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GERMANY'S EAST: SAME AS EVER?

**SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES BETWEEN
EAST AND WEST GERMANS 30 YEARS AFTER
THE FALL OF THE BERLIN WALL**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Have the two formerly separate parts of Germany fully converged? Or are “new, deep cracks” appearing between East Germans and West Germans? Thirty years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, few issues are as hotly debated in Germany.

Differences do exist between people in eastern and in western Germany. A nationwide representative survey carried out by d|part and the Open Society European Policy Institute (OSEPI) shows that respondents who currently live in the east are on average more sceptical towards immigrants. In comparison to West Germans, East Germans are more likely to consider the arrival of refugees to be a negative development, and think of migration as more of a threat than a benefit to society.

These differences, however, are not necessarily signs of “new, deep cracks” between people in eastern and western Germany. The study shows that there are at least as many different ideas of a good society among people in eastern Germany as there are in the rest of the country. There is no such thing as a typical “Ossi” (short for East German), just as there is no typical “Wessi” (West German).

Instead, differences in attitudes between people in eastern and western Germany are first and foremost associated with demographic factors and people’s different experiences of reunification. East Germans who were born before the fall of the Berlin Wall and are now between 35 and 54 years old, for example, tend to look at migrants much more sceptically than younger people living in the east of the country

or West Germans of a similar age. Also, when asked what – for them – constitutes a good society, middle-aged East Germans are much more likely to emphasise the importance of majoritarianism and of German traditions and culture than respondents from other parts of the country.

The argument that this is evidence of a resurging form of nationalism is only true for few people. In most cases, these findings merely highlight the particular role that identity and belonging play for many people in eastern Germany. The study shows that respondents in the east consider a number of ways of identifying with social groups as much more important than people in the rest of the country – be they identification with other Germans, with people of the same profession, the same city or region.

These findings suggest that varying attitudes to migration and an open society are a sign of the remaining differences between people in eastern and western Germany rather than evidence for “new, deep cracks”. This is because many of these differences can be traced back to people’s experiences of reunification – including those of a time well after the fall of the Berlin Wall. To acknowledge that people in eastern Germany have experienced reunification differently, and to recognize, in particular, the heterogeneity of these experiences, is more difficult than stereotyping “Ossis” across the board. However, acknowledging and discussing these different experiences might well be the most important contribution to German unity we can make 30 years after the fall of the Berlin Wall.

INTRODUCTION

Thirty years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, few issues are as hotly debated in Germany as the question of whether the two formerly separate parts of Germany have fully converged, or whether “new, deep cracks”¹ are appearing between East and West Germans. Why else would a party like the right-wing populist Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) achieve significantly better election results in those federal states that were part of the German Democratic Republic until 1990? And what about differences in attitudes towards questions of migration and national identity?

After three decades of German unity, politicians, the media and commentators are taking stock. Where do we stand with regards to German reunification? For many, the answer comes with a mixed picture – and one that gives cause for concern. While some claim that the success of parties like the AfD is evidence of the rise of a new wave of nationalism, others argue that it primarily shows a high degree of dissatisfaction among East Germans. The only thing we really know is that 30 years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, there are many things that potentially distinguish and unite people in the two parts of formerly divided Germany.

Looking at the significant number of studies on the subject of German integration, we have to acknowledge the recurring finding that substantial parts of the population in East Germany are considered more inward-looking than their west German peers. What is more, the proportion who hold right-wing extremist views is found to be higher in the East than in the West.² Although this is an important finding, even in the East, this is only a small part of the population and by no means the majority. Nevertheless, this tendency reflects an often deeply rooted scepticism towards minorities, which is more prevalent in the East, and not only among the older generations who grew up before the fall of the Wall.

However, we must be careful not to oversimplify. On the question of age alone, for instance, it is worth taking a closer look at what exactly distinguishes people's attitudes in the East from those in the West.³ We cannot simply equate the tendencies of a specific part of the population with those of an entire region in Germany. Inward-looking attitudes may not necessarily be a reflection of extreme right-wing attitudes. Several studies have shown how the special circumstances of the fall of communism

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- 1 Federal President Frank-Walter Steinmeier in a speech at the event „Geteilte Geschichte(n): Von Erwartungen und Enttäuschungen“ on September 16, 2019.
 - 2 Zick, A., Küpper, B. & Berghan, W. (Eds). 2016. *Gespaltene Mitte – Feindselige Zustände Rechtsextreme Einstellungen in Deutschland 2016*. Bonn, Germany: Dietz.
 - 3 Faus, R., Storcks, S. 2019. *Im vereinten Deutschland geboren – in den Einstellungen gespalten? OBS-Studie zur ersten Nachwendegeneration*. Frankfurt (Main), Germany: Otto-Brenner-Foundation.

and the associated challenges and upheavals in the lives of many East Germans have led to new insecurities.⁴ In addition to economic insecurity, these include concerns about societal cohesion in times of great social and demographic change. This is why understandings of Germany as a society and the role of national identity are different in the East compared to the West.⁵

This report aims to make a nuanced contribution to discussions about existing differences between East and West 30 years after the fall of the Wall. It is part of the “Voices on Values” study by d|part and the Open Society European Policy Institute (OSEPI). It presents new and comparative analyses of data from a representative survey of both East as well as West Germans, investigating attitudes towards the characteristics of a good society, and questions of migration and national identity.

4 See for instance: Köcher, R. 2019. Fremd im eigenen Haus. Allensbacher Archiv, IfD-Umfrage 11093. Available at: https://www.ifd-allensbach.de/fileadmin/kurzberichte_dokumentationen/FAZ_Januar2019_Ost_West.pdf (last accessed on September 30 2019).

5 Westle B. 2013. Kollektive Identität in Deutschland – Entwicklungen und Zwischenbilanz. In: Keil S. & Thaidigsmann, S. (Eds). Zivile Bürgergesellschaft und Demokratie. Wiesbaden, Germany: Springer VS.

METHODOLOGY

This report is based on comparative analyses of a representative survey that was conducted in all German federal states in 2018. As part of the “Voices on Values” project, we investigated which values citizens, policy-makers and civil society leaders deemed important for a good society and which mechanisms can be used to strengthen support for open societies.⁶ The focus of this report is on the political views and the values of people in East Germany compared to those of people in the West.⁷

In the survey, participants answered questions about their political attitudes. These included, for example, questions about their attitudes to the admission of refugees and about migration in general. In addition, we identified respondents' views on German identity and on the characteristics

of a good society. We also examined to what extent respondents would exchange open society principles for other societal priorities such as the protection of economic interests, the prioritisation of security or the preservation of national values and culture.

A total of 1,046 respondents took part in the survey. The survey is representative for the German population as a whole and that of its regions, as well as in terms of age, gender, educational attainment and household income. A detailed description of the methodology and of the survey questions can be found in the project report “The Hidden Majority: How Most Europeans Care About Open Society Values”, available on our project website: <https://dpart.org/voices-on-values>

6 The project focused on six countries: Germany, France, Hungary, Poland, Italy and Greece. A detailed project description as well as the results of our research can be found at <https://dpart.org/voices-on-values>.

7 Participants were classified as East or West German on the basis of their residence at the time of the survey. A total of 1,046 people participated in the survey, 209 of which lived in those federal states which belonged to the German Democratic Republic and joined the Federal Republic of Germany after the fall of the Berlin Wall (Brandenburg, Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania, Saxony, Saxony-Anhalt, Thuringia and Berlin); a further 837 respondents lived in northern, southern and western Germany, here taken together as West Germans.

THERE'S NO SUCH THING AS A TYPICAL "OSSIS"

This study confirms that there are indeed differences between East and West Germans in terms of their social and political views. In East Germany, the proportion of respondents who were sceptical about immigration in general and the admission of refugees

in particular was significantly higher than in the rest of the country (Table 1). However, a closer look reveals a significant diversity in views among people in both West and East Germany.

TABLE 1

Attitudes towards migration in West and East⁸

	WEST	EAST
Assessment of the impact of migration		
Enriches society	40,0	32,3
Neither a threat nor an enrichment	21,3	16,7
Threat to society	34,8	46,2
Impact of migration on the economy		
Positive	37,5	29,6
Neither positive nor negative	39,0	37,7
Negative	19,5	27,3
Assessment of the intake of refugees		
Good	29,8	18,6
Neither good nor bad	27,1	24,5
Bad	40,9	55,0

⁸ Column percentages per item. Missing to 100%: don't knows and respondents who did not answer this question.

In West Germany, more respondents said that migration enriches society rather than threatens it. In East Germany, however, the proportions are reversed. About half of the respondents in the East (46 per cent) viewed migration as a threat and only 32 per cent said it enriches society. A similar dynamic emerges when looking at how respondents assessed the impact of migration on the economy. In West Germany almost twice as many people assumed that migration had a positive (38 per cent) rather than a negative (20 per cent) impact on the economy. In the East, however, the proportions of respondents evaluating the influence of migration as either good or bad for the economy were about equal (just under 30 per cent). Differences in attitudes toward migration between East and West Germans are most evident when it comes to the specific question of accepting refugees. Even though there were also more respondents in West Germany who were critical about the admission of refugees (41 per cent) than supportive of it (30 per cent), this proportion is much higher in the East. A clear majority of respondents in East Germany (55 per cent) were critical about the intake of refugees, in contrast to just under one-fifth of respondents (19 per cent) who supported it.

At first glance, these results seem to indicate that people in East Germany tend to be more sceptical about immigration, more likely to be opposed to refugees, and more likely to view migration as a threat to society compared to their counterparts in

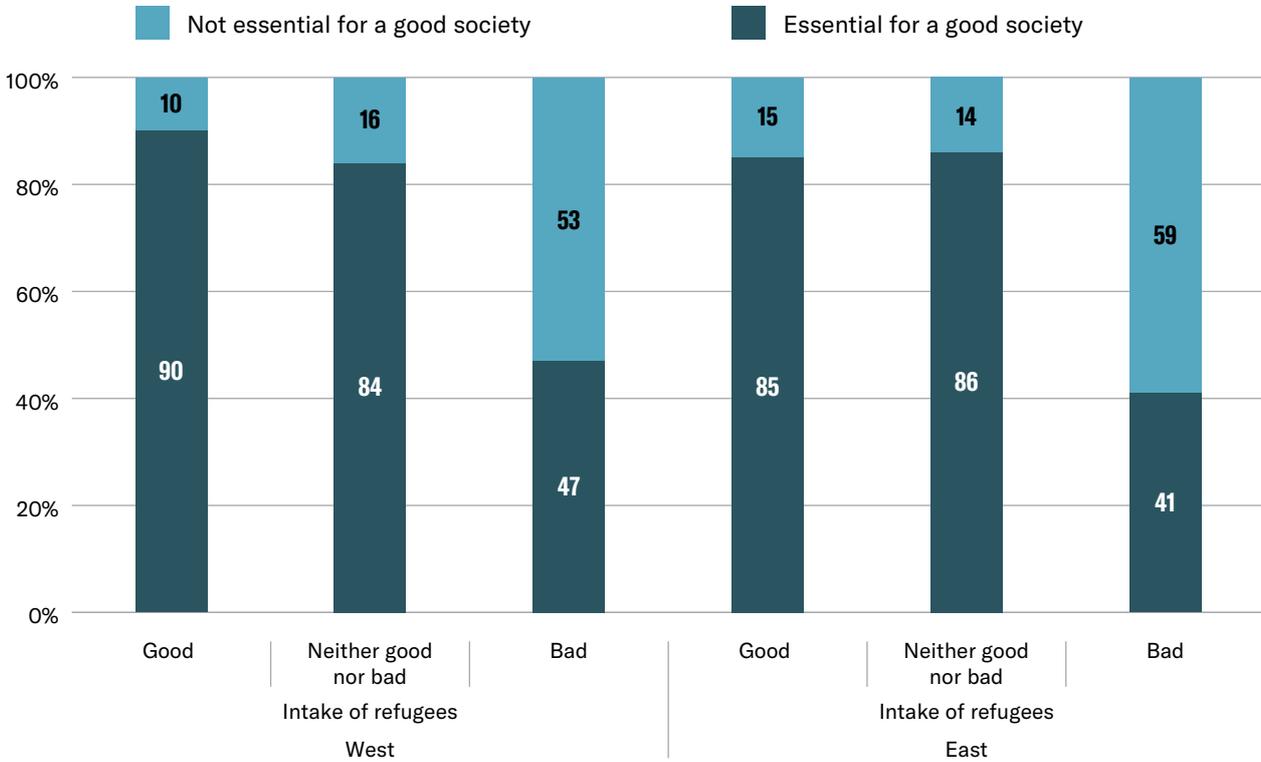
western Germany. On closer inspection, however, we find that this scepticism has a number of different manifestations – in both East and West Germany. In all parts of the country, there are people with different priorities and attitudes when it comes to broader societal and political values. With regard to the question, for example, of how a good society should deal with migration, respondents in East Germany differed at least as much from one another as people in the rest of the country.

A clear majority of respondents in both East and West Germany were of the opinion that people who had recently come to Germany should in principle be treated equally (70 per cent in West Germany and 60 per cent in East Germany). Moreover, even among those who were critical about the intake of refugees, almost half of respondents in both the West and the East (47 and 41 per cent respectively) shared this view, i.e. that people who recently arrived in Germany should be treated equally (Figure 1). This may seem contradictory at first, but points to an important nuance: not all of those who are sceptical about migration reject the principle that immigrants be treated equally. Although there are certainly people who reject this principle, in both East and West Germany many of those who are sceptical about current developments with regards to migration nevertheless support equal treatment of newcomers to Germany.

FIGURE 1

Attitude towards equal treatment of newcomers, according to views on the intake of refugees (in %)

EQUAL TREATMENT OF PEOPLE WHO HAVE RECENTLY COME TO GERMANY



This also holds for people’s overall priorities regarding social and political values. We found that, for many respondents, the values of an open society on the one hand and a closed society on the other are not contradictory or mutually exclusive. This applies particularly to many people in East Germany. Here, the majority of respondents (55 per cent) – and substantially more than in West Germany (only 42 per cent) – considered it important for a good society that there was a balance of characteristics of an open society on the one hand, such as freedom of religion and the protection of minorities, and characteristics of a closed society on the other, such as prioritisation

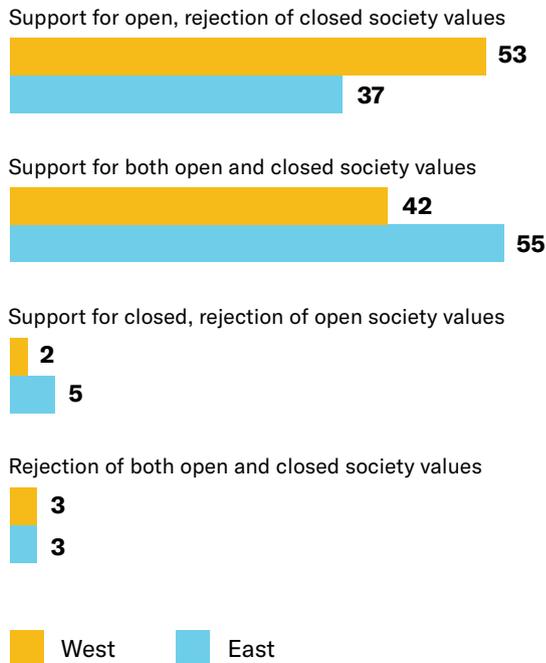
of majority views and a focus on national norms and values (Figure 2).

In addition to this overall trend, it is also important to point out that people within both East and West Germany have very different ideas about what exactly constitutes a good balance of open and closed society values. Slightly more than a third of respondents in East Germany favoured the values of an open society (37 per cent) and rejected the values of a closed society - compared to about half of respondents in West Germany (51 per cent). Few respondents fundamentally rejected the values of an

open society and their proportion is low in both parts of the country (8 per cent in the East and 5 per cent in the West).⁹ We can conclude that, throughout the country, only very few people outright reject an open society. The main difference between West and East Germans is a relative one: the proportion of those who, in addition to emphasising the values of an open society, also consider characteristics of a more closed society to be important is larger in the East than in the West.

What this means is that despite substantial differences in attitudes towards migration, there is no stereotypical “Ossi” (short for East German), just as there is no typical “Wessi” (West German). In both East and West Germany, we find people with different ideas about what constitutes a good society and about how open it should be toward immigrants and refugees. We have shown that among those with a sceptical stance on migration, there are people who reject the principle of equal treatment for migrants as well as people who support it. This shows that attitudes towards migration alone do not indicate which values are fundamentally important to people in East or West Germany.

FIGURE 2
Value profiles according to questions on the values of open and closed societies among respondents in East and West Germany (%)



9 Some of those also rejected closed society values (a total of 3 per cent in the West and 3 per cent in the East), while others rejected open society values but supported closed ones (5 per cent in the East and 2 per cent in the West).

A CLOSER LOOK AT THE DEMOGRAPHIC DIFFERENCES

If, in both East and West Germany, we find people with different ideas about what constitutes a good society, what then can we say about claims that “new, deep cracks” are appearing between East and West Germans? The results of this study suggest that the different attitudes toward migration are not a result of fundamentally different or even diverging sets of values. Rather, differences between people in East and West Germany are based on their often very different experiences of the tumultuous time before and immediately after the fall of the Wall. These experiences differed vastly and were formative of large parts of the population in both East and West.

This is illustrated by the fact that demographic factors, such as age and gender, go some way in explaining the differing attitudes of people in the East and West. Throughout Germany, 35- to 54-year-olds are most critical of migration and the intake of refugees (Table 2). Although this applies to both East and West Germany, this trend is more pronounced in the East. Here, almost three-quarters of those in the middle-aged group – all born well before the fall of the Wall – were sceptical about the admission of refugees (71 per cent). In comparison, for the same age group in West Germany, only just under half of those surveyed (47 per cent) were equally sceptical about the admission of refugees.

TABLE 2

Views on the intake of refugees, according to demographic factors in West and East

	% within the respective group who were critical about the intake of refugees	
	WEST	EAST
	40,9	55,0
Age		
18-34	37,3	37,5
35-54	47,3	70,9
55+	36,7	54,7
Gender		
Female	45,5	49,5
Male	36,0	60,2
Education		
Lower	39,3	48,3
Middle	44,4	57,8
Higher	34,5	54,7

We do not find such a strong difference in attitudes between people in East and West in any other age group. Of the 18- to 34-year-olds – all of whom were born after or only shortly before the fall of communism – only a little over a third (37 to 38 per cent) in both the East and West were critical of the admission of refugees. Such a clear difference between two generations suggests that the different attitudes between people in East and West on issues of migration can largely be traced back to people's experiences of the time before and after the fall of communism.

This difference is also apparent in people's ideas on how a good society should deal with immigrants and minorities. We find only minimal differences between East and West Germans aged 18 to 34 in their assessment of whether or not migrants should be treated equally, the importance they assign to the protection of minorities and to the freedom of religion. For those aged 35 to 54, however, we find substantial differences between respondents in East and West Germany. In comparison to 35- to 54-year-old West Germans, East Germans in the same age group considered the protection of minorities, freedom of religion and the equal treatment of migrants to be much less important for a good society.

Interestingly, these differences are much less pronounced among the oldest respondents, those aged 55 and over. Compared to their West German peers, older East Germans are on average more sceptical about migration (55 per cent compared to 37 per cent in West Germany). However, within this age group, the proportion of respondents in East Germany sceptical about the admission of refugees is significantly lower than in the group of 35- to 54-year-olds (55 per cent compared to 71 per cent). Also, the scepticism of the oldest respondents manifests itself differently from that of the middle-aged respondents: the over 54-year-olds in East Germany rated freedom of religion and the protection of minorities as clearly more important for a good society than respondents aged 35 to 54. At the same time, many East Germans over the age of 54 considered it more important for

all people in Germany to live according to German values and norms, for religion to be practised in private, and for the government to prioritise the opinion of the majority.

Just as there are differences between age groups, we also find gender differences. Among the respondents living in East Germany, men tended to be more sceptical about the admission of refugees than women (60 per cent compared to 50 per cent of women living in East Germany). The opposite applies to West Germany: at 45 per cent, West German women tended to be more sceptical about migration than West German men (36 per cent). Here, too, it is worth taking a closer look at the different conceptions of a good society that form the basis for these attitudes. Women in East Germany were much less persuaded than men that people of different religions should be able to practise their faith freely and publicly. However, in their assessments of principles such as the protection of minorities and equal treatment of migrants, they were on a par with West German men. Men in East Germany, on the other hand, considered it much more important than West German men and women in all parts of the country that the government represent the majority opinion and that German citizenship be reserved for ethnic Germans.

These demographic differences only emerged upon closer inspection. Such nuance in perceptions of migration and the underlying notions of what constitutes a good society do not always feature in public commentary about East Germany and stereotypical "Ossis". Above all, the differences we find between the various age groups suggest that it is different (pre- and post-Wall) experiences that shape people's views on issues of migration and lead to different ideas about what constitutes a good society. Although our analysis only highlights the associations and more in-depth study would be needed in order to understand exactly which factors cause these differences, it shows that analysis and commentary, rather than focusing solely on demographic factors, must also address people's life circumstances and experiences.

THE PARTICULAR ROLE OF IDENTITY AND BELONGING IN EAST GERMANY

Finding a larger proportion of people with more inward-looking attitudes and societal values in East Germany is not necessarily an indication of fresh differences or even a newly emerging form of German nationalism. Questions of identity and belonging have played a special, and above all different role for people in East Germany, not least since the fall of the Wall. The results of this study show clearly that this still applies today.

What counts as German and what does not can be manifested in very different ways. Most Germans have at least one or even several ways of identifying with the country. Only 12 per cent of respondents in East and West Germany said that they are not at all proud to be German. We find differences, however, when looking at how German identity manifests itself. A large number of respondents in the West said they felt proud to be German because of Germany's Grundgesetz (the Basic Law, 40 per cent) and the country's welfare state (32 per cent). In contrast, these items were mentioned by fewer respondents in East Germany (30 and 23 per cent respectively, Table 4). Both the Basic Law and the welfare state can be considered West German achievements that

date back to a time well before German reunification. For this reason, it is not surprising that people in East Germany - especially those born before the fall of communism - prefer alternative manifestations of their national identity, in particular those that reflect the present or that are non-political, such as culture and technology. Many respondents in East Germany stated that they were proud of Germany's cultural heritage (45 per cent), Germany's role in technological innovation (26 per cent) and the country's economic strength (25 per cent, Table 3). What is more, among older East Germans - those born before the fall of the Wall - one in two respondents said they were proud of Germany's cultural heritage (48 per cent), while only one in three of the youngest East Germans, those born shortly before or after reunification, said the same (34 per cent). This proportion is nevertheless higher than that of West Germans who identify with the country on the basis of cultural heritage (26 per cent). This suggests that East and West Germans have a different sense of belonging and understanding of what it means to be German, even if these differences appear to be decreasing for the younger generations.

TABLE 3**The top 5 things people are most proud of about Germany in East and West (%)**

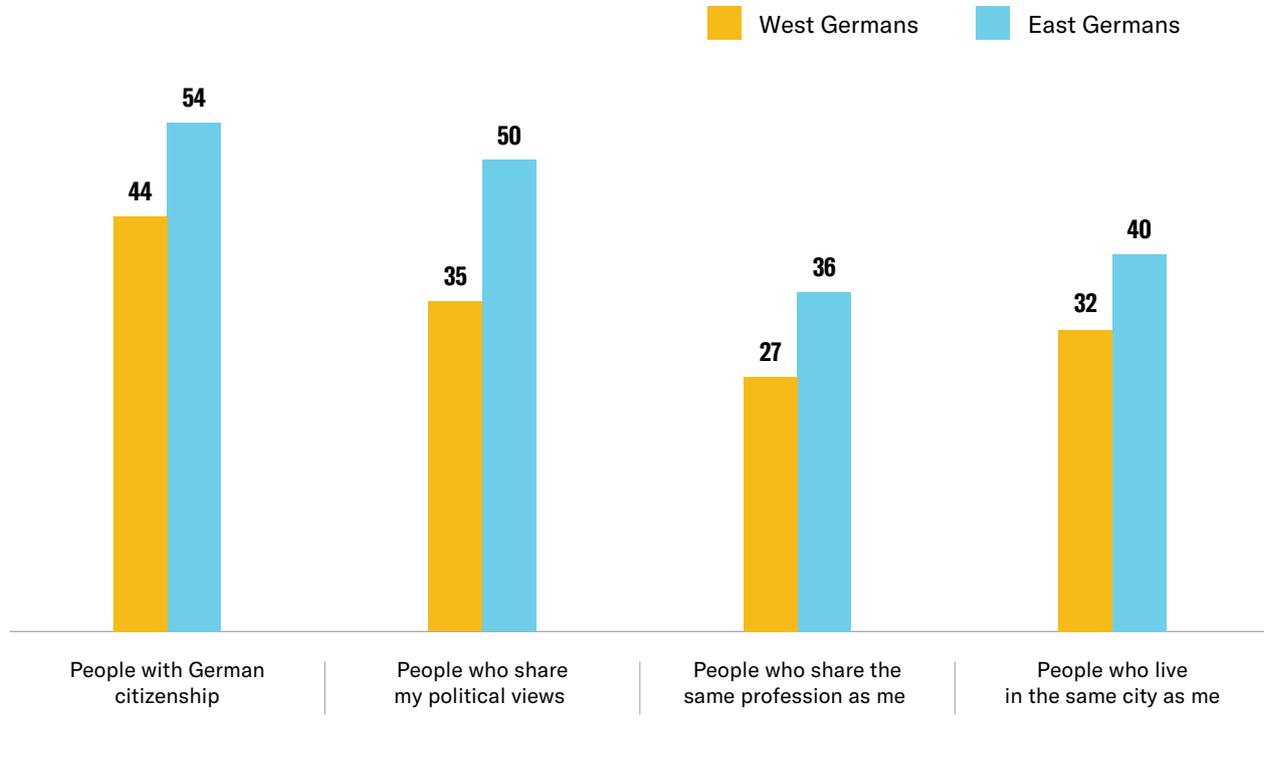
EAST		WEST	
Cultural heritage	45	The Basic Law	40
The Basic Law (Grundgesetz)	30	Strong welfare state	32
Leading role in technological innovation and progress	26	Cultural heritage	26
Economic strength	25	Economic strength	24
Strong welfare state	23	Leading role in technological innovation and progress	19

Among East Germans, identification with Germany's cultural heritage goes hand in hand with a stronger emphasis on "being German". More than two thirds (69 per cent) of those respondents in East Germany who stated that they were proud of Germany's cultural heritage also said that they generally felt closer to people with German citizenship. Similarly, these respondents were also more inclined to say that they identified with people who share the same political views (63 per cent). This association was much weaker among East Germans who chose to identify in other ways, for instance through pride in the Basic Law, and among West Germans - including among those West Germans who stated they were proud of Germany's cultural heritage (43 and 45 per cent, respectively).

This could be considered a cause for concern, especially in the context of signs of a newly emerging nationalism and considering Germany's approach to migration policy. It is among those who identify as German on the basis of cultural heritage and who feel closest to other people when they also have German citizenship that we find the largest proportion of those who are sceptical about immigration and critical about the admission of refugees. This suggests that for some respondents, scepticism toward migration is associated with nationalistic attitudes and an emphasis on German ethnicity. However, we find this link not only for a proportion of respondents in East Germany, but also among some respondents in West Germany - albeit less frequently.

FIGURE 3

Percentage of respondents in West/East who identify strongly with other groups (8-10 on a 10-point scale, in %)



Yet, having a strong sense of German identity is not necessarily linked to a new form of German nationalism, especially in East Germany. For most respondents in the East, identifying with Germany's cultural heritage comes with a greater need for belonging in general – to any kind of social group, even those that have nothing to do with “being German” per se. Compared to West Germans, a substantially larger proportion of respondents in East Germany said they felt closer to people who hold German citizenship (54 per cent), but also to those who have the same profession (35 per cent), live in the same city or region (40 per cent), or share similar political views (50 per cent, Figure 3). The proportions of people looking to identify with other social groups, for example with people who have the same profession or who live in the same city or region, were also much higher among respondents in East Germany who were born well before the fall of

the Wall than among younger East Germans or West Germans of all age groups.

In general, for East Germans an emphasis on cultural heritage tended to be associated with a stronger need for identification with all kinds of social groups. While those proud of Germany's cultural heritage did indeed strongly identify with other German citizens, East Germans in this group also tended to identify with people who shared the same political views, lived in the same city and had the same profession (Table 4) - i.e. with groups who do not primarily share a national or ethnic background. This differed markedly for West German respondents. In the West, too, pride in cultural heritage was associated with a higher identification with German citizenship and people with the same political attitudes – even if this relationship was more pronounced for respondents in the East. However, when it came to

identification with people in the same city or of the same profession, the relationship was the reverse for respondents in the West: respondents who identified

on the basis of pride in German culture felt less close to people in the same city or the same profession.

TABLE 4

Identification with particular groups, according to pride in Germany's cultural heritage in West and East (average)

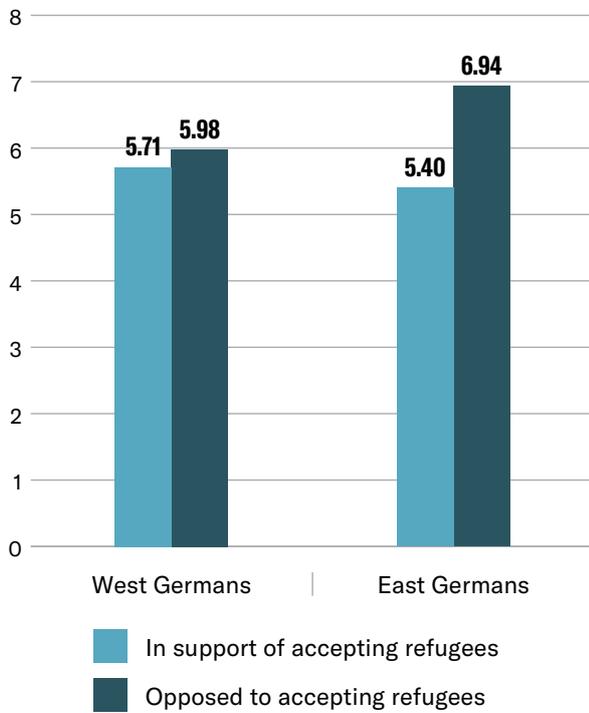
Identification with (1: low – 10: high)	AVERAGE IDENTIFICATION VALUE (1-10) IN WEST/EAST, ACCORDING TO IDENTIFICATION WITH GERMANY'S CULTURAL HERITAGE			
	West		East	
	Proud of cultural heritage	Not proud of cultural heritage	Proud of cultural heritage	Not proud of cultural heritage
People with German citizenship	7,1	6,7	8,0	6,4
People who share my political views	6,7	6,4	7,5	6,8
People who share the same profession as me	5,4	6,0	6,8	6,1
People who live in the same city as me	6,0	6,1	7,0	6,1

In short, while a stronger emphasis on Germany's cultural heritage is associated with greater identification with other Germans and people with similar political views in West Germany, the same does not necessarily hold true for East Germans. In the East, questions of national identity seem to be more broadly associated with a sense of belonging. While for some this is indeed tied to explicitly national attitudes, for others it is primarily about a latent sense of belonging – one that includes identities that go beyond “being German” or even have nothing to do with it.

Compared to the West, for East German respondents identifying with people in the same profession was strongly associated with a general need for belonging, as well as with scepticism towards migration. Respondents in East Germany who strongly identified with people in the same profession tended to be more sceptical about migration and about the admission of refugees (Figure 4). This was not the case among respondents in western Germany: here, those who strongly identified with people in the same occupation were no more or less sceptical about migration than the rest.

FIGURE 4

Identification (average 1-10) with people of the same occupation according to attitudes towards accepting refugees in West and East



We can begin to understand the distinct connection between a general need for belonging, identifying with a shared profession and negative attitudes towards migrants – especially among East Germans born before the fall of communism – when considering the special role of the workplace in the former GDR and the tremendous labour market uncertainty that came with reunification. The results of this study suggest that East Germans have a greater need for identification and belonging. Although in East Germany scepticism about migration tends to go hand in hand with an emphasis on German culture and values, this does not necessarily imply that someone has nationalistic attitudes. A closer look reveals that while for some East Germans the emphasis on German identity and culture may indeed be associated with a divisive and inward-looking attitude, for many others it is a product of a general need for identification and belonging.

CONCLUSIONS

What is the state of German reunification 30 years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, and what explains the residual differences in attitudes between East and West Germans on questions of migration and conceptions of a good society? This report showed that there is no such thing as a typical “Ossi”, just as there is no typical “Wessi”. Rather, there are many different conceptions of a good society among both East and West Germans and there are many reasons for differences in political attitudes.

When asked about their ideas of how a good society should deal with issues of migration, East Germans had at least as many different attitudes as people in the rest of the country. It is too easy to adopt a generalising narrative about typical “Ossis” who vote for right-wing populist parties, refuse to accept refugees and prefer an ethnically homogeneous and closed society. Even though these kinds of people do exist – and even though we find them somewhat more often in the East – they live in both East and West Germany. For many Germans the values of an open and of a closed society are not fundamentally opposed or mutually exclusive. Only a very small minority of Germans – in both East and West – fundamentally reject the values of an open society, including the protection of minorities and the equal treatment of migrants.

In both East and West Germany, we find people with different ideas about what constitutes a good balance between the values of an open and closed society. On average, East Germans – and primarily those born before the fall of communism – tend to prioritise the protection of majority rights, German traditions and culture over values such as the protection of minorities. For many East Germans, this is more

of an expression of a need for identification and belonging after decades of turmoil than a sign of a newly emerging nationalism – even if some people do have clearly nationalist attitudes.

The fact that it is primarily those East Germans born well before the fall of the Berlin Wall who tend to emphasise closed society values and have more inward-looking attitudes suggests that the differences between East and West are largely attributable to different experiences of the process of reunification. Among the youngest respondents, all of whom were born shortly before or after the fall of the Wall and experienced reunification as children, the differences between East and West are much smaller. The experience of reunification was very different among East and West Germans. These differences are the basis for the residual disagreement about what constitutes a good society.

We did not find evidence for “new, deep cracks”, with East Germans being more inward-looking or favouring nationalist values. Certainly, there are people who favour a closed, nationalist society – in East as well as West Germany. But it is primarily East Germans who witnessed the numerous upheavals of the fall of communism and its associated insecurity and who, as a consequence, hold political attitudes that are influenced by these experiences. To acknowledge that people in East Germany experienced reunification differently, and to recognize, in particular, the heterogeneity of these experiences, is more difficult than stereotyping “Ossis” across the board. Acknowledging and discussing these different experiences might be the most important contribution we can make to German unity, 30 years after the fall of the Berlin Wall.

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