western counterparts.

However, there is evidence from established democracies that the relationship between political (in)tolerance and (un)democratic public policy, assumed by those who document politically intolerant attitudes, may not always exist. There are several institutional reasons to expect that the low average level of political intolerance among post-communist citizens may not always translate directly into intolerant public policy.

First, in representative democracies like Germany, policy is actually made by political elites, not mass publics. In established democracies learning within democratic political institutions has been shown to shape the political tolerance of elected officials over time; elites are often more tolerant than ordinary citizens. Rather than being homogeneously tolerant, however, elites within long-established democracies have exhibited a wide range of opinions, suggesting that eastern German parliamentarians too are far from uniformly intolerant. In long-term democracies, elite political tolerance is often closely related to ideology or party affiliation. Given the importance of political parties in Germany’s party state, and given easterners’ proven willingness to join political parties, to vote with their party’s Fraktion, and to support policies put forth by their national-level party organization, government
partisanship rather than the eastern or western origin of deputies determined policy outcomes. While leftist majorities across Germany extended the most rights to gays and lesbians, rightist coalitions in east and west had the most restrictive laws.

Furthermore, state legislators were constrained by their subordinate institutional position in Germany’s federal system. Politically tolerant MdL complained that the national law did not go far enough in extending rights to homosexuals but were not in a position to change the laws promulgated at the federal level. Similarly, politically intolerant state-level actors tried but failed to stop implementation of a national law of which they completely disapproved. Politically intolerant easterners and westerners were forced to accept EU and German Supreme Court decisions allowing same-sex partnerships to be registered in their states. In other words, political institutions were a vital intervening variable between levels of political tolerance and public policy.

The relationship between political tolerance and policy outcomes was assessed by consulting three sources. First, the public debate over the Life Partnership Law and its progress through German political institutions were traced by reading contemporary newspaper articles. Second, partisan positions were determined by reading the transcripts of parliamentary debates on the various laws. Third, resulting policies were categorized according to the texts of the laws ultimately passed.

Plan of the Book

In all of the above cases, I find that although they had some impact in the immediate post-unification period, eastern and western German politicians’ attitudinal differences became increasingly irrelevant in the following decade as easterners learned the incentives involved in the political system they inherited at unification. United Germany’s political institutions—collectively known as the party state—have made eastern parliamentarians today virtually indistinguishable from their western counterparts in terms of their willingness to become involved with political parties, to vote in line with their party caucus, to favor representative democracy and legislative control over economic and other policy areas, and to extend rights to disliked groups. Despite their differing socialization, eastern and western German state legislators today are all party politicians, and their choice of policies can be predicted by the
partisanship of the state parliament rather than its geographic location in eastern or western Germany. The following five chapters trace the party state’s transformative effect on eastern state legislators.

Chapter 2 examines MdL’s relationships to their political parties in the form of holding inner-party office, occupying partisan political office outside the Landtag, and being involved with affiliated interest groups. This chapter establishes the electoral incentives that state legislators have to become party politicians and shows how eastern German parliamentarians have acted on these incentives, despite their initial skepticism of political parties.

Chapter 3 goes on to ask whether the kinds of partisan affiliations described in the previous chapter have had an influence on legislators’ decision making while in office. It finds that this is indeed the case, tracing the rise of disciplined party voting in eastern legislatures between 1991 and 2000, despite easterners’ professed resistance to party discipline after decades of dictatorship by an all-encompassing political party.

Chapter 4 in turn asks whether party voting has had an impact on public policy. This was indeed the case as early as the drafting of the eastern state constitutions immediately following unification. In terms of provisions for direct democracy, eastern legislative parties paralleled the national branches of their respective parties’ stances, despite their greater attitudinal support for the practice. In the subsequent decade, although they were more supportive of social equality and direct democracy, eastern governing majorities—like their western counterparts—have not been supportive of citizen initiatives, even those in favor of greater direct democracy or more state involvement in the economy.

Chapter 5 examines the implementation of Germany’s same-sex partnership law across the German states. Both in the eastern and in the western parts of the country implementation laws varied along partisan—rather than east/west—lines, despite varying degrees of political tolerance in the two parts of Germany.

Chapter 6 concludes by discussing the mechanisms through which the party state has trumped MdL’s attitudes and values. It also addresses the implications of these findings both for the discipline of political science and for German politics. Finally, it offers some thoughts on the possibility of successful institutional transfer in settings beyond Germany.