

Communist Social Structure and Post-Communist Elections: Voting for Reunification in East Germany

On March 18, 1990, the citizens of the GDR participated in the first competitive election in their country's history. With a voter turnout of over 90 per cent the majority of the population delivered a stunning blow to the left and brought to power the first Christian Democratic-dominated government in the GDR. In voting conservative, though, the GDR electorate knowingly signed the death warrant not only for its socialist system, but for the GDR as a political entity.

Over the course of the campaign the primary issue in the mind of the electorate became the speed and desirability of unification with the West.¹ Conservative parties loudly proclaimed the need for rapid "reunification" with the West, while the left-leaning parties voiced their objections to, and fears of a West German colonial style "Anschluss." Public opinion polls suggest that the pull of the wealthy West was simply too strong to be resisted, and, therefore, voting behavior reflected more the dominance of this single issue than any long term trend in party alignment in the East.²

This article explores the sociological underpinnings of the resounding defeat suffered by the left in the Volkskammer elections in March, 1990. The identity of the groups most responsible for the defeat of the left are counterintuitive to what conventional political sociology would lead us to expect. A coalition of voters comprising the traditionally most left-wing group, the industrial proletariat, and the most vulnerable, the aged, combined to bring the conservatives to power and pave the way for unification. We test this hypothesis by inferring a relationship between the outcomes in the voting districts and the social characteristics of the Bezirke (provinces). On the basis of the admittedly sketchy published data on social and demographic conditions in the provinces, we establish the relationship between performance of the parties on the one hand, and occupational structure, settlement structure, and other social demographic characteristics of the Bezirke on the other. Since the investigation establishes a relationship between voting results and specific characteristics of the voting districts, a correlation analysis was carried out and the

1. W. Friedrich, "Gestern ungefragt, Morgen ueberfragt?" *Sonntag*, Vol. 10 (1990), p. 10; U. Feist, "Eigener Weg oder Einheit sofort. Hoffnung auf Bonner Hilfe bestimmte Waclervotus," *Das Parlament*, No. 14 (30 March 1990), p. 7.

2. See G. Roski of Leipzig's Zentralinstitut fuer Jugendforschung, quoted in V. Warketin, "Im frueher roten Sachsen triumphierte die CDU," *Die Welt* March 20, 1990, p. 8.

derived coefficients checked for significance. The correlation matrix is located in Table 1.³

It is, of course, always risky to link social structure and political behavior, if for no other reason than that objectively similar social traits and processes can be interpreted differently in different cultural contexts. When using population data, as we do here, such methodological concerns are intensified. However, on the basis of the correlations made in the body of the paper one can derive some interesting hypotheses about the GDR electorate, which can provide the basis for further investigation of the consequences of communist social structure for post-communist voting behavior.

Our conclusions challenge as too simplistic the notion that the vote for rapid unification was merely a product of West German largesse. To a certain extent this is true, but as we argue below the social structural characteristics of East Germany, as shaped by the policies of the former communist party (the SED), contributed significantly to defeat of the left. The need for unification and the introduction of the institutions of capitalism were experienced with different intensity by various groups within the population. The peculiarities of the GDR's social structure ensured that the campaign strategy of the right would work: an electoral campaign that made rapid unification its cornerstone would find resonance among a diverse and curious coalition of voters ranging from the elderly to the traditional home team of left-wing politics—the industrial proletariat.⁴

3. The data base for the study was drawn from two main sources: (1) the final results of the Volkskammer elections of March, 1990, broken down to the Bezirk level as published in *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, March 21, 1990, p.2. (2) The social indicators provided in the official statistics on the individual Bezirks have been used unchanged as they appear in the *Statistical Yearbook of the GDR* (1989). This includes the occupational structure of each Bezirk, broken down into the categories industry, productive trades, construction, agriculture and forestry, transportation and communication, retail trade, and the "non-producing sector." For dividing up the population of the Bezirks by settlement size several changes were made. Instead of placing the rural villages under 2000 inhabitants and smaller communities under 10 000 into separate groups, a new indicator was formed showing the total population of each Bezirk living in communities under 10 000 inhabitants. This indicator still gives an impression of the rural character of a Bezirk. The second change concerns the border between small and large mid-sized cities which was drawn not at the East German norm of 50 000, but at 45 000. Finally Halle-Naustadt, an area that with its 94 000 inhabitants is usually counted as an administratively independent unit, because of its close connections to Halle/Saale is counted here among the large cities instead of as a large mid-sized city. Both age and sex indicators were used.

Beyond these indicators further indicators were gleaned from the statistics to provide information on social conditions in the Bezirks. These include total migration between the Bezirks from 1971–1988, apartments per inhabitant in each Bezirk, per capita savings rates in each Bezirk, the number of doctors, dentists, and pharmacists, the number of stillborn children and infant mortality per thousand, and the overall death rate reworked to the number per thousand over pension age. These indicators are related not only to the health system, but also reflect the environmental conditions in the respective Bezirks. Further remarks on the individual indicators can be found in the text when appropriate.

From the outset the methodology employed here has two main flaws. Firstly, the use of population data means that the study suffers from the ecological fallacy that plagues all such studies. The second problem is that the number of cases (14) is far too small to run more sophisticated tests to determine how the variables (26) affect each other. The ecological problem we shall simply leave as one of the inherent drawbacks to this type of study. The latter problem we attempt to ameliorate by generating coefficients for the whole range of variables to give the reader some idea of the complexity of the inter-relationship between the variables. It is hoped that the hypotheses generated and tested by the data will lead to further, more refined tests when the data becomes available.

4. While the latter may be of some puzzlement to the left, the former runs counter to the bulk of Western literature on the GDR which has conventionally seen in youth the main source of disaffection while not even bothering to mention the elderly. See Gunter Minnerup, "East Germany's Frozen Revolution," *New Left Review*, No. 132 (March April 1982), pp. 27–28; Pedro Ramet, "Disaffection and Dissent in East Germany," *World Politics*, Vol. 37, No. 1 (October 1984) pp. 85–111.

Post-communist Elections

As in the other countries of Eastern Europe, the GDR's first (and last) competitive multi-party election had a rather strange quality to it. Firstly, the country faced problems of such a scale as to make the status quo abhorrent in almost all respects to every political grouping. All could agree that the political and legal institutions of "really existing socialism" had long ago become moribund and inhumane. Politicians of every political color spoke of a need for some form of multi-party parliamentary democracy based on the rule of law.

Furthermore, there was consensus that the "socialist planned economy" had reached a dead end. Every political party/movement advocated some form of a "social-market economy."⁵ On the environmental front even the most right-wing politicians understood the concern among the population about the conditions of the air, water, and soil in the country. Thus, seemingly overnight, the West German model of a "social-market economy" was transformed into an "ecologically responsible social-market economy," becoming an integral part of the campaign jargon of every politician worth his salt.

What the population wanted was all too apparent: a clean break with the policies and institutional arrangements of the past 40 years. The issues became almost too big to allow for the kind of campaigns around the concrete and often mundane issues encountered in the West such as taxes, education, defense spending, and housing. It was simultaneously a politics of the apocalypse and the millennium; for the old guard it was the end, and for the new political entrepreneurs the beginning of a dream. This was the case not only in East Germany, but in Hungary, Poland, and Czechoslovakia as well.

Aside from the absence of debates over taxes, housing and the like the East European elections manifested a further potential oddity. While communism never succeeded in raising the living standards of East Europeans to that of the West, it did manage radically to alter the social structure of these societies. In doing so it left them for the most part without the traditional constituency of conservative/market oriented parties—a good sized property owning middle class with an on-going stake in the development and maintenance of the institutions of capitalism. What this meant is that one of the main cleavages so crucial in the formation of Western party systems was absent.⁶ Other cleavages from which conservatives traditionally benefitted, like confessional voting, had ceased to be relevant.

Amidst the rather amorphous political discourse, and the as yet unclear or unarticulated social structural connections between the population and political groupings, a number of political parties emerged. Many of the new parties in Eastern Europe were replicas of West European Christian Democratic and Social Democratic parties. Others presented themselves as reformed versions of the old communist parties. But apart from these more traditional political groups, there also appeared countless political movements and micro-parties who would barely

5. The consensus extended to economists as well. See the symposium of experts from the GDR and the FRG in "Es geht nicht schnell genug," in *Die Zeit*, February 7-9, 1990, pp. 37-44.

6. The classic analysis of cleavage development is Seymour Martin Lipset and Stein Rokkan, eds., "Cleavage Structures, Party Systems and Voter Alignments: An Introduction," in *Party Systems and Voter Alignments* (New York, 1967) pp. 1-64; also Seymour Martin Lipset, "Radicalism or Reformism: The Sources of Working-Class Politics," *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 77 (January 1983), pp. 1-19.

make it through the campaign for lack of organizational resources and public support.

One might reasonably expect that with its large working classes, weakly developed middle classes, and swollen intelligentsia, post-communist Eastern Europe would be an ideal candidate for a left-wing vote. Viewed from the reverse angle, campaigning in countries with mutated social structures and apocalyptic political cultures, bourgeois parties faced a seemingly organic sociological obstacle in eliciting electoral support. From a sociological viewpoint it was hard to see how conservative parties stood a chance, or what strategies they could use for victory. After all, who will vote for "bourgeois" parties in the absence of a bourgeoisie?⁷

Perhaps in order to compensate for the absence of a natural constituency with clear material interests in favor of the institutions of capitalism, many conservative parties of Eastern Europe successfully appealed to nationalist sentiments to gather public support. In Poland and Hungary, for example, mildly nationalist parties favorably disposed to capitalism came to power, in all likelihood not primarily on the appeal of their economic programs alone, but in tandem with calls to protect, restore, and heal the "nation."⁸ Even the pseudo-democratic National Salvation Front of Romania employed a nationalist politics of its own before the Romanian election.⁹

The East German Volkskammer election presents an interesting variation on this general East European pattern. In a similar fashion to the other countries of the area, the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) and the German Social Union (DSU) successfully exploited nationalist sentiments and slogans during the campaign. But unlike the conservatives of Hungary and Poland, the CDU and DSU, in their coalition form known as the Alliance for Germany (AfD), could combine the interests of nationalism and economic welfare in an extremely appealing way. Through rapid unification, so the logic goes, both the German national question and the East German economic mess could be solved simultaneously.

Their opponents on the left, the Social Democrats (SPD), had high hopes. East Germany was the homeland of social democracy, and notwithstanding the decline in confessional voting, its overwhelmingly protestant population, large industrial proletariat, and assistance from the Western branch of the SPD gave cause to believe that it would do well. The SPD came out for the unity of Germany, but campaigned against a quick unification and for a slower merging along the lines first articulated by Willy Brandt, "what belongs together will grow together."¹⁰

The former communist party, the Socialist Unity Party of Germany (SED), whose reform oriented basis had helped to topple the former Politburo and the regional

7. "Although in the West there is no hard evidence that liberal parties attract fewer working class votes overall, the very rare and brief appearances of liberal-labor alliances lead one to suspect that the inference is valid." Gregory M. Luebbert, "Social Foundations of Political Order in Interwar Europe," *World Politics*, Vol. 39, No. 4 (July 1987), p. 459.

8. For an interesting argument that transition to successful capitalist economic development and extreme nationalism go together see A. James Gregor, *Italian Fascism and Developmental Dictatorship* (Princeton, 1979). The East European cases differ in this respect from that of the Soviet Union. In the East European case "protecting the nation" and the institutions of capitalism are not necessarily perceived as contradictory, but in the case of Russia nationalism/Slavophilism and anti-market/capitalist/law sentiments are historically tied closely to each other. See A. Yanov, *The Russian New Right* (Berkeley, 1978).

9. The NSF's capitalist credentials, however, are rather suspect.

10. For the SPD reticence about a rapid *Anschluss* see, "Vereinigung, Konfoederation, Bundesstaat oder Staatenbund?" in *Frankfurter Rundschau*, February 10, 1990, p. 6.

party leadership in the autumn of 1989, found itself in a deep crisis. In searching for a new program for left-wing politics it entered the campaign with the goal of becoming a strong opposition party. In doing so it could rely on the help of two new charismatic leaders, lawyer Gregor Gysi, and the liberal leader of the former Dresden party organization and acting prime minister Hans Modrow. At an emergency congress the party changed its name to the Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS), and soon thereafter came out strongly against rapid unification. PDS leaders criticized the steady stream of leaked reports out of Bonn predicting the "imminent financial collapse of the GDR" as "nonsense," a transparent attempt to intimidate the East German population into acquiescing to the CDU's plans.¹¹ The PDS warned that an early economic unification could place unmanageable burdens on the social safety nets of both German states, and rapid political unification was in some respects simply irrational.¹²

In addition to these mainstream parties a number of other political groupings took part in the election. The Liberals, for their part, were essentially off-shoots of their sister in the West, the Free Democrats. Other parties were revived versions of the discredited "bloc" parties from the old order. Still more had transformed themselves from social movements which had taken part in the events of October, 1990, into micro-parties. Most of the latter group did not possess the organizational capacity or the popular support to make the transition from movement to party.

All in all, a GDR citizen, when visiting the poll, had to decide from among 24 competing parties in filling out his/her ballot.¹³ The following analysis focuses primarily on the big parties (although we do include the Liberals) because the inclusion of the smaller parties would neither alter the statistical significance of the correlations nor the interpretations offered.

Voting and the Parties

The final performance of the larger parties for the 400 allotted seats, won according to the proportion of the vote, were as follows: CDU, 164; DSU, 25; Liberals, 21; SPD, 87; PDS, 65. The absence of clear social structural connections to the parties might lead one to expect the voting behavior to be somewhat random. However, the issue of unification provided a point around which the vote split. If one examines the relationship between the parties' performance in the districts—including "Alliance for Germany" (CDU and the more conservative DSU together)—several factors stand out at first glance (Figure 1).

Firstly, the performance of the Alliance was very closely tied to that of the CDU (correlation coefficient=0.91). The DSU contributed to the strength of the Alliance mostly in the southern Bezirke. Secondly, the performance of the Liberals is independent of the performance of the other large parties examined here. Even if the Liberals might display the same traits as the conservatives, there appears to be a constant clientele of Liberal voters whose vote was not influenced by the relative strength or weakness of the left- or right-wing parties. Thirdly, the performance of the Alliance and the CDU correlates very negatively with the performance of the

11. *ibid.*, p. 1.

12. "Währungsunion jetzt—was waren die Auswirkungen?" in *Neues Deutschland*, February 9, 1990, p. 2.

13. *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, March 21, 1990, p. 2.

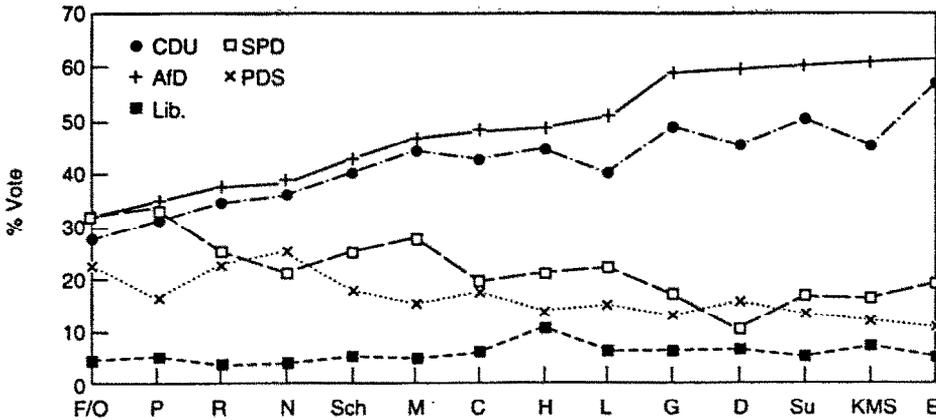


Figure 1. Voting performance in the districts. Bezirke: F/O-Frankfurt; P = Potsdam; R = Rostock; N = Neubrandenburg; Sch = Schwerin; M = Magdeburg; C = Cottbus; H = Halle; L = Leipzig; G = Gera; D = Dresden; Su = Suhl; KMS = Karl-Marx-Stadt; E = Erfurt.

SPD (-0.86, -0.72) and PDS (-0.82, -0.79). Even clearer is the negative correlation between the combined vote for the PDS and SPD against the Alliance (-0.98), which here can be taken for the strength of the left side of the voting spectrum. This is certainly plausible. Where conservative votes dominate, the left is relatively weak, and conversely where left-wing votes are relatively strong the conservatives fared rather poorly. The essential point here is that the SPD and PDS were affected equally by the strength of the conservative parties, and when the conservatives showed weakness they profited in equal proportions.

Fourthly, the percentage of votes for the SPD and PDS in the 14 Bezirke was not significantly correlated. The coefficient of 0.41 points merely to a trend. A level of significance is attained (0.56 with a margin of error of less than 5 per cent), however, if one removes from the calculation the results of Neubrandenburg, the Bezirk in which PDS star candidate Hans Modrow put in a surprisingly strong showing.

It appears to be a trend, at any rate, that the left-wing of the voting spectrum, the SPD and PDS, was split in consistent proportions, with the SPD receiving on average the larger share of the vote. Undoubtedly it would be wrong to minimize the differences between the SPD and PDS as parties, both in their structures and their platforms. However, the fact remains that on the issue most important in the election campaign—the speed of unification—the SPD and PDS converged in their opposition to a rapid takeover of East Germany by the West. The election results show a polarization of the voters exactly along these lines. From this one can conclude with some certainty that few others voted for SPD or PDS except those who were opposed to a rapid unification, and that this group of voters presumably represented the “core” of the left.

Voting and the Economic Structure of the Bezirke

Traditionally the industrial proletariat has been portrayed as a standby of left-wing voting, and farmers as the patrons of conservative parties, especially in German

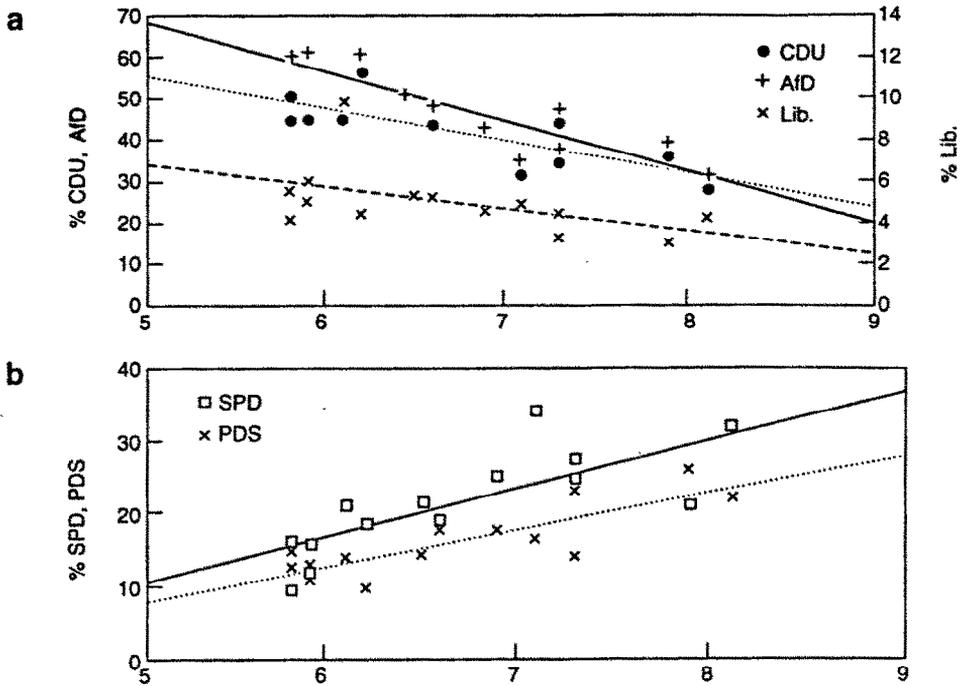


Figure 2. Percentage working in the construction industry vs. vote.

politics. However, the number and the strength of the significant correlations between the voting behavior of East Germans and the economic structure of the Bezirke—correlations presenting contrary evidence—leads one to question this hypothesis as too crude.

The strongest relationship uncovered is between the distribution of votes and the percentage of the population working in construction, followed by the proportion of those involved in industry. Expressed concretely, the strength of the conservatives increases where the proportion of industrial workers rises and where the number of construction workers sinks (Figure 2). With a view to the left-wing parties, precisely the opposite is true. The left grows stronger where the proportion of construction workers is higher and where the number of those involved in industry is smaller.

The hypothesis that employment in the construction industry (varying in the Bezirke between 3 per cent and 8 per cent) would have a strong influence on right-wing or left-wing voting is too simple, if for no other reason than that the proportions of those employed in industry and construction correlate very strongly in a negative direction (-0.87). From the correlation matrix it is apparent that the proportion of people involved in construction, in trade, and in the sector transportation/communication correlate positively with each other. Where one of the sectors is relatively developed so are the others. Where one of the sectors is weak the others fall equally behind. Each of these sectors, however, correlates negatively with the percentage employed in industry. In addition, there is a negative correlation between those involved in the "non-productive sector" (a Leninist sociological

category indicating those working in administration, health and welfare, education, science, culture, and art) and the percentage employed in industry.

In sum, then, precisely where there were high concentrations of industry, the sectors responsible for the upkeep and growth of housing, trade, transportation, communication, art, and culture—those sectors that determine the quality as opposed to the quantity of life—were developed below the national average. This underdevelopment was the product of a policy of disproportionate investment among the territories of the GDR.¹⁴ As such, it had a negative impact on the performance of left-wing parties, and the surprising success of the conservative parties in industrial areas can at least in part be explained by this factor.¹⁵

Exactly the reverse relationship results if one analyses the correlation of voting behavior and the proportions working in the “non-productive sector.” These relationships are highly significant for the Alliance (-0.78), CDU (-0.67), and PDS (0.79), as well as for the SPD and PDS together (0.79). Moreover, once again the correlations between the right and the left parties run significantly in a negative direction, while voting for the Liberals as before followed the conservative trend (-0.54).

The explanation for this might be as follows. In the Bezirke, where the non-productive sector is relatively well developed, the industrial sector is not only of below average strength, the proportion of those involved in the non-productive sector also correlates positively with employment in construction, trade, and communication/transportation sectors. If the industrial regions suffered under undue regional disproportions in investment, the Bezirke with relatively large non-productive sectors—unknowingly to be sure—benefitted from it. Even if the nature of the problems in “non-productive” Bezirke was hardly different from those in the highly industrialized ones, the magnitude of the problem, and therefore the cause in the case of an ambivalence of voting against the left, was apparently less.

The favorable trend for the left in areas with a larger non-productive sector should not be overlooked or minimized. After all, given the strength of the SED nomenklatura in the entire sector of state administration it is tempting to see the strength of the left-wing vote potential tied to the size of this group.

However, for at least two reasons the influence of this sector on the tendency to vote left-wing should not be exaggerated. Firstly, according to a crude calculation in which Berlin with its above average number of bureaucrats is included, this sector amounted to 612 000 employees together with drivers, doormen, and cleaning personnel. Of the 12.4 million voters, this sector constituted only 5 per cent of the electorate, whereby for each Bezirk the number varies between 4 and 6 per cent. However, even if one significantly increases this number, the left-wing voting trend outlined here cannot be explained solely, or even primarily, on the basis of an above average presence of reliable servants of the SED who would like nothing better than to return to the good old days of Honecker. People working in the sphere controlled by the nomenklatura had access to unpublished information which allowed them to make a better evaluation of the actual state of the country long before the demonstrations started. For the employees of this sector, frustration and resignation,

14. See Klaus von Beyme, “Regionalpolitik in der DDR,” in Gert-Joachim Glaessner, ed., *Die DDR in der Ära Honecker* (Opladen, 1988) pp. 434–443. Although von Beyme makes precisely the opposite argument, his data supports the hypothesis proposed here.

15. It is therefore hardly surprising when according to a DDR television poll the working class voted 59 per cent for the Alliance and only 21 per cent for the SPD, see Warketin, *op. cit.*, note 2.

especially since Gorbachev came to power in 1985, was hardly less pronounced than in the society as a whole. Unlike the Soviet case, the vast majority of state employees had few privileges to defend. Given this, it is highly questionable whether the positive correlation of left-wing voting with the size of the non-productive sphere is evidence of some kind of nostalgia for the old order.¹⁶ It is more likely that the stronger left-wing showing in Bezirks with a larger non-productive sector reflect their different employment structures. The non-productive sector included precisely those areas of the economy in which highly skilled employees and members of the intelligentsia are concentrated, among whom in the German tradition leftward leaning political attitudes find above average representation.¹⁷

Running counter to our sociologically ingrained expectations of the farming sector is the fact that the proportion of the population employed in agriculture and forestry in a Bezirk correlates negatively with conservative outcomes (-0.72) and positively with the left (0.73), although here we have not found even a trend establishing a relationship between the proportion of rural inhabitants and voting behavior. We will return to this below. However all things being equal, one can say for the employees in agriculture that there was more of a left-wing trend in voting than a right-wing trend.¹⁸ Such a trend, if somewhat paradoxical, would nonetheless certainly be understandable since the proposed conservative program of a clean takeover of the GDR by the West created the concern that many farmers would lose the land on which they worked. Even if their rights to the land remained secure, however, a reunited GDR agriculture would face extremely stiff competition from the EEC, raising the ever present "Existenzfrage" (existence question) for the East German farmer.

Voting Results and the Demographic Structure

Traditionally, students of the GDR have identified westward political/cultural orientations with unrest among the younger generation. An examination of the Volkskammer elections, however, may cause us to re-evaluate this original estimation of the relationship between age cohort and political orientation.

At first glance the picture of the relationship between voting behavior and the age/gender structure of the population in the individual Bezirks is highly variable. What one first notices is the polarization between young men in the age group 18-30 on the one hand, and people of pension age on the other. In particular it seems to be the case that the larger the elderly population in a Bezirk, the stronger the performance of the conservatives, and the more poorly the left fared. Precisely the opposite is the case for young men: the more young men of 18-30 the stronger the left wing vote. The negative correlation concerning the Alliance on the one hand (-0.76) and the positive correlations for the PDS (0.82) and the combined SPD/PDS vote (0.82) on the other are highly significant. In so far as the calculations concern

16. The intensity of the process of political disintegration of the SED actually is demonstrated by the fact that according to an opinion poll conducted for GDR television by the West German Infas Institute on the night of the election, among former SED members only 23 per cent voted PDS and 23 per cent for the SPD. Sixteen per cent voted for the Alliance and 17 per cent were undecided.

17. According to one opinion poll, among the intelligentsia the conservatives fared relatively poorly with a 31 per cent popularity, while the PDS enjoyed 26 per cent and the SPD 23 per cent. Warkentin, *op. cit.*, note 2.

18. This is not to argue that with a finer division of the Bezirks into Kreis (the data for which we do not have) this trend within the Bezirks is merely hiding an overarching conservative urban-rural trend.

merely the CDU and the SPD, the level of significance is somewhat lower (-0.54 and 0.53 respectively).

Similar relationships exist for the male age group 30-40 as for the age group 18-30. However, the results are even less clear here where for the Alliance (-0.55) or the PDS (0.54) as well as the PDS/SPD combined vote (0.59) a level of significance with a 5 per cent probability of error can still be attained. The connection between the votes for the CDU or the SPD can merely be interpreted as a trend.

For women of these age groups the relationship to voting behavior becomes even more confused with the given data. As far as the conservatives are concerned, one can at this point speak merely of a trend against the conservatives (-0.40 for CDU). Moreover, the pro-SPD trend observed among the 30-40 year old men is more tenuous among women because the connection between the votes for the PDS and female voters between the ages of 30 and 40 in comparison to men of this age is considerably strengthened, and a significance level with a 1 per cent probability of error is attained (0.71).

The picture becomes even more complex when we look at the group of female voters between the ages of 18 and 30. Here the trend against the Alliance witnessed in the groups of 30-40 year olds loses its punch, and one can speak of a left-wing trend only in relation to the proportion of votes for the SPD (0.46) or the combined totals of the SPD and PDS (0.44). In the groups of voters between 40 and pension age there is a trend against the CDU (-0.52) and, somewhat weaker to be sure, against the Alliance (-0.44). All further correlations between the size of these groups of voters and the distribution of votes can hardly even be evaluated as trends.

Looking at the age groups between the ages of 18 and 40 there is in all groups a trend against the right. This trend is more pronounced for younger men than for older men, stronger for men than for women, and stronger for older women than for younger women. It is stronger against the Alliance than against the CDU alone. The trend against the right is at the same time a trend towards the left. This is especially true for the combined vote of the SPD and PDS, but it is also true for the PDS alone, with the exception of the group of younger women, or for the SPD alone, with the exception of older women.

On the basis of the preceding analysis we can conclude that voters between 18 and 40 were more oriented against the right than against the left, whereby the orientation becomes weaker as one moves up the age scale, and becomes stronger among women as they get older. In addition, among the voters between 40 and pension age there was a trend against the right which, however, cannot be classified as a clear trend toward the left. Therefore, we can conclude that, given the data and the methods used here, among working age voters there is a trend (decreasing with age) against the right and toward the left. Here the group of women in the age group 30-40 represent an exception in so far as they were more consistently oriented to the PDS than the group of women younger or immediately older.

There are several explanations for these results. Firstly, for the majority of voters of working age, the question of job retention was raised by the prospect of rapid unification. Certainly this fact did not eliminate the desire of the East German population on the whole to have the Deutsche mark as their currency, but perhaps in certain groups it was a cause for further consideration and concern.

The older groups of workers considered themselves more professionally secure than the younger groups, and remained dissatisfied with the supplies of consumer

goods for far longer than younger people despite the latter's larger savings. Furthermore, they had confronted mismanagement at the work place and decay in the capital stock in society at large for more years than their younger colleagues. In short, their longer social contact with real socialism probably left older workers more sceptical with respect to any new experimental social orders.

The anomalous results involving the strong left-wing tendencies among women between the ages of 30 and 40 can be explained by the fact that in many respects their situation is different from that of younger or older women in the GDR. High rates of divorce in the GDR often left mothers as single parents, giving them special cause to be uncertain about their welfare in a united Germany. These concerns do not have the same urgency for younger women, and have ceased to be meaningful altogether for older women, and, therefore, can explain the middle group's stronger orientation toward issues of social security stressed by the PDS in the election campaign.

As opposed to the group of younger voters, the older voters came out clearly for the Alliance. Just as strong as the trend to the right is the trend against the left. This goes equally for male and female voters. The elderly, in their voting behavior, revealed their sense of being discriminated against under SED rule, and felt much more so than the younger groups that quicker unification would bring not only higher pensions, but pensions in Deutsche marks.¹⁹ Since they did not have to fear losing their jobs and did not have to worry about long term plans, the pensioners evidently acted in favor of a quick solution.

Just how strongly the vote can be characterized by a left/right polarization along generational lines, between working age people and pensioners is shown by the following figures. In 1988 there were approximately 2 675 000 senior citizens in East Germany.²⁰ Their share of the population by the time of the vote had undoubtedly grown, not only because of the general aging of society, but also because very few of those who fled to the West in the summer and autumn of 1989 were elderly. Even if one accepts the conservative figures as accurate, and puts their turnout at the polls at the average for the rest of the population (93.22 per cent), among the 11.475 million who took part in the election some 2.494 million were senior citizens, and around 9 million were of working age.

If we take the analysis one step further and assume only 75 per cent of senior citizens voted for the Alliance (our coefficient of 0.79 does not make this an unreasonable assumption), among the Alliance voters (5.25 million) 1.8 million would have been senior citizens and 3.7 million would have been of working age. Put differently, if the assumption provided here is true, the Alliance received approximately 41 per cent of the votes of the 9 million voters of working age. Hypothetically, if 85 per cent of the voters older than pension age voted for the Alliance, the number of voters of working age who supported the alliance drops to 37 per cent. And to take the scenario to the extreme, if 100 per cent of senior citizens had voted for the Alliance, only 33 per cent of working age voters could possibly have voted for the Alliance.

19. In February, 1990, the economics spokesperson for the movement "New Forum" stated "When I think about the security of our senior citizens. . . its so bad — we have a form of senior citizens' poverty, and really lousy care for old people. I don't think here we can speak of a "social achievement." in *Die Zeit*, February 9, 1990, p. 44.

20. *Statistisches Jahrbuch der DDR 1989*, p. 3564.

This estimated portion of the working age population voting for the Alliance is certainly not small. However, if our calculations reflect reality, then among the working age population the Alliance for Germany did not receive a majority. With respect to the more or less plebiscitarian nature of the Volkskammer elections, this means that a large part of the adult population of working age came out against a quick takeover of East Germany by West Germany. Decisive, however, was the vote of the senior citizens who, together with at least a third of the younger voters, laid the groundwork for the annexation of the GDR by the Federal Republic. Simultaneously, and hypothetically, the left was punished for the excessive concentration of the SED on the young to the detriment of the elderly, and for the fact that at least twice in their life the latter group had lived through the trying experience of total political collapse.

However, notwithstanding these arguments, it would be an unjustified simplification to assume a monocausal relationship between age and gender on the one hand, and voting behavior on the other. For example, not only does the proportion of those employed in industry correlate with the respective proportion of voters in the age and gender groups considered here, but the correlations between the proportion working in industry and those in other economic sectors is also reproduced almost completely through the age and gender groups.

In other words, Bezirks that are overwhelmingly industrial, with all the disadvantages discussed above, also have an above average number of older people. Conversely, in Bezirks with a less industrial character, the proportion of young people is larger than average. The assumption here is that gender-specific traits and the structure of age groups, as well as that of the economy exercised a complicated influence on voting behavior. While it is always dangerous to connect objective traits with voting behavior, the data presented here, if not complete enough to run more sophisticated statistical tests, at least permits us to give a plausible interpretation of the events.

Voting Results and Bezirk Population Structure

Traditionally in German politics small cities are considered conservative and large cities more left-wing. In the 1990 Volkskammer elections one would have thought that this phenomenon would have been intensified by the SED policy of devoting considerable resources to the development of larger cities, while simultaneously neglecting the upkeep of the older small cities of East Germany. However, an examination of the relationship between the distribution of votes and the size of cities in the Bezirks reveals some surprising results. Significant correlations (in this case an orientation toward left-wing parties) can be found only in proportions of the population in cities of between 10 000 and 20 000 inhabitants, while all other coefficients fail even to show trends.

It is first noteworthy that the proportion of the population living in the countryside, with the exception of a mild trend against the Liberals, does not affect the distribution of votes. Since a large part of the population living in the countryside does not work in agriculture or in forestry but commutes to the nearby cities, this result does not actually contradict the trend toward stronger left-wing voting in Bezirks with larger agricultural and forestry sectors. Therefore one can conclude that the effects of rural life on political preferences in the elections to the Volkskammer

varied greatly, and, given the data base here, do not lend themselves to any single classification with respect to the dominant direction of voting behavior.

Secondly, the previously mentioned relationship between voting and the proportion of the population living in cities with a population between 10 000 and 20 000 does not really lend itself to interpretation. In this case what seems to be important is that the portion of the population living in cities of this size correlates highly negatively with employment in industry and positively with that in construction, trade, agriculture, and forestry as well as the "non-productive sector." Behind the left-wing trend in the larger mid-size cities is above all a left-wing trend in the Bezirks with less industry.

Thirdly, the connection between a left-wing voting trend and the number of large medium-sized cities in a Bezirk is spurious since there is no relationship between the number of large sized medium-cities and the amount of labor involvement in industry. However there is a significant positive correlation between the number of people living in larger mid-sized cities and the proportion of the population working in construction. In addition there is a similar trend involving the "non-productive" sector, and a trend among smaller numbers of senior citizens that almost reaches the significance level. However, without more detailed information the question of how much the left-wing trend can be explained by the above-mentioned correlations cannot be answered.

Fourthly, it is also noteworthy that the relationship between voting behavior and the proportion of the population living in large cities can only with great generosity be termed a trend (the highest correlation coefficient = -0.45). Moreover, this "trend" runs precisely opposite to the trend in the medium-sized cities mentioned above. This holds true especially when one examines the performance of the PDS. The PDS did relatively well in Bezirks with above average proportions of their population living in larger medium sized cities. In Bezirks with above average numbers of their inhabitants living in large cities, however, the PDS performed under its overall level. Therefore, one could postulate that the left-wing tending age-groups of men between 18 and 30 and women between 30 and 40 are under-represented in Bezirks with large numbers of their populations living in large cities, and that large city Bezirks have a larger number of senior citizens. Again, however, in the absence of more complete data these hypotheses do not seem to be overly convincing.

On the whole the connection between settlement structure and the distribution of votes does not lend itself to clear interpretation. In the absence of more telling data, the relationships thus far established must be explained by factors other than city size and the rural/urban split.

Voting and Quality of Life

Intuitively it makes sense that the different social conditions in the Bezirks would have an effect on voting behavior. A natural hypothesis would be that the better the living conditions in a Bezirk, the more support and less hostility there would be regarding a slower unification or, perhaps, for a continued independent existence of the GDR. Since detailed published information on social conditions were rare and incomplete in the GDR, only a few social indicators can be considered here. The results are somewhat surprising.

The unexpectedness of the results relates above all to the fact that there are absolutely no significant correlations or trends between voting behavior and the indicators used to provide information about the health system or the environment situation. The lack of significant correlation holds over the whole range of indicators, from number of doctors, dentists, and pharmacists per thousand, to the number of still births and infant deaths in the first year of life per thousand. Other indicators for which there were significant correlations (deaths per thousand of pension age and inhabitants per apartment) yield either unclear information or can be explained by reference to the economic structure of a *Bezirk*.

One must note, however, the impressive and highly significant variation of voting depending on per capita amount of savings in a *Bezirk*. The higher the rate of savings the more likely the right-wing trend would be stronger than average ($AfD=0.84$, $PDS+SPD=-0.82$). *Bezirke* had the highest savings rates where industry and trades were the most highly developed, where relatively smaller proportions of the population were involved in the non-productive sector and agriculture, and where relatively less younger and relatively more older people resided.

Even if per capita savings as an indicator is difficult to interpret—and without data revealing the real distribution of savings this will continue to be the case—the correlation is so clear, and falls so neatly into the pattern of the election, it still makes sense to offer an interpretation. In more industrialized *Bezirke* incomes were above average. Due to the shortage of attractive consumer goods and services this money could not be spent by individual consumers. The lack of anything on which to spend the money and the constant underfulfilment of consumer demands, amidst a sea of overly cheap everyday items such as bread, milk, and living space, devalued the GDR mark in the eyes of the man on the street. With a promise from the West of a conversion rate of 1:1 for the better part of their savings, the conservatives created the wish among GDR citizens for as rapid a unification with the West (and the Deutsche mark) as possible in precisely those areas where the savings rate was highest.

Conclusions

The analysis of the results of the *Bezirk* level voting presented here allows us to derive the hypothesis that the group of people who were interested in a quick unification of Germany, as well as those interested in a slower unification or perhaps none at all, fell under the influence of three main factors. First was the impact of industrialization on a *Bezirk*. Second was the effect of differing orientation among age cohorts, experienced most clearly among the elderly. Third was the strain of consumer frustration caused by excess savings. The traits causing these effects correlate highly with each other. *Bezirke* with a larger industrial base possessed populations with relatively more senior citizens. Furthermore, where there is a large industrial base and a high proportion of senior citizens there is an above average per capita level of savings. All other indicators examined in this study played either no role, or could be better accounted for, or derived from, the three mentioned here.

1. The variation in performance of the Alliance for Germany in industrially developed or less developed regions was caused by the unbalanced regional investment policies of the SED. In highly industrialized *Bezirke* all economic sectors

responsible for the upkeep of the housing stock, trade, transportation, communication, and culture were undercapitalized. All sectors determining the quality of life, especially in city centers, were relatively less developed. The problems of city and regional development that are so common in all command societies became more extreme precisely where the largest part of the national income was produced. This conclusion is supported not only by the figures on population loss experience by the industrial regions between 1971 and 1988, but in the conservative vote of the industrial areas in the Volkskammer elections.

The policy of the SED leadership of maintaining political stability by means of social policy (stable prices, subsidized housing, etc.) led over the course of the last fifteen years of the regime to a dramatic disproportion between the ability of the population to accumulate savings and the opportunities to acquire consumer goods. Investment in key industrial sectors yielded disappointingly low levels of productivity and an array of products that could not penetrate the world market. The low levels of capital productivity led to the ironic situation where, even with the huge investments in certain prestige sectors (such as computers), there never seemed to be enough capital to make industry truly competitive. The remaining industries, capital starved, deteriorated to the point of shut down. Especially in industrial Bezirke, areas that already knew too well the problems of city and regional development in the overcentralized GDR, the shame of deteriorating production facilities and the accompanying worsening labor conditions must have added fuel to the sentiment that things could no longer go on as before. Indeed, so the argument would run, they had to be changed quickly. Only a vote for the Alliance could reasonably be expected to make this happen.

The idea that rapid change, especially a speedy cure for the crumbling economy, could come about through unification was made plausible by an absence of alternatives. The situation might have been different had the FRG's living standard been on the level of Spain or Portugal. But this was West Germany, the richest and most productive country of Western Europe. Unification seemed the reasonable thing to do, for it held open the possibility that out of the dire economic crisis the East German population could emerge as winners.

2. The analysis of the Bezirk voting shows that the Alliance profited from the vote of the senior citizens. In all other age groups, and especially for the 18–30 year olds, the data points to a more or less strong trend towards the SPD or PDS. Putting aside the presence of a certain amount of nostalgia for the “conservatism” of an earlier age, the reasons the elderly wanted so desperately to unify can be rather easily accounted for. The senior citizens of the GDR, that is those who sacrificed the most for a “new beginning” after the war, became the victims of SED policy that clearly discriminated against the old in favor of the young. As if this were not enough, they faced for the second or even the third time in their lives the complete collapse of their “Lebenswelt.” In a literal sense they had no more time to give, a theme repeatedly driven home in the conservative slogan “no more socialist experiments.”

Furthermore, senior generations did not have the same kinds of existential concerns as the younger generations in a new order. For them the resurrection of capitalism, where the vagaries of the labor market make life far riskier than under Leninist conditions, did not pose a problem that would affect them personally. Important in this respect is the fact that Kohl led the senior citizens to

believe that pensions would not fall in the East, and that unification would profit especially them. Finally, the older generation in particular understood long before the collapse of the SED that the German work ethic, destroyed by 40 years of Leninist economics, could only be restored by one thing—unemployment. “A good dose of what the SPD and the PDS fear is just what the doctor ordered, and although the medicine is bitter, it is worth it,” might express the essence of their thoughts.

3. The highly significant statistical relationship between money savings and conservative voting (outside of the death rate, the only social indicator to correlate significantly with the distribution of votes) points a finger at what appears to be the largest factor in the results—money. In fact, it seems justified to say that the sheer enormity of the monetary overhang in the industrial Bezirke acted morally as well as financially to undermine the value of the East Germany currency. Helmut Kohl and the conservatives time and again over the course of the campaign exploited the expectation that with monetary union a sizeable part of a person’s savings would be exchanged at a rate of 1:1. Suddenly the population would be in possession of considerable savings of one of the most powerful currencies in the world instead of one of the most worthless. This was certainly more than they could have ever expected six months before, when the politically excluded went out into the streets under the threat of violence to bring down a system in which you could buy as much bread as you wanted but had to wait ten years or more to buy a car, and could only dream of taking a trip to a warm place in February.

At the same time, despite the humiliating defeat suffered by the left at the polls, almost 5 million voters cast their ballots for the SPD, PDS, and other parties running on platforms against rapid reunification. These voters form what amounts to a powerful minority who were driven not so much by pent up consumer demand, but most likely by the wish not to see the GDR swallowed up by West Germany, and partly at least by existential fears. In recent months we have seen how, in the short run, the difficulties of the transition to capitalism have confirmed many of the fears of the left. How long a 5 million strong minority can be kept down when their interests are threatened by unemployment, rent hikes, and displacement remains to be seen.

Finally, there remains the lingering question of why Helmut Kohl moved as quickly as he did, insisting on a lightning fast unification. Kohl made no secret about his desire to go down in history as the “unity Chancellor.” There is the fact also that, given the fluidity of events in the Soviet Union, Kohl could not be sure that the Soviets would continue to support German unity. The recent conservative turn of events in the USSR and the reticence in the Supreme Soviet concerning the ratification of the two-plus-four treaty certainly vindicates this logic.²¹

But aside from Kohl’s historical ambitions and possible objections in the East, there remains a far more practical motive behind his actions. Perhaps already in early 1990 Kohl worried that his own West German electorate, who had never been asked at the ballot box if they wanted reunification, would balk if they stopped long enough to calculate the possible costs of unity. Kohl pre-empted this scenario by moving fast and issuing assurances that unity could be achieved at a reasonable

21. “Honecker Flight Provokes German Sanctions Threat,” *Kommersant*, March 18, 1991, p. 11.

price, generating his own version of George Bush's "no new taxes." Like Bush, Kohl has since been forced to go back on his word. But unlike Bush, Kohl's manoeuvre led him not only to the top of his political system, but on the basis of an unkept political promise he succeeded in generating the necessary political support to reconstitute Germany as a whole.