

Introduction

Germany as a Normal Democratic Polity

Germany has always been and continues to be what Gustav Heinemann—a former president of West Germany and one of the country’s most thoughtful leaders—called a “difficult fatherland.” Germans, no less than foreign observers, remember Germany’s descent into the ruthlessness of the Nazi regime. The magnitude of World War II, the enormity of the Holocaust, and the repercussions of these remain moral blots on the nation’s record. Furthermore, for more than forty years there were two German regimes: the Federal Republic of Germany in the west and the German Democratic Republic (GDR) in the east. Each was embedded in mutually hostile military alliances, and Germans died at German hands along a border that divided both the country and its capital.

German unification formally ended the country’s postwar division between antagonistic capitalist-democratic and communist states, but it left unresolved a number of important questions about the nation’s past and future. If it is true, as some scholars and political leaders have argued, that Germany followed a distinctive path of development, a “special path” (*Sonderweg*) that led from deep historical roots through the Imperial regime and the Weimar Republic into the abyss of National Socialism,¹ then one would expect the prosperous and democratic Germany to be a fragile social anomaly occasioned by the Cold War. Conversely, if pre-Hitler Germany was as “normal” in its political, economic, and social arrangements as say, France or Russia, then the rise of a peaceful, democratic, and prosperous united Germany might be seen as a resumption of an interrupted standard European path. As Mary Hampton has observed, this would suggest that unified Germany has once again become a “normal nation.”² This, of course, raises the question of what such a “normal” path would entail.³

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Related to this line of thought, there are scholars who suggest that the fall of communism in Central and Eastern Europe means that history has resumed where it left off in 1945. So what are the implications of this for Germany in the twenty-first century? Was West Germany's unprecedented affluence and political stability beginning in the early 1950s an anomaly fostered by the imperatives of the Cold War? Will these achievements continue to characterize the economic and political performance of a reunified Germany? To what extent does Germany, in the twenty-first century, face social, political, economic, and international problems comparable to those facing its fellow democratic partners in the European Union? In the chapters that follow, we seek an answer to this question of Germany's destiny by testing German actions and institutions to see whether contemporary Germany is indeed a normal modern democratic European state in its problems as well as in its achievements.

The modern German national state dates only from 1871. It has never been contemporaneous with German ethnic settlement or German cultural life. Unification poses anew fundamental questions concerning national memories and identity. As Alan Watson provocatively asks: "[W]ho are the Germans now? Do the Germans now constitute a normal nation? Have they begun to rediscover their own identity and patriotism? Or do they remain different and dangerous?"⁴ Answers to these questions clearly reveal that German national identity is a complex and changing mosaic consisting of multiple historical, cultural, political, and economic components. The legacy of Germany's postwar division constitutes a profound singularity in comparison with other European nations. Forty-five years of separation between western and eastern Germany, as well as the course and rapidity of German reunification in 1989–1990, decisively shape ongoing efforts by Germans to redefine their identity within the boundaries of a reestablished sovereign national community. In the process, should it not be expected that a unified Germany will adopt a normal European patriotic pride in its achievements even as it also faces normal European problems?

German unification has meant the extension of western German political and social norms and institutions, socioeconomic relations, and ways of life to the former German Democratic Republic. We explore how such institutions and social norms may have been altered by their expansion into a reunified Germany. Such an assessment necessarily encompasses mass values and attitudes, political parties and election outcomes, the welfare state, economic policies and performance, and the conduct of foreign policy. It also includes important questions relating to how the reconstitution of capitalism and the creation of Western-style trade unions and business associations in the former GDR affect industrial relations on a national basis. We also discuss an issue fundamental to eastern German awareness of "what remains of the GDR"—or, perhaps, what should remain?

Such questions underscore the elusiveness of political "normalcy" as Germany approaches its third decade as a reunited nation. While western

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German constitutional norms and institutions prevail throughout both parts of the country, deeply rooted psychological cleavages persist among citizens on both sides of the former border. One consequence is that Germany's party system has assumed greater complexity than in the previous "old" Federal Republic because of widespread electoral support for the newly constituted Left Party, which is an amalgamation of the postcommunist Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS) of East Germany and dissident Social Democrats and others of West Germany. At the opposite ideological extreme, radical right movements challenge the dominant political culture in much the same fashion as the National Front in France and the Freedom Party in Austria. The dramatic disclosure at the turn of the century of illegal financial contributions to former Chancellor Helmut Kohl and other prominent members of the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) prompted an interim crisis of the party system reminiscent of the implosion of the Socialist and Christian Democratic parties during the early 1990s in Italy.

And these issues matter, because Germany's location in the heart of Europe, means that it constitutes an important economic and political link between West and East. As a founding member of the European Coal and Steel Community and the European Economic Community (now the European Union), Germany has steadfastly advocated economic integration and institutionalized political cooperation in Western Europe. The demise of communism in the former Soviet empire offered the Federal Republic a leadership role in extending these principles to the new democracies and market economies of Central and Eastern Europe. Germany's presidency of the EU during the first half of 1999 and again in 2007 underscored its leaders' strong commitment to that community's further "widening" and "deepening."

By virtue of its geographical location and considerable material and human resources, unified Germany confronts a set of newly crucial foreign policy issues. Shall it play a global political role, perhaps as a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council? Or should it seek a more limited, perhaps regional role, particularly within and through the EU? What are the domestic and international political implications of German military involvement in NATO's war against Serbia in 1999 and the ongoing struggle to establish peace in Afghanistan? What political, economic, and military role will Germany play in the expanded European Union and an increasingly globalized world? And finally, what are Germany's special relations with the United States and Russia?

In considering these and related issues, we concentrate on the period since the mid-1980s while drawing on relevant historical antecedents. Conceptually, we utilize multiple principles of comparative analysis in our assessment of politics in Germany: (1) modernization theory, which for us is a shorthand label for interrelated processes of industrialization and postindustrialization, social mobilization, and political development over time; (2) political and popular culture, which we utilize to assess successive tides of

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value changes, the diffusion of an elite-mass democratic consensus in Germany, and linkages between politics and society as expressed through literature, music, and cinema; (3) constitutionalism, political institutions, parties, and interest groups; and (4) comparative public policy, with attention to both domestic and foreign policy choices and performance.

Because of its turbulent past and contemporary status as one of the most powerful European states, Germany offers a compelling opportunity for such analysis. Having experienced a prolonged period of “modernity gone awry” and more than four decades of national division, what sort of Germany has now emerged in the ever-changing European context? How will Germany’s role in the twenty-first century compare with its troubled and problematical one in the twentieth? How do German policies and problems compare with those of its democratic industrial partners? To what extent has unified Germany in fact become a “normal” nation?

In undertaking this assessment, we bring together complementary intellectual experience and perspectives. One of us (Hancock) has written extensively on western Germany;⁵ the other (Krisch) on the one-time GDR. Both of us have studied and taught postwar German politics in an explicit comparative (West European, Soviet bloc, European Union) context.

We thus see Germany as the product of multiple political systems in the past giving way to the current democratic constitutional system, a country seeking to subsume in one national community deep historical cleavages of region and religion, the more recent division between East and West, and the current struggle to integrate substantial non-German immigrant minorities, particularly large Turkish and Islamic communities. That is the Germany whose politics is described and analyzed in the chapters that follow.