



**Territory and Electoral Politics in  
Germany**

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## Abstract

*This paper analyses the effect of territory on electoral outcomes in Germany. We analyse variations in these outcomes on the basis of differential voting patterns in state-wide and sub-state elections. We illustrate that the East/West divide is by no means the complete story in terms of the influence of territory on German party political competition. To measure differentiation across space in state-wide elections we employ the Pedersen Index and a standardised coefficient of variation. To analyse differentiation in each of Germany's 16 Länder we build on ideas of multi-level voting by introducing analysis based on the weighted mean deviations of party performance and expected vote shares in different electoral contests. Taken together, these measures give a strong indication that the differences in party performance across space in state-wide elections are also supplemented by differences in electoral outcomes across a vertical dimension; in other words, territorial distinctiveness has contributed to producing not just differing electoral results in state-wide elections across all Germany, but also in Land elections, where voters can and do differentiate between parties based on their position in sub-state party systems.*

# **Territory and Electoral Politics in Germany**

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## *Introduction*

Modern party political competition occurs in ever more complex settings. Long gone are the days (if, indeed, they ever existed at all) when parties could craft one political package that was suitable for more or less all electoral contests. Parties now have to mould, shape and articulate their demands in a multitude of ways to make them relevant to different sets of voters possessing differentiated sets of interests for elections to different sets of institutions. At the vertical level, federalist institutional arrangements have traditionally been used to permit voters to voice their territorially specific interests in sub-state elections. Long established federal states (such as the US, Australia, Canada, Germany and Switzerland) have recently been joined by states such as Belgium, the UK, Spain and Italy – to name but four – in creating, or rejuvenating, genuinely significant multi-layered institutional frameworks. Increasing divergences in wealth, interests and even identity-awareness *within* nation-states have also prompted parties to mould their political profiles and messages in more subtle and focused ways in order to appeal to electors who rely less and less frequently on the pillars of class and partisan alignments in shaping their vote.

Political scientists have not always been the most adept at making sense of the changes (or nuances, in the case of older multi-level states) in organisation, policy and strategy that parties have adopted in coming to terms with these challenges. Parties are all too frequently viewed as unitary actors with specific sets of aims and methods. Such criticisms can also be made of attempts to make sense of what voters make of these different electoral environments. While attempts to understand voter attitudes to mid-term polls in the US (Tufte, 1975; Erikson, 1988) and elections to the EP in Europe (Reif and Schmitt, 1980; van der Eijk et. al., 1996) have undoubtedly gone some way to highlighting how electors deal with multi-level challenges, a concerted theory of voting behaviour in different institutional contexts is still noticeably lacking. Tony Blair's decision to devolve power to a newly (re-)created parliament in Scotland and an assembly in Wales has prompted a generation of UK scholars to at least

attempt to take up this (not inconsiderable) challenge. Although most scholars would be quick to say that data sets in the UK are small and attempts at theorising from them are very much works-in-progress, one particular interesting attempt to understand the new dynamics of party political competition stemmed from a research team in mid-Wales centred around Richard Wyn Jones, Roger Scully and Dafydd Tristan. They have developed a framework for understand voter behaviour that is based around what they term multi-level voting (Wyn Jones and Scully, 2006a, 2006b; See also Trystan et. al., 2003). This approach suggests that sub-state elections in states with meaningful regional authorities are not necessarily subject to what Reif and Schmitt would call ‘second order’ influences alone. These polls lie somewhere in-between first and second order and therefore illustrates sets of characteristics that can be particular to either of the arenas. Strong regional identities, cultural traditions and socio-economic peculiarities may prompt voters to think rather more about whom they cast their votes for in *all* elections in that territory than has previously been perceived as being the case. While some second order traits may be evident, such as lower turnouts and an increased tendency to vote for smaller parties, there may also be significant interest in the election itself and votes could quite plausibly be being cast in such a way as to grant politicians at the sub-state level legitimacy to shape sub-state-level solutions to the problems of the day. But the primacy of ‘first order’ considerations among those voting cannot be assumed as a given; it is most likely to hold when voters are *not* able to identify relevant considerations within the particular electoral context to guide their voting decisions. In other words – as Heath et. al. argued in 1999 – first order considerations may be less dominant, for example, in local council elections in the UK if people can be mobilised around local issues (Heath et. al., 1999). And in the elections to *Land* parliaments in states such as Germany, with its (in comparative terms) relatively powerful regional tier there may be substantially greater scope yet for many of those voting to identify matters in the sub-state arena on which to shape their voting decisions.

Research conducted elsewhere (Jeffery and Hough, 2006, 2008) illustrates that some of the characteristics of the multi-level voting that the Welsh team discusses may well be prevalent – particularly since 1990 – in the Federal Republic of Germany. Although the same parties contest all types of election, and voters do not generally cast their ballots in radically different ways across the levels, disparities between

state-wide and sub-state election results in individual *Länder* appear to have increased since unification (Jeffery and Hough, 2006). Pre-1990 German voters largely cast their ballots the same ways no matter what the electoral contest (European, federal, *Land*, local). Yet, this nicely symmetrical pattern appears to have been disrupted and complicated by forces set in motion as and when Germany unified in 1990. Given the evidence accrued this far, it is therefore certainly worth investigating in more detail whether, and to what extent, the notion of multi-level voting has any mileage in the German case.

There are good reasons to expect that it might, and even should, have. Germany possesses a myriad of well-developed territorial identities and is, since unification, now quite diverse in socio-economic terms. It also, as was indicated above, has a significant tier of sub-state government in the shape of the 16 *Länder*. Yet, most analysis of territorial politics in Germany tends to stress that if territory matters, then it matters most within the context of the east-west cleavage that unification has spawned. Eastern ‘differentness’ (not to mention ‘difficultness’), so the theory goes, gives it undue influence in shaping German electoral outcomes. The party system that has developed in the eastern states since unification is indeed quantifiably different, and territorially more differentiated, than that which exists in the western states. The traditionally strong socio-economic and religious cleavages that shape(d) electoral competition in the pre-1989 FRG either facilitate altogether different electoral outcomes in the East and/or simply play a much less significant role than is the case in western Germany. Furthermore, rather than ‘settle down’ as time went on, the eastern German party system continues to display systematic differences when compared with the state-wide party system and those that exist in the ten sub-state parliaments across western Germany. This goes, at least superficially, against the general train of thought in contemporary electoral politics in Europe which tends to stress how – slowly, and in nationally specific ways – processes of nationalisation tend to overcome regional peculiarities in shaping voting behaviour (Caramani, 2004). Processes of homogenisation – built on events being shaped within a state-wide context and voters getting used to framing their own political existences within the discourse of state-wide politics – therefore squeeze out sub-state specific shapers of the vote. We aim to analyse this apparent paradox in a little more detail. This paper deals mainly with variations in electoral behaviour on the basis of differences in

voting for state-wide/sub-state elections. We do this by briefly analysing the mechanics of the German party system, illustrating how territorially specific issues, interests and influences – particularly since unification – have contributed to produce different party landscapes and different electoral outcomes. We then move on to illustrate that the East/West divide is by no means the complete story in terms of the influence of territory on German party political competition. To measure differentiation across space in state-wide elections we employ the Pedersen Index and a standardised coefficient of variation (see also Deschouwer, 2007). To analyse differentiation in each of Germany's 16 *Länder* we build on ideas of multi-level voting by introducing analysis based on the weighted mean deviations of party performance and expected vote shares in different electoral contests. Taken together, these measures give a strong indication that the differences in party performance across space in state-wide elections are also supplemented by differences in electoral outcomes across a vertical dimension; in other words, territorial distinctiveness has contributed to producing not just differing electoral results in state-wide elections across all Germany, but also in *Land* elections, where voters can and do differentiate between parties based on their position in sub-state party systems. Territorially-specific issues and cleavages therefore contribute not just to an increasing *horizontal differentiation* in voting behaviour across Germany, they also have a strong effect on the *vertical choices* that voters make across the levels. Finally, we speculate on what this may mean for German electoral politics in the future.

#### *The German Party System Post-1990: Developments at the Horizontal Level*

For most of the post-war period the German party system at the state-wide level – and largely also at the sub-state one – remained perhaps the most solid and unspectacular in Europe. Within 15 years of the introduction of democratic elections, minor parties were largely sidelined and a 'two-and-a-half' party system had, by 1961, become the norm. Two larger parties – the SPD on the centre-left and the CDU/CSU on the centre-right – were each dominating their respective sides of the political spectrum, and only a smaller, liberal, Free Democratic Party (FDP) remained alongside them in the Bonn parliament. Voting behaviour remained highly stable and levels of party identification high – in state-wide and sub-state polls alike (Roberts 2006).

The calm world of German electoral politics received the first of two major shocks in the early 1980s when the Greens began forcing their way onto the political scene. They entered parliament on the back of a slow – but significant – loosening of the links between voters and parties. Voters were becoming more volatile, and the SPD was confronted with a new challenger for votes on its left flank. The entry of the Greens into the Bundestag in 1983 also had the effect in the short term of tying the FDP to the CDU/CSU, but in the longer term raising the prospect of new ‘red-green’ coalitions. (Lees, 2000; see also Hough and Jeffery, 2006: 123-124).

The second shock came in the form of unification and the expansion of the FRG party system to include the former citizens of the GDR. Although both the Christian Democrats and the Social Democrats expanded quickly into the eastern states, they were not able to dominate political and electoral competition in the same way that they have historically done in western Germany. The stabilisation of the Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS – recently re-named the Left Party) as an eastern German regional party, periodic rises (and – as a rule – falls) in support for right-wing parties such as the German Peoples Union (DVU) and the National Democratic Party (NPD) and the much smaller vote shares achieved by the FDP and Greens have ensured that three relevant (in the Sartorian sense) parties tend to exist across the region. This is in stark contrast to the ten western legislatures, where the Left Party is not represented at all and the FDP and Greens (and occasionally the Republicans) normally have fair chances of achieving more than five per cent of the popular vote. The existence of two structurally different ‘regional party systems’ is therefore largely uncontested.

The reasons for such a differentiation lie in the (in)ability of the western parties to incorporate differing eastern German attitudinal and value positions into their political platforms. This originally surprised many analysts who, at the time of unification, posited social-psychological models of electoral behaviour suggesting that as the two Germanies came together the western parties were likely to simply expand into virgin electoral territory and subsequently dominate political activity (Bürklin and Klein, 1998: 168). No matter that Easterners had had no direct experiences of the western system of political interest articulation and eastern German society was not likely to be rooted in the mosaic of cleavage divides that characterised western German political and electoral competition; the western parties were clearly convinced (as

were many academics) that they could mould and shape such apparently rootless terrain to their advantage (Weßels, 2000: 132). Through the 1990s the ability of the western parties to set the agenda and articulate the particular concerns of eastern Germans became ever more apparent. By 2005, the two main *Volksparteien*, the CDU and SPD, were barely scraping together half of the votes in the eastern states (55.8 per cent) compared to a historically low but nonetheless respectable 73.5 per cent in the western states (see table 1).

**Table 1**  
**The 2005 Bundestag Election in Eastern and Western Germany**

	Germany		Western States		Eastern States	
	Vote Share (%)	Change since 2002	Vote Share (%)	Change since 2002	Vote Share (%)	Change since 2002
<b>SPD</b>	34.3	-4.3	35.1	-3.2	30.5	-9.4
<b>CDU/CSU</b>	35.2	-3.3	37.5	-3.3	25.3	-2.9
<b>FDP</b>	9.8	+2.4	10.2	+2.6	7.9	+1.5
<b>Left Party</b>	8.7	+4.7	4.9	+3.8	25.4	+8.5
<b>Greens</b>	8.1	-0.4	8.8	-0.6	5.1	+0.4
<b>Others</b>	3.9	-0.9	3.5	-0.7	5.8	-1.9

Elections that have taken place in the late 1990s and early 21<sup>st</sup> Century reveal that the initial alignments of the eastern electorate were, and still are, weaker than had been initially anticipated. Since 1990 there has been a steady drop in the number of voters who claim to identify in strongly, or reasonably strongly, with a particular party; at the time of unification, around 70 per cent of western Germans regarded themselves as having some sort of party identification, while – perhaps surprisingly, given that they had not actually lived in the FRG at that point – as many as 60 per cent of easterners also saw themselves as strong/reasonably strong party identifiers. A fall to barely 40 per cent in the East in the mid-1990s – largely as a result of increasing dissatisfaction with the fallout from unification – saw the gap between the two regions open, before, interestingly, it narrowed again through the late 1990s and into the 21<sup>st</sup>

Century. In the run-up to the 2005 election 50-55 per cent of eastern Germans and 60-65 per cent of western Germans (depending on the exact wording of the question) saw themselves as psychologically attached to one of the parties, illustrating that even in an era of increased dealignment, the majority of voters do (still) exhibit some sort of party identification (Arzheimer, 2002; 2005).

Electoral volatility nonetheless remains higher in the East than it does in the West, as Easterners appear more prepared to vote for the party which they perceive to best represent their interests at any given time. Volatility is most typically measured using Pedersen's index of volatility, which calculates the net change in each party's seat or vote share from election to election (at whatever level of analysis one chooses). The total change in the percentage of seats and/or votes won or lost by all parties is then added together and divided by two (Mainwaring and Scully, 1995: 6). The implications of high levels of electoral volatility are that electoral outcomes are naturally more erratic and, in states that are newly democratised, establishing legitimacy can be more difficult and governing therefore more complicated.

**Table 2**  
**The Pedersen Index in Post-1990 Germany**

	<b>1994</b>	<b>1998</b>	<b>2002</b>	<b>2005</b>		<b>1994</b>	<b>1998</b>	<b>2002</b>	<b>2005</b>
<b>Bad-Wüt</b>	5.5	7.1	6.9	7.2	<b>Brandenburg</b>	15.9	10.7	13.8	12.3
<b>Bavaria</b>	5.4	4.9	11.6	9.3	<b>MV</b>	8.9	12.3	15.5	10.7
<b>Bremen</b>	6.6	7.1	6.1	8.2	<b>Saxony</b>	13.0	17.6	14.3	12.4
<b>Hamburg</b>	6.4	6.9	5.8	7.2	<b>Sax-Anhalt</b>	13.3	13.0	10.1	14.8
<b>Hesse</b>	3.6	6.9	6.0	7.6	<b>Thuringia</b>	13.3	14.7	17.2	13.8
<b>Lower Sax</b>	5.2	9.0	4.3	5.5					
<b>NRW</b>	6.6	4.9	6.4	5.0					
<b>RP</b>	5.1	4.8	6.5	7.5					
<b>Saarland</b>	7.2	5.0	8.4	19.2					
<b>Sch-Hol</b>	5.9	7.1	4.1	5.8					
<b>West Ger</b>	5.1	6.1	6.2	7.2	<b>East Ger</b>	12.6	13.5	10.4	12.3
<b>Germany</b>	6.0	7.5	6.6	8.1					

A look at the Pedersen Index in eastern and western Germany since unification reveals a number of interesting trends. It is no surprise to see that volatility is consistently more pronounced in the eastern states. Scores for the most recent four elections (1994, 1998, 2002 and 2005) range from 10.4 to 13.5 and are clearly in a different league to the scores in western Germany (5.1 to 7.2). The scores across the five ‘authentic’<sup>1</sup> eastern Länder group together reasonably well, generally around the 10.5 – 15 mark, with only the 1994 score in Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania slipping into single figures. A similar grouping occurs in western Germany, although at a lower level (around 4-9), with few outliers either above or below this. However, the trends evident when the two regions are directly compared are a little different; the western states have seen a steady increase in their Pedersen Index scores since 1990, moving from 5.1 in 1994 to 6.1 in 1998 and 6.2 in 2002. The 2005 election saw a further increase, up to 7.2. This steady pattern towards further volatility in voting behaviour is not evident in eastern Germany. The scores may indeed be higher (indicating that there is more volatility in real terms), but there is no such pattern of increasing scores; 12.6 in 1994, 13.5 in 1998, 10.4 in 2002 and 12.3 in 2005. This may, on the one hand, be taken as evidence of a stable pattern of instability in eastern Germany and of increasing changes in voter preference (if from a much lower level) in western Germany. On the other hand, it is clear that the 2005 election – at least in the western states – was not a ‘normal’ one. The Left Party has competed in elections in both regions since 1990 under the guise of its predecessor the PDS – but up until 2005 it never managed to poll more than 1.2 per cent of the vote in the West. This changed in 2005. Popular opposition to Gerhard Schröder’s package of labour market and welfare reforms by a vocal minority of left-wing critics from his own party prompted a new ‘Electoral Alliance for Social Justice’ (WASG) to be constituted in 2004. This movement did not form in time to run for election in 2005, but had a clear effect on the electoral outcome by running some of its members on the open lists of the Left Party (which changed its name precisely to illustrate its openness to WASG members). The decision of former SPD Finance Minister Oskar Lafontaine to run on a Left Party ticket further enhanced the party’s profile and contributed to the party obtaining a highly respectable 4.9 per cent of the vote in western Germany (Hough, Koß and Olsen, 2007). Lafontaine’s presence clearly prompted the massive leap in

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<sup>1</sup> Berlin is excluded from the analysis for reasons of simplicity.

the Pedersen Index in the Saarland (19.2 in 2005), illustrating how outliers in western German data can often be linked to the influence of a local matador; it is no coincidence that Gerhard Schröder's home state of Lower Saxony registered its highest score in 1998 (9.0), the year he ran for the chancellorship for the first time and that the highest Bavarian figure (11.6) came in 2002, when a CSU candidate, Edmund Stoiber, ran for Germany's top office.

The Left Party did not have such a dramatic effect in the eastern states as it already enjoyed strong vote shares across the region. And, in spite of the advances made in the western states in 2005, the Left Party still remains the most noticeable expression of eastern German differentness. It is not only ideologically anchored in eastern German society, it is also sociologically and organisationally rooted there.

Figure 1: Regional heterogeneity in Germany

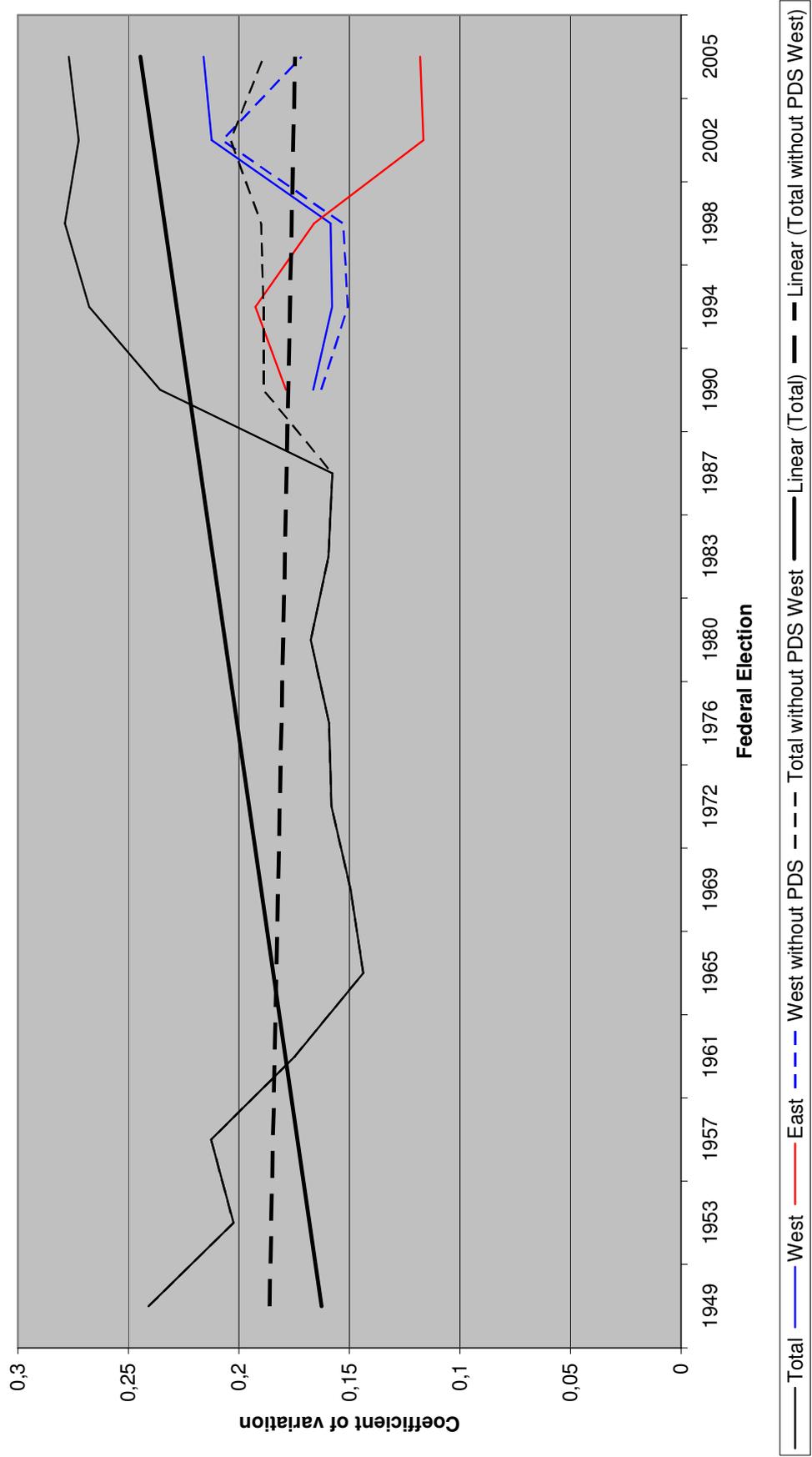
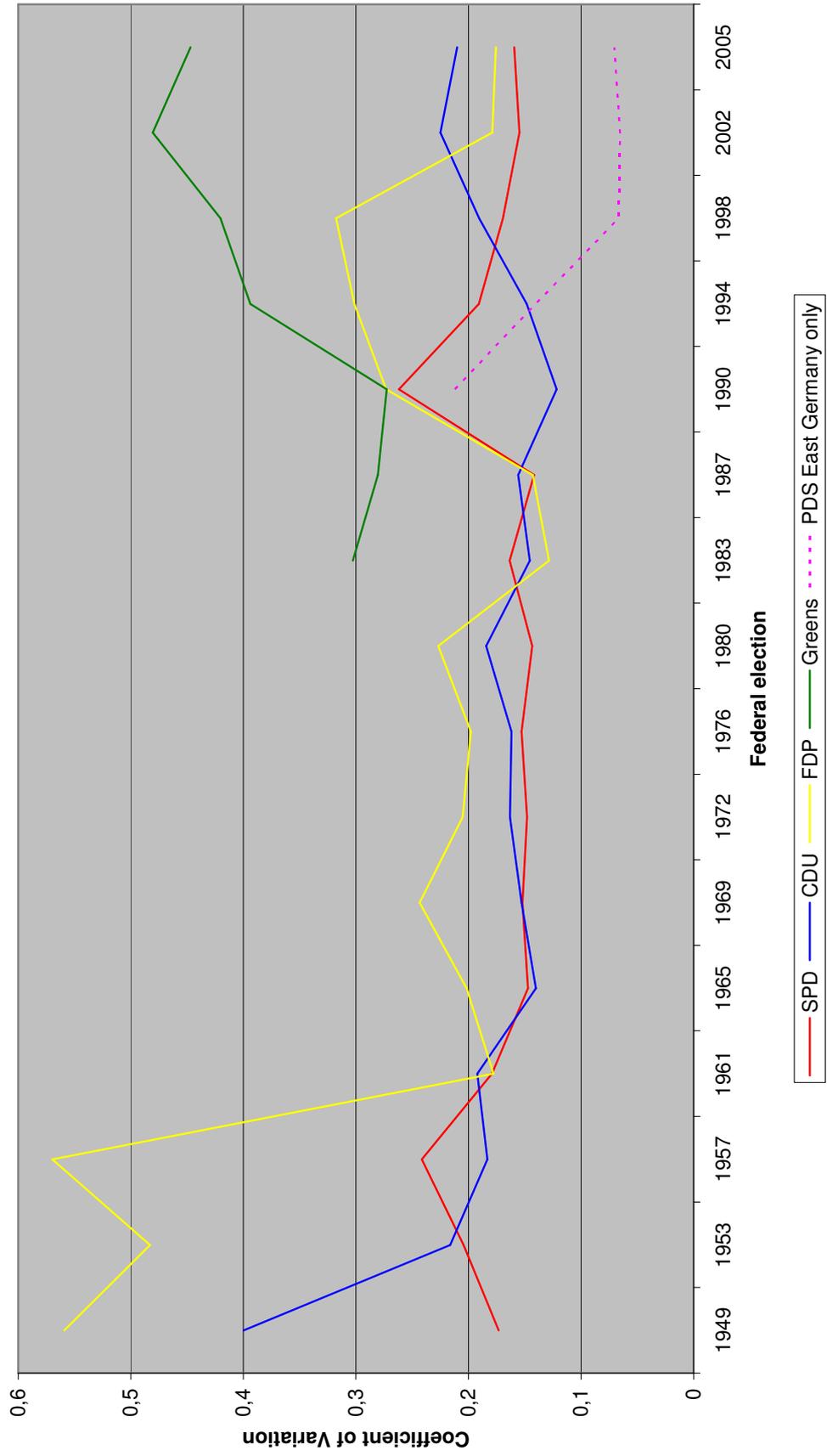


Figure 2: Regional heterogeneity: all parties



The importance of the regionally strong Left Party in understanding state-wide election results in Germany is also evident if we look at another tool for measuring variation in election results across space – the standardised coefficient of variation. This figure is simply the standard deviation of the results per party in the different states in the same state-wide election divided by the state-wide result (see Deschouwer, 2007, for more on this). One noticeable advantage of this measure over others is that it enables us to compare the performances of single parties and not just the differences between regions. Figures 1 and 2 show these results. The general finding varies depending on whether one includes the Left Party's results in western Germany. If one chooses to do this,<sup>2</sup> then the pattern is very clear. Levels of regional heterogeneity in party performance across space are greater today than they have ever been in post-war Germany. Even if one takes the Left Party in western Germany out of the equation – an equally understandable thing to do given that the Left Party remains a small actor that is bound, given its strong performances in the East, to skew our results a little – then we see that the figures are 'merely' increasing at almost the same pace as they have been doing since the heyday of electoral homogenisation in 1965, the (linear) trend line pointing only slightly downwards. These findings are indicative of the overall importance of the Left Party when it comes to interpreting regional heterogeneity in the German party system.

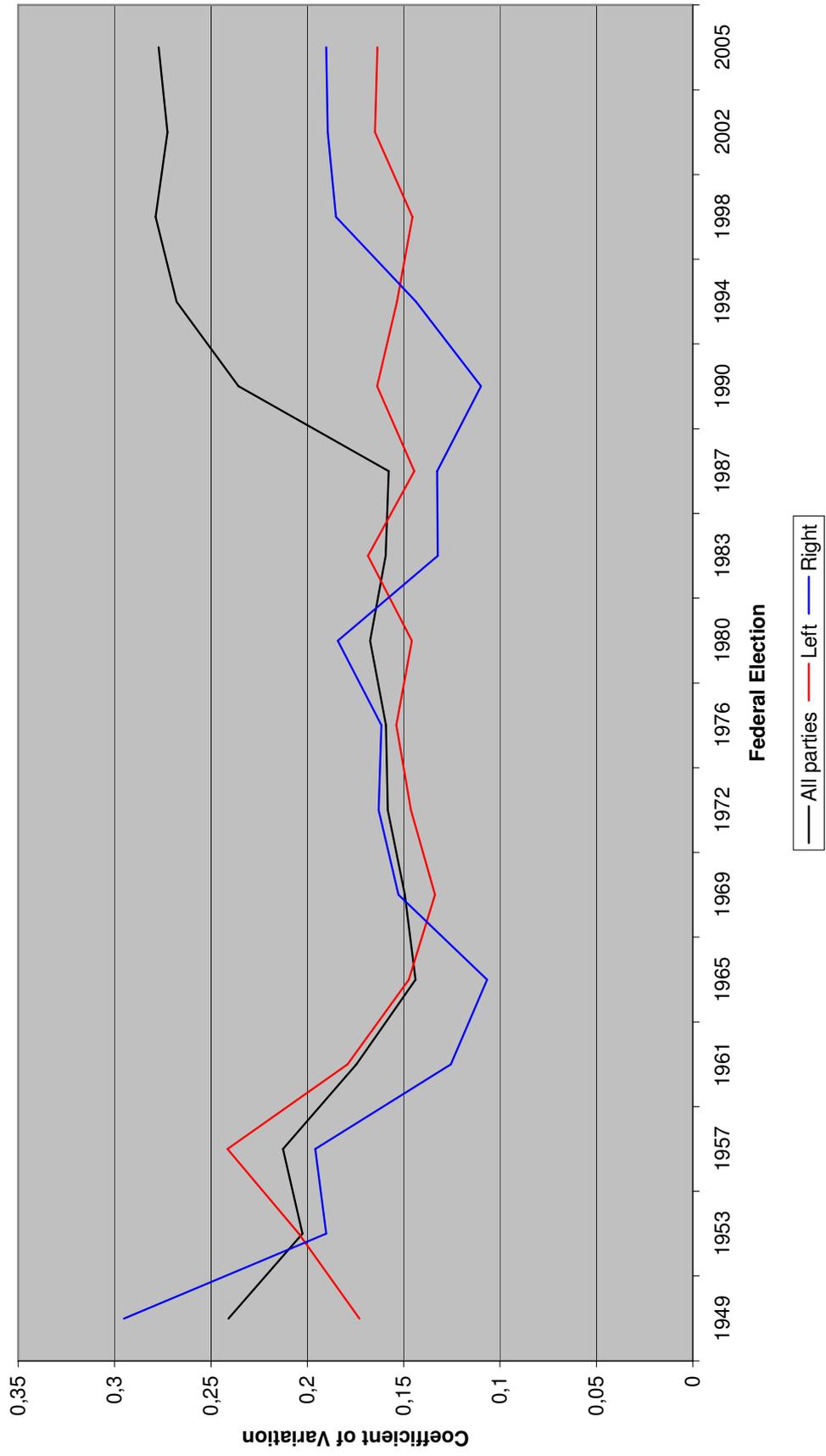
Figure 2, furthermore, illustrates that the FDP (both in the formative years of the Federal Republic and again since 1987) and the Greens (mainly since 1990) have contributed to increasing heterogeneity in the German party system. We have left out the Left Party for western Germany here because it would have made the party a crass outlier, showing coefficients of heterogeneity between 1.1 and 2.1. A case of increased heterogeneity all round then, it would appear? Not quite. Figure 1 also illustrates, even more interestingly, that whereas heterogeneity of results was greater in the eastern states after 1990, it is now – and has been since approximately 1998 – far more obvious in the western states. This remains the same even if we exclude the Left Party from the results for western Germany, although regional heterogeneity decreases after 2002.

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<sup>2</sup> And there is indeed good reason to include the Left Party in western Germany as it defines itself as an all-German party, contests elections all across Germany and has recently entered a western German *Land* parliament (Bremen) for the first time.

These trends can also be explained by looking at the different relationships that eastern voters possess towards political parties in general. Voters in the eastern states are more willing to vote based on short-term factors such as their attitude towards a particular chancellor candidate or sets of salient policy-issues and this prompts more uniform swings for or against particular parties. This is in marked contrast to the period from 1990-1998 when faith in Helmut Kohl as the 'Chancellor of Unity' prompted a proportion of a much more non-aligned electorate to remain loyal to the CDU. Such loyalty has, for many citizens, long since evaporated. In comparison, western Germany appears far more heterogeneous, remaining divided into a largely social democratic north and a more conservative south.

Figure 3: Regional heterogeneity 1949-2005 Left-Right



One intriguing aspect of Germany's relatively stable pattern of instability is the destination of voters who choose to switch their votes between elections. Germany's party system has developed into a block-system, with a centre-right pole (CDU/CSU and FDP) battling against a centre-left (SPD and Green) or even out-and-out left (centre-left plus the Left Party) one. Germany's proportional electoral system, as well as its consensual political culture, have strongly facilitated this development and it is something that voters are more than well aware of. It is nonetheless worth asking whether voters tend to stay within their block or whether there is evidence of cross-block switching. This will give us a further indication of the nature of Germany's stable pattern of instability in that it illustrates whether voters still think in terms of supporting one party within a block or if electoral volatility extends to jumping the ideological divide. In other words, is a recalcitrant SPD voter likely to vote for a party such as the Greens or the Left Party that is ostensibly within the same block or is there evidence that they could cross the left-right divide and support out-and-out political opponents? Figure 3 elaborates on this and shows aggregate trends for the party blocks. The CDU/CSU and the FDP are regarded as being on the 'right' throughout all of these calculations while all other parties are placed on the 'left' (except for the period of 1969-82 where the FDP clearly joined the 'left' camp when it governed with the SPD at the state-wide level). Post-1990, and particularly since 1994, variation in the right camp has been larger than it is on the left. This comes as no surprise seeing as the CDU has polled erratically in the East and much more consistently in the West. Compared to the overall heterogeneity of all parties, we find a far more stable picture between blocs. Given that Peter Mair argued that we can only speak of party system change when the balance between party blocs changes (Mair 1997: 68 f.), we find little evidence for significant party system change in Germany – another feature of the stability behind the change in German party politics. We also tend to find a far more stable picture between left and right than between East and West and it appears that although German regions are becoming ever more vocal in articulating their 'differentness', the parties still appear to serve as genuine mediators in all of these debates.

### *The German Party System: Developments at the Vertical Level*

Most of the systemic differences discussed above have received at least some coverage in analyses of eastern German differentness. Three parties of roughly similar electoral strength compete for votes in state-wide and sub-state elections in the eastern states compared to two large parties and two smaller ones in the western states. This east-west territorial cleavage – and the much weaker alignments that are linked with it – are also visible if one takes a look at voting behaviour at the sub-state level. Territory has a role to play in *Land* elections in two main ways: (1) politicians can successfully buck (or at least partly counteract) national trends to their own advantage if they campaign on platforms that voters in their *Land* can relate to and (2) there is qualitative evidence – for each of the main parties – that territorially specific factors can prompt voting behaviour across the levels that is simply more volatile than is the case in western Germany (see election reports in *German Politics* and *Zeitschrift für Parlamentsfragen* for more evidence of this). In the eastern German case this can frequently lead, for example, to startling successes for far-right parties in the sub-national arena while they remain marginal, at best, in state-wide polls.

In order to unpack some of the deeper trends that may exist is to measure the differences in performance of the five main state-wide parties across *Land* and federal elections across time. More specifically, do some parties perform better at one level than they do at others? And are such inter-level differences more prevalent in particular areas of Germany? Is there evidence of a de-coupling between the two levels or between the vote shares of particular parties across the two levels? Recent research has illustrated that some parties across Europe – noticeably regionalist or nationalist parties such as the CiU in Catalonia, the SNP in Scotland and PC in Wales – do indeed seem to do better in sub-state elections than they do in national elections (Wyn Jones and Scully, 2006a and 2006b; Pallares and Keating, 2006; Bromley, 2006). Voters appear willing to support nationalist/regionalist parties in their more ‘natural home’ in sub-state parliaments or assemblies. How does Germany fare?

**Table 3**

**Mean of Expected Vote Share (aggregate data, as a percentage, weighted)**

	<b>1949- 2005</b>	<b>1949- 1990</b>	<b>1990- 2005</b>	<b>1990- 2005 (West)</b>	<b>1990- 2005 (East)</b>
<b>SPD</b>	-0.9	1.6	-2.7	-1.0	-4.1
<b>CDU/CSU</b>	2.1	-1.6	4.6	3.6	6.7
<b>FDP</b>	-1.3	-1.0	-1.5	-1.6	-1.3
<b>Greens</b>	-0.2*	-0.2**	-0.1	0.2	-0.7
<b>Left Party</b>			2.2	-0.2	3.7
<b>all parties</b>	-0.3	-0.3	0.5	-0.02	0.8

\* 1982-2005

\*\* 1982-1990

Table 3 reveals information about the direction of these hypothesised decoupling processes. We have calculated the mean of the expected vote share<sup>3</sup> for each of the parties in eastern and western Germany since 1949. We also differentiate between East and West. In other words, one can see the extent to which actual election results differ from our expected results in numerical terms. A mean figure below 0 indicates that a party performed less well at the sub-state level than it did at the state one. A mean figure above 0 indicates the opposite; a party is polling better at the sub-state level than it is in the state-wide arena. Subsequently, the further the value away from 0, the weaker the coupling of sub-state and state election results for that particular party. The mean percentage of expected vote also shows the *direction* of change

<sup>3</sup> In this paper, we slightly modify a simple model that has recently been used to analyse the relationship between federal and *Land* election results in Germany as well as in similar elections in other countries (Dinkel, 1977; Jeffery and Hough, 2001; Hough and Jeffery, 2006). The original model, propagated by Rainer Dinkel, (consciously<sup>3</sup>) focuses just on the performance of those parties which happen to be in federal government during a particular legislative period. It has a number of significant weaknesses (see Jeffery and Hough, 2001) and also lacks predictive capability, but its effectiveness at showing basic trends none the less makes it a useful tool. In this model, Dinkel introduced the notion of ‘expected vote share’ for *Land* elections. This was a simple average of party vote shares in that Land at two successive federal elections. If the federal government parties scored, say, 50 per cent in a Land in one federal election and 46 per cent in the next, then their ‘expected vote’ for any Land election in the intervening period in that Land would be 48 per cent (see Jeffery and Hough, 2001). The result of the federal election *after* any round of Land elections is needed in order to calculate the trend in support for each of the parties. Despite a number of limitations, his model has a genuine heuristic value and it is one of the few attempts to systematically model the relationship between party performance in state and sub-state elections. It therefore provides a useful base from which to explore developments in party vote share both pre- and post-unification, and also to tease out some of the differences in nuance that exist between west and east.

between results in state-wide and sub-state elections. We simply calculated the average of the percentages of the expected results. The SPD's figure of 1.6 percentage points between 1949 and 1990 probably has much to do with the fact that it was in opposition at the state-wide level for most of this period, while the CDU/CSU's score of -1.6 percentage points has at least something to do with its long tenure in the national government. The FDP's underperformance in almost all *Land* elections indicates that it was basically regarded as an actor on the state-wide level, helping the CDU/CSU (and earlier the SPD) to govern.

While interesting, the performances of the individual parties are, again, not the whole story. It is the lack of a post-unification pattern – particularly in the eastern states, although this is also true to some extent in western Germany – that makes multi-level voting such a prevalent phenomenon across the East.

**Table 4**  
**Mean of Expected Vote Share (as a percentage, weighted)**

	SPD		CDU/CSU		FDP		Greens		Left Party
	1949-1990	1990-2005	1949-1990	1990-2005	1949-1990	1990-2005	1949-1990	1990-2005	1990-2005
<b>Bad-Wüt</b>	1.4	-2.9	-1.9	0.2	-0.1	-1.3	-0.2	1.0	—
<b>Bavaria</b>	0.3	-1.9	-3.0	3.4	-1.3	-2.9	1.7	0.1	—
<b>Bremen</b>	1.7	-6.7	-3.1	6.8	-1.0	-2.0	-3.0	-0.3	-0.6
<b>Hamburg</b>	2.0	-2.6	2.0	2.1	-2.8	-2.9	1.1	-0.2	—
<b>Hesse</b>	3.5	-0.9	-2.8	5.1	0.4	-1.9	2.3	0.1	—
<b>Lower Sax</b>	0.8	-0.8	-0.5	3.2	-1.6	-1.2	1.3	0.9	—
<b>NRW</b>	2.9	-0.5	-1.9	2.2	-0.3	-0.5	-1.2	1.3	-0.1
<b>RP</b>	1.3	4.1	-0.8	-4.1	-1.0	0.1	0.1	0.3	—
<b>Saarland</b>	1.3	-8.0	-3.3	18.1	-0.3	-2.0	-2.0	-0.2	-0.1
<b>Sch-Hol</b>	1.3	0.7	-0.8	-1.4	-2.1	-1.7	-2.1	-1.0	—
<b>Brandenburg</b>		1.5		-2.4		-2.2		-1.4	5.3
<b>MV</b>		0.6		0.2		-1.0		-0.7	1.0
<b>Saxony</b>		-10.2		17.7		-2.9		-0.7	4.4
<b>Sax-Anhalt</b>		-3.3		-0.8		2.3		-0.2	3.6

As table 4 illustrates, pre-1990 there are strong links between the election results at both levels for the three parties that dominated German political life for the vast majority of this period; both of the main catch-all parties (CDU/CSU and SPD) and the Free Democrats. The only exception to this are the Greens, where a degree of diversity exists – in half of the western states they perform better at the sub-state level, while in the other half this is reversed. The better performance in the sub-state arenas in Lower Saxony, Hamburg and particularly Hesse probably reflect their willingness to co-operate with the Social Democrats in government in those three states, indicating that when a party is not in government in the state-wide arena but does take part in sub-state coalitions, it is likely – in the long term – to benefit electorally from the territorial profiling it can inevitably undertake in the *Land* arena.

There is nonetheless a remarkably high degree of uniformity across states and across levels during this period.

Post-1990 this stable pattern starts to unravel – although only slightly. Of the 40 cases (4 parties that compete in both periods in 10 western *Länder*), the level of decoupling is greater than it was pre-1990 in 25 of them. There are, however, a fair number of genuine outliers; the CDU/CSU's strikingly better performances in the Saarland stand out (as do the SPD's poor performances there), much like the Christian Democrats' much better results in Bremen's sub-state elections (likewise the SPD's poorer showings there too). The CDU/CSU has improved its performance in sub-state elections in NRW but the SPD has clearly improved its standing in *Land* elections in Rhineland-Palatinate. There are explanations for these phenomena. First, local politicians have made an impact – more specifically, Oskar Lafontaine's departure not just from the Saar's *Land* arena, but also from the SPD itself has contributed to drops in support in what used to be his 'home' state, whilst present SPD leader Kurt Beck has proven to be a very successful minister president in Rhineland-Palatinate. Secondly, the SPD's dismally low approval ratings during its 7 year tenure in national government caused it to lose a succession of *Land* elections as voters punished the federal government in sub-state polls. This is probably the main reason that we see so many minus figures appearing before the SPD's post-1990 values.

The smaller parties have seen less change in their scores, reflecting perhaps voter willingness to 'punish' or 'reward' politicians in the major parties for the performances in either state-wide or, occasionally, the sub-state arena. Even though it has not been in national government for over eight years, the FDP continues to struggle to get its message across in sub-state elections. It's perceived as a party with a national role and continues to poll much better in these elections with only one exception; Rhineland-Palatinate (again), where it performs marginally better in sub-state elections, most likely on account of its longstanding coalition – the only one of its sort left in the whole country – with the Social Democrats in that state. The Greens, meanwhile, continue to reveal something of a mixed picture characterised by remarkably little decoupling. Figures for the Left Party are included, but given the low proportion of the vote that it polls in the western states, it should not be too surprising to see that decoupling is not an issue for the Socialists. Most interestingly

when looking at the smaller parties, both the Green and FDP vote shares don't appear any more de-coupled than before 1990.

If we turn our attention to the East then the picture is altogether different. There is no uniformity of catch-all party scores across the states, and we frequently see large differences in the percentage points that they register. The small parties do, however, perform worse in sub-state elections and, in contrast to the performance of the major parties, much more consistently (particularly for the Greens). Neither the FDP nor the Greens mobilise protest support in sub-state elections; in the East that either goes to the far-right or, under certain circumstances, to the Left Party. The Left Party's scores are also striking; they clearly do much better in the sub-state arena across all of eastern Germany; particularly in Brandenburg (where the party has never governed) although not so well in Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania (where the party was in power for 7 years and where sub-state and state-wide elections have a tendency to fall on the same day). The picture therefore is something of a confusing one of instability (and decoupling) for the major parties, stability (and much less decoupling) for the minor parties as well as systematic patterns of better support at the sub-state level for the Left Party.

### *Conclusion*

This paper has thrown light on the role that territory plays in shaping both the party system and electoral outcomes in Germany. It has illustrated that although party competition and voting behaviour in state-wide and sub-state elections are more differentiated in eastern Germany than they are in the western states, the picture is rather more complex than it may at first appear. It is no surprise to see that party system volatility across space, as measured by the Pedersen Index, is consistently more pronounced in the East than it is in the West. However, the trends evident when the two regions are directly compared are a little different; the western states have seen a steady increase in their Pedersen Index scores since 1990, while such a steady development towards increasing volatility in voting behaviour is not evident in eastern Germany.

Post-1990, and particularly since 1994, variation in the support for blocks of parties has been larger on the right than it is on the left. This comes as no surprise seeing as the CDU has polled erratically in the East and much more consistently in the West. Compared to the overall heterogeneity of performance by individual parties, we nonetheless find a far more stable picture between blocks. Given that party system changes are frequently only seen as being of genuine significance when voters are prepared to cross the block-divide, we find little evidence to suggest that such significant party system change is taking place in Germany now. If we do not take into account the Left Party in the West, then regional heterogeneity – even when we look at individual parties – has remained stable since 1949. We also tend to find a far more stable picture between left and right than between East and West and it appears that although German regions are becoming ever more vocal in articulating their ‘differentness’, the parties still play an effective role in mediating territorial differences within the political process.

We did not find a great deal of evidence to support theories of multi-level voting in the pre-1990 period. Both the election results of the SPD and the CDU/CSU (as well as the FDP) showed strong similarities across the levels and there is little evidence to suggest that voters thought (and acted) differently in the various electoral arenas. There was a strong link between *Land* and federal election results and only the Greens – arising as they did to deliberately challenge the prevailing consensus that the three other parties epitomised – bucked this trend. Post-1990 we do, however, see rather more evidence of voters taking different cues in different arenas. This is clearly not a case of *Land* contests becoming first order; but some of their characteristics do appear to have rather more ‘first-order-ness’ about them. But, while this shift is noticeable and quantifiable (in terms of election results), this clearly should not be taken to mean that the mirror is completely broken. The increased role of personalities is likely to have prompted some of the decoupling at the vertical level whilst the variations in socio-economic status and cultural identity across the country are likely to have contributed to greater variety in electoral outcomes in horizontal terms. The East, of course, remains much less subject to uniform trends than the West per se.

What we might in fact be seeing is a slow process of the West becoming rather more like the East than many Westerners would perhaps like to admit. Voters across the whole of

the republic are gradually becoming more volatile. This development is gathering speed (if from a low level) in western Germany whereas in the east this stable instability has long since embedded itself into the electoral process. This, in other words, may in fact be more evidence of some form of 'nationalisation' taking place; this process is not linear and it is not uniform, but the dynamic nonetheless appears to have been set in motion

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