

RESEARCH NOTE



OLD PARTIES IN A NEW GERMANY

The CDU and FDP in Eastern Germany, 1989–94

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With unification of the two parts of Germany in 1990, the parties and other political institutions of West Germany were extended to the former German Democratic Republic. The Communists had ruled with the forced support of several satellite parties, called bloc parties. These possessed elements of affinity with the CDU/CSU and the FDP in West Germany, and merged with those two parties. In the elections of 1990, the CDU/CSU and FDP both benefited from these mergers; by 1994, the FDP had declined sharply in the East, while the CDU/CSU continued to prosper. The difference in the outcome of the party mergers stems from the differing organizational structures of the parties. The CDU/CSU was large, decentralized, relatively non-ideological and pragmatic in coping with the merger, while the FDP was small, elitist, centralized and ideological. It felt threatened by the size and outlook of its East German allies and preferred reduced electoral influence to the perceived threat to unity posed by its eastern organization.

KEY WORDS ■ bloc parties ■ democratization ■ Germany ■ party organization

Introduction

With the recent waves of democratization in eastern Europe and Latin America, studies of institutional transformation have gained prominence in comparative politics. Through analysis of the processes of institution

building and re-building during periods of democratic consolidation, social scientists can acquire a deeper understanding of the influence of institutions on political outcomes. Because of their crucial role in a democracy, political parties are an especially fruitful focus for the study of institutional reform and democratic consolidation. Political parties serve as intermediaries between the citizens and the government; party elites both reflect and influence the public's preferences. Parties remain vital for the consolidation of democracy and the development of a democratic citizenry. Indeed, for the newly democratizing countries of central and eastern Europe, the establishment of a stable party system is a primary goal on the road to democratic consolidation.

In the former East German states, the establishment of a stable party system has particular relevance. The Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) has long been characterized as having one of the strongest and most stable party systems in Europe; it remains the only European country to provide for political parties in its constitution. Because of this emphasis, Germany is often termed a party state (*Parteienstaat*), in which parties are the key actors in the political system. The eastern German case also holds special importance because of the process of German unification; the institutional takeover of East Germany by West Germany in 1990 presents social scientists with a rich laboratory for theoretical and empirical institutional research. This takeover allows us to study the transplanting and evolution of established organizations in a new social, political and cultural context and thus represents a unique opportunity to study institutional development and adaptation.

As in all of eastern Europe, features long considered important for the stability of western party systems, such as partisan loyalties and social mobilization, remained weak in eastern Germany. As a result of 40 years of Communism, there were no natural bases of partisan stability. The eastern electorate lacked deep political ties to the parties, and opinion polls showed that existing partisan attachments remained fluid (see Gibowski and Kaase, 1991; Bluck and Kreikenbom, 1991; *Der Spiegel*, 1998). Moreover, traditional expectations concerning voting cleavages were turned on their heads in the east, where the working class, long supporters of the SPD in the west, gave a plurality of its votes to the CDU.

There was also little political mobilization in the east. Although many East Germans took part in the 1989 mass demonstrations, most of the public retreated from politics once the goal of toppling the SED regime was achieved. As a result of these low levels of partisan attachments and mobilization, issue voting and personalities played a large role in eastern German politics, as they have across eastern Europe. In this sense, political parties in eastern Germany – and post-Communist Europe as a whole – face obstacles somewhat different in the consolidation of democracy from those confronted in earlier waves. With weak or non-existent societal cleavages in the spirit of Lipset and Rokkan (1967), or an absence of the boom of

participation in Huntington's (1968) model, parties need to mediate societal cleavages less and mobilize them more.

All German parties have struggled with these problems of membership, weak political participation, difficulties in finding candidates, and a volatile electorate in the east, but with different outcomes. Despite starting from similar positions in 1989–90, the CDU and FDP dealt with these problems in different ways and with different degrees of success. Both the CDU and FDP took over existing small East German parties – called bloc parties – in order to gain the organizational resources for political success in united Germany. But in terms of electoral success, attracting and integrating new members and leaders, addressing east German issues, building up party organizations, and dealing with the legacy of the bloc parties, the CDU was initially more effective than other German parties – and the FDP in particular – in the early post-unification years in adapting to the new environment in eastern Germany.

Both the CDU and the FDP were part of the governing coalition of the Federal Republic, and both undoubtedly benefited from the visibility of their leaders as well as their policies relating to unification, though it is likely that the CDU as senior partner and Kohl as Chancellor received greater visibility from their governing position. Both parties did well in the early elections during the unification period, and in the 1990 Federal election the FDP did considerably better in the east than in the west. By 1994, votes for the FDP had declined dramatically. This research note argues that the greater success of the CDU is largely due to the manner in which the two parties dealt with the merger of their FRG parties with the organizations that they had inherited from their counterparts among the parties of the east, the bloc parties. It argues further that these differences in dealing with the merger were the result of the differing organizational structures of the CDU and FDP.

With the unification of Germany in 1990, the political institutions of the FRG were extended to the former German Democratic Republic (GDR). Beginning with economic and monetary union on 1 July 1990, the formal institutions of the GDR were phased out and replaced by West German structures. This institutional integration transformed all of the political structures in the united country; political parties, with their integral role in the German political process, were among the most affected. While a stable multi-party system had prevailed in West Germany for 40 years, in East Germany the Socialist Unity Party (SED) had governed with the forced support of several satellite parties called *Blockparteien*. Organized as a so-called anti-fascist bloc, these bloc parties held a fixed number of seats in the *Volkskammer* (the East German Parliament), but exercised no real power until they asserted their independence in the fall of 1989.

In early 1990, the leading political parties in West Germany sought partners in the east to help foster democracy and stability in the GDR. Several different strategies were possible for party development and cooperation, and the western parties diverged in their approaches. The western Social

Democrats (SPD) joined forces with the fledgling eastern SPD, which had been refounded in the fall of 1989 as an opposition group under the Communist regime. The SPD consequently did not have to deal with a bloc party ally, which may have hurt it organizationally and electorally during reunification, but spared it the decisions that the CDU and FDP had to face. Although the western Greens developed ties to the eastern Alliance '90/Greens, the two parties remained separate until 1993. Both the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) and the Free Democrats (FDP), however, chose to take over the organizations, officials and rank and file of the former bloc parties. After unification, the western CDU¹ absorbed the eastern CDU plus the Democratic Farmers' Party (DBD), while the FDP took over the Liberal Democratic Party (LDPD) and the National Democratic Party (NDPD).

This study analyzes the integration of the bloc parties into the CDU and FDP and the different strategies each national party pursued in the east after 1989–90. Such a study is important for several reasons. First, by analyzing both pre- and post-1989 parties, it sheds light on the transformation of actors and institutions in democratizing societies. Second, with the absorption of the former bloc parties, the CDU and FDP embarked from similar positions in the east in 1990. By adopting differing strategies, they provide a controlled comparison for the study of institutional adaptation and development. Unlike the SPD and the Greens, both the CDU and the FDP acquired entrenched organizations, memberships and personnel from the bloc parties; unlike the Communist successor party, the Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS), the CDU and FDP also had the financial backing and political expertise of western parties behind them. Along with these organizational benefits, however, the CDU and FDP also inherited the burdens of GDR history in the ambiguous legacy of the bloc parties and the resulting divisions between old and new party members.

This analysis of the development of the CDU and FDP in eastern Germany begins with the peaceful revolution in the fall of 1989 and ends with the super election year of 1994. It argues that in the first phase of democratization in East Germany – from fall 1989 until the first all-German elections on 3 December 1990 – West German parties quickly gained the upper hand in the transition by providing financial and organizational support to East German parties and by turning the elections into a referendum on unification. Given the high saliency of this issue, both the FDP and its eastern sister parties and, especially, the CDU and its allies were able to mobilize voters and attract active members and bloc party elites.

After the goal of unification was reached, however, both parties faced the difficult task of restructuring the old bloc party organizations in eastern Germany and absorbing their rank and file. Like other parties in eastern Europe, they also had to struggle to mobilize voters and enlist new members without the presence of a strong civil society from which to recruit. Despite starting from similar positions in 1989–90, the CDU and

the FDP experienced different results. The CDU met with some success in recruiting new members and leaders in the east and became the dominant party in the region; the FDP all but collapsed electorally and organizationally. The research presented here shows that the different experiences of the two parties stem from their different organizational structures. Because of its framework as a weakly ideological catch-all party with a strong federal foundation and mass membership base, the CDU was better able to integrate eastern members and their ideas into the party. In contrast, the FDP, as an interest-based party with a small, fairly homogeneous membership and centralized leadership, had less room to incorporate new members and ideas and thus to adapt to the new political environment in the east.

This research note begins with the developments of the fall of 1989, the March 1990 elections in East Germany and German unification. Its main section then addresses the experiences of the CDU and FDP after 1990 and places these developments in the broader contexts of both the German party system and post-Communist Europe as a whole.

The Road to Unification: The CDU, the FDP and the Bloc Parties, 1989–90

The bloc parties played a mostly decorative function in the political system of the GDR. While the SED controlled the upper echelons of government, it often relied on the bloc parties to transmit policies to certain societal groups. For the CDU, these groups tended to be the middle class and Christians; for the LDPD, they were teachers and the self-employed. The NDPD was primarily a home for military officers, rehabilitated members of the NSDAP (Nazi party) and the self-employed; the DBD represented the agricultural sector. The bloc parties remained true to the Communist party line until the very end. In keeping with the GDR's resistance to embracing the reforms sweeping across the rest of eastern Europe, the bloc parties' official policies did not change, nor did members push for reforms before the summer and fall of 1989.

The LDPD and the FDP

In the summer of 1989, the LDPD became the first bloc party to voice the need for reform in East Germany. Manfred Gerlach, the party's long-serving chairman, called for a more open media law and freedom of the press, as well as for critical discussion about the direction of the GDR (*Der Tagesspiegel*, 1989a). The FDP welcomed the push for reforms within the LDPD but increasingly came to view Gerlach with skepticism. These two parties had maintained contact since the 1950s, and several prominent FDP officials pushed for early cooperation with the LDPD in the fall of 1989. Indeed, the then-chairman of the FDP, Otto Graf Lambsdorff, met with

Gerlach in November of 1989 to discuss strategy and push for reform, including the LDPD's departure from the Democratic Bloc, which finally occurred in early December (*Der Tagesspiegel*, 1989b).

In January, the FDP expressed its support for an electoral coalition among the LDPD and two smaller, newly-founded parties in the GDR, the east German FDP and the German Forum Party (DFP). The FDP's support for the LDPD, however, depended on the removal of Gerlach as chairman, significant party renewal and a new party name (*Die Welt*, 1990). The LDPD held a conference on 9 February 1990, at which the party elected a new leadership, drafted a new party program and changed its name to the LDP. Satisfied with the party's renewal, the FDP backed all three liberal parties for the *Volkskammer* elections on 18 March under the coalition heading League of Free Democrats (BFD).

Like the other major West German parties, the FDP supplied massive financial, technical and political assistance to its partners during the election campaign. The FDP printed thousands of posters and leaflets – all of which bore a distinct similarity to the slogans and style of the FDP; provided computers, fax machines and cars; and sent political advisers to oversee the campaign. The FDP also dispatched several prominent West German politicians to mobilize voters and wanted to make them the focus of the campaign, but the eastern parties resisted a greater western presence (*Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 1990a).

Within the coalition itself, however, divisions remained; the East German FDP and DFP viewed the LDP's bloc party past with suspicion, and instead of pursuing the common goal of rapid monetary and political unification, infighting dominated their campaign. For the FDP, the BFD's 5.3 percent of the vote on 18 March fell short of expectations, as the party, traditionally the king-maker in West German politics, had hoped for a similar role for its eastern partner. Despite joining the CDU-led government, problems ensued within the FDP-led alliance. Two days after the election, the leaders of the three parties announced a formal merger, but the State Council of the east FDP, which remained wary of the LDPD's bloc party past, voted down the decision. The LDPD united with the NDPD instead, which after a dismal 0.4 percent of the vote, was near collapse. The west FDP, however, continued to push for a merger of all BFD parties, and in June the party finally succeeded, announcing plans for unification of the DFP, east FDP, LDP (including the NDPD) and the west FDP in August (Glaeßner, 1991) (see Table 1).

In the state and federal elections in the fall of 1990, the FDP increased its share of the vote significantly. It joined coalitions in four of five state governments in the east, and in the December federal elections it won 13.4 percent in the east, more than it had ever won before in West Germany. During the campaign, the FDP stepped up the presence of western politicians, particularly popular Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher (a native of eastern Germany), in order to improve upon its disappointing *Volkskammer* tally (see Tables 2 and 3).

Table 1. Results of the 1990 East German *Volkskammer* elections

	<i>Percentage of vote</i>	<i>Number of seats</i>
CDU	40.9	164
DSU	6.3	25
DA	0.9	4
SPD	21.8	87
PDS	16.3	65
BFD	5.3	21
Alliance '90	2.9	12
DBD	2.2	9
Greens	2.0	8
NDPD	0.4	2

Source: IPOS, 'Wahlen zur Volkskammer der DDR am 18. März 1990', 19 March 1990.

Table 2. Results of the 14 October 1990 state elections (%)

	<i>Brandenburg</i>	<i>Meck.-Vorp.</i>	<i>Saxony</i>	<i>Thuringia</i>	<i>Saxony-Anhalt</i>
CDU	29.4	38.3	54.4	45.4	39.0
SPD	38.2	27.0	19.1	22.8	26.0
FDP	6.6	5.5	5.3	9.3	13.5
PDS	13.4	15.7	10.2	9.7	12.0
A'90/Greens	9.3	9.3	5.6	7.2	5.3
DSU	1.0	0.8	3.6	3.3	1.7
Other	0.9	2.5	1.8	1.6	1.9

Source: Statistisches Bundesamt (1997).

Table 3. Results of the 1990 federal elections (%)

	<i>Turnout</i>	<i>CDU/CSU</i>	<i>SPD</i>	<i>FDP</i>	<i>Greens</i>	<i>A'90/Gr</i>	<i>PDS</i>	<i>Other</i>
West	78.5	44.1	35.9	10.6	4.7	–	0.3	4.3
East	74.5	43.4	23.6	13.4	–	5.9	9.9	4.0
Overall	77.8	43.8	33.5	11.0	3.9	1.2	2.4	4.2

Source: Statistisches Bundesamt (1997).

The CDU

For the East German CDU, the initial push for reform in 1989 came not from the party leadership, but from the grass-roots. On 10 September 1989, four CDU members and church leaders sent a letter from Weimar to party leaders and to the party's daily newspaper, *Neue Zeit* (1989), calling for political reform, free elections and freedom of the press. The CDU's leadership at first rejected the proposals, but by early November the party yielded to the pressures from below. The CDU's long-time chairman, Gerald Götting, stepped down and was replaced by Lothar de Maizière, who had

previously held no political posts in the party. By December, the CDU had left the Democratic Bloc and elected a new governing body at a special party congress.

Despite the change of leadership, many in the west CDU – including Helmut Kohl – were initially reluctant to cooperate with the former bloc party. Although several prominent western CDU politicians called for cooperation, much of the western party still viewed the eastern CDU as politically suspicious (Jach, 1989). They turned their attention instead to two small, newly established parties: the Democratic Awakening (DA), which emerged out of the opposition movements in the fall of 1989, and the German Social Union (DSU), which was founded with the support of the west CDU's Bavarian sister party, the CSU, in January 1990 (*Der Spiegel*, 1989).

In that same month, however, the East German caretaker government moved the date of the first free *Volkskammer* elections up from May to March. With the polls indicating a potential SPD majority in the east – and thus a probable majority in the future united Germany – the western CDU realized that the two democratically legitimate parties alone did not have the organization, experience or numbers to run a successful electoral campaign (Schäuble, 1991). They needed the entrenched, countrywide structures of the east CDU; the west CDU thus moved to gain a foothold in the east and backed all three parties under the coalition Alliance for Germany.

Like the FDP, the western CDU provided financial, technical and material resources to its partners in the east. The party sent advisers to help write election programs and teach campaign skills and politicians to help mobilize and rally voters. The west CDU established a coordinating committee in Bonn to manage the elections, and each East German district was assigned a western state party organization as a partner (*Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 1990b).

In addition to organizational and financial assistance, the west CDU also dominated the political agenda by turning the elections into a referendum on rapid unification. Unlike the divided western SPD and its pro-confederation eastern partner, the west CDU came out early in favor of rapid economic and political union. The issue dominated the platforms of the Alliance parties. Although the liberal parties also supported rapid unification, the various groups suffered from divisions within and among them, and they thus failed to develop a clear profile during the electoral campaign. Reading public opinion correctly, the Alliance framed the campaign around the single issue of rapid unification and thus reaped the benefits of its pro-unification stance.

Both the March *Volkskammer* elections and the May local elections met with overwhelming Alliance and CDU victories. The three parties won a total of 48.1 percent in March, while the SPD – despite leading in the polls – lagged behind with 21.8 percent. The CDU's party chairman, Lothar de Maizière, became Prime Minister, and the government – formed out of a

grand coalition of the Alliance, liberal parties and the SPD – began working towards unification with the west.

With German unification set for 3 October 1990, the east and west CDU agreed to merge at a unity party congress held 1–2 October in Hamburg. As the first party to announce formal plans for unity, the CDU hoped to present itself as the true party of united Germany. After the two wings of the CDU announced their plans to merge, other eastern parties indicated their interest in joining the all-German union. At the end of June, the DBD dissolved itself and became a part of the east CDU, though much of its total membership of about 80,000 did not join the CDU (Winters, 1990). At its party congress in August, the DA voted with a two-thirds majority to join forces with the CDU as well (Süß, 1990). Both small parties realized that with unification of the two states their prospects in the all-German party system looked bleak; merger with the dominant CDU provided the best option for a continued voice on the political scene.

The first all-German elections on 3 December 1990 took place in the aftermath of unification, and the Bonn coalition partners (CDU and FDP) reaped their rewards. The CDU emerged again as the dominant party, leading the government in four of five eastern states. The results of the December elections reflected the success of the parties' unification policies. The coalition was re-elected with a comfortable majority, and the CDU did particularly well in the east, retaining its dominant position in the region.

Thus, in the first phase of democratic consolidation in East Germany, western parties dominated the political agenda and tone of the campaign. Indeed, with the West German CDU, FDP, SPD and Greens all supplying election assistance to partners in the east, the first free elections to the Volkskammer quickly became, as Russell Dalton (1993) puts it, a West German election on East German soil. Given the allure of unification and the lingering euphoria of the fall of 1989, the parties had few difficulties finding active members and mobilizing the electorate. Voters packed election rallies – especially those featuring western politicians – and political meetings.

By seeking partners early on and offering them financial resources and political know-how, the major West German parties were able to influence eastern party programs, center the election around the issue of rapid unification and dominate the electoral campaign. The CDU and FDP, in particular, were able to entice reform and renewal in the former bloc parties, and in return they received the entrenched organizations, memberships and infrastructure necessary to succeed electorally in eastern Germany.

The excitement of unification and the revolution of 1989 masked the difficulties all West German parties would face in the east in the years to come. Indeed, pointing to similar election results and coalition arrangements in the east and west, many analysts argued that the West German party system had been successfully replicated in the eastern *laender* (see Pappi, 1991; Jesse and Mitter, 1992). The consolidation of the party system in eastern Germany, however, proved more difficult than many analysts originally

believed. As the following analysis demonstrates, the ability to adapt to the difficult new conditions faced in eastern Germany depended heavily on party type and organization – on the institutional structures of the West German parties.

The CDU and FDP in Eastern Germany, 1990–4

The two parties in the post-1990 period will be examined through an analysis of electoral results, membership and party organization, party elites and party programs and positions.

Electoral Results

In 1990, both the CDU and FDP emerged as the electoral winners in united Germany. The two parties dominated the political scene in the east until 1994. In that year, however, a new round of local, state and federal elections ended with the continued (albeit weaker) domination of the CDU and the virtual collapse of the FDP. The CDU retained its position as the leading party in the region, winning an absolute majority in the state of Saxony and forming governments with the SPD in two other states. The party again attracted different voters in east and west. Although the party captured the majority of Christian voters in both, less than 30 percent of the eastern population belongs to a church, compared to about 75 percent in the west (Statistisches Bundesamt, 1997). The CDU thus cannot rely on the religious vote to achieve victory in east Germany and must seek out additional voter groups there. As in 1990, the CDU in 1994 again won a plurality of the eastern working-class vote – a group that has historically been the domain of the SPD in west Germany (see Tables 4 and 5).

For the FDP, the picture was bleaker. After its success in 1990, the party failed to reach the 5 percent of the vote necessary to gain representation in any eastern *Landtag* (state parliament) and captured only 6.9 percent in the federal election (4.0 percent in the east). The number of east German FDP representatives in the *Bundestag* dropped from 17 to 5 – one from each eastern state. The FDP, however, did remain stable in the municipal elections,

Table 4. Results of the 1994 eastern German state parliament elections (%)

	CDU	SPD	FDP	A'90/Greens	PDS
Brandenburg	18.7	54.1	2.2	2.9	18.7
Meck.-Vorp.	37.7	29.5	3.8	3.7	22.7
Saxony	58.4	16.6	1.7	4.1	16.5
Saxony-An.	34.4	34.0	3.6	5.1	19.9
Thuringia	42.6	29.6	3.2	4.5	16.6

Source: Statistisches Bundesamt (1997).

Table 5. Results of the 1994 federal elections (%)

	<i>CDU/CSU</i>	<i>SPD</i>	<i>FDP</i>	<i>A'90/Greens</i>	<i>PDS</i>
Overall	41.5	36.4	6.9	7.3	4.4
West	42.2	37.6	7.7	7.8	N/A
East	38.5	31.9	4.0	5.7	17.7

Source: Statistisches Bundesamt (1997).

and thus became almost exclusively a local party in the east, a role it has never played in the west. After the 1994 local elections, the FDP had 381 mayors in eastern Germany, in addition to 3680 city and regional council members, which gave it a much larger presence at the local level than it had in the west (FDP, 1996).

Local FDP politicians, however, indicate that they feel they were elected despite their FDP membership and not because of it.² Local elections in east Germany are far more personalized than in most of the west in terms of both style and electoral laws. Mayors and many council members are directly elected. This system has led to a personalization of local politics in which politicians are elected less because of their party membership than their reputation in the community.

The FDP itself attributed its decline at the state and national level to the continued economic problems in the east and the lack of a liberal electorate in the region. As a governing party in four of five eastern states during 1990–4 (and the party holding the economic ministers in those states, as well as in Bonn), the FDP was held electorally responsible for the economic troubles (FDP, 1996). Likewise, the lack of a strong entrepreneurial class in the east made it difficult for the FDP to gain a stable following there (FDP, 1996). The CDU, the dominant governing party, managed to survive the 1994 elections and retain its dominant position despite the economic chaos in the region. The FDP struggled; unlike the CDU, it was unable to attract a following in the east among social groups different from its traditional clientele in the west. Indeed, the FDP did not succeed in attracting a following of any kind in the east, be it among the self-employed, small businessmen and teachers, as in the west, or newly emerging groups in the east (see Tables 6, 7 and 8).

Table 6. CDU membership in the eastern German states

	<i>December 1990</i>	<i>December 1993</i>	<i>December 1995</i>
Brandenburg	18,555	10,528	8,981
Mecklenburg-Vorpommern	21,210	10,636	9,864
Saxony	37,614	24,517	21,329
Saxony-Anhalt	26,214	16,595	14,572
Thuringia	30,816	21,518	18,627

Source: CDU, *Bericht der Bundesgeschäftsstelle*, 7. Parteitag, Karlsruhe, 1995. 100,00 CDU.

Table 7. FDP membership in the eastern German states

	<i>December 1990</i>	<i>December 1992</i>	<i>December 1994</i>
Brandenburg	15,853	5,177	3,848
Mecklenburg-Vorpommern	13,154	5,826	3,220
Saxony	25,363	9,666	6,635
Saxony-Anhalt	24,171	8,394	5,908
Thuringia	28,425	7,841	6,138

Source: FDP, *Geschäftsbericht 1994–5*.

Table 8. Social structure of CDU members (%)

	<i>Overall</i>	<i>West</i>	<i>East</i>
Self-employed	21.3	23.0	9.2
Working class	11.2	8.7	29.3
White-collar worker	28.7	28.3	31.8
Civil servant	11.4	12.6	2.4
Retired	6.8	5.5	16.8
Homemaker	10.3	11.2	3.4

Source: CDU, *Bericht der Bundesgeschäftsstelle*, Bonn, 1994.

Membership and Party Organization

With unification, the CDU and its three eastern allied parties had a total of 130,000 members, the majority of whom had been members of the east CDU before 1989.³ The CDU also acquired the former bloc parties' entrenched organizational structures, which gave the united party a presence in almost every town in east Germany. However, although the CDU had gained 21,000 new members in the east in 1990–1, it had lost almost as many by 1994 – including almost 4000 post-1991 members (*Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 1991a). Indeed, all of the pre-1989 parties in the east – the CDU, FDP and PDS – experienced severe membership drops between 1990 and 1994; most analysts and the parties themselves attributed these drops to the changing nature of party membership and party work in comparison to the GDR days (*Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 1992). Party membership no longer carried any tangible privileges or provided a societal niche as it did before 1989. In contrast to the GDR, where the SED and the bloc parties employed enormous full-time staffs, party work in the FRG tended to be a volunteer job, done by the rank and file.

The CDU actively tried to offset these losses in membership by attracting new members, and the party met with some success. All of the eastern state party organizations ran several membership campaigns and organized informal political discussions and citizens' forums to court potential members. Estimates about the number of new members in the east vary, from about

one-third to one-half of the total membership, but party officials estimate that most active members of the party have joined since 1989.⁴ As with the CDU's voters, its members reflected differing social backgrounds in east and west. The eastern party had a higher percentage of workers, women and younger members and a lower percentage of the self-employed and civil servants than its western counterpart (CDU, 1994).

As Table 7 indicates, the FDP's membership losses were far more severe. With unification, the new all-German FDP jumped from a membership base of 67,000 to over 200,000 and became the only party (except for the eastern-based PDS) to have more members in the east than in the west. Two-thirds of the FDP's members were located in the east, which had a population of about one-quarter that of the west. Of the approximately 140,000 eastern members of the FDP in the fall of 1990, however, only 2000 came from the DFP or east FDP.⁵ Although the FDP does not keep official demographic data on its membership, party officials estimate that the social structures of its eastern and western wings were similar, composed mostly of the self-employed, teachers and other white-collar workers.⁶ In 1990, many analysts argued that the FDP was the only integrated, truly all-German party, as many easterners held prominent positions in the party, and the FDP as a whole seemed committed to the needs of both the east and united Germany (see Kaiser, 1993). However, the party's success in the east soon began to fade. In contrast to the CDU, which sought to augment its ranks and attract new followers, the FDP pursued a policy of reducing levels in the east by weeding out inactive members and discouraging the recruitment of new members, arguing that the enormous membership in the east contradicted the FDP's structure as a small, interest-based party.⁷

From the viewpoint of western leaders, the different perspectives of party membership duties in east and west also posed a problem: membership in the west, and thus national, FDP required significant monetary and time commitments, while many former bloc party members were accustomed to little work and significant benefits.⁸ By transferring its organizational structure eastward, the FDP thus expected that its new members would either adapt to its culture or leave the party, even if it meant political decline in the east. In contrast to the CDU, the FDP was unable to offset some of its losses by attracting new members; indeed, party officials say that very few people joined the FDP in the east in the years following unification.⁹ Along with this membership drop, the party's organization also suffered, as it no longer had a presence in many towns in the region. As a result, the FDP's eastern wing declined significantly after 1990. The party's policy of reducing its membership ranks had far-reaching effects. It clearly damaged the FDP's image and electoral chances in the east, and many eastern party officials attribute the party's difficulties in the region in large part to this policy.¹⁰

Party Elites

In 1990, both the CDU and FDP made efforts to place easterners in high-ranking positions. The CDU expanded the party presidium from 7 to 10 and its executive board from 20 to 26, with the additional slots going to eastern representatives. Likewise, the party reduced the number of deputy chairmen from seven to one, in order to afford former east CDU chairman Lothar de Maizière a prominent role in the united party (*Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 1990c). Kohl also named two eastern CDU politicians – Günther Krause and Angela Merkel – to his cabinet.

After 1990, the CDU retained a fair number of easterners in prominent positions. One change did occur, however, in the political background of CDU party elites. In 1990, most of the top positions in the party went to former bloc party members; the number declined after 1991. That year, the east German CDU underwent a heated debate about its bloc party history. Several prominent CDU members in the east – with the backing of Volker Rühe, the CDU General Secretary and Kohl's right-hand man – spoke out against the continued domination of the old guard. Citing the CDU's declining membership and its drop in the polls, they charged former bloc party members with obstructing the advancement of new talent and undermining the party's moral credentials and credibility. This group recommended that anyone who had held a political office in the GDR should be banned from the party permanently or at least for a transitional period of four years (*Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 1991a).

Rühe himself advocated reform of the eastern CDU and pressed for deeper renewal of the ranks. In so doing, he angered many long-time CDU members in the east, who labeled his call self-righteous and cited it as another example of western interference in eastern affairs; indeed, these tensions still linger today. Throughout the fall of 1991, however, Rühe and his eastern allies succeeded in removing many former bloc party officials from power at both the local and state levels. Even de Maizière came under fire for alleged contacts to the Stasi and resigned in September 1991.

The debate essentially resolved itself at the CDU's national party congress in Dresden in December 1991, when the party passed the Dresden Manifesto. It stressed the need to deal with the role of the bloc parties in the GDR through voluntary self-control, calling on bloc party members to examine self-critically their past roles and to ask themselves if their earlier activities made it difficult for newer colleagues to win their trust (CDU, 1991). The report put a formal end to the bloc party debate within the party, but party offices and mandates increasingly went to easterners who had joined the party since 1989. Most of the prominent eastern CDU politicians today – especially those in positions appointed by Helmut Kohl – joined the party after 1989.

Like the CDU, the FDP also reorganized its party leadership to make room for its eastern newcomers in 1990. The number of deputy chairmen

increased from three to five, with the additional slots reserved for easterners. The party also added 10 eastern members to its executive board and two to its presidium (*Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 1990d). Rainer Ortleb, the former chairman of the LDP and long-time bloc party member, was named education minister in the new CDU/CSU-FDP-led government.

After 1991, however, the presence of easterners in prominent positions in the FDP declined. In 1991, the FDP reduced the number of deputy chairmen back to three, with one reserved for an easterner (*Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 1991). After Ortleb resigned as education minister in 1994, there were no eastern FDP ministers left in the Kohl cabinet. To some extent, the dearth of eastern elites stemmed from the fact that the FDP was no longer represented in any eastern *Landtag* and thus had no prominent state politicians in the region. However, the FDP struggled at the state level in the west as well, as it had seats in only 4 of 11 state parliaments there. In addition, the party did retain a wealth of local politicians and mayors in the east, in contrast to the west, where it had never been a strong local party.

Unlike the CDU, the FDP avoided a discussion about its past as a bloc party (although several politicians advocated such a debate in 1990) and the calls for party renewal in the east FDP were also less noticeable. Indeed, the national party specifically avoided any internal debate over the role of the bloc parties in the GDR, fearful of further fragmentation of its small ranks.¹¹ The FDP comprises two dominant wings representing the libertarian economic liberal and the more progressive social liberal perspectives; these two orientations have clashed over the years and at times fragmented the party. The national party organization thus places a high price on unity within its ranks and worked to prevent further division over the bloc party debate.¹² At the same time, however, this lack of discussion served to further alienate members who joined after 1989 and made it difficult to attract new followers in the east.¹³ This lack of debate also meant that the FDP did not undergo an internal renewal similar to that of the CDU in the east. Former bloc party members continued to dominate the upper echelons of the party in the region. Of the six FDP MPs sent from the eastern states to the *Bundestag* in 1994, four were former bloc party members, while two had joined the party after 1989. The vast majority of local politicians and party officials were former bloc party members; few new members played an active role.¹⁴

Party Programs and Positions

In 1990, there were concerns in the western CDU that the party would become more leftist and less religious after unification. As a whole, easterners in the CDU tended to be progressive, favoring abortion rights, increasing the welfare state and government involvement in the economy more than their western counterparts. On certain social issues, however, they tended to be more conservative. Surveys have shown that 82 percent

of eastern CDU members supported tightening the German asylum law, as opposed to 62 percent in the west (Padgett, 1995). Overall, as Andrea Volkens and Hans-Dieter Klingemann (1992) have shown, inner-party differences based on state and local programs of the major German parties were the largest between the eastern and western CDU. Divisions have remained between east and west in the party, especially with regards to positions on abortion, economic reform and the PDS. The western party, for example, has tended to take a polarizing view of the PDS, whereas much of the eastern wing rejected this approach. In 1994, the party wanted to run a red socks campaign in the east directed against the post-Communist PDS, but it met with resistance from eastern state organizations, who argued that the campaign would alienate much of the eastern electorate. Indeed, at the local level in the east, the CDU even cooperated with the PDS, particularly in the state of Brandenburg (*Der Spiegel*, 1997).

In order to coordinate issues and positions, the eastern CDU Bundestag representatives formed a group to discuss and highlight issues important to the region. This group had occasional success in pushing through its interests in the CDU as a whole, including retaining the so-called solidarity surcharge, a tax to finance the economic restructuring of eastern Germany. In addition, the group met every Wednesday with Helmut Kohl to address eastern-specific issues. Under pressure from eastern politicians, the CDU also instituted a series of summits to allow party members in the region to voice their concerns (Fuhrer, 1996).

With unification, the CDU established a commission to revise the party program; the commission solicited party members for ideas and draft reports, which continued to trickle in even after the new program was adopted in 1994. Several proposals came from eastern groupings, and though they varied in their content and ideological stripes, all emphasized the need for greater inner-party democracy and a stronger commitment to federalism within the party, to give the eastern state party organizations more freedom.¹⁵

The 1994 party program reflects post-unification changes within the CDU. In comparison to its previous basic program from 1978 and additional reports from the 1980s, the CDU placed far greater stress in 1994 on its role as a mass party. Cognizant of its appeal in the east to groups different from those in the west, the CDU noted the importance of attracting different branches of society, including men and women, Catholics, Protestants, conservatives, liberals and Christian socialists, all social and economic classes and regions (Hintze, 1995: 416). Likewise, in a nod to the less religious party and electorate in the east, the CDU also emphasized that the party welcomed non-Christians, stating that the CDU was open to everyone who valued the dignity and freedom of all people, from which the basic convictions of our politics were derived. This is the basis for cooperation between Christians and non-Christians in the CDU (Hintze, 1995: 417). The new party program also recognized both the

legacy of the 1989 revolution and the difficult history of the bloc party. While it accepted partial responsibility for the history of the GDR, it also viewed the party as a niche for opposition to the SED regime: Despite discrimination and personal risk, many members preserved their

internal [*innere*] independence . . . The CDU accepts the entire history of Germany, and with it the history of the party, and has begun the necessary process of working through the past and renewing the party. With this, we want to inherit and carry on the legacy of the citizens' movements in the GDR.

(Pfeifer, 1993; Hintze, 1995: 400)

While the CDU's programs since 1990 illustrated some eastern influences, the FDP's remained mostly unchanged. With unification, however, there were concerns in the FDP as well that the party would become more leftist and social-oriented with unification and the absorption of the bloc parties. Indeed, it at first appeared as if these predictions would bear fruit. In the fall of 1990, for example, the Berlin state party elected a prominent social liberal, Carola von Braun, as chairwoman, largely with the votes of east Berlin representatives, who comprised two-thirds of the delegates (Brink and Doerfler, 1990).

In contrast to the CDU, however, the eastern influences on the FDP have had little effect since 1990–1. Even before the party's collapse organizationally and electorally in the region, there were few initiatives from the east. There have also been no significant attempts by eastern FDP members to strengthen their voice within the party. A backlash against western colonizers did not occur within the FDP, and, in contrast to the CDU, members did not call for an eastern group within the party to represent the interests of the region. Likewise, although there is an eastern spokesman for the party in the Bundestag, he remains far more low profile than his counterpart in the CDU or the SPD, and there has never been an organized parliamentary grouping. The national FDP and its parliamentary wing have discouraged the creation of an eastern bloc within the party, and have sought to prevent its further fragmentation.¹⁶

In contrast to the more decentralized CDU, the FDP also pursued a unified policy in eastern Germany with the national party directing campaign and policy strategy, shunning specifically eastern directives or interests.¹⁷ The liberal, free-market oriented FDP (which held the economics and justice Ministries in the Kohl government) took several unpopular positions in East Germany, particularly with regards to economic transfers and subsidies and the return of property confiscated in the late 1940s. The eastern state party organizations rarely spoke out against the national party or its leaders publicly, even though dissent towards the economic and legal policies of the party existed. The party's concerns about unity overrode any attempts to foster different ideas in the party.

This policy also colored the party's programs. In 1997, the FDP presented a new party program at its Wiesbaden party congress. Unlike the CDU's

1994 program, it contained no references to the bloc party or the revolution of 1989. Likewise, there were no recognizable shifts in whom the party sought to represent or its basic principles.

Conclusions: Party Organization in Eastern Germany

The CDU's and FDP's divergent experiences since 1989–90 stem in large part from their organizational structure. Models of party organization draw attention to organizational constraints and opportunities in the form of resources, structures, rules, norms and values; they emphasize the formal structures and actual practices that link party leaders with their extra-parliamentary organizations (Scarrow, 1996). In this tradition, Maurice Duverger (1954) advanced the distinction between mass and cadre parties in terms of leadership and organizational patterns, and Otto Kirchheimer (1966) developed the concept of the catch-all party; other similar examples of party types include Herbert Kitschelt's (1989) distinctions between left-libertarian and mass-bureaucratic parties and Angelo Panebianco's (1988) differentiation between mass-bureaucratic and electoral-professional parties. All of these models, however, emphasize organizational structures in shaping developments and decision-making within parties. They stress factors such as party centralization, size and inclusiveness of membership, influence of membership on party decisions and selection of leadership and candidates, and the nature of channels between party elites and their membership.

The CDU is a mass-based catch-all party with a strong federal base. The state party organizations have traditionally enjoyed a degree of autonomy from the national party. In the spirit of Kirchheimer's catch-all party, the CDU has placed emphasis on drawing members and voters from all groups in society and has a weak ideological framework, with a somewhat wide range of opinions and beliefs in the party (Schmid, 1989; Becker, 1995; Scarrow, 1996). This combination of weak ideology, decentralization and a mass-based diverse membership helped the CDU adapt to the new environment in the east.

The CDU's more decentralized structure enabled the eastern state organizations to develop more distinct eastern policies and thus attract a wider following among the regional electorate, which tends to have issue interests, values and concerns different from those in the west. Likewise, its diverse membership and limited concerns about party fragmentation allowed the CDU to undergo an internal debate over its role in the GDR and achieve some party elite renewal, as well as provide members with room to develop different ideas. This diversity led to tension between eastern and western members, but it also helped the CDU attract a following in the east and set the agenda in regional politics.

In contrast to the CDU, the FDP is a small, interest-based party without a mass membership; its restricted membership base draws predominantly

from the educated and prosperous middle class, civil servants and the self-employed. The large membership the party inherited from the former bloc parties in 1990 threatened to reverse its status as a small, interest-based party. Instead of capitalizing on its early foothold, the party thus actively sought to reduce its membership in the east in order to maintain its elite-based organization and balance out the eastern and western wings of the party. The policy of reducing membership ranks hurt the FDP's image in the east and made the remaining members feel unwelcome in the party.

The FDP remains more centralized than the CDU in terms of campaign strategies and state and regional policy and is also more concerned about preventing further divisions within its restricted ranks. The desire to maintain unity and its homogeneous clientele seems to have discouraged an internal debate over the role of the bloc parties and also any attempt at party renewal. Unlike the CDU, the FDP is a centralized party; state party organizations have less autonomy than in the CDU and as a result of the party's poor showing in state elections in recent years they have become even weaker (see, e.g., Falter and Winkler, 1996). The lack of regional diversity and the constant concern with fragmentation have hindered the development of an eastern voice within the party and hurt the party's ability to address issues and attract followers in the east.

In the case of party transformation in eastern Germany, therefore, structure does matter. The extension of the institutional norms, values and rules of the western CDU and FDP to the east in 1990 has impacted the development of the political landscape there; institutional factors have shaped the parties' electoral, policy and organizational strategies, which in turn have affected the CDU's and FDP's abilities to attract new followers and political leaders and achieve renewal within their ranks.

These institutional factors have led the CDU and FDP down divergent paths in the east since 1990, despite the fact that both parties began from similar electoral, historical and organizational positions. These case studies also have implications for the process of German unification and the transplant of western institutions in the east. They indicate that the integration and adaptation of eastern elites in western organizations occurs more easily when these organizations are decentralized and federally structured, allowing greater room to tailor programs to the needs and interests of the eastern polity.

Likewise, these findings have implications for actor and institutional transformation in democratic transitions in other countries. For the broader questions of transition to and consolidation of democracy, these case studies indicate that institutions matter. Indeed, they suggest that the levels of centralization and flexibility in institutional structures and culture play an important role in fostering the circulation of elites, internal renewal and effectiveness in responding to the public interests in the development of policy.

Notes

- 1 In Germany, the CDU competes in all federal states except Bavaria, where the Christian Social Union (CSU) is the dominant conservative party. The latter cooperates with the CDU at the federal level in a permanent coalition. For the purposes of this research note, however, I use the CDU and CDU/CSU interchangeably when discussing federal elections.
- 2 Interview with Dr Volkmar Kunze, Mayor of Radebeul/Saxony, July 1996.
- 3 There is debate as to exactly how many eastern members came from the DA and DBD. See Schmidt (1997).
- 4 Interviews with Peter Liebers, Kreisgeschäftsführer der CDU-Chemnitz, June 1996 and Beate Barsch, Pressesprecherin der CDU-Sachsen, July 1996.
- 5 Interviews with FDP party officials, summer 1996.
- 6 Interviews with Martin Biesel, Abteilungsleiter Politik und Internationale Beziehung, Thomas-Dehler-Haus der FDP and Dr. Hartmut Wirthgen, Director of the Wilhelm-Külz-Stiftung and member of FDP Landesvorstand in Saxony.
- 7 Interviews with FDP party officials, summer 1996.
- 8 Interview with Biesel.
- 9 Interviews with Biesel and Wirthgen.
- 10 Interviews with FDP party officials, summer 1996.
- 11 Cited in interviews with several FDP officials, summer 1996.
- 12 Interview with Biesel.
- 13 Interview with Konrad Felber, FDP Ortsvorsitzender, Limbach-Oberfrohna and former member of FDP Bundesvorstand, July 1996.
- 14 Interviews with Kunze and Wirthgen.
- 15 Examples include Werte- & Strategiedebatte CDU 2000; 14 Thesen zum Ost-Profil der CDU; Identitätsgewinn auf sächsisch: Ein Beitrag zur Zukunftsdebatte der CDU Deutschlands aus Sicht der Sächsischen Union; 13 Grundsätze christlich-demokratischer Politik im wiedervereinigten Deutschland.
- 16 Interviews with Biesel, Wirthgen and Felber.
- 17 Interview with Biesel.

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