

RELIGION AND SUPPORT FOR DEMOCRACY IN THE OLD AND NEW BUNDESLÄNDER

Allan L. McCutcheon, University of Delaware
Department of Sociology, 322 Smith Hall, Newark, DE 19716

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For forty years the government of the former East German state--the German Democratic Republic (GDR)--pursued a policy of state-supported secularization. Following the division of post-war Germany, the Communist party (SED) pursued a policy of secularizing the GDR, unlike the newly formed West German (FRG) state, which assumed the Western, pluralist model of free religious practice. While the formal policy in the GDR allowed for religious freedom, the regime sought to discourage religious participation and belief.

Despite the program of state-sponsored secularization, religious institutions in the GDR continued to play a vital political and social role. The religious leaders of the mostly Protestant eastern sector had established an early opposition to the prior National Socialist regime, and in the post-war period they actively opposed the "Cold War" arms race and proliferation of nuclear weapons on the European continent. Also, the churches of the GDR were able to attract hard currency from the West, and used these resources to provide for many of the social needs of the GDR congregations. These positions and practices were consistent with the policies and needs of the state, and helped to reduce the opposition of the SED leadership to existing religious institutions. Thus, while religious practice and belief were discouraged, religious institutions remained the only autonomous social institution in East Germany (Dahrendorf 1965; Hicks 1982; Goeckel 1981, 1989a, 1989b).

In this paper we examine the consequences of this state-sponsored secularization in the GDR, focusing on its consequences for democracy in the recently unified Germany. The general proposition of this research is that the marginalization of religious adherents in the GDR has resulted in a pattern unlike that found in Western democracies; the Western pattern of a positive correlation between religiosity and participatory conservatism, as well as religiosity and materialism (Inglehart 1990), is not characteristic of residents of the former GDR.

Religion, Politics and Values

The division of Germany had a number of consequences for the political and religious beliefs of the two populations. Several analysts have suggested that the differing historical sequences experienced by these two populations have resulted in substantial differences in their contemporary political views. Indeed, some have

raised the concern that the recently united Germany continues to contain two electorates divided along geographic lines (Dalton 1992, Fuchs et al. 1992).

In the post-war period, the experiences of the two populations could not have been more different. The political institutions, and the religious and political socialization of the young followed quite different paths. The socialization of the FRG youth followed the Western pluralist model and resulted in outlooks among youth similar to those found among the generations of post-war youth in the West (Pulzer, 1992, Merkl 1992); recent cohorts exhibit patterns of emergent rebelliousness and post-materialism found throughout the West.

The socialization of GDR youth, however, was the result of conscious design, implementation, and monitoring by the state (Henderson 1992, Friedrich and Griese 1991). From the early 1970's on a majority of East German youth identified themselves as atheist (Lange 1991, Eiben 1992).¹ Moreover, available data suggests that from the mid-1960's until the mid-1980's, support for Marxism-Leninism steadily increased (Friedrich and Griese 1991, Noelle-Neumann 1991, Henderson 1992). The SED's belief that the "proper" socialization of the young was among the state's highest responsibilities led to the implementation of a special code of law directed at the young (*Jugendgesetz*), and the success of the state's efforts were monitored by the Central Institute for Youth Research (*Zentralinstitut für Jugendforschung [ZIJ]*) in Leipzig; the ZIJ's research findings were regarded as state secrets, and their release was restricted by the SED.

Hypotheses

It seems likely that the marginalization of religious adherents in the GDR has resulted in a pattern unlike that found in Western democracies; the Western pattern of a positive correlation between religiosity and participatory conservatism, as well as between religiosity and materialism (Inglehart 1990) is not characteristic of residents of the former GDR. This research focuses on four hypotheses regarding the influence of religious identification on political beliefs and values among the citizens of the former East and West Germanies.

First, as a marginalized minority and the primary target of state-sponsored secularization, religious identifiers from the former GDR should be most likely to criticize the state policy of suppressing opposing political and religious views.

H₁: Among the residents of the former GDR, those who remain religious identifiers are most likely to criticize the former regime for the suppression of opposition.

Second, as a marginalized minority, religious identifiers from the former GDR are more likely than non-identifiers to be pleased with the democratic nature of the newly unified Germany. Any group that is marginalized as part of a state-sponsored policy is likely to welcome a political system that promises an end to discrimination. Given the conservative nature of religion (McGuire 1992, 214-221; Fuchs and Klingeman, 1989, 221-225), however, religion may generally incline German religious adherents toward favorably viewing existing governmental structures. Thus,

H₂: Although religious identifiers in unified Germany are likely to report higher levels of satisfaction with the existing democracy in the nation, religious identifiers in the areas of the former GDR are likely to express significantly higher levels of satisfaction than are identifiers in the FRG.

Third, while the material conditions of the GDR are likely to have given rise to a greater level of materialism than that found in the FRG (Inglehart 1971, 1977, 1981), the usual pattern of greater materialism among the religiously inclined (Inglehart 1990) is not characteristic of religious identifiers in the area of the former GDR. Just as patterns of economic insecurity promote the development of materialist values (Inglehart 1971, 1977, 1981), patterns of insecurity regarding one's own religious beliefs are likely to promote post-materialist beliefs (e.g., freedom of opinion).

H₃: Religious identifiers from the former GDR are more likely than those from the former FRG to hold post-materialist values.

Third, although religious identifiers in democracies are more inclined than non-identifiers to support the existing political structures, they are less likely to endorse *unconventional* forms of participation such as demonstrations (Barnes, Kaase, et. al 1979, Kaase 1989). As a marginalized minority in the GDR, however, religious identifiers had only unconventional forms of political participation available to them, and as the old regime faltered, the church leadership played a significant role in the opposition which used unconventional forms of political participation.

H₄: Although religious identifiers in the areas of the former FRG are less likely to support unconventional political participation, those from the former GDR follow

no such pattern; religious identifiers from the former GDR are more likely than those from the former FRG to support unconventional political participation.

Data and Methods

The data used in this paper come from the *Basisumfrage 1991*, part of the *Allgemeine Bevölkerungsumfrage der Sozialwissenschaften* (ALLBUS), the German General Social Survey (Mohler et al. 1991). This survey is the first of a projected series of surveys of the united German population using probability samples; it continues the series begun in West Germany prior to unification. The survey employs nearly identical questionnaires for all participants, differing only when questions were deemed inappropriate for the respondents of either the GDR or FRG. The data for the first survey were collected in the summer months of 1991, and thus represent an important baseline from which the consequences of German unification can be observed.

The 1991 questionnaire included a series of items regarding religious practice and beliefs in the German population, as well as several items regarding citizens' attitudes toward the former GDR, the unification process, and democracy. The questionnaire also included demographic information such as employment status, age, sex, community size, and education, which will be used in the analyses that follow.

The comparative analysis presented here focuses on respondents who reported being life-long residents of the former GDR and FRG. Of the initial sample of 3058 respondents, 369 respondents were excluded for having reported birth somewhere other than Germany. An additional 124 respondents reported either having been born in the GDR and moving to the FRG, or having been born in the FRG and moving to the GDR; these respondents were also excluded from the following analyses. The effective sample thus represents life-long residents of the regions of the former GDR (N=1330) and the former FRG (N=1235). All estimates are weighted to represent these populations in their respective areas. To test hypothesis 1, we use ordinary least squares (OLS) regression, and to test hypotheses 2 through 4, we use a set of OLS regression equations with a series of linear interaction terms (Draper and Smith 1981): one for the East-West difference, and one for each of the independent variables.

Analyses

Attitudes Toward Former and Current Regimes

Our first analysis examines evidence for the first two hypotheses. Respondents from the former GDR were asked to examine a list of "frequently criticized policies

of the former GDR," and to say which "bothered [them] the most," second most, and so forth. The list included an item regarding "the persecution of opposition groups," and Table 1 reports the results of an OLS regression of this item (1="not at all bothered," 4="most bothered") on the five independent variables.

As the these data indicate, those former GDR residents who remain religious, as well as those who live in larger cities, are the most inclined to criticize their former government for its policy toward opposition groups. Thus, it is clear that religious persons in the GDR--often the targets of officially-sanctioned intolerance--are critical of the former regime for pursuing that policy; these results support H₁.

The second hypothesis (H₂) is comparative, stating that while all religious identifiers are more likely than non-identifiers to evaluate democracy positively, East German religious identifiers are more likely than West German identifiers to do so, since the new regime offers protection from further discrimination. Table 2 presents data that address this hypothesis. Respondents in both the former East and West regions were asked

Table 1: OLS Coefficients for Variables Effecting Attitudes Toward "Persecution of the Opposition"

Variable	Coefficient
Constant	2.411***
Sex	.067
Age	-.002
Education	-.078
City Size	.383***
Religious Identification	.202**
R ² _{adjusted}	.0198

* p<.05, ** p<.01, *** p<.005

"How satisfied or unsatisfied are you all in all with democracy, the way it exists in Germany?" (1="very unsatisfied," 6="very satisfied"). As these data indicate, when we control for age, sex, education, and city size, West German religious identifiers are significantly more satisfied with democracy in Germany than are the West German non-identifiers (.329). Furthermore, the East German religious identifiers are significantly more satisfied with democracy than are the West German identifiers (by an additional .328), indicating that the effect of religious identification in the East is nearly double that found in the West (.329 + .328 = .657). Thus, we also find support for H₂.

The data reported in Table 2 also indicate that sex, age, education, and city size affect satisfaction with democracy among West Germans; men (.256), older people (.010), the more highly educated (.246), and those living in smaller towns (-.369) tend to be more satisfied. Interestingly, however, the signs and magnitudes of the interaction coefficients cancel out the significance of these effects for age (.010 - .011 = .001), education (.246 - .283 = -.037), and city size (-.369 + .553 = .184) among East Germans. While we cannot directly assess the statistical significance of these combined coefficients for residents of the former GDR, it appears that only sex (.256 - .010 = .246) and religious identification (.657) affect their satisfaction with democracy; among East Germans, men are more satisfied than women, and the religious are more satisfied than the non-religious. Thus, H₂ is supported by the data.

Table 2: Coefficients for Variables Effecting "Satisfied with Democracy in Germany"

Variable	Coefficient
Constant (West)	3.383***
Sex	.256***
Age	.010***
Education	.246***
City Size	-.369***
Religious Identification	.329**
Interaction (East)	.091
Sex Interaction	-.010
Age Interaction	-.011***
Education Interaction	-.283***
City Size Interaction	.553***
Religious Identification Interaction	.328*
R ² _{adjusted}	.1592

* p<.05, ** p<.01, *** p<.005

Materialism vs. Post-Materialism

The third hypothesis suggests that while citizens of the former FRG exhibit the usual association between religious identification and materialism, citizens in the former GDR do not. As Inglehart (1990, 1992) has noted, in virtually every country for which there is data, we see a correlation between religiosity and materialism; by several measures of religiosity, post-materialists tend to be less religious.

The data in Table 3 address the hypothesis relating religious identification and materialism among East and West Germans. In this analysis, a four-point materialist/post-materialist scale (1=materialist, 4=post-materialist) is regressed on the five independent variables. Most of these coefficients show a pattern common among other Western nations: younger, better educated respondents who live in big cities are more likely to be post-materialists. Also, while in the FRG men are more likely than women to be post-materialist (.113), the sex interaction term indicates that this gender difference is not found among respondents in the former GDR (.113 - .147 = -.034)--though we must exercise caution here, since the

among residents of the former FRG, this finding is consistent with Inglehart's argument regarding the development of materialist values in populations experiencing economic insecurity (Inglehart 1981).²

Political Participation

The final hypothesis examines the role of religious identification on what Barnes and Kaase (Barnes, Kaase, et. al 1979, Kaase 1989) characterize as *unconventional* forms of political participation. Unconventional forms of political participation represent non-institutionalized forms of participation; we examine three of these forms: citizens initiatives (e.g., grassroots social movements); petition signing; and demonstrations. Respondents were asked about their willingness to participate in each of these actions, with answers ranging from (1) "under no circumstances would I participate in such an action," to (2) "I would participate in such an action only in a very unusual situation," to (3) "I would participate in such an action if it was about something important," to (4) "I have already participated in such an action." Thus, responses to these items allow for a mixture of subjective disposition and behavioral reports.

The regression results reported in Table 3 extend Barnes and Kaase's analysis of the effects of sex, age, and education by including religious identification and size of place of residence as predictors. The size of place of residence variable is included since the availability of some forms of unconventional political participation is likely to be influenced by the size of the locality.

The data reported in Table 4 indicate several interesting relationships. Younger people are more likely than older people, and the more highly educated are more likely than the less well educated, to be positively disposed toward each of these three forms of unconventional political participation. Only for petition signing does there appear to be a significant difference between the effects of age in the FRG (-.018) and GDR (-.018+.009=.009). We also see that men are likely to be more positively disposed toward demonstrations, but sex appears to have no significant effect on the other two forms of unconventional political behavior. It also appears that living in a larger city does increase the respondents' disposition toward petition signing and demonstration, perhaps reflecting the greater likelihood of the occurrence of these forms in larger cities. Interestingly, the effect of city size for GDR residents is double (.409 + .422 = .831) that for FRG residents (.409).

The data reported in Table 4 show clear support for the fourth hypothesis. Among the FRG respondents, the religious identification coefficients for citizens' initiatives, signing petitions, and demonstrations indicate a sizable negative influence (-.335, -.304, and -.501, respectively); thus, among respondents from the former

Table 3: Coefficients for Variables Effecting Inglehart Materialism Index

Variable	Coefficients
Constant (West)	3.046***
Sex	.113*
Age	-.017***
Education	.285***
City Size	.437***
Religious Identification	-.315**
Interaction (East)	-.833***
Sex Interaction	-.147
Age Interaction	-.003
Education Interaction	-.097
City Size Interaction	-.249
Religious Identification Interaction	.297**
R ² _{adjusted}	.2057

* p<.05, ** p<.01, *** p<.005

sex interaction coefficient is not significant (p=.053).

The data in Table 3 present support for H₃. Among respondents in the former FRG, the usual association between religiosity and materialism is evident; religious identifiers are significantly more materialist than are non-identifiers (-.315). Among respondents from the former GDR, however, religious residents of the former GDR appear to be no more materialist than are the non-religious residents (-.315 + .297 = -.018).

The negative interaction term (-.833) indicates that, ceteris paribus, the residents of the former GDR are significantly more materialist than are the residents of the FRG. Given the higher level of material well-being

Table 4: Regression Coefficients for Variables Effecting Political Activities

Variable	Citizens' Initiatives	Signing Petitions	Demonstrations
WEST			
Constant	2.900***	3.555***	2.403***
Sex	.081	.074	.207***
Age	-.011***	-.018***	-.017***
Education	.237***	.241***	.342***
City Size	.086	.291**	.409***
Religious Identification	-.335***	-.304**	-.501***
EAST			
Interaction	-.113	-.763***	.003
Sex Interaction	.020	-.038	.087
Age Interaction	.006	.009***	.005
Education Interaction	-.039	.084	-.105
City Size Interaction	.211	.014	.422**
Religious Interaction	.279*	.257*	.639***
R^2_{adjusted}	.1062	.1326	.2398

* p<.05, ** p<.01, *** p<.005

FRG, religious identification appears to have a substantial negative influence with respect to approval of these forms of political participation. Among respondents from the former GDR, however, we see that these negative religious identification coefficients are offset by positive interaction coefficients (-.335+.279= -.056, -.304+.257= -.047, and -.501+.639=.138, respectively); thus, the negative orientation toward unconventional political participation found among FRG respondents appears to have been completely neutralized among GDR respondents.

One final note of interest regarding the data presented in Table 4 has to do with the significant negative petition signing interaction coefficient (-.763). This effect indicates the greater reluctance of former GDR respondents to sign petitions. Given the high visibility, low anonymity, associated with such an act, this coefficient may partially reflect the legacy of political angst that remains a part of life in the former East Germany.

CONCLUSIONS

One interpretation of these results is that, as a persecuted minority under the previous regime, religious citizens in the former GDR came to favor political forms which promise to reduce marginalization and allow for fuller social and political participation. If so, the policy of state-sponsored secularization resulted not only in a greatly diminished congregation for the church, but also dramatically altered the nature of religion's influence on democratic values. Unlike the usual conservative

influence religiosity has on politics, religious identification in the GDR exhibits no such affect. The pattern which we commonly find among virtually all Western nations--and which we see replicated among those in the former FRG--is conspicuous by its absence in among those in the former GDR.

NOTES

¹ Terwey (1992) presents an analysis of the differences in religious beliefs between residents of the former East and West Germany. For a detailed cohort analysis of this policy and its impact on the religious beliefs and practices of former East Germans, see McCutcheon (1993).

² All of the analyses presented in Tables 1 through 4 were also examined with variables for recent unemployment experience, as well as for experience with *kurtzarbeit* in the East. Since these variables were insignificant in all analyses, the reported regressions exclude these variables.

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